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WATERFRONT REDEVELOPMENT AT SOUTH STREET SEAPORT: WHERE WATER AND LAND, COLLABORATION AND PLANNING CONVERGE

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WATERFRONT REDEVELOPMENT AT SOUTH STREET SEAPORT: WHERE WATER AND LAND, COLLABORATION AND PLANNING CONVERGE

BY

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# Table of Contents

**List of Figures** ......................................................................................................................... iii

**Introduction** ............................................................................................................................ 1

**Background and Definitions** ....................................................................................................... 6

**Literature Review** ....................................................................................................................... 14

**Interdisciplinary Approach and Theory** ................................................................................... 17
  - Interdisciplinary Approach ....................................................................................................... 17
  - Urban Theory ............................................................................................................................ 18
  - Planning Theory ....................................................................................................................... 21
  - Sociological Theory .................................................................................................................. 24
  - Political Theory ....................................................................................................................... 26
  - Community-Based Development Theory .............................................................................. 17

**Methodology** ............................................................................................................................ 32

**History** ..................................................................................................................................... 34

**Analysis** .................................................................................................................................... 37
  - South Street Seaport 1960 – 2004: Friends of the South Street Seaport Museum and Publications .......................................................................................................................... 37
  - South Street Seaport Museum and Save Out Seaport .............................................................. 49
  - South Street Seaport and East River Esplanade Redevelopment ........................................... 59
  - Vision 2020: New York City’s Comprehensive Waterfront Plan ............................................ 65

**Conclusion** .................................................................................................................................. 77

**Bibliography** .............................................................................................................................. 81

**Appendix A** ................................................................................................................................ 84

**Abstract**

**Vita**
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Map of New York City Metropolitan Region ..................................................... 7
Figure 2: Outline of South Street Seaport Area .............................................................. 10
Figure 3: Map of South Street Seaport and the East River Esplanade South .................. 10
Figure 4: Percentage Breakdown of Races Represented in zip code 10038 ..................... 11
Figure 5: Household Income in zip code 10038 ............................................................ 12
Figure 6: Industries Represented in zip code 10038 .................................................... 12
Figure 7: Map of South Street Seaport Museum ............................................................ 50
Figure 8: Entrance to South Street Seaport Museum ................................................... 51
Figure 9: Third Floor Art Installation ........................................................................... 52
Figure 10: Ships in Glass and Bottles .......................................................................... 52
Figure 11: Contemporary Furnishings .......................................................................... 52
Figure 12: Shipbreaking by Edward Burtynsky ........................................................... 52
Figure 13: Model Ships ................................................................................................ 52
Figure 15: Found Objects ............................................................................................ 53
Figure 14: Designer Wes Gordon .................................................................................. 53
Figure 16: Historic Hotel ............................................................................................. 53
Figure 17: Scale ............................................................................................................ 54
Figure 18: Docks ......................................................................................................... 54
Figure 19: Working Waterfront .................................................................................... 54
Figure 20: Occupy Wall Street ..................................................................................... 55
Figure 21: Photography by Jeff Chien-Hsing Liao ....................................................... 55
Figure 22: View of East River from Museum ............................................................... 56
Figure 23: Map of East River Esplanade South - boundaries ....................................... 63
Figure 24: Map of Pier 15 .......................................................................................... 65
Figure 25: South Street Seaport - Pier 17 ................................................................. 64
Figure 26: View East on Fulton Street – South Street Seaport .................................... 78
Figure 25: View West on Fulton Street - Freedom Tower ........................................... 78
INTRODUCTION

New York City is the global model for the urban experience. A center of business, tourism, culture, fashion, and innovation, communities all over the world look to this city for inspiration for all of these things. City spaces are modeled after Times Square, open spaces such as Central Park are coveted in other urban settings, and visitors from around the globe come to New York for cutting-edge goods and services. What New York City has not been is a model for waterfront development. Instead, old port cities in Europe, for example, have modeled their waterfronts after Baltimore, Maryland, Boston, Massachusetts, and San Francisco, California.¹ Why does New York have the reputation of being an inward looking city despite its historic roots as a Dutch trading colony and its status as a global city? What has New York City been doing on its 520 miles of shoreline and what must it do in order for its residents and visitors to enjoy and benefit from its most abundant natural resource and to secure a healthy and sustainable future?

The city and Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who has been in office since 2001, have identified the redevelopment of the New York City waterfront as a priority on their political agenda. Vision 2020: New York City’s Comprehensive Waterfront Plan was published by the New York City Department of City Planning (DCP) as part of the administration’s dedication to waterfront redevelopment and to serve as a framework for the future of the city’s waterfront and waterways. It was a collaborative effort by governmental agencies on multiple levels, non-governmental groups, and members of the community whose work culminated in the publishing of this document by DCP in March 2011. Vision 2020 builds upon the 1992 Comprehensive Waterfront Plan, which was a

written declaration of the city’s reclamation of its waterfront, which was long neglected until then. Addressing new priorities and issues facing the city, Vision 2020 outlines eight broad goals for New York’s waterfront and waterways. The interdisciplinary collaboration leading up to this publication and its projects is characteristic of waterfront redevelopment. I will analyze the collaborative process that led to this comprehensive plan in New York and advocate for this type of approach to planning and for the process to continue to be used in other urban waterways.

Dirk Shubert, Dean of Studies of the Urban Planning Master’s program at Hamburg University, describes the importance of studies of waterways in Transforming Urban Waterfronts: Fixity and Flow, which is a compilation of papers from a 2008 conference of the International Network of Urban Waterfront Research in Hamburg, Germany:

Waterfronts are places where incompatibilities become evident in succession struggles between industrialization, deindustrialization, and post-industrialization. Waterfronts provide spaces to advance processes of transforming cities toward a post-industrial society. They have many points of interaction with and accessibility to other parts of cities, are often hubs of local economies, and are important influences on socio-cultural changes and spatial restructuring processes. The current period of change is marked by spatial and social shifts from industrialization to knowledge-based economies and post-industrial society.

A collaborative process is needed in waterfront redevelopment projects because of the complexity and importance of these spaces.

In addition to analyzing Vision 2020, I will examine the multiple redevelopments of South Street Seaport from the 1960s to the present using urban planning, political

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3 Editors of Urban Waterfronts are Gene Desfor, Professor Emeritus from Concordia University, Jennefer Laidley, graduate of the Urban Planning Masters Program at York University, Quentin Stevens, Reader in Urban Design at University College London and Dirk Schubert
4 Desfor et al., Urban Waterfronts, 75.
science, spatial, sociological, urban, and community-based planning theories. This analysis will solidify the discussion of the collaborative interdisciplinary process spearheading the redevelopment of New York City’s waterfront. Theorists from a variety of disciplines will be used to analyze both the history and current states of its land use, community involvement, economy, and its relationship to the city. Other political, economic and social factors will be taken into account when assessing the process of designing South Street Seaport and making decisions about this public space.

The first chapter will go through the background and definitions needed to introduce the topics to be discussed followed by a literature review in the second chapter. Chapter three will address the interdisciplinary approach used in this urban studies analysis and the theories to be used. Chapter four introduces the methodology of the study and chapter five follows with the analysis of South Street Seaport from 1960 – 2002 and then from 2002 to the present to discuss the current redevelopment effort focusing on the South Street Seaport Museum and East River Esplanade and the New York City Department of City Planning’s Vision 2020 document, followed by my conclusion.

Growing up in the city of Virginia Beach, Virginia, the waterfront was at the forefront of the economy, recreation, and my everyday life. Fellow Virginia Beach residents share similar personal histories of taking trips to the oceanfront with their families as children, playing in the sand and waves, and staring out into the great expanse of the Atlantic Ocean wondering if there were children staring back at us from the other side. During our adolescent years, we took jobs as lifeguards, bike and beach chair rental operators, and hostesses with an unmatched view of sunsets at dinnertime and
background music of waves crashing on the sand. The waterfront marked the city’s edge on the map, but it was also a place for us to experience our day-to-day lives even fuller than on more solid ground.

When I moved to New York City in 2007, I was enthralled by all the city had to offer. I visited museums, explored parks, walked and ate my way through a new, exciting, and fast-paced city; this was exactly the experience I yearned for after college. After I became more comfortable in this urban setting, my desire to be connected to the water resurfaced. Although Manhattan is an island and my daily commute to work on the Q train from Queens to Brooklyn traversed the East River twice each way, the water just served as a border for the city, not a place to enjoy. While New York City is not a beach town like Virginia Beach or any of its neighboring cities on the shores of Connecticut or New Jersey, the inward-looking focus of the five boroughs has been a detriment to the economy, environment, and community. Most ancient civilizations attribute their very survival to their proximity to water, but why has New York City neglected to revive its most valuable natural resource after the end of its industrial era?

With a new analytic approach to waterfront space and the incorporation of community-based planning in the process, urban planning can be used as a tool in the social and environmental justice movement for a more livable and accessible city. I will identify the benefits and challenges of an interdisciplinary approach to planning and developing urban waterfronts by 1) analyzing the history and past redevelopments of South Street Seaport, an essential step to understanding any urban space; 2) identifying the benefits and challenges of an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach to planning and developing urban waterfronts; and 3) providing a possible explanation for why New
York City’s waterfronts have not been the focus of tourism, recreation, or development and why it should be from now on. Themes of equity, access, sustainability, and education will be at the forefront throughout this analysis in the hope that New York City’s waterfront will no longer restrain New Yorkers, but will free them instead.
BACKGROUND AND DEFINITIONS

NEW YORK HARBOR AND SOUTH STREET SEAPORT

Figure 1: Map of New York City Metropolitan Region

Architectural historian and New York City native Carol Krinsky follows this history of New York City’s port and its influence on the built environment in her book, *New York City: How Its Port Shaped Its Streets and Architecture*. The city was established as a Dutch trading colony and was developed in the nineteenth century. Before the five boroughs became one city in 1898, Brooklyn and Manhattan had the most important ports. Krinsky has found evidence in architecture and planning decisions that New York City’s history of maritime trade and industry had a profound effect on the city’s street patterns, land use, zoning, and waterfront development.

As industry left New York City’s ports, the infrastructure based on that use remained. Less attractive buildings such as warehouses, brothels, saloons, shops for

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6 Ibid., 4.
sailors, and cheap hotels were established along the water’s edge. In the borough of Queens, Long Island City and Astoria were home to waste treatment facilities, which dumped sewage and waste into the East River. Historically, New York City’s waterfronts have not been treated with a lot of care. Although more important buildings such as the World Trade Center, World Financial Center, and the United Nations Building, have been built along the waterfront since then, there are still obstacles in terms of access to the waterfront because of old infrastructure. The following section explains how perceptions about the waterfronts have changed and what cities are doing to reclaim them.

Professor Emeritus of Geography at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and Senior Fellow at the Institute for Sustainable Cities, City University of New York, Rutherford H. Platt’s article in Environment Magazine, “The Humane Megacity: Transforming New York’s Waterfront” discusses the history of Manhattan’s waterfront in the 1900s, which was dominated by industrial use including shipping, power plants, waste facilities, and later, highways. The building of urban planner Robert Moses’ highways along rivers and waterways continued to separate waterfronts from the rest of the city and hindered access to these spaces. These loud and polluting thoroughfares circumvent the island of Manhattan and are obstacles to access to the city’s waterfront.

Two trends since 1960 have contributed to the transition to thinking about the waterfront in a different way and to citizens wanting access to these spaces: 1) federal and state urban renewal programs, which paired public and private investment and 2) legislation in the 1970s such as the National Environmental Policy Act and Clean Water

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7 Ibid., 12.
Act, which both sparked more widespread awareness of environmental and ecological issues.\(^9\) The improvement of water quality in the Hudson River, for example, created a desire for boating and other recreation on the water. Beginning with the development of Battery Park in New York, the potential of mixed use space on the waterfront was becoming a reality due in part to the community’s activism. Platt argues that New York City’s waterfront is a product of “civic vision, legal and financial creativity, and tireless advocacy over generations.”\(^{10}\)

Platt discusses the issue of urban sustainability and his concept of the “humane metropolis.” This is defined as “an urban community at any scale – city block to metro region that seeks to become more green, healthy, safe, efficient, equitable, and people-friendly.”\(^{11}\) Because waterfronts have historically been spaces worth advocating for and worth having access to, New York City is a perfect city to apply Platt’s trends in the development and redevelopment of these spaces. He outlines changes that occur with regard to the revitalization of urban waterfronts including the changes in public perception of the waterfront, involvement of scientists in decision-making, community-based activism, public-private collaboration, ecological and social changes such as water quality, access, and environmental justice, and mixed use projects.\(^{12}\) This framework is useful in my analysis of South Street Seaport and its stages of redevelopment.

