

MEGA-EVENTS AND THEIR URBAN ENVIRONMENT:
CONSIDERING THE 1939 NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR



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Figure 1: a sketch of the Trylon and Perisphere, the central monument on the 1939-1940 World's Fair (New York Public Library, no date).

0. SUMMARY

Mega-events, such as World's Fairs and Olympic Games, have often been assessed for their legacies, what remains after the event has been hosted. These events are often critiqued for not benefiting city residents, but are rather focus on aesthetics to increase a city's image. This study has tried to determine the importance of the physical and socio-cultural legacies of the 1939-1940 New York World's Fair, by placing them in their urban-historical circumstances. On the basis of interviews, two event sequences have been constructed. Centered around two types of physical infrastructure – the mega-event site of Flushing Meadows Corona Park and associated urban infrastructure – they provide context and intentions behind the choices made. The results reveal that the physical infrastructure built for the World's Fair has been and still is of great importance for Queens. Moreover, these legacies focused on the automobile, has prompted suburban development along its highways. Lastly, exclusionary forces at the fair made clear that the fair's benefits were not for everyone. Interpreting the socio-cultural legacies connected to the physical infrastructure, mega-events as sophisticated strategies for urban development were considered inasmuch as they may not put local needs first and disregard the social reality of urban spaces.

Keywords: *mega-event, legacies, World's Fair, urban spectacle*

1. INTRODUCTION

“Washington's place is before the Tylon and the Perisphere. [...] The Perisphere is a huge globe, its white surface already streaked by rain; [...] The Tylon is a three-sided obelisk. [...] . They are supposed to mean something.”

With these words, poet John Peale Bishop described the central monument on the 1939-1940 World's Fair, as seen on the front page of this thesis. The Fair was held on a newly constructed lot called Flushing Meadows, located in the heart of Queens, a borough of New York City. Events such as Fairs have been gathered under the term 'mega-events', and other examples include World Cups and Olympic Games. These events move to a host city for a short period of time, typically a year, after which another city will do the honors next time (Müller, 2015b). Although the event itself is transient, they may have a lasting impact on the urban development of a city. For instance, Barcelona's 1888 World's Fair helped modernize the city, citizens of Paris still see the 1889 Paris Exhibition when they look at the Eiffel Tower, and New York still owes Flushing Meadows Corona Park to the 1939 World's Fair (Espuche *et al.*, 1991; Chalkley and Essex, 1999; New York Public Library, no date).

The influences that mega-events have on an urban area, applying both to the physical environment and its inhabitants, are called legacies (Kassens-Noor *et al.*, 2015). Legacies have become increasingly important for cities bidding to host such an event. It is argued that hosting a mega-event benefits the city, as it can serve as a justification for construction of various kinds of infrastructure (e.g. roads, metro lines and so forth), yet 'softer' effects such as culture, emotion or knowledge based legacies are also hoped and planned for (Chalkley and Essex, 1999; Preuss, 2007). Hence, a “large scale transformation” (Kassens-Noor *et al.*, 2015, p. 665) is wished for, which is a reason for considerable public and private investment.

At the same time, the massive capital influx prompts various critiques on the benefits of mega-events, next to sources citing positive influences (Hiller, 1999). Critical voices especially rally around marginalization of local needs, shining a light on public space privatization (Smith and McGillivray, 2020) and local positive impacts possibly being an empty promise (Weber-Newth, Schlüter and Helbrecht, 2017). It is argued that direct local needs are not central to the choice to host a mega-event, but that a focus on a city's world status and a longing for grandeur are considered more important. As such, an *urban spectacle* is created (Espuche *et al.*, 1991).

A quick scan of the literature indicates that legacies tend to be measured within five to ten years after the mega-event. Espuche *et al.* indicate that the positive performance of previous mega-events should be considered in their appropriate timeframes and circumstances in order to search for “more complex significance” on the urban environment (Espuche *et al.*, 1991, p. 140). It is necessary to consider a mega-event in a more detailed, contextual setting to uncover local needs, due to mega-events' general tendency to overshadow those needs (Chalkley and Essex, 1999). A case study approach fits this aim, as will be elucidated further in the methodology (Taylor, 2016). The 1939-1940 World's Fair is regarded a fitting case to study, because the Fair is situated in a more or less 'sealed off' time period and takes place in a rich, well documented historical setting. This study attempts to answer the following research question and sub questions (please turn over):

What was the importance of the physical and socio-cultural legacies of the 1939-1940 World's Fair for the urban environment of Queens?