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\(^9\) Ibid., 54.  
\(^{10}\) Ibid., 48.  
\(^{11}\) Ibid., 58.  
\(^{12}\) Ibid., 58.
South Street Seaport is located at Fulton Street in downtown Manhattan and on the East River. Many of its historic row houses and cobblestone streets are preserved to this day. To define the community of South Street Seaport, I chose zip code 10038, which encompasses the seaport area and parts of the Financial District in Lower Manhattan. It is also part of Community Board 1, which represents Tribeca, Seaport/Civic Center, Financial District, and Battery Park City. There are 59 Community Boards in New York City and they serve as advisory boards for land use, local budget, and service delivery.
issues. Members are appointed by the Manhattan Borough President and half are recommended by the City Council Member of that district.\textsuperscript{13} According to American Fact Finder data from 2000, zip code 10038 had a total population of 15,574 people, 46\% of whom were male and 54\% female. The age group with the highest percent was 25 to 34 at 16\% and then 20 to 24 at 15\%. The median age in 2000 was 35.2 years old.\textsuperscript{14} Other key demographic data such as race, household income, and professional industries represented are depicted in the following pie charts.

![Percent of Races Represented in Zip Code 10038](image)

Figure 4: Percentage Breakdown of Races Represented in zip code 10038

\textsuperscript{13} “Community Board 1,” last modified 2012, \url{http://www.nyc.gov/html/mancb1/html/about/about.shtml}
\textsuperscript{14} “American FactFinder,” last modified 2010, \url{http://factfinder2.census.gov}
Figure 5: Household Income in zip code 10038

Figure 6: Industries Represented in zip code 10038
This data from 2000 represents the community as a predominately white population with the majority of the people with a very low household income. This may be due to reporting issues, but that aside, most of the households in zip code 10038 fall in between a wide $15,000 to $74,999 range. The finance, insurance, real estate and leasing, educational, health and social services, and the professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management sectors make up the majority of the industries in this area.

DEFINITIONS

The terms that will be used in this thesis will be defined here. Astrid Wonneberger, lecturer at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at Hamburg University, defines community in her chapter in *Transforming Urban Waterfronts: Fixity and Flow* in a way that applies to South Street Seaport’s community. Due to a more localized form of social organization at the community level, “This new approach challenged the old assumption of a close connection of territory and community and formulated ideas of aspatial communities, groups who were no longer dependent on a fixed urban place, but constructed their common identity and social ties through common features and interests and were scattered all over a city or beyond.”\(^{15}\) She identifies three theoretical approaches, in which my discussion of community will fall: “1) a specific social structure; 2) a group of people with these specific features; and 3) a specific territory.”\(^{16}\) Identifying zip code 10038 as a place to start my analysis of this community provides strict boundaries identified by the United States Postal Service. It encompasses

\(^{15}\) Desfor et al., *Urban Waterfronts*, 58.
\(^{16}\) Ibid., 58.
the area of the South Street Seaport and is based on a specific territory. The next two community groups I address in this analysis are ones formed on common interests: Friends of the South Street Seaport Museum and the public groups who are involved in the Vision 2020 discussion. The former has a more rigid social structure as members have responsibilities to the group, while the second is held together by a common interest in revitalizing New York City’s waterfront.

Tom Angotti, urban planner, community organizer and author of New York for Sale: Community Planning Confronts Global Real Estate, defines planning as “a conscious human activity that envisions and may ultimately determine the urban future.”17 Humans have always had to organize the space in which they lived and continue to do so. Planning decisions made today affect the quality of life and the economic opportunities of future generations living within the built environment.

Dirk Schubert defines revitalization as having “no precise definition, but embraces a complex field of changing uses, rejuvenation and regeneration, redesign and remodeling, at the intersection of diverse interests that are connected at the interface of the city and the port.”18 Old industrial uses of the waterfront are long gone and the city must find other economically and socially viable uses for it. Especially in the context of waterfront redevelopment and the collaborative process New York City has employed, Schubert’s definition is helpful in this discussion.

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18 Ibid., 75.
LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis will add to the discussion about the relationship between society, the economy, and physical space in the context of the urban waterfront. In Transforming Urban Waterfronts: Fixity and Flow, Dirk Schubert defines “fixity and flow” as “a term that…indicates a spatial flow and movement of information, goods, capital, etc., on the one hand, that are a contested relationship with more static elements such as the urban fabric and the built environment on the other. Port cities with their waterfronts provide a rich source for empirical case studies to explore this theoretical concept.”19 The importance of urban waterfronts is summarized in the following quote from the introductory chapter:

Historic spaces at the water’s edge that were once home to manufacturing plants, cargo handling facilities, passenger ship terminals, sailor towns, and warehouses had slipped into a devalued, under-utilized, and feared condition. Economic, political, and biophysical processes are coming together to make those spaces come alive again with twenty-first century activities oriented to a globalized urban life housed in mixed-use buildings, convergence centres, entertainment complexes, centres of higher learning, and sleek corporate headquarters.20

Investments are made in urban waterfronts in order to improve the city as well as to create new spaces for social interaction. Gene Desfor, Professor Emeritus from Concordia University and other editors argue that waterfronts have always been centers of urban transformation as they “continue to be spaces where an ensemble of actors, both societal and biophysical, and representing global, regional, and local forces, engage in intense struggles that change the urban.”21 Waterways connect places and before the web of technology that defines societal interaction today, waterfronts were places where people, nature, ideas, and activity converged. Desfor et al. explain that waterfronts:

19 Ibid., 75.
20 Ibid., 2-3.
21 Ibid., 3.
embody the past and represent opportunities for the future; they generate growth within the city and impel growth outside the city; they are both subject and objects of cities’ ambitions and growth strategies; they are within a jurisdiction but are often outside that jurisdiction’s control; they are both colonized and colonizing territories; they are represented as spaces of promise but have often been spaces of oppression; they are planned and unplanned; and of course, they are both natural and artificial.22

It can be argued that the effects of history are felt most strongly on urban waterfronts and are telling of current urban issues and have the ability to inform us about the future of the city.

The conference in Hamburg, Germany and book’s theme of fixity and flow describe the original development and subsequent redevelopments of waterfronts. The authors explain, “fixity is the transient moment that can never be captured in its entirety as the flows perpetually destroy and create, combine, and separate.”23 Just as the urban studies approach would advocate, they recognize the anchoring of the waterfront space to a particular time and analyze it with this fixity in mind. They also analyze the economic, social, and physical changes that occur on the waterfront at the same time as flow. Waterfronts from New York to Baltimore to Boston vary greatly because of their history, circumstances, and location. This book compiles studies that have been done on the influence of American port cities on global urban waterfront cities, but New York City has not been a global model for waterfront redevelopment.

Peter V. Hall, Professor of Urban Studies at Simon Fraser University and Anthony Clark, graduate of the Master of Urban Studies program at Simon Fraser University, wrote a chapter in Transforming Urban Waterfronts: Fixity and Flow, “Maritime Ports and the Politics of Reconnection.” Their definition of “disconnection” or

22 Ibid., 3.
23 Ibid., 5.
what happens to the relationship between cities and their ports in a postindustrial age because of technological advances such as containerization can describe many different urban waterfront cities. Hall and Clark argue that “shipping interests cannot secure these conditions solely by disconnecting from the city-regions that contain them and jumping to higher scales of action; in many places, especially in the port-city regions of Western democratic states, they need to (re)establish closer and more fixed relationship in port city-regions.”24 In order to understand this complex relationship, their approach to studying port-city regions involves an interdisciplinary analysis examining port activities, the effect of containerization on the seaport, management, demographics, institutional shifts, shipping routes, the scales of area in question, and consequences of urban-regional development. Hall and Clark argue that, “relationships between ports and cities, in more general terms, are open-ended, continuous, and historically contingent political processes in which actors seek to exploit, and if necessary to create, spaces of engagement.”25 In their studies in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, they found community interests to be dominated by those of businesses and it will be interesting to see how these types of relationships play out in New York City.

Using the city of the New York and South Street Seaport as a case study, I will analyze the collaborative process that goes into revitalizing the waterfront. It is important to address the historical significance of the space as well. New York City has not attempted a Comprehensive Waterfront Plan since 1992, so this is a timely analysis of the changing redevelopment efforts on the city’s waterfront.

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25 Ibid., 31.
INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH AND THEORY

INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

Analyzing South Street Seaport and *Vision 2020* from an urban studies perspective requires an interdisciplinary approach. To conduct a study in this field is to look at all aspects: historic, economic, social, and physical, that make the space unique. It is through this interdisciplinary analysis that we as urban studies students thoroughly explore a subject and reach conclusions about urban problems. This multidimensional framework allows me to fully understand why certain spaces are so important to people that they feel they must organize and advocate for it and how decisions about space and the built environment are made and the extraordinary effects of these on the people who experience it.

When people feel their spaces are being compromised or treated unjustly, an urban studies perspective leads to a thoughtful and comprehensive study of the problem. In the case of South Street Seaport, an area that has a deep historical significance and a local community that feels so strongly about preserving its maritime function, this space has not thrived as I and many think it should, despite multiple redevelopment projects. Understanding the historical roots of the seaport, its current redevelopment, and the grassroots organizing to save the seaport will help to explain why New York City’s waterfront has not experienced the successes of other East Coast cities such as Baltimore or Boston, how redevelopment efforts have shaped the outcomes of the space, and whether or not they align with the community’s vision for the seaport. The following sections will outline the interdisciplinary theoretical approaches that will be utilized throughout the rest of the thesis.
Urban Theory

Understanding the history of a space is essential to urban studies analysis. The history of a particular place situates it in time, highlights any changes in function, and often times explains a community’s memories, ties, and passions about an area. When we take into account the history of a place, it gives it meaning beyond its current function or physical façade. The stories of people who experienced that space in the past are brought into the conversation along with accounts of what happened in that space. South Street Seaport has a rich maritime history, which will be discussed in more detail later. The Postmetropolis, explained here, will help to unpack the complexities of changing space starting with the postfordist era.

Edward W. Soja is Professor of Urban Planning at the University of California, Los Angeles and his writings concentrate on regional planning, urban geography, and the links between social and spatial theory. In his book Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions, Soja focuses on the new spatiality of human life using the city of Los Angeles as his point of reference, but emphasizes that his theories can be applied to other urban centers. This book adds to the literature on a critical postmodern approach to urban studies with a defined interest in spatiality and its importance in scholarly research and practical application.

Soja writes in his paper, “Six Discourses on the Postmetropolis”, which preceded the book:

What has been happening is that the new urbanization processes and patternings are being overlain on the old and articulated with them in increasingly complex ways. The overlays and articulations are becoming thicker and denser in many parts of the world, but nowhere has the modern metropolis been completely
erased. What this means is that we must understand the new urbanization and urbanism without discarding our older understanding.26

His term for the new urbanism in the postmodern world is the postmetropolis. The objective of this book is to encourage an interdisciplinary approach to the field combining cultural studies with geopolitical economy and the commitment to this will help to reach the attainable goals of spatial justice and regional democracy.27

To understand Soja’s postmetropolis, one must recognize the drastic changes in twentieth century cities. Soja explains that there must be a “double-sided recognition of substantial material changes taking place in our contemporary urban worlds and the challenge these changes represent for those who study cities is the necessary first step in understanding the postmetropolis.”28 He identifies six discourses on the postmetropolis: the postfordist industrial metropolis, cosmopolis, exopolis, fractal city, the carceral archipelago, and simcities. This paper will focus on the first discourse, which Soja explains “is woven of many strands, but motivating each is an interpretive emphasis on the role of industrial production and the impact of industrial restructuring on contemporary urban life.”29 It is a way to look at space after industry has left and to highlight social and spatial inequalities.30 This particular discourse explains New York City’s South Street Seaport starting in the mid-twentieth century.

Soja also identifies three distinct periods of crisis-generated restructuring in cities which were “unusually turbulent times of experimentation, redirection, and change when,

28 Ibid., 149.
29 Ibid., 157.
30 Ibid., 174.
to use more contemporary terms, long-established economic, political, and cultural practices are selectively deconstructed and reconstituted in new and different forms.”

The first period came after the Age of Capital at the end of the nineteenth century, the *fin de siècle*, the second occurred during the 1920s including the Great Depression and end of World War II, and the third, still continuing today in the twenty-first century, began in the 1960s and early 1970s when the global post-war boom was coming to an end. South Street Seaport’s role as a place of historic preservation fits in Soja’s timeline and the accompanying discourse helps to explain the challenges it faced in making the transition from industrial use to a museum and public space.

In addition to a historical perspective on urban spaces, urban theory also addresses the dimension of the public sphere. While Jürgen Habermas, German sociologist and philosopher of the twentieth century identified the public sphere as communication marked by new arenas of debate, more open and accessible forms of urban public space and sociability as well as print culture, modern theorist, Gerard Hauser’s explanation of the public sphere will be used in this discussion. In Hauser’s book, *Vernacular Voices*, he defines the public sphere as a “discursive space in which strangers discuss issues they perceive to be of consequence for them and their group. Its rhetorical exchanges are the bases for shared awareness of common issues, shared interests, tendencies of extent and strength of difference and agreement, and self-constitution as a public whose opinions bear on the organization of society.”

Hauser identifies features of the rhetorical model of public spheres as: 1) discourse based and not class-based; 2) derived from actual discursive practices; and 3) a composition of multiple

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31 Ibid., 110.
32 Ibid., 110.
33 Gerard Hauser, *Vernacular Voices* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 64.
dialogues that come together later in the discussion. A benefit of Hauser’s theory is that it allows for constant change. Just as the physical space of South Street Seaport has changed over the years and will continue to change in the future, his public sphere allows for and is built upon evolving voices converging on shared interests. The people present at the public workshops to be discussed later exemplify this.

PLANNING THEORY

Planning informs redevelopment and the process that leads up to a plan is just as important as analyzing the plan itself. Urban planning has a long history during which approaches to the practice have evolved with the growing needs of cities and their inhabitants. In his book *Cities of Tomorrow*, town planner, urbanist, and geographer Peter Hall identifies the turning point for urban planning theory to be the 1950s when it became a professional field. Often times, strictly economic solutions were crafted in opposition to sustainable ones. Urban planning originated as a response to widespread dissatisfaction with the physical squalor in cities. Planning education, in the past, did not address the living and changing aspect of city neighborhoods and blocks.

Tom Angotti, urban planner, community organizer and author of *New York for Sale: Community Planning Confronts Global Real Estate*. He argues the orthodox approach to urban planning is rational-comprehensive planning, which “has its roots in the Enlightenment faith in the ability of humans to determine the shape of their environment through scientific knowledge and practice.”

Professor of Urban Studies at the University of Akron, Richard Klosterman, identifies planning’s organizational roots

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34 Ibid., 61-62.
to be in architecture, and the desire to improve the built environment by increasing the efficiency of services and to promote health, safety and convenience.\textsuperscript{36} Planning’s political roots come from an independent “‘fourth power’ of the government promoting the general or public interest over the narrow, conflicting interests of individuals and groups.”\textsuperscript{37} Problems with this model include the disproportionate amount of power in the hands of professional planners and the failure to account for the natural development of neighborhoods. Klosterman also notes that the rational planning model has been attacked for “failing to recognize the fundamental constraints on private and organizational decision making; the inherently political and ethical nature of planning practice; and the organizational, social, and psychological realities of planning practice.”\textsuperscript{38} A focus on how real people interact with space and with each other is essential to a shift in the urban planning framework.

As community organizers come together to create plans for their neighborhoods, it is important to keep in mind that these communities are not homogenous and therefore conflicts are inevitable. A democratic process is essential to the success of community planning and consensus at all times is not necessarily the goal; multiple voices must be heard and incorporated into the plans. This shift, as discussed by sociologist David Harvey, moves away from “a predisposition to regard social justice as a matter of eternal justice and morality to regard it as something contingent upon the social processes operating in a society as a whole.”\textsuperscript{39} This is useful for this discussion of urban planning because of its focus on the social processes and their effects on planning and therefore on

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Ibid., 159.}
\footnote{Ibid., 160.}
\footnote{David Harvey, \textit{Social Justice and the City} (Athens: University of Georgia Press), 15.}
\end{footnotes}
the individuals in that space. Framing social justice in this way makes it more attainable by situating it in the reality of social complexity.

Susan S. Fainstein, Professor in Urban Planning at Harvard University suggests a different approach to urban development called the “just city”. This concept implores city planners to strive for goals of equity while considering issues of diversity and participation, which would ultimately create a better quality of life in the urban setting within a global capitalist political economy. Fainstein identifies two sides of the urban planning theory debate: communicative theorists versus just-city theorists. The communicative side is concerned with who is included in the formulation of development plans, whereas just-city theorists are more interested in an equitable outcome, not just a democratic process.

This brings up a number of questions about what is equitable and just. David Harvey suggests that justice can take on different meanings in different contexts, but it is still useful because it allows for shared interpretations. Fainstein’s article, “Planning Theory and the City” in Readings in Planning Theory argues that urban theory and planning theory should be used together because they include the following elements: “the historical roots and justification for planning, dependence of effective planning on its context, object of planning as conscious creation of a just city.”

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41 Ibid., 10-11.
SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

The framework for conceptualizing the effects of planning and the redevelopment of spaces on individuals and on society must take into consideration more than just changing the physical attributes of a space. Changes to the built environment affect the people who live, work, or visit there. To capture these important aspects, David Harvey’s sociological theories are useful. Harvey’s book *Social Justice and the City* addresses the problems when social and spatial analyses converge. Regarding the planning process, he explains that spatial environmental determinism is part of the planning process, which occurs when planners “seek to promote a new social order by manipulating the spatial environment of the city.”43 Planners impart their values on society through the decisions made about the built environment. Harvey also argues that the spatial environment may have little impact upon behavior patterns because the “Social process is viewed as possessing its own dynamic that often – in spite of the planner – will achieve its own appropriate spatial form.”44 While these two concepts seem contradictory, Harvey suggests that they are actually complimentary. According to this view, “The planner…should be seen as a servant of the social process and not its master.”45

This suggests that different forces act within and on the built environment, which is a different perspective from the orthodox approach to planning. Keeping in mind that both the actions of the planners and the social processes taking place have an effect on the spatial environment of the city is important to shifting the approach to urban planning. Because external forces will always be present, aside from the spatial manipulation by planners, these must be taken into account when creating a plan for the

43 Harvey, *Social Justice and the City*, 44.
44 Ibid., 45.
45 Ibid., 45.
city. An understanding of the social forces at work within communities is important to anticipating the long-term effects of planning decisions and their impact on people.

The challenge in applying this framework to redevelopment projects is how one can determine how social processes achieve their own spatial form. Because communities and spaces are unique, governed differently, and have different populations and histories, the difficulty is in determining the effects of social processes on space. The importance of this is worth the challenge, because if planners’ mindsets are changed to look further into the future, the benefits to the community and to the city will be tremendous. The issue here is not implementing this specific way of thinking, but integrating ideas of sustainability and achieving a humane metropolis, using Platt’s definition, and people’s interactions with space into planning education.

Harvey also theorizes that, “The planner is therefore intricately bound up with the social processes generating change since most publicized plans are most certain to influence the course of events (though not always in the direction anticipated) if they are not actually self-fulfilling.”46 If this is true, how can planners work to take social and systemic problems such as poverty, unequal access to resources and educational opportunities into account when they design and organize city space? Just as David Harvey suggests that the field of geography cannot remain objective in the face of poverty, perhaps planning must take an activist role as well.

I argue that in order for planners and developers to understand all of these parameters, ideas that are widely accepted in a variety of social science disciplines should be engaged in the planning field in order to foster an interdisciplinary approach to urban

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46 Ibid., 51.
planning. The sociological imagination as defined by American sociologist C. Wright Mills:

enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals...The first fruit of this imagination...is the idea that the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period, that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances.47

Harvey explains that the geographical imagination or spatial consciousness “enables the individual to recognize the role of space and place in his own biography, to relate to the spaces he sees around him, and to recognize how transactions between individuals and between organizations are affected by the space that separates them.”48 A shift is needed in the urban planning practice. By incorporating an understanding of people’s relationships to space, taking into account the political and economic forces at play, and employing effective community-based input when appropriate, a more interdisciplinary and inclusive approach to urban planning can be achieved. It is imperative that in this time of economic turmoil, people strive to think creatively about the use of space and the impact any changes will have on a community.

POLITICAL THEORY

Addressing and analyzing the political climate during a redevelopment process is essential. Urban politics expert Clarence Stone raises power issues relating to community organizations in his article, “Social Stratification, Nondecision-Making, and the Study of Community Power” that address the reasons why marginalized groups struggle with the politics of development. Stone explains, “The disadvantaged are likely to use their

47 Ibid., 23.
48 Ibid., 24.
resources on the issues of most immediate impact—decisions involving concrete and particular allocations of benefits and costs—and these are the issues where overt and direct conflict is most frequent.”

Because planning has focused on the immediate issues, residents also have focused too much on the short-term in some instances, but this must change. In addition to this obstacle, Stone explains, “It would take a large expenditure of resources to overcome system bias, but those with large resources are generally oriented toward reinforcing rather than changing system bias.” Even with the intention of eradicating systemic inequalities, the process is pitted against those who are marginalized. To overcome such inequalities, large amounts of resources are needed, which are not available to the marginalized groups who need it most. This unequal distribution of resources was initiated by a variety of factors, one being brought on by biased development decisions to be discussed in the next section and perpetuated by modes of capitalism. Is the answer for the more advantaged groups to aid the marginalized ones in their fight for equality? While this is happening in various ways in communities around planning issues, community programs, education, etc., is this the only way for change to occur? This question will be left for future consideration as issues of power and political efficacy must be addressed, but it is an important one to keep in mind.

Stone does offer an optimistic view about community organizing in his article, “Paradigms, Power, and Urban Leadership” explaining, “It is through civic organizations and informal networks that much of the essential cooperation, exchange, and consequent

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50 Ibid., 68.
mobilization of resources occurs.”

Political science professor Jeffrey Berry, et al. address the political efficacy of neighborhood associations in their book, *The Rebirth of Urban Democracy*. They identify two types of political efficacy: internal and external. Internal efficacy is an “Individual’s sense that he or she is capable of understanding politics and influencing the political process.” External efficacy is “an individual’s sense that the government will be responsive to his or her attempts to influence government” which measures confidence in the government. These two ideas are very different in that an individual can have a strong sense of one and not the other. Both must be achieved in order for a person to feel completely confident in himself and in his government to listen to and to address the needs of his or her community.

Richard Klosterman also references a Marxist argument that “the role of planning in contemporary society can be understood only by recognizing the structure of modern capitalism as it relates to the physical environment…the fundamental social and economic institutions of capitalist society systematically promote the interests of those who control society’s productive capital over those of the remainder of society.” Without addressing this issue of the role of capitalism in space, the analysis of a community will be incomplete. Although capitalism’s influence is not at the forefront of planning and development, they are both driven by its force.

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COMMUNITY-BASED DEVELOPMENT THEORY

Government mandates or a city planning department’s decision to include communities in the planning process are informed by community-based development theories. William Peterman, coordinator of the Neighborhood Assistance Center and professor of geography at Chicago State University, analyzes the effectiveness of community-based development and neighborhood planning in his book, *Neighborhood Planning and Community-Based Development: The Potential Limits of Grassroots Action*. Peterman explains that modern day planners use the concept of a neighborhood in their rhetoric, but are still constrained by Euclidean zoning, which separates land by use and makes it difficult to plan multi-use space. This obstacle limits the type of development that can occur in a given location. There are two types of planning at the neighborhood level: subarea planning and neighborhood planning. Subarea planning has its roots in citizen participation movements of the 1960s and has the same general city planning principles, but applied to a smaller scale. The American Planning Association supports this method. Similarly, neighborhood planning came about in the 1960s, but it is not as clearly defined as subarea planning. The issues that form the basis of neighborhood planning include housing revitalization, physical improvement, social services, health and safety, and community empowerment. It includes an element of political development as agendas and plans are created outside of city planning.