- / What physical legacies in the built environment of Queens – which stand in relation to the World's Fair – can be identified?
- / Outlining intention, how can these physical legacies be placed in an urban sequence of events?
- / Outlining meaning, what socio-cultural legacies were present in relation to the identified physical legacies?

Physical legacies are defined as concrete, tangible structures, including construction of parks, highways, subway line extension and the like. The structures are described in their urban-historical context by placing them in two 'event sequences', which serves the purpose of *describing* the successive incidents but also outlining *intentions* behind building these physical structures. In doing so, an opportunity is opened up to derive *meaning*, which interprets the socio-cultural intangible legacy connected to physical infrastructure by asking for whom the mega-event is exactly built. Lastly, *importance* to the urban environment is qualitatively explored, by interpreting the physical and socio-cultural legacies together. Discerning whether an event is built as an urban spectacle, built to advance urban life, or doing something in between contributes to the academic *and* societal discussion reflecting on whether mega-events are an asset or a burden. The direct legacies in the post-event period are sought after. A second Fair was held in Flushing Meadows in 1964-1965 (Moses, 1966): in order not to 'mix up' the 1939-1940 legacies and the 1964-1965 legacies, the timeframe of legacies is set between 20 and 25 years.

By means of four in-depth interviews, supported by a historical map assessment, the above mentioned physical structures and their significance are sought after. Mega-events, legacies and urban spectacle are elucidated in the following theoretical framework, after which the employed methodology is described in detail. Before the results are presented, the 1939-1940 World's Fair case is described further, dealing with its geographical location, the important figure of Robert Moses and the Fair's contents. Subsequently, results in the form of two event sequences will be sketched out, after which a discussion of the socio-cultural legacies will follow. Lastly, the conclusion deals with the main types of significance for Queen's urban environment, and offers suggestions for future research.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the following section, the most important concepts are laid out: these concepts are used to answer the research question posed in the introduction. Their relations with one another have been schematically displayed in the conceptual framework in figure 2. The first concept to be dealt with is mega-events itself. Müller has formulated a definition for mega-events from an aggregate of sources, and concludes that “mega-events are ambulatory occasions of a fixed duration” (2015b, p. 634), attracting many visitors and are associated with large costs. The terms and conditions under which such an event is hosted are determined by some external organization, which is the Bureau International des Exposition in case of World’s Fairs.

In most literature, the aftermath of hosting a mega-event is often referred to as ‘legacies’ (Kassens-Noor, 2016; Kassens-Noor *et al.*, 2015; Müller, 2015b; Preuss, 2007). Legacies and urban transformation are often used to justify expenditure (Chalkley and Essex, 1999). Preuss (2007, p. 211) developed a comprehensive, general definition: “Irrespective of the time of production and space, legacy is all planned and unplanned, positive and negative, tangible and intangible structures created for and by a[n] [...] event that remain longer than the event itself”. What this means, is that specific legacies do not need to manifest themselves *prima facie*, but that legacies can also come to the fore in a more concealed way, i.e. intangible. Examples include urban regeneration, improved public welfare, or socially unjust redistributions (Preuss, 2007).

As outlined by Kassens-Noor *et al.* (2015), many different legacies can be considered and classified, after which various so-called ‘legacy frameworks’ have been introduced. The frameworks range in detail and scale, based on where the focus lies. Brent Ritchie (1984) drew up five categories: economic, physical, psychological, socio-cultural and political. For this study, such broad categories are sufficient, as any *physical* legacy of the 1939-1940 World’s Fair will be targeted. All other categories will not be addressed separately, but *socio-cultural, intangible legacies*¹ (Brent Ritchie, 1984; Preuss, 2007) will be covered whenever a physical legacy in the built environment contains such legacies. This ‘stepped’ approach is visualized in the conceptual model in figure 2. The intangible socio-cultural legacies will be dealt with later, by using the ‘urban spectacle’ concept.