Advocacy planning, outlined by planning theorist Paul Davidoff, is the foundation of progressive community planning and includes the following points: the planner is not a

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55 Ibid., 23-25.
value-neutral professional, values are part of each step of the process, planning should be
pluralistic and represent a variety of interests, politics and planning cannot be separated
and lastly urban planning should be concerned with the physical, economic and social
aspects.\textsuperscript{56} Peterman also addresses this form of community-based organizing and explains
that planners are to be advocates for neighborhood organizations and that it is the
“responsibility of planners not only to identify and articulate the specific values
underlying planning prescriptions but also to affirm them.”\textsuperscript{57} He recognizes planning as a
political process, even though competing perspectives exist in each project. In advocacy
planning, the planner would support the perspective of the client who could be political
parties, special interest groups, or protest associations.\textsuperscript{58}

Peterman identifies four criteria in the neighborhood development success. The
first addresses disinvestment in a community. Peterman argues neighborhood
development requires steady monetary resources to sustain a comprehensive program.
Second, community empowerment is also something that he identifies as fundamental to
the success of neighborhood development. The demand must be driven by the grassroots
organization and not legislated into effect by the government. Third, sometimes skills
beyond the group’s capacity are needed in order to achieve their goal. Community leaders
must foster relationships with technical, legal, and financial experts in order to attain their
vision. Lastly, the relationship between the community organization and government
agencies must be a delicate balance between friendliness and confrontation. Peterman
calls this “creative tension” that allows for a healthy advocacy battle between the

\textsuperscript{56} Angotti, \textit{New York For Sale}, 8.
\textsuperscript{57} Peterman, \textit{Neighborhood Planning and Community-Based Development}, 26.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 27.
interests of the power structure versus those of the people living in the neighborhood and experiencing the space.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 155.
METHODOLOGY

This thesis includes a case study of South Street Seaport in New York City and an analysis of Vision 2020: New York City’s Comprehensive Waterfront Plan. With its historical roots as a flourishing seaport and its present-day economic and cultural decline, it is an interesting public space in New York whose function and reputation have fluctuated throughout the years. I will look at the first major overhaul of the Seaport in the postindustrial area beginning in the 1960s as well as the most recent redevelopment of South Street Seaport and the East River Esplanade beginning in 2002 to the present. Then I will analyze Vision 2020 and its collaborative effort to revitalize New York City’s waterfront. I will use the following methodology to answer questions of why redevelopment is occurring and what is being done. The research will include analysis of South Street Seaport records, plans and publications from 1967 to 2003, as well as interviews with the leaders and organizers involved with South Street Seaport, the East River Esplanade, and Vision 2020.

Data was collected through observation, in-person and telephone interviews with city planners and community organizations involved in the redevelopment efforts. The questions listed in Appendix A were addressed and expanded upon in order to analyze the interdisciplinarity of this particular redevelopment effort. Research also involved analyzing notes from public workshops as well as the content of Vision 2020: New York City’s Comprehensive Waterfront Plan published in March 2011.

This research will be used to illustrate the usefulness of an interdisciplinary approach to waterfront redevelopment and to help understand the varying degrees of interactions between the community, private organizations, and city planning
departments. The historical, political and economic contexts are equally as important, as the plans and waterfronts are tied to their specific cities. It is my hope that collaboration among different community organizations, city agencies and advocacy groups on these plans will prove to have an outcome that benefits the economy, society, environment and quality of life of the inhabitants of each waterfront city. To support this hypothesis I will use a historical analysis, analyze publications and interviews involving these redevelopment efforts, and understand why New York City’s waterfront is just now being revitalized and how this will propel the city forward and hopefully be a model for domestic and international port cities in the future.
Using Soja’s discourse on postfordism, this section will discuss the New York City waterfront’s evolution from old to new industries and the transition to a postfordist industrial metropolis, which Soja presents as a way to “define and describe the emerging new forms and characteristic tendencies of contemporary urban-industrial capitalism.”

One key aspect of Soja’s discussion is the flexibility within this postfordist industrial city space. Soja identifies specific sectors of the economy where re-agglomerations took place after the effects of Fordism were felt. These included an increased vertical and horizontal disintegration because of subcontracting, outsourcing, multiple production sites, and the assembly line. The three sectors where re-agglomeration was most intense were:

1. high-technology-based production, especially in the electronics, aerospace, and biomedicine, giving rise to a host of new terms such as technopoles, technopolis, and silicon landscapes; (2) craft-based and often highly labor- and design-intensive industries, ranging from the production of garments, furniture, and jewelry to guided missiles and movies; and (3) the so-called FIRE sector, consisting of finance-insurance-real estate firms as well as related activities in advertising, promotion, and legal services.

New York City bounced back from the deindustrialization and abandonment of its ports by moving into service-oriented business including finance, which is the city’s cornerstone today. The financial services sector alone added 100,000 jobs between 1980 and 1987. The FIRE sector as a whole increased by 67% during the latter half of the twentieth century.

The most drastic change in South Street Seaport was the decline of shipping activity into and out of South Street Seaport. Few industrial activities remained in this

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60 Soja, Postmetropolis, 171.
61 Ibid., 163.
62 Ibid., 164.
particular port by the mid-twentieth century and the city was looking to other sources of revenue and business operations besides the industry and shipping around its ports. Much of the old shipping business shifted to Brooklyn and New Jersey and the number of manufacturing workers and factories declined during this time period in the original ports of South Street Seaport. Changes in technology also affected the decline of the seaport. Attorney Stephen G. Marshall examines the effect of containerization on the Port of New York in his paper, which he presented at the City University of New York Graduate Center, “Containerization’s First ‘Tipping Point’: The Fall of the New York Port, 1965 – 1975.” Marshall argues that just as New York became the leading seaport in the United States because of enhanced technology and innovation, Port Newark, New Jersey took over as the base of operations because of its own innovations in the late twentieth century. Marshall writes:

A similar combination of productive investments in technological and economic innovations (dredging and landfill operations in the Newark and Elizabeth meadowlands, construction of adjacent railroad and highway routes, early installation of containerized cargo facilities) enhanced the natural resources of Newark and Elizabeth (their location on the east side of the Hudson River and Newark Bay, and the availability of thousands of acres of vacant land), and resulted in New Jersey attracting almost all of the port’s shipping operations.

While New York City also tried to adopt these new technologies in order to accommodate containers and regain business, accessibility to the New Jersey Turnpike was unique to Port Newark and allowed the goods to continue on to their destinations seamlessly. Other shipping companies and railroad industries followed suit and discontinued their cross-harbor services between New York City and Port Newark. The

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shifting spatiality speaks to the transition to a postfordist industrial metropolis. Just as Soja uses the examples of technopoles on the outskirts of the Los Angeles city center, the movement of business and trade to other areas in the New York and New Jersey region occurred at the same time in the 1960s.⁶⁶

Because old industrial modes of operation no longer worked, Soja’s idea of flexible specialization, a characteristic of postfordist industrial city spaces, began to be employed. Soja explains, “Increasing flexibility is seen as the key ingredient in the propulsive expansion and multiplication of the new technopoles, craft-based industrial districts and FIRE stations, and indeed to the entire transition from Fordism to postfordism.”⁶⁷ A city’s ability to restructure its spaces of production and adapt to new circumstances reflect the transition to postfordism. While New York City and South Street Seaport never regained their prior status as America’s leading port city, they did exercise flexible specialization to look to other sectors for economic growth. Dirk Schubert identifies this theme in global waterfront cities: “the new post-industrial waterfront was embedded in plans to reinvent urban images. The waterfront became the particular place where the transformation from the Fordist industrial city to the post-industrial and science-based city could be accomplished.”⁶⁸

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⁶⁷ Ibid., 171.
ANALYSIS

SOUTH STREET SEAPORT 1960 – 2004: FRIENDS OF THE SOUTH STREET SEAPORT MUSEUM AND PUBLICATIONS

James DeFilippis, Associate Professor at Rutgers University, analyzed the changing space in 1997 on the New York City port, “From a Public Re-creation to Private Recreation: The Transformation of Public Space in South Street Seaport.” Chronicling the history of South Street Seaport, DeFilippis argues that a transformation of space occurred from the once open-air museum and public space to one of commercialized space. The intention of the Friends of the South Street Seaport Museum, an activist group created and led by Peter Stanford in 1967, was to establish a living museum that would preserve the historical character of the area. After battles for designation as historic landmark for the seaport, the group opened the museum in 1968 and that year it was well-attended with 60,000 visitors. At that time there were 103 members in the Friends of the South Street Seaport organization. Even with the support of the community, the museum struggled financially to support its programs, events, refurbishing of ships and other museum operations. Ownership of the land was transferred to the city in 1973, but prior to that, the museum had owned all 68 buildings in the historic district. The members felt that the area should be a public space, so the city leased it back to the museum.

In 1977, Peter Stanford resigned as president of the museum board because of disputes over the daily operations and goals of South Street Seaport Museum. John

Hightower replaced him as president and this solidified the Museum’s shift away from its original ideas. The commercialization of the seaport was a point of contention for older and newer members. The newer members had more ambitious goals with regard to real estate issues and the older members wanted to stay true to its original goals of preserving the history of the space and the historic vessels. DeFilippis writes, “This changing of the guard signaled a turning point in the museum’s goals and purpose. It would no longer be an accessible public space and open air museum and was now destined to become a center for commercial development.” The new president did not hide the fact that the seaport’s ships would no longer be the Museum’s primary focus, but rather the development of the commercial space and retail would take precedence.

The City of New York also backed the development of South Street Seaport as Mayor Abraham Beame announced a $5.3 million federal grant to restore the historic Schermerhorn Row and Piers during his tenure from 1974 to 1977. To formalize this, a non-profit was created as a separate arm of the South Street Seaport Museum to handle the real estate development activities and the priorities shifted in order to: the city, corporation, and museum. There were early financial troubles for the South Street Seaport Museum as the city did not continue its grants and subsidies to the operation. Staffing and operations were cut in order to sustain the museum.

In December of 1977, the museum signed an agreement with the Rouse Company to do a feasibility study of the area to develop an urban marketplace. This company was a pioneer in the development of enclosed suburban malls in the 1950s and in the 1970s.

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71 “Seaport Museum.”
72 DeFilippis, “From a Public Re-Creation to Private Recreation,” 409.
73 Ibid., 410.
74 “Seaport Museum.”
created urban festival marketplaces in historic locations as they saw retail as a direct link to revitalization. In 1982, the museum staff dwindled to 50 employees as it was forced to cut back staff and salaries; even a complete shutdown of the museum was considered. Buildings went into disrepair and the organization saw this redevelopment by the Rouse Company as its only hope. The Fulton Marketplace was created by the Rouse Company in 1983 and the Pier 17 mall hosting shops and fast-food restaurants was completed in 1985. Shortly after, South Street Seaport Museum director Ellen Fletcher quit and expressed that there was nothing left to direct among the commercial-driven activities of the seaport. Despite this redevelopment by the Rouse Company, the project did not meet expectations and the museum’s financial problems continued. They blamed it on the competition in New York City and its superior established developments towards the center of the city or “upland”.

In 1994, there was an attempt to shift the group’s focus back to its roots by electing a chairman of the Board of Directors who opposed the prioritization of the corporate wing of the organization. More problems arose after the attacks on September 11, 2001 as insurance went up for the buildings and the number of visitors drastically declined from 362,959 in 2000 to 95,892 in 2001. By 2004, the five million dollar budget was reduced to one million dollars and the museum had to let go key museum staff in the archaeology center and the main ship historian. In 2005, the museum gave away its two

76 DeFilippis, “From a Public Re-Creation to Private Recreation,” 411.
million dollar collection to the New York State Museum in Albany, another low point in
the museum’s history.77

The South Street Seaport Museum was closed from February 2011 to December 2011 and reopened on January 26, 2012 under the auspices of the Museum of the City of New York led by president Susan Henshaw Jones. Prior to this, the museum was indebted to the Economic Development Corporation for a decade’s worth of rent and utilities. This took a toll on the employment of staff members, the loyalty of trustees, and the exhibits in the museum. Board members were financing the failing operation out of their personal accounts. The Museum of the City of New York received a grant to renovate the seaport museum for two million dollars from the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation and operate within an 18-month trial period. The South Street Seaport Museum now has a five million dollar budget within the Museum of the City of New York’s sixteen million annual operating budget. There were sixteen staff members by the museum’s reopening and a few more have been added since then.78

Currently, South Street Seaport is known as a tourist destination and outdoor mall and the historic buildings on Schermerhorn Row with original brick façades on cobblestone streets have been transformed into an Ann Taylor, Brookstone and Body Shop stores. DeFilippis argues that this transformation was due to more than just design, but that it was integrated into Mayor Ed Koch’s growth plan in the 1970s and that the “transformation in American cities of public spaces like South Street Seaport, from relatively accessible to virtually inaccessible, has excluded [the urban working poor and

77 “Seaport Museum.”
homeless population] from the material spaces of the public sphere and thereby created a substantial barrier to the possibility of representation in that sphere.”