However, this study’s focus on physical legacies is not without reason, as it can be considered the most defining element of mega-events: it has considerable impact on the built environment and population (Müller, 2015b), or even changes the host’s city for good (Chalkley and Essex, 1999; Kassens-Noor, 2016). Mega-events alter urban spaces, as host cities have to provide the site and infrastructure for the events (Hiller, 1999). Muñoz (1997) asserts that mega-events can be considered an essential element of urban development in the 20th Century, due to their “transformative potential” (Kassens-Noor *et al.*, 2015, p. 665). Indeed, Brent Ritchie suggests that mega-events can lead to “highly valuable developments which [...] serve as the basis of recreational enjoyment for local populations for many years” (1984, p. 7).

In pursue of physical legacies, mega-events are *used* to restructure the built environment. Deng *et al.* (2016, p. 163) say that mega-event structures possess “an inborn duality of temporality and permanency”. This quote exposes the threat of permanent infrastructure not being used after the mega-event. If that happens, the Olympics of Rio De Janeiro in 2016 come to mind (Talbot, 2021), it begs the question: for whom are mega-events built? Pouring money into high-end, profitable areas often leaves other parts of the city virtually untouched and neglected (Ronneberger, 2008), especially in the context of mega-events. Here, the social-

¹ For simplicity, whenever socio-cultural legacies are mentioned, their intangible character is implied.

cultural legacies mentioned earlier, when connected to physical infrastructure, are considered. These legacies are discovered by using the concept of spectacle.

Urban spectacle refers to “a new stage in the development of [...] urbanization, a shift to an image-saturated society where advertising, entertainment, television and mass media [...] increasingly define and shape urban life” (Gotham, 2005, p. 227). Mega-events, it is argued, are not reflective of the urban area in which they are hosted. It calls the reality that is built on mega-events into question – often, there is a fixation on the aesthetics, grandeur, and what image spectators are getting (think of the Trylon and Perisphere mentioned in the introduction), while the social reality of urban space is more or less neglected, including class, race and gender relations (Ley and Olds, 1988; Gotham, 2011; García-Doménech, 2015). Subsequently, it is argued that a focus on a dramatic display of aesthetics do, in fact, “divert the masses from more serious matters” (Ley and Olds, 1988, p. 199), “disguise social problems in an effort to project a positive global image” (Chalkley and Essex, 1999, p. 385), and thereby overshadow the political and social realities of urban space by “controlled visual production” (Gotham, 2005, p. 227).

Thus, on the one hand, the urban spectacle concept tries to cast a light on the aesthetic reality of urban space, and how that may cover up the social reality on the other. In this way, local needs of the host city may not be decisive for using mega-events as transformation devices for the urban environment (Espuche *et al.*, 1991). The conceptual model, see figure 2, shows the relationship of urban spectacle with the other concepts. The mega-event itself can be considered a spectacle – hence, the dotted line – but the concept is mainly used to *interpret* the socio-cultural legacies that are attached to the physical legacies.

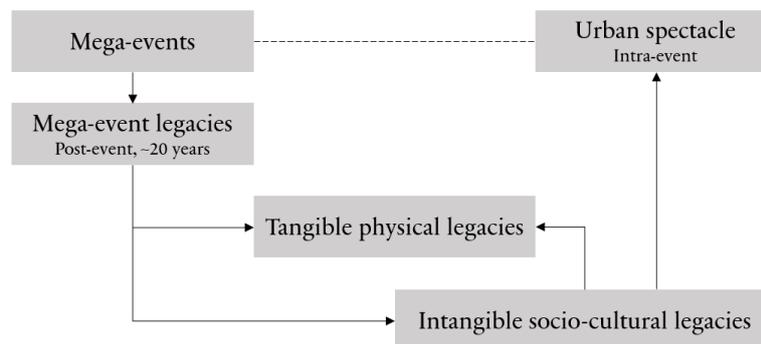


Figure 2: conceptual model. Note the ‘stepped’ legacies – which indicates that intangible socio-cultural legacies are only considered when they are connected to tangible physical legacies – and the position of urban spectacle.

3. METHODOLOGY

To obtain answers to the questions posed in the introduction, the case of the 1939-1940 World's Fair was selected. Taylor (2016) posits that case studies are suitable to discern the mechanisms that govern outcomes visible by the naked eye. Intentions, meanings and ultimately importance do not present themselves as such. This makes both a study of a specific case an apt technique, and points to the use of qualitative research methods. Also, qualitative methods are more fitting for the event sequences approach that is taken (elaborated on in this section). Lastly, qualitative data is chosen because quantitative methods aim to isolate effects, which would not do justice to the historical urban context that is considered.

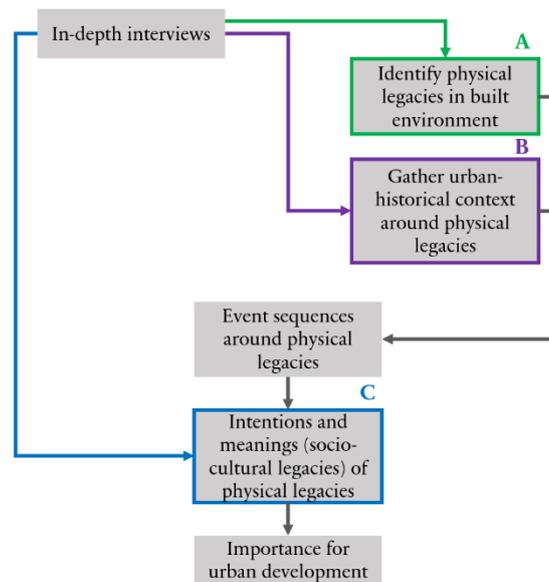


Figure 3: Data collection scheme.

Figure 3 schematically displays the methods used and steps taken in order to arrive at a conclusion. As the primary data collection method, in-depth interviews will be employed. This method is chosen, because interviews can effectively gather local knowledge. Additionally, as the third sub question tries to uncover meaning, interviews prove apt to discern relatively subjective insights (Longhurst, 2016). The selection and amount of participants cannot be determined by some rule-of-thumb, so instead a set of factors are to be considered (Morse, 2000; Baker and Edwards, 2012). The selection procedure can be found in detail in appendix 8.1. Ultimately, four in-depth, semi-structured interviews of approximately one and a half hour have produced sufficient information to construct a results section. Both purposive and snowball sampling methods have been used to select the interviewees. Preferably, a higher number of interviews would have been conducted, yet time and recruitment restraints allowed for a maximum of four.

The interviews have been held online. In-person meetings were not possible due to geographical limitations and COVID-19 travel restrictions. Ethics play a role here: people may not feel as comfortable being interviewed online, due to challenges of modern technology and the distance it creates between interviewer and interviewee. In communication with prospective interviewees, this has been kept in mind. The online video calling software Google Meet is used, as recordings are immediately saved online on Google Drive. This limits the risk for loss of recordings. Consent is collected both verbally and in written form (see appendix 8.3), to ensure that the interviewees are comfortable with their contributions being stored, which is essential for an ethically conducted study. The questions asked have been created on the basis of the to be obtained

data outlined in figure 3 (elements A, B and C). In essence, all have been asked the same questions (see appendix 8.2), yet the order was flexible (Longhurst, 2016). The recorded interviews have been transcribed using oTranscribe and coded using the Atlas.ti software. The coding has first been categorized according to the A, B and C elements. Thereafter, these categories have been broken down into multiple refined codes, which formed the basis for the creation of two event sequences. These sequences have come to the fore in the analysis phase, and have not been determined beforehand.

Categorization of the interview results by an event sequences approach is chosen, because it dissects an otherwise complex, entangled story into clear and understandable portions. It is based upon a ‘path dependency’ method. Path dependency is defined by Mahoney (2000) as “historical sequences in which contingent events set into motion institutional patterns or event chains that have deterministic properties” (p. 508). However, this definition implies an unexpected point of departure that triggers successive events (Mahoney, 2000; Pflieger *et al.*, 2009). The term “path dependency” is *not* used because this research does not aim to seek for contingent events – an inherent part of path dependency – but intends to put the World’s Fair in its historical context. Therefore, the term “event sequences” is adopted, used by Espuche *et al.* (1991), as it is considered more unambiguous. Event sequences are defined as “the course which in a given city charts a linear and continuous perspective of the development [...] in the medium or long term, of the conditions of their production, and their effects”, after Pflieger *et al.* (2009, p. 1427). As said in the introduction, only legacies in a time span of 20 to 25 years after the event have been taken into account, to not confuse the legacies of the 1964-1965 World’s Fair with the 1939-1940 legacies.