This issue ties in to Soja’s discussion of the negative effects of flexible specialization, which he identifies as stemming from the nature of economic restructuring itself: “Its origins in crisis and its double edged driving force of seeking new ways of achieving sustainable and profitable economic expansion while also finding new ways to maintain social peace and stability, especially with respect to controlling and disciplining the vital workforce.”

This push for economic expansion in the postfordist industrial metropolis has hindered certain people from experiencing and participating in this otherwise public space. This detachment of the group from its members and the community it intended to serve is apparent in the progression of the museum’s publications.

Gerard Hauser defines the public sphere as, “a discursive space in which individuals and groups associate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment about them. It is the locus of emergence for rhetorically salient meanings.” The same holds true in the twentieth century during the time of the formation of South Street Seaport. Analyzing the publications of the Seaport Museum, changes in their content, focus and representation of their membership will reveal how they reflect the changing interpretation and intention for the public space of South Street Seaport. How the events occurred in history is important to note, but more useful to analyze is the public’s opinion of the changing space as well as the Friends of South Street Seaport’s vision for the space. Because South Street Seaport was intended to

79 DeFilippis, “From a Public Re-Creation to Private Recreation,” 413-414.
80 Soja, Postmetropolis., 173.
81 Hauser, Vernacular Voices, 61.
preserve the seaport and ships and to educate the community on its rich history, this project always had a public focus. The *South Street Reporter* was a publication created and edited by the South Street Seaport Museum to communicate with its membership. Publications from the Museum will be analyzed between the years of 1967 and 2004 in order to illustrate the changing rhetoric in this public sphere that informed the museum’s decisions.

The January 1967 edition of the *South Street Reporter* stated that the Friends of the South Street Maritime Museum existed “to bring into being an informed body of citizens opinion” on the museum concept; they wanted to study old ships, local history and be involved in the museum operations.82 That same year, different events were hosted by the Friends of the South Street Maritime Museum to raise money for the museum and to further their mission to educate the public on the history of the South Street Seaport. Their efforts were supported by local citizens as well as political figures. United States Senator Jacob K. Javits wrote in the paper, “It is commendable to see the work being done on behalf of preserving this old seaport so that coming generations may be aware of the early days of our great city. I salute you for this fine effort.”83 On February 23, 1967, the group became the Friends of South Street Seaport and went forward with getting their proposals for the museum and area reviewed by the appropriate authorities. Part of this plan was to ask the Parks Department to create an open plaza for a public market. In addition, schooner races were held around the seaport area.

1968 was a successful and productive year for the Friends of the South Street Seaport as the museum opened and more waterfront events took place including a folk

83 Friends of the South Street Seaport, *South Street Reporter*, March 1967.
music concert, the annual Mayor’s Cup Schooner Race in New York harbor, classical music programs, and arts and crafts. In addition to building a museum, the Friends of the South Street Seaport had goals of bringing back the square-riggers that once docked in the old seaport and using old buildings that housed sailors, other workers, and old port shops for commercial purposes such as restaurants, gift shops, book and print shops, maritime supply stores, and continuing to hold activities and events. The group limited access to these events as membership was required to participate in these programs. The rates were one dollar to receive the bi-monthly newsletter for the year and those members were informed of all seaport programs and with a five dollar membership fee, a regular member could receive discounts on all seaport publications in addition to the other benefits. Although the Friends of the South Street Seaport had good intentions of preserving the historical character of the area and educating people on maritime history and activities, there was a monetary barrier to their activities despite the seaport’s physical façade of open public space.

The *South Street Reporter* announced that the city Planning Commission approved the seaport proposal in May of 1968. On May 15, 1968, the seaport area was designated as an urban renewal area to restore historic buildings and add museums, stores and apartments. This was the first time in history that urban renewal was tied to preservation and restoration of landmarks. This connection may have been a detriment to the area in the end as urban renewal also prioritizes the economic viability of an area. The Friends of the South Street Seaport struggled with questions of historic preservation versus future growth as the November 1968 issue asked, “Should South Street Seaport represent a frozen time in history, a pre-determined by-gone era, or a fluid progression of

84 Friends of the South Street Seaport, *South Street Reporter*, May 1968.
beginning, growth, and continuation?"85 This question was raised at the South Street
Planning Conference that year and was the primary topic of discussion. They concluded
that they wanted “the neighborhood to be alive with present day activities; we want it to
provide the perspective and sustenance that can be drawn from the past.”86 An area so
deeply rooted in its spatial location and historic use required these questions and
benefited from the original mission upon which the group was founded.

The seaport restoration continued to get political support from Mayor John
Lindsay as he spoke at the launch of the project on May 15, 1969 and commented on its
importance to the city of New York, “It will bring visitors to New York. It will honor the
men who helped build the city’s greatness. It will serve as a model for creative urban
planning.”87 The budget for this one million dollar project was published in the South
Street Reporter and their priorities were clear with the bulk of the budget, $500,000, set
aside for the reconstruction of Wavertree, a square-rigger and the next highest at
$150,000 for the restoration of buildings.88

In 1977, the same year Peter Stanford resigned as president and John Hightower
became the new president, the South Street Reporter changed to a quarterly publication.
The paper wrote, “As the second decade begins, South Street Seaport Museum is poised,
ready to take the next giant step into a more certain future. It will do so with the integrity
of its original vision intact and with some visible accomplishments to prove its value.”89
The message of the intention to stay true to the group’s original mission resounded
throughout the next few issues. But as previously mentioned, the actions of the South

85 Friends of the South Street Seaport, South Street Reporter, November 1968, 1.
86 Ibid., 5.
87 Friends of the South Street Seaport, South Street Reporter, July 1969, 1.
88 Ibid., 4.
89 Friends of the South Street Seaport, South Street Reporter, Summer 1977, 6.
Street Seaport became more and more driven by economic and real estate goals. This becomes clear in the Spring 1978 edition, “The original vision of the seaport’s founders will be realized. Almost from the beginning, commercial development of the seaport’s blocks of irreplaceable architecture was seen as the glove into which the hand of the South Street Seaport Museum would fit.”90 This statement is far from the original mission printed in the January 1967 edition that promoted the study of old ships and local history. The messages over the ten-year period in the South Street Reporter chronicle the drastic change in the goals and objectives of the Museum, but still continued their focus on education in terms of the content of the publication.

In the spring of 1979, the publication noticeably changed in name to Seaport and physically in the print and glossy paper. It was now “The Magazine of the South Street Seaport Museum” and shifted its focus to articles on fishing and ships. The letters to the editor reflect the readers’ disappointment with Thomas McBride from West Orange, New Jersey writing, “Editor: I have just finished looking at the winter edition of Seaport. Yes it looks very pretty – too bad there’s nothing in it.” Similarly, Ellen Fletcher Rosebrock from Boston wrote, “There’s something I miss, though. The Museum itself doesn’t get through. Maybe the Bulletin covers the Museum, but I missed the Reporter’s regular columns on land and ships, descriptions of exhibitions and projects.”91 There were noticeably more advertisements in the publication than before.

Arguing that the magazine and the South Street Seaport group had lost its identity, Dick Hoover from Newark, New Jersey wrote into the Summer 1979 edition:

Editor: Seaport magazine is nice, it is slick, but that is it. There is no meat. You can usually go through it in ten minutes. It is so slick it lost its substance and who

90 Friends of the South Street Seaport, South Street Reporter, Spring 1978, 7.
91 South Street Seaport Museum, Seaport, Spring 1979, 26.
knows what it is anymore. It could be put out by the Port of New York and New Jersey or Tishman Realty or heaven forbid almost any airline. If there is anything in it about the seaport or ships it seems to be in passing. It almost seems that South Street has forgotten what it is and why it started.92

The museum had lost its identity even with its membership, so how much more for the people of the public who were experiencing the space? To say that the publication, the group’s primary means of communication with the people who supported their cause, could have been published by anyone reveals the loss of connection with its spatial significance. If Hauser identifies rhetoric and discussion of mutual interests as a defining aspect of the public sphere, these publications reveal a lot about the changing function of South Street Seaport. In 1979 and 1980, the South Street Seaport Museum attempted to save itself economically by allowing commercial development similar to Boston’s Faneuil Hall, but this did not do much to ameliorate its integrity with the membership. The plan for an outdoor shopping mall as most members viewed it, was met with disagreement and disappointment.93

The South Street Seaport Museum seemed to bounce back in the 1990s. In 1994, the Seaport announced that new art and children’s exhibitions were being added to the museum. The president at the time, Peter Neill, wrote of the exhibits, “Both these exhibitions embody so much of what we are and what we are still moving toward: a multi-faceted institution dedicated to an integrated approach to maritime and urban history, one that embraces the fine arts, historic preservation, and a maritime and social history all built on a foundation of top-flight scholarship.”94 The Museum’s return to its

92 South Street Seaport Museum, Seaport, Summer 1979, 24.
94 South Street Seaport Museum, Seaport, Fall 1994, 2.
foundation of education for the public is solidified in this statement. In addition to these new museum exhibits, they expanded their Adopt-A-School Program that year.

To discuss South Street Seaport in more contemporary terms and to see the steadfast importance of this space, in 2002, Peter Neill addressed the importance of water to the city of New York. He wrote in his message in *Seaport*, “Life-sustaining water, too, figures profoundly in the events of September 11. As people fled the dust clouds and smoke, museum volunteers and staff members on board the *Wavertree* gave them water both to cleanse their eyes and to drink, vividly demonstrating that life depends upon the clear liquid we all take for granted.”95 The rhetoric shifted focus and those who were part of the South Street Seaport organization who were unhappy and those in charge who identified their dismay changed the direction of the discussion to encapsulate the priorities of the public sphere at this time. Further anchoring its place in history and its importance in the current conversation about Lower Manhattan, Sharon Ann Holt, Senior Historian and Curator of the World Port New York exhibit at South Street Seaport Museum, write an article for *Seaport*, Spring/Summer 2003 entitled, “Looking Both Ways.” Her exhibit encapsulated the importance of the port to New York City’s formation and to its current status as a global city. Holt writes, “The story of the port does belong in a museum, but precisely because the port continues to be such a vital part of the city.”96

Analyzing the South Street Seaport publications and the changing rhetoric documented by them exemplifies the complexity of development decisions for a private entity. While decision-makers of the South Street Seaport Museum were informed by a

96 South Street Seaport Museum, *Seaport*, Spring/Summer 2003, 4A.
concerned and passionate membership, their ideas were not translated into decisions that were made for the museum or for their real estate investments. Paul Davidoff’s concept of advocacy planning could have been useful in this situation as he sees the planner or development corporation in this case as advocates for those who take ownership of the space. Mistakes by the Rouse Company are outlined in the following section.

The South Street Seaport Museum still exists and is located at 12 Fulton Street between Water Street and South Street. After being closed for most of 2011, the reopening of the museum came with drastic changes in its physical appearance as well as in the museum’s content. While the Museum of the City of New York is responsible for the South Street Seaport Museum’s operations, the Howard Hughes Corporation owns the property. Former owner General Growth Properties also put Harborplace in Baltimore, Maryland and Faneuil Hall in Boston up for sale around the same time of South Street Seaport because of its mounting debt. The developers of South Street Seaport’s Fulton Marketplace and Pier 17 the Rouse Company also created Faneuil Hall and Harborplace, which led to revitalizations of the cities. They also have a long, entwined history with General Growth Properties and both of these companies have led waterfront redevelopments in the United States. Their approach in Boston with Faneuil Hall incorporated shopping, dining, and entertainment, playing off of the local culture as much as possible. It attracted fifteen million visitors in its opening year and doubled the number of visitors to Boston.97 The development in Boston tried to keep in line with its historic roots and was successful in doing so. The developments of Harborplace and South Street Seaport followed suit and Harborplace led to a positive change for the city of Baltimore, while South Street Seaport floundered in New York City.

97 “Commercial Development.”
This cookie-cutter approach to waterfront development did not work in New York City because South Street Seaport was having financial troubles in an otherwise successful urban metropolis. Unlike Harborplace it was not saving the rest of the city from decline; it was trying to save itself. The use of retail space did not play to its strengths as a historic space and otherwise did not support the museum’s functions or the vessels it owned. The Rouse Company’s generic approach to the development in New York failed the South Street Seaport and it continues to feel the effects of this misstep years decades later. In this next section, I will address changes in the South Street Seaport that are trying to correct these mistakes.

SOUTH STREET SEAPORT MUSEUM AND SAVE OUR SEAPORT

Figure 7: Map of South Street Seaport Museum

A vibrant blue was chosen for the South Street Seaport Museum’s banners, signage, and brochures by design team Cooper Joseph Studio based in New York City. It is an attractive, modern color that is appealing to visitors and highlights the museum along the row of historic brick buildings. No longer a hidden gem, the museum is trying to promote itself among the other tourist destinations in South Street Seaport. A member
of the museum staff was stationed outside of the building handing out pamphlets as people walked by and answered their questions the day I visited in March 2012. A combination of aesthetic design and personal outreach made the museum very inviting.

As of March 2012 the South Street Seaport Museum had 15 exhibits spanning three different floors. The small lobby on the ground floor has a playful museum shop and ticketing area. The museum’s merchandise is displayed in open cabinets reminiscent of a child’s playroom. An escalator takes you up to the exhibits past a wall of exposed brick to the third floor, where visitors are greeted by a beautiful installation of 4,000...
fishing weights suspended from the ceiling by blue lines carrying the theme throughout the museum.  

There is also a view of the historic ships and the East River from the tall windows on the third floor. There are four exhibits and a 22-minute film produced by the Museum of the City of New York, *Timescapes*. It chronicles the history of the city from its roots as a Dutch trading post to the development of Manhattan past Wall Street and the outer boroughs to the global urban center that New York City is known as today. The film’s images and historic account of the very space in which the museum inhabits is a strong message to visitors and New Yorkers alike: that the history of the city is not to be

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98 Pogrebin, “Seaport Museum Sets Sail, Again.”
forgotten and that it should be at the forefront of educational experiences. It is a nice exhibit to encounter first, situating visitors in a very specific time and place.

In the main room are exhibits one through four: miniature vessels encased in glass, contemporary artwork of New York’s creative class, replicas of ships, and a photography exhibit showcasing Toronto-based artist, Edward Burtynsky’s work documenting the dismantling of ships in Bangladesh. The juxtaposition on this floor and throughout the museum is carefully carried out by the curators of the museum.
This back and forth between reminders and pieces of history and the current industries and creative activities in New York City appeal to a broad range of people, educating and entertaining them at the same time; teaching them about the past as well as connecting them with the more familiar.

This continues on the fourth floor with an exhibit of historic hand tools that Wendy Evans Joseph and Chris Cooper of Cooper Joseph Studio found stored away at the museum site. They created a beautiful display of relics from an industrial past next to a room showcasing contemporary fashion designers based in New York City, next to part of a hotel that was preserved in the existing museum that housed sailors from 1870 to 1920.

Figure 14: Found Objects

Figure 15: Designer Wes Gordon

Figure 16: Historic Hotel
On the top floor is a diverse display of the past and present vitality of New York City. The first two exhibits are images and artifacts from the coffee, fish, and tattoo businesses that once dominated South Street Seaport. It reminds people that this was once a working space and vital to the city’s economy. Lower Manhattan is still the heart of New York City’s economy housing its financial center, but at one point in history, this area had a lively working waterfront.
While the post-industrial era took much of the foot traffic away from this area, New York still brings in people through their two airports and a video by New York artist Ben Rubin showcases arrivals and departures through John F. Kennedy International Airport’s terminal. Anchoring the fifth floor in the middle is the Manhatta exhibit, which projects images onto large screens of the island before European settlers. The island is unrecognizable filled with just green trees and without the iconic New York City skyline, but it reminds visitors again of the historical roots of the city and the development that has taken place here. Another reminder of the past is the next exhibit of waterfront films from 1903 to 2011. While the waterfront may not be at the forefront of people’s minds when they think about New York City, the images playing side by side show that it is the city’s lifeblood.

The next exhibit shown above on the fifth floor showcases the people and places of New York City, juxtaposing two artists’ different styles of photography and perspectives. Likewise, images from the Occupy Wall Street movement give glimpses of the passion and diversity of New Yorkers, their ideas and their actions. It is a bold decision on the part of the museum to display such a range of artistic, political, and controversial perspectives in New York. While one museum could not possibly capture
every individual’s urban experience in New York City, they have made informed decisions about what was important about the city’s past and what will shape the city’s future.

While I argue that the revamping of the inside of the museum is a visible change for a better and brighter future, there are still concerns for the fate of the historic vessels whose maintenance fees are funded by the museum as well. There is a grassroots organization, Save Our Seaport, led by the original founder of the Friends of the South Street Seaport, Peter Stanford, comprised of past and present South Street Seaport Museum volunteers, sailors, and maritime enthusiasts who support the museum’s activities and fundraise for its historic ships.

Figure 22: View of East River from Museum
According to Save Our Seaport’s website, their mission is to support the museum as “The South Street Seaport Museum preserves and interprets the history of New York City as a world port, a place where goods, labor and cultures are exchanged through work, commerce, and the interaction of diverse communities.” Save Our Seaport’s action plan also outlines their goals: 1) to preserve the museum’s assets; 2) rededication to public engagement; 3) redevelop an active membership; 4) focus on public demonstrations of ship operations; and 5) reopen Bowne Stationers, which was accomplished on October 14, 2011. The first goal is of highest importance to Save Our Seaport and that is to maintain and operate three working vessels in particular: Pioneer, fishing schooner Lettie G. Howard, and WO Decker.

Clarence Stone’s political theory on the mobilization of resources through the work of civic organizations is exemplified by Save Our Seaport. While the City of the Museum of New York has used its funding to revitalize the South Street Seaport Museum, Save Our Seaport is still needed to see the plans for the vessels through and to continue to maintain the ships. There is but so much the museum can do and it is because of the hardworking volunteers of Save Our Seaport that the vessels are being maintained and used.

In an interview David Sheldon, sailor and member of the Save Our Seaport Steering Committee, said that the Save Our Seaport group formed because the museum was faltering and because of threats that they would have to dispose of vessels. Original

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101 “Action Plan.”
founder of the Friends of the South Street Seaport Museum Peter Stanford circulated a letter calling for new leadership and volunteer sailors and others concerned with the situation responded. They held a meeting with 30 people and then doubled to about 60, reaching out to other community groups in Lower Manhattan and to the greater New York City area. They were successful in keeping the boats in responsible hands and for decisions to be made responsibly. The operating vessels have always been a priority of Save Our Seaport and making this a priority for developers of the area amid the stores and other activities there has been a struggle. 102

Sheldon describes the makeup of the group to be predominately sailors, museum volunteers, and those with a passionate interest in the seaport. The preservation of these historic vessels is made possible by the civic engagement of Save Our Seaport. Luckily, Sheldon reports that the current administration of the museum, which owns the boats, has been receptive to the group’s ideas. Because they are an established advocacy group, their existence factors into the decisions made by the new administration. Because of their members and therefore voices in the community, Save Our Seaport is a means for the museum to get in touch with interested parties in the community. The tension between the historic preservation-minded Save Our Seaport group and those who would like to see more economic success for South Street Seaport still exists. This will always be a point of contention because there are different means to a profitable end. Achieving a balance between what will help South Street Seaport financially and preservation and maintenance of the historic ships will lead to a successful public space and one that may look very different if people approach this redevelopment creatively.

102 David Sheldon, Interview by author, telephone interview, February 23, 2012.
Analyzing the content of the South Street Seaport Museum’s publications and new exhibits highlight the changes in the use and meaning of its public space. As a rich part of New York City’s history, the original Friends of the South Street Seaport intended to preserve the history of the port and promote the maritime activities of the past and present. The group’s internal struggles with identifying and reaching their goals are manifested in the content of their publications. Examining the choices in design and exhibits made for the new South Street Seaport Museum in 2012 shows a renewed desire by the current administration to connect visitors to South Street Seaport’s history and future contributions to the city. The museum in itself is an interdisciplinary approach to revitalizing South Street Seaport. Displaying the history alongside with current trends, art, and political movements solidifies a contemporary connection to New York City and allows for diverse interpretations of how individuals experience the same space. This connection is what is needed in order for South Street Seaport to establish itself as a worthy destination for New Yorkers and tourists. This renewed vision coupled with the involvement of Save Our Seaport and their advocacy for the historic ships docked at Pier 17 gives us hope for a bright future for South Street Seaport. The redevelopment may begin at a level of those with authority and decision-making power, but the purpose and drive must come from people involved in the organization and those who will advocate for the historic preservation of the space and vessels.

SOUTH STREET SEAPORT AND EAST RIVER ESPLANADE REDEVELOPMENT

Planning efforts along the East River in Lower Manhattan are another part of the redevelopment of this area and are essential for the success of South Street Seaport. Dirk
Schubert identifies a cycle or historical pattern in waterfront development which involves: 1) dereliction and relocation of terminals and port uses; 2) neglect of derelict areas; 3) planning and designing for former port areas; 4) implementation of these plans; and 5) revitalization and enhancement of nearby waterfront areas.103 He also recognizes that the vision of what the waterfront is for the city will change: “Romantic and nostalgic views will be left behind as the planning of cities and ports increasingly follows different development parameters. Future development in coastal regions and seaport cities is thus dependent on the interaction and development of the global economy, transport and ship building, nature and the environment, as well as climate change and interests of citizens.”104 New York City’s waterfront follows this pattern and this section will discuss the implementation phase. While I agree that there must be a shift in the redevelopment of the waterfront from pre-industrial times, there can be a balance between nostalgia for its history as well as a forward-looking public space to enjoy.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg and City Council Speaker Christine Quinn unveiled their redevelopment plan on April 13, 2010 for New York City’s 520 miles of waterfront, the Waterfront Vision and Enhancement Strategy (WAVES). It is a two-part plan comprised of Vision 2020: New York City’s Comprehensive Waterfront Plan and The New York City Waterfront Action Agenda. The action agenda outlines 130 specific projects the administration has prioritized and Vision 2020 details the long-term vision for the waterfront. According to the New York City Economic Development Corporation, WAVES “will reconnect New Yorkers and visitors to the water and reclaim New York City’s standing as a premier waterfront city by transforming the City’s waterfront with

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103 Schubert, “Waterfront Revitalizations,” 76.
104 Ibid., 94.
new parks, new industrial activities and new housing. And it will capitalize on the City’s waterways—the ‘sixth borough’—to promote waterborne transportation, recreation, and natural habitats.\footnote{105}

WAVES is not the first or the last master plan for waterfront development in New York City. In 2002, Mayor Bloomberg’s Vision for Lower Manhattan required that a study be done of Lower Manhattan along the East River. The New York City Department of City Planning conducted the study, which was funded by a grant from the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, funneled through a Community Development Block Grant from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. Ideas for the stretch of the East River Esplanade extending from the Battery Maritime Building to Montgomery Street, resulted from this concept study, which involved conversations with members of community boards, tenant associations, civic leaders, maritime experts, and local elected officials. The use of this information solicited from the public informed the professional architects and planners concepts for this public space along the East River waterfront.\footnote{106}

Michael Marrella Director of Waterfront Planning for the NYC Department of City Planning discussed this planning process. Lower Manhattan was given funding after the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 to rebuild the site as well as the surrounding areas. This was an important opportunity for New York City to rebuild and to diversify the area, making it more than just a place for office buildings. Planners wanted to create new and attractive residential, commercial, and cultural experiences. They saw an opportunity for the waterfront to be a driver of these new functions. A master plan was created eight years ago for the East River Esplanade and this stretch is one of the remaining links of the waterfront greenway around Manhattan. This process involved an interdisciplinary team approach as the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation provided the funding and worked closely with the New York City Economic Development Corporation and the Department of Parks and Recreation. They used a public outreach approach to get the community’s input on the East River Esplanade. The administration’s commitment to collaborating with the community and different city

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agencies on waterfront projects is admirable and a great step toward creating a waterfront that is accessible and useful to everyone, not just a stamp of a waterfront development in another United States city.