The New York Public Library is home to an extensive archive with World’s Fair literature and maps. The elements accessible online are used, but a considerable amount of data is also only accessible either in person or by request. Considering that the request time is around twelve weeks, the closed-off section of the collection has not been used as a data source. However, maps have served to ‘validate’, contextualize, and complement the assertions that interviewees made. Furthermore, *The Power Broker*, written by Robert Caro is used as supplementary literature. This is a biography of Robert Moses, an important figure dealt with in the case description. It contains claims which are at times contested, especially regarding racial issues. Ethical caution is appropriate: this source is not used when discussing race and class matters in the results.

Previous courses in the bachelor program have helped to construct the current methodology. The courses Introduction to Academic Research and Methods for Academic Research were instrumental for reviewing literature, writing properly, conducting interviews and coding. Furthermore, the GIS course helped to select and assess maps, and Urbanism and Planning has provided useful background information regarding the urban history of New York.

4. CASE DESCRIPTION

The research question will be answered using the New York World's Fair, held in 1939 and 1940 (New York Public Library, no date). Because the results will outline physical legacies of the fair, it is necessary to lay out the geographical and topographical location of the fair. Moreover, a man called Robert Moses begs for an introduction as well, due to the pivotal role he has played in the narrative. Lastly, the content of the fair's exhibitions will be sketched out, because it provides useful social context for the results.

The Flushing Meadows are located in Queens, one of the boroughs that constitute New York City. Before the 1900s, it was the home of the Flushing Creek, that ultimately flowed into the Flushing Bay (Murphy Schlichting, 2019). On figure 4, the location of the site is shown with reference to the entire city. Note how the site is situated quite peripherally, with most of the development occurring in either Brooklyn or Manhattan. Before the redevelopment of Flushing Meadows for the fair, this edge of the city was an amalgam of small industry, farms and junkyards. There was some local use of the marshlands, but the area served as a retention basin for higher lying surroundings. As an effect, the Flushing Meadows swamps “remained wet, soft, and nearly impossible to build on” (Murphy Schlichting, 2019, p. 194).

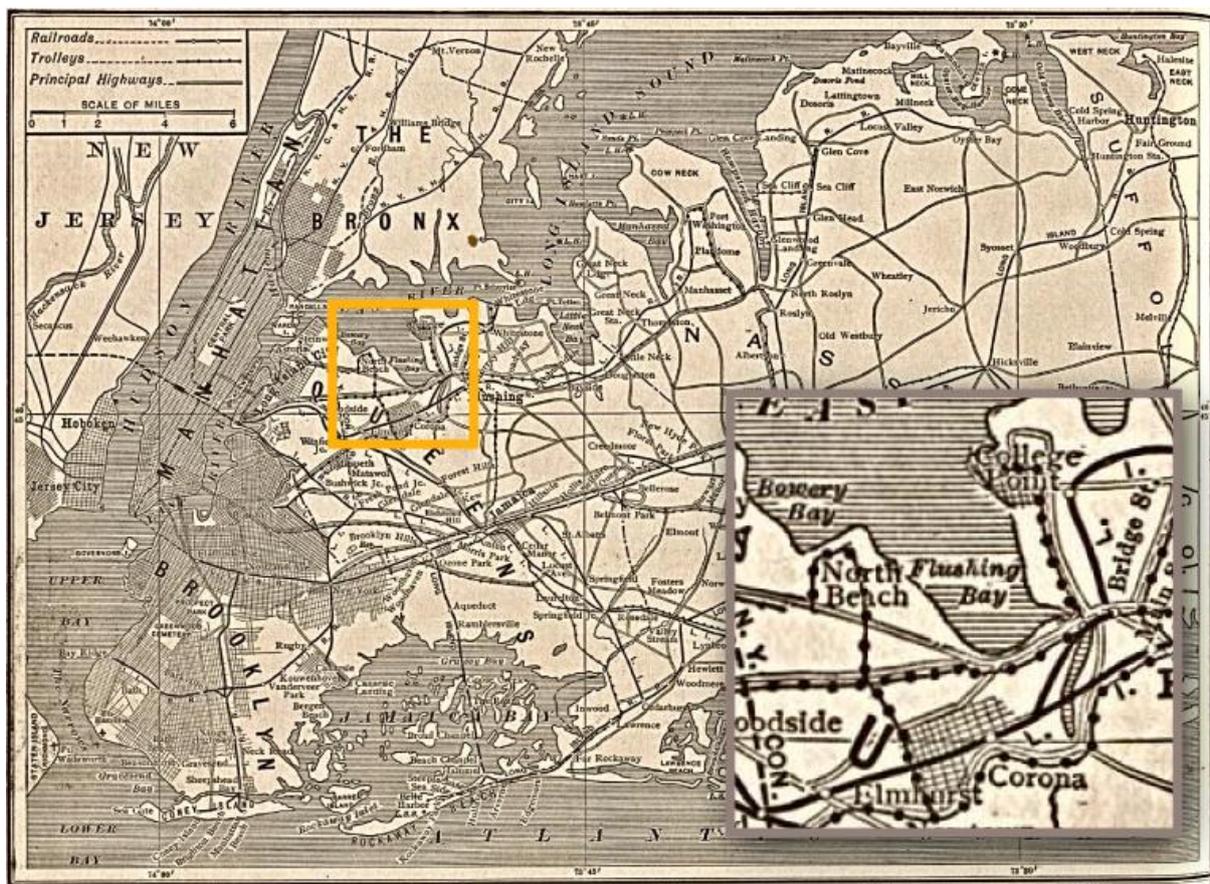


Figure 4: topography of New York in 1917 (P.F. Collier & Son, 1917; edited by author).

The redevelopment of Flushing Meadows and the organization of the fair came together in one person, Robert Moses. He has held multiple positions in and around New York for a good part of the 20th Century. At the time of the fair, Moses headed various commissions and offices, most notably the New York City Parks Commissioner position. Moses was not a politician but a public official, which means that he has never been elected. Nonetheless, his influence has been described as enormous (Caro, 1974; Jackson and Ballon, 2007).

When the fair opened in 1939, its theme was “Building the World of Tomorrow”, as it aspired to emphasize progress, industry, science, enlightenment and cooperation. While there were many exhibits, three stuck out in showing “How Americans may live” (Clarke, 1937, p. 35): General Motors’ Futurama, the Ford exposition and the fair’s own exhibit, Democracity. All three celebrated a future of low-rise, residential neighborhoods connected by highways and automobiles. Bishop (1939, p. 249) describes Futurama as if one was “already in the brave new world of 1960”. Hence, the fair itself had a spatial character, as it proposed a radical redesign of the urban landscape (Fotsch, 2001; New York Public Library, no date).

5. RESULTS

The presented data has primarily been gathered by in-depth interviews, supplemented by historical maps for validation and contextualization. In table 1, the interviewees have been listed. As described in the methodology, the transcribed interviews have been coded firstly using the broad categories of A, B and C (see figure 3) and have subsequently been broken down further. Each event sequence is based around a type of physical legacy, and will be thoroughly described in the subsections below. All physical legacies have been outlined on a map at the end of the section, see figure 7. The socio-cultural legacies attached to the physical legacies will be covered in the last subsection.

Interviewee ID	Position
1	PhD student in architecture
2	Interim chief librarian and urban historian
3	New York City historian
4	Urban geographer, born and raised in Queens

Table 1: overview of interviewees and their positions.

5.1 SEQUENCE I – A LOCATION FOR A FUTURE PARK

The foremost and most obvious physical legacy of the 1939 World’s Fair is Flushing Meadows Corona Park itself, as drawn up in the case description. Flushing Meadows had become a disposal site for ashes and other types of garbage in the beginning of the 20th Century (Murphy Schlichting, 2019). Interviewee 2 notes that was not unusual: multiple wetlands at the city’s fringes had been turned into dumps. This marshland particularly stood out from other dumps, such as in Staten Island, due to its location. Interviewee 3 sums up why it had not been developed:

“The only reason it still existed as open land – that one could imagine having a World’s Fair on – is because it just so gosh darn hard to get real estate value out of it in its natural state”
– Interviewee 3, *New York City historian*