The most recent completed project is Pier 15 located at the end of John Street on the East River. It is a 500-foot, two-level pier in the South Street Seaport area of Lower Manhattan. Marrella encourages visitors to Pier 15 to look both out onto the water towards Brooklyn as well as back into Manhattan. It is a unique space on the waterfront that provides beautiful views looking both ways. There are some Requests for Proposals out now for use of the Pier 15 space. The city would also like to see maritime use on the water as there is space for boats to tie up there. It will also include restaurant and café space, which Marrella identifies as an important way to “activate” the pier. He also reveals that new construction will not have the quasi-Dutch façade, but the preservation of existing Dutch-style buildings in South Street Seaport is important.¹⁰⁹

Pier 15 is also a great example of design principles for waterfront public spaces. Not only does it serve as a way to get people to the water’s edge, it serves as a place for people to gather with ample and comfortable seating with activities and amenities available nearby. There are sunny and shady spaces and the greening of the waterfront is beneficial to the ecosystem as well as adding to the aesthetic of the pier. It also provides fishing sites, boat launches, and access to get into the water.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Marrella, Interview, March 19, 2012.
The opening of the new Pier 15 has sparked plans for the renovation of South Street Seaport’s nearby Pier 17, which houses shops and fast-food restaurants. SHoP Architects and South Street Seaport owner Howard Hughes Corporation, shared the new vision for Pier 17 recently that will transform the closed-off structure into a glass structure above the street level where space underneath would connect to the rest of Lower Manhattan upland. It will be 270,000 square feet and have views of the Brooklyn Bridge. Approval by the community is pending and must also be cleared by the Landmark Preservation Commission and the Department of City Planning.111

VISION 2020: NEW YORK CITY’S COMPREHENSIVE WATERFRONT PLAN

Because of the South Street Seaport Museum’s financial struggles in the past, Vision 2020 and its related projects are important to the success of the revitalization of South Street Seaport. The city’s renewed dedication to its waterfront will provide the necessary public support for projects at South Street Seaport. A larger goal of a revitalized New York City waterfront will also serve as a framework in which South Street Seaport can situate itself. It will also serve as a destination for those who have rediscovered the importance of the waterfront in the city and can provide educational resources to them on New York’s maritime and port histories.

Susanna Schaller, Ph.D. in City and Regional Planning and professor at the City College of New York and Johannes Novy, Ph.D. in Architecture, Planning and Preservation of Columbia University, authors of “New York City’s Waterfronts as Strategic Sites for Analyzing Neoliberalism and its Contestations” in Transforming Urban Waterfronts: Fixity and Flow address the political and economic issues at play on the city’s waterfront. They see the New York City waterfront as a place “where competing urban imaginaries collide, as community groups, political figures, and citywide alliances organized around specific interests such as environmentalism, labour rights, affordable housing, and industrial retention seek to assert the possibility of alternative futures.”

Schaller and Novy also quote the Nonprofit Center for Urban Future as arguing that New York City is “one of the only major cities in the world that hasn’t made its

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waterfront a central part of economic, housing and tourism strategy.”

They identify Mayor Bloomberg’s administration as a time of restructuring of urban space through a “top-down development agenda.” During his tenure as mayor, there have been many rezonings, changes in transportation infrastructure, expansions and changes in public space. His approach to waterfront revitalization has been for the public sector to invest and to incentivize private sector development in this post-industrial city.

There have been a number of projects addressing waterfront redevelopment in New York City since the 1992 Comprehensive Waterfront Plan. There is the Waterfront Revitalization Program that is the city’s principal coastal zone management tool, which requires that a determination be made on a project before moving forward, Waterfront Zoning stemming from a 1993 resolution to have special regulation along the waterfront, Maritime Support Service Location Study, PlaNYC, Mayor Bloomberg’s growth and climate action plan to address by 2030, New York City Water Trail, Hudson-Raritan Estuary Comprehensive Restoration Plan to restore the New York New Jersey Harbor, NYC Green Infrastructure Plan, and the Comprehensive Citywide Ferry Study. Since 1992, there have been many achievements on the New York City Waterfront. Since 1992, the city has acquired about 1,250 acres of waterfront land. In the same time period, there have been 70 rezonings affecting 3,000 acres of waterfront land. These rezonings are essential to waterfront redevelopment as they set up and allow for physical and environmental changes to be pursued. Six working waterfront locations were designated as “Significant Maritime and Industrial Areas” in the 1992 Comprehensive Waterfront Plan.

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113 Ibid., 168
114 Ibid., 167.
Plan: Kill Van Kull on Staten Island, Sunset Park, Red Hook, and Brooklyn Navy Yard in Brooklyn, Newtown Creek in Brooklyn and Queens and the South Bronx. This shows the growth and development that have taken place economically on New York City’s waterfront.

All of these aforementioned projects have contributed to Vision 2020: New York City’s Comprehensive Waterfront Plan. In 2008, New York City Council passed Local Law 49 requiring the Department of City Planning to conduct a comprehensive waterfront plan and Vision 2020 is the result of this mandate. It required input from officials on the city, state, and federal levels as well as from the general public. The steering committee of the Technical Advisory Committee formed in 2009 was comprised of staff from the Mayor’s Office, DCP, NYC Economic Development Corporation, the Department of Environmental Protection, the Office of Emergency Management, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Department of Housing Preservation and Development. A Waterfront Planning Working Group was also formed to involve other agencies in the Vision 2020 project, which advised DCP and the other agencies creating the plan and held monthly meetings beginning in March 2010 to provide recommendations and guidance during the planning process. Some of the agencies involved include: American Institute of Architects, American Planning Association, Empire State Development Corporation, Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance, Municipal Arts Society, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, Regional Plan Association, US Coast Guard, and US Army Corps of Engineers. The public played a pivotal role as well. Through DCP’s public workshops,

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116 New York City Department of City Planning, Vision 2020, 11-15.
117 Ibid., 18.
they were able to provide input and feedback on the comprehensive plan. Their involvement began on April 8, 2010 when the agency unveiled their goals for this project. Seven public workshops were held in each of the boroughs plus two to cover the Blue Network or the waterways that traverse the city.

*Vision 2020* was achieved in three phases: 1) identification of goals and issues by the Department of City Planning in spring 2010; 2) identification of opportunities and priorities in summer 2010 where they held seven public workshops attended by advocates, residents and other stakeholders; and 3) identification of recommendations in fall 2010 during which DCP reviewed information from the workshops and drafted recommendations which were presented to the public on October 12, 2010.\(^{118}\) After review by the public, the final version of the plan was announced and released on March 14, 2011. In this situation, city agencies and planners follow David Harvey’s view of what a planner should be, a servant of the social process, not its master. Professionals are needed to execute the plans, but public input is essential.

As the big-picture complement to The New York City Waterfront Action Agenda in Bloomberg’s WAVES project, *Vision 2020* identifies eight broad goals and ideas on how to achieve them by the year 2020:

1. Expand public access to the waterfront on both public and private property
2. Make the waterfront a multi-use space, well integrated with upland communities
3. Support economic activity on the working waterfront
4. Improve water quality
5. Restore natural waterfront areas and protect wetlands and shorefront habitats
6. Enhance the public experience of the waterways or the Blue Network
7. Improve governmental regulation, coordination and oversight of the waterfront
8. Identify and pursue strategies to address climate change and sea level rise

Expanding public access to the waterfront is the most relevant to this paper. DCP argues that “public open spaces on the waterfront can transform neighborhoods, turning previously inaccessible lands into vibrant community gathering areas that foster economic growth.”\textsuperscript{119} One example of this is a waterfront greenway, which provides a way for people to travel along the shore. People can now traverse Manhattan’s west side from the neighborhood of Inwood at Dyckman Street all the way south to Lower Manhattan’s Battery Park. The east side of Manhattan is catching up quickly and the development on the East River Esplanade South will help to add to the waterfront greenway along the East River.

An obstacle to public access to the waterfront is funding. The costs of acquiring and maintaining waterfront land, constructing infrastructure, and managing the parks add up to high capital costs. They can be publicly or privately funded, but are usually funded by both. Interestingly enough, city and state agencies can enter agreements with private landowners to maintain spaces accessible by the public on their property. Another situation is where waterfront land is developed by private developers and is then transferred to the city providing private funds for the space. These different approaches allow for more and diverse development along the city’s waterfront and address the issue of funding when the city’s budget cannot cover or maintain everything. This is one way to address the unequal resources Clarence Stone refers to, but the plan must be mobilized by the public and prioritized. Stone recognizes the unequal distribution of resources in cities and this is one way to address that. The Lower Manhattan East River Esplanade South project is written into the Waterfront Action Agenda’s projects under this first goal of expanding public access.

\textsuperscript{119} New York City Department of City Planning, Vision 2020, 24.
The next goal to enliven the waterfront addresses the improvement of life, recreation, and work on the waterfront. DCP writes, “Housing on the shoreline satisfies the deep human desire to be on the water and offers the chance to have bracing views of ships and shorebirds and glittering water.”\(^{120}\) Not only do people living on the waterfront benefit from revitalization of that space, but it also allows people living upland to enjoy a part of the city that has been long ignored. In addition, improvements to waterfront infrastructure such as sewage systems will help the ecological system. This section also addresses the importance of historic districts including South Street Seaport. DCP argues:

> Such sites promote an understanding of New York’s history and provide a sense of identity and uniqueness of place. Protecting these resources safeguards the city’s historical, aesthetic, and cultural heritage for the benefit of current and future residents and visitors. Preservation can also have economic benefits, improving property values and enhancing New York’s attractiveness for tourism.\(^{121}\)

They also identify historic areas such as South Street Seaport and Governor’s Island as places to host contemporary events and programs as they already have a draw for tourists and residents alike. The historic vessels owned by the South Street Seaport Museum also provide an educational and recreational experience to the waterfront.\(^{122}\)

Just as Soja argued that there would be a transformation of space in the post-industrial era, *Vision 2020* identifies the challenges for the working waterfront and advances in technology that will help the working waterfront in the third goal:

As a result of advances in shipping technology, primarily the development of containerized shipping, waterborne freight operations have been consolidated and now occupy a smaller number of facilities, even though the total volume of goods shipped into New York has grown considerably. Volumes are expected to continue to increase, and so will demands on maritime support services. At the same time, changes to global shipping patterns that will result from the expansion of the

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\(^{120}\) Ibid., 36.
\(^{121}\) Ibid., 38.
\(^{122}\) Ibid., 39.
Panama Canal have implications for the Port and the many businesses that sustain it.\footnote{Ibid., 44.}

The function of the waterfront has changed and the development and economy around it must change as well in order for everything to survive. Although South Street Seaport has struggled to find a new purpose, it is on its way to doing so and according to \textit{Vision 2020}, the rest of New York City is also ready to make the transition to the next technology or economic structure.

The next two goals of improving water quality and restoring the natural waterfront have great ecological benefits, but also promote recreation and other public benefits. It is in the collaboration of the diverse groups of people on \textit{Vision 2020} that help formulate innovative ways to solve these problems. Representatives from a variety of professional backgrounds and advocacy groups can focus on a project under these goals and use their expertise to address these issues.

The sixth goal of enhancing the Blue Network is one that begins to include a regional perspective on the waterfront. The major waterbodies in New York City are the Hudson River, the Long Island Sound, and the New York Bight of the Atlantic Ocean. Just as it served as a major port hundreds of years ago, New York is beginning to upgrade its modes of transportation via water and think of alternative sources of energy such as tidal energy and offshore wind power. It is a positive sign that the city sees the potential in its Blue Network.\footnote{Ibid., 86.} There are many benefits to this regional approach including better connectivity to nearby urban areas, more sustainable energy sources, and an expanded regional economy. Waterways are a natural connection to other parts of the region and

\footnote{Ibid., 44.}
\footnote{Ibid., 86.}
New York City should take advantage of this to partner with other cities especially during this time of economic uncertainty.

In order to execute any of these plans, improvement to government oversight is key and Vision 2020 identifies that need in goal seven. Regulations must be made with regard to the environment, management of public infrastructure and regional coordination. Thinking about waterfront redevelopment on a regional scale is essential in the physical planning of projects such as dredging, water quality, and bridge replacement, but is also important to thinking about funding on a regional level.125 The last goal of increasing climate resilience has implications for all of the issues previously mentioned in Vision 2020. Without a plan to address and protect against climate change and rising sea levels, the other projects will be done in vain. Planning for these changes is essential and the dedication to doing so by DCP is promising.126

Discussions at the public workshops were divided into “reaches,” which represented a segment of waterfront within each of the five boroughs plus a broader discussion of the Blue Network. Reach 1, East River South, encompassed the South Street Seaport and surrounding areas. Notes from this workshop reveal the issues that the community identified as priorities for them. In this meeting, people from the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance, Lower East Side community group member, Assembly and Council members, the New York City Economic Development Corporation, Lee Architects, the Mayor’s Office of Environmental Remediation, and residents were present.

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125 Ibid., 101.
126 Ibid., 106.
Issues they raised included poor access to the East River Park, the need to address the structure of agencies that control the waterfront, corporations they feel are immune to agency pressure, access to the Brooklyn Bridge beach as the upland owner will not grant this to them, the need to invest in porous surfaces such as plants or grass, getting apartment buildings on the waterfront invested in the neighborhood, unfavorable parking garages near the waterfront, new zoning, administrative reform, and a natural edge.\textsuperscript{127} The goals listed in \textit{Vision 2020} for this area do reflect the community’s concerns, “Study opportunities to improve upland connections, including providing ADA accessibility. Support plans to create public pier with an eco-park component. Improve upland streetscape connections, along Montgomery St., Rutgers St., and Catherine St., as described in the East River Waterfront master plan.”\textsuperscript{128}

DCP also hosted a public comment session on October 12, 2011 after the draft recommendations were released. Representatives at this session included people from The Point Community Development Center in the South Bronx, Uprose, Community Board 1, Bronx Borough President’s Office, New York Water Taxi, New York City Water Train Association, Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance, New York City Fire Department, concerned citizens among many others. Again, this narrow representation of the New York City population still brings a variety of voices to the table, but it is still representative of very specific interests. This is not a criticism of the process, but something noteworthy. The sentiment at this public comment session was concern for details that may have been left out. It does not have every project listed, but it provides a framework for the redevelopment of New York City’s waterfront and does not intend to

\textsuperscript{127} Author unknown, Notes from public workshop in Brooklyn, 2010.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 118.
list every specific project. While concrete goals are necessary and included in Vision 2020, this should also serve as a springboard for other public and private development projects.

Individuals identified issues that were not addressed in Vision 2020 including affordable housing on the waterfront, environmental justice issues regarding industrial buildings in certain neighborhoods, and creating buffer zones to separate residential areas from polluted industrial sites. While the document identifies environmental solutions, climate change and sea level rise resilience, individuals raised concerns about unequal investment and funding and advocated for support for all boroughs, not just Manhattan. This sentiment is reminiscent of Clarence Stone’s theory and Susan Fainstein’s concept of the just city. Stone addresses the difficulty of overcoming system bias such as unequal planning or environmental justice and how a large amount of resources is required to overcome this. Funding is an issue when it comes to implementing these projects and it will be interesting to see how spatially just they are. Which programs will get funding and which will be prioritized? He argues that it is through these informal networks and civic engagement that resources can be advocated for in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods. Fainstein’s just city implores city planners to strive for equity with regard to who they are serving and the degree to which the public is being included in the planning process.

Michael Marrella was the project director for Vision 2020 and spoke to the dedication of the current Bloomberg administration to public outreach and collaboration with regard to urban planning. Engaging the public has always been important to this administration and Vision 2020 stems from the same ethos. What is different about Vision

129 Author unknown, Notes from public comment session in Manhattan, 2010.
2020 is that it was the first time the agency has done a city-wide process and it had to be completed within a year. Gerard Hauser theorized that the public sphere is formed because of common interests. There are advantages and disadvantages to this; within this public sphere, many voices are heard, but on the downside, they may not represent a broad range of interests, only specific ones related to the waterfront. While Marrella recognizes that the more organized groups will always be best represented, he felt that his team reached a broad constituency. He had some ideas for making it more accessible to and convenient for the public, such as providing childcare at the meetings. Financial resources did not allow him to provide that service. His office was proactive about offering translation services at all meetings, but was not taken up on that offer.

Marrella also identified the economic climate to be important for Vision 2020 as they did not face intense development pressures and were able to be more reflective. Also, the political situation with Bloomberg in his third term allowed for the theme of waterfront redevelopment to be discussed continuously. The eight to ten different city agencies that were involved in Vision 2020 had the same individuals in place, so everyone had the knowledge of and familiarity with the comprehensive plan. According to Marrella, this made for an incredibly successful plan that has the support of the public.

South Street Seaport is an anchor to the history of New York City’s maritime past, but it is only a piece of its vast waterfront. As important as it is to keep the museum functioning it is even more essential to put energy into revitalizing all of New York City’s waterfront in an equal and sustainable manner. If the city is to continue as a global leader it must invest in its spaces along the water’s edge. To create a waterfront that lends itself to a successful working space, recreational destination, and ecological balance, an
interdisciplinary approach must be employed as seen in the East River Esplanade and

*Vision 2020* projects.
CONCLUSION

What comes to mind when you think of New York City? Skyscrapers? Broadway shows? Central Park? Iconic movie scenes? How can we make the waterfront a part of every New Yorker’s life and how can we bring to the forefront the bodies of water in which the island of Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Staten Island are situated? What is going to keep people coming back to the water’s edge in New York time and time again? The barriers to realizing a healthy and thriving waterfront in New York City are plenty and not limited to funding, access, and major physical changes to the spaces. Overcoming these barriers can only be achieved by prioritizing these aspects and following through on Vision 2020 and waterfront plans that will come after it.

Revitalizing the waterfront will be a long-term process; the collaboration of multiple city, state, and federal agencies and the solicitation of community input are steps in the right direction and essential to the success of these projects.

New York City leads the global urban world in many different sectors. What is unique about this city is its 520 miles of waterfront and it has been long neglected. Save Our Seaport committee member David Sheldon recognizes that South Street Seaport never tried to work off of its uniqueness such as exploring the New York Harbor on the Pioneer. He recalls the former administration’s focus on renting meeting space in empty rooms of the historic building in which the museum was housed, while on the other hand, he saw value in doing more hands on educational activities with the historic vessels as “ships are living things” and so is the waterfront.130

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130 Sheldon, Interview, February 23, 2012.
I chose to study South Street Seaport because of its historical significance and current revitalization as part of Lower Manhattan’s redevelopment project after 9/11. While the new Freedom Tower being built in the Financial District serves as a symbol of hope amidst the city and nation’s recent tragedies and challenges, South Street Seaport, visible eastward on Fulton Street from the Freedom Tower solidifies the city’s unbreakable ties to its history.

Director of Waterfront Planning for the NYC Department of City Planning, Michael Marrella says that understanding the historic connection to the waterfront is vital as everything can be directly tied to the waterfront. He notes that the past generation has begun to lose that connection. But with the help of planning initiatives, New York City’s residents and visitors have been granted better access to the waterfront. Even in the beginning stages of the Waterfront Action Agenda and executing Vision 2020’s goals for...
the waterfront, Marrella has seen changes. While in Lower Manhattan one day, a tourist stopped him to ask how to get to the harbor. The fact that this person was seeking out the South Street Seaport is a testament to the rise of the waterfront as a true tourist destination in New York City. With more known places such as Broadway for entertainment, Fifth Avenue for shopping, and Central Park, it will take some work for the waterfront to rise to popularity.131

Economic, recreational, and ecological opportunities are plentiful if we approach this natural resource and space in a sustainable and just manner. Addressing the environmental issues will benefit the health of New Yorkers as well as the habitat and animals living there. Revitalizing the spaces along the water will draw more residents and tourists to new areas of the city and foster growth, community, and business. These issues have been prioritized on the agenda by the current administration, but will only be sustained by the community’s support and public and private sector development. Harder battles will have to be fought in communities with fewer resources and systemic inequalities will also have to be addressed there.

Planning is going in the right direction for this goal and to keep people engaged, nonprofit organizations such as the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance will help to push waterfront issues to the forefront of New Yorkers’ minds. They envision this for New York City:

The Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance envisions a New York and New Jersey harbor and waterways alive with commerce and recreation; where sailboats, kayaks and pleasure craft share the waterways with commuter ferries, barges and container ships; where beautiful, cared-for parks are connected by affordable waterborne transit; where there are dozens of exciting waterfront destinations that reflect the vitality and diversity of the great metropolis that surrounds it; a waterfront that is no longer walled off by highways and rails, or by private luxury.

131 Marrella, Interview, March 16, 2012.
residences; a waterfront that is a shared precious resource and is accessible to all. MWA is a leadership organization that will make this vision real for our region.\textsuperscript{132} The community must continue to fight for its waterfront in order for the city to become a humane metropolis. Treating the waterfront as a place that will further enrich their daily lives and contribute to an already innovative thriving economy in New York will result in a better city for everyone. Should New York City achieve a successful redevelopment of its waterfront as I expect it to, the process leading up to the redeveloped waterfront will serve as a model for the United States and for the global community. This successful redevelopment process will be attributed to the interdisciplinary, inclusive, and thoughtful approach to urban planning with goals of equity and a better quality of life for the entire community. With a renewed sense of ownership of the city’s waterfront and an inclusive and collaborative process to realize its goals for these spaces, visitors to and residents of New York City will reap the benefits of a revitalized waterfront for years to come.

\textsuperscript{132} Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance, “Mission,” last modified 2009, \url{http://www.waterfrontalliance.org/about/mission}. 
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APPENDIX A

- What is your background? How did you get to the position with the [name of organization/agency]?
- What is the vision of your organization and what steps have been taken or will your organization take to achieve its goals?
- What are some of the obstacles you have faced or anticipate facing?
- With my interest in urban spaces, what is it about this particular space that makes it so important to you? Does the development (past, present, or future) raise issues for you in any way?
- Was there collaboration with city agencies or other organizations? If so, did the collaboration of different agencies and community organizations result in a more comprehensive plan, incorporating the views of the community, businesses, and city agencies?
- Did the ways in which these plans were framed (i.e. environmental issues or otherwise) affect the types of organizations that got involved in the process?
- What other factors contributed to the community organizations’ involvement in the planning process? If there was weak community involvement, how could they have been better engaged?
- What were the political, economic and social climates of the times during which the comprehensive plans were being pushed in these various areas? What, if any, influence did these conditions have on the outcomes of the waterfront projects?
- Does the history of the waterfront and its political ties affect the plans created and presented to the city planning department?
- Why were communities involved in the planning process? What community organizations, city agencies, and politicians are involved?
- Why are the people of [name of organization/agency] involved?
- What are the visions of each group for this space and what steps have been taken or will the group take to achieve its goals?
- What are the primary concerns of the people in charge of the development and who comprises that group? Does this contradict other interest groups?
- Has this focus ever shifted and if so, how and under what circumstances?
- What is the existing and new legislation pertaining to the waterfront plans?
- Has the outcome, plans or completed projects, reflected the collaborative efforts?
- To what extent was the media involved?
- Why do you care about the space? How do you think it would be best treated in the midst of current and future development? Closing thoughts?
ABSTRACT

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Waterfront Redevelopment at South Street Seaport: Where Water and Land, Collaboration and Planning Converge

Thesis directed by Rosemary Wakeman, Ph.D.

This thesis will explore the viability and the outcomes of an interdisciplinary approach to urban planning by examining Vision 2020: New York City’s Comprehensive Waterfront Plan and by using the case of South Street Seaport and its various redevelopment phases from 1960 to the present. The purpose of urban planning should not only be to provide necessary services to sustain a city and its residents, but also to foster community building and to provide opportunities for its residents to gain the most from their surroundings so that they can be positive, active members of society. Often times, planning serves as a way to solve economic problems or to hastily meet a need that is not already being fulfilled without exploring the sustainability of the project or the implications of such decisions on a community. Urban planning must incorporate an interdisciplinary approach to include geography, sociology, urban studies, economics, history and political science, utilizing the concepts and theories from each discipline along with community-based approaches. Together South Street Seaport and Vision 2020 provide a unique forum for analyzing the urban planning process. A successful redevelopment project requires the input and collaboration of various professionals and people from the community in order to create an equitable space with a higher quality of life on the waterfront.
VITA

Kathryn Anne Lorico Tipora, daughter of Cora and Nathaniel Tipora, was born on May 1, 1985 in Norfolk, Virginia. She grew up in Virginia Beach and graduated from Norfolk Academy in 2003. She pursued her undergraduate education at the University of Richmond and received the Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology with minors in Geography and Urban Practice and Policy in 2007.

She moved to New York City to work for the New York State Child Advocacy Resource and Consultation Center, a program of Safe Horizon, in 2007. In 2009, she began the Urban Studies Master of Arts program at Fordham University.