Wetlands were seen as useless, but the space was attractive nonetheless. The New York Times informed that it was the “last great open space left anywhere near the geographical center of New York City” (Murphy Schlichting, 2019, p. 199). As the city expanded eastwards onto Long Island, the population moved closer to Flushing Meadows (Caro, 1974). Interviewee 2 adds to that, by saying that Flushing Meadows was not only a strategic nexus in the already developed and prospective roadway network, but also had strategic subway lines. Interviewee 1 summarized it by saying that the World’s Fair location reflects transportation patterns (more on that in sequence II). These assertions are confirmed by the landscape architect of the fair, Gilmore D. Clarke, who praised the rail, automobile and naval links (see figure 5) (Clarke, 1937).

Robert Moses had eyed the Flushing marshlands for a while: “...a park there, Moses felt, would be a true “Central Park” to the whole city” (Caro, 1974, p. 1083). Interviewee 4, who lives in Queens, agrees with Moses, eighty years later:

“...we still have the park. That is central park of Queens, like Central Park is to Manhattan”
– *Interviewee 4, urban geographer*

To save the bay from the pollution that had accumulated over the years, public intervention was needed and the city acquired Flushing Meadows for future parkland in the 1930s (Clarke, 1937; Murphy Schlichting, 2019). As a result, according to interviewee 2, all the piles of garbage were leveled and a flat surface was created. Both interviewee 1 and 4 note that the topography of Flushing Meadows is flat, compared to other big parks in the city, such as Prospect Park and Central Park. Interestingly, interviewee 3 notes that the marshy grounds of the area required a lot of expensive landfill. The lakes situated at the bottom of the park are the result, as they were dug out for cheaper landfill.

The Fair was merely seen as a means to an end by Robert Moses, interviewee 2 notes. The World’s Fair proved the perfect ‘excuse’ to develop the Flushing lowlands. The money needed came pouring in from the New Deal, interviewee 2 and 3 indicated. The program was launched by American President Roosevelt in the 1930s, aimed at getting the economy up and running again after the Great Depression. New York City immensely benefited from this program, effectively becoming the 49th state for funding, per interviewee 3. The massive federal funding results in public works all over the city, the World’s Fair being just one them:

“Moses had a vision for within the boundaries of New York City, and the idea was: you create the fair and fund the transformation of Flushing Meadows.” – *Interviewee 2, interim chief librarian and urban historian*

The same applies to interviewee 4, who mentions that the Fair was of negligible importance for Moses, but that it spearheaded his redesign of the city. Caro sums it up as “this man who built for centuries could not be interested in structures that would last for two years” (1974, p. 1092), the time the Fair’s pavilions would last. The pavilions were low quality, temporary buildings made of plaster, not designed to be durable. Flushing Meadows was always intended to become a public park, and the quality of the buildings reflected that choice. The elements that did endure the Fair’s extent – the paths, roads and landscaping (Caro, 1974) – were built to a high standard, according to interviewee 2.

The aesthetics of the fair itself were very important, posits interviewee 3. The Fair organizers put in considerable effort to make sure that the backyards next to the train tracks were aesthetically pleasing. A competition for the ‘prettiest backyard’ was hosted, to control the appearance of the surroundings. In addition, zoning was adjusted to allow only low-density housing in the direct vicinity of the fair, banning billboards and certain types of commercial activity (Murphy Schlichting, 2019). Interviewee 3 recalls:

“Robert Moses is very strict in what can face the fair on the [...] approach streets. What he calls “honky tonk”, [...] he doesn’t want that.” – *Interviewee 3, New York City historian*

5.2 SEQUENCE II – A VEHICLE FOR URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE

The second event sequence contains the physical legacies of the Fair, but surround the Flushing Meadows rather than consisting of the grounds itself. Moses saw the Fair as a mode to fund the creation of Flushing Meadows Corona Park, but this applies even more when it comes to the roadways and bridges that are linked to the fair. Interviewee 2 goes as far to say:

“Flushing Meadows Corona Park was a creature of the highways. They are part of the same family.”
– Interviewee 2, interim chief librarian and urban historian

All interviewees indicate that the World’s Fair was the reason to seriously expand the roads and bridges in New York City. The reasoning was fairly simple: if we want people to come to the fair, we should built the infrastructure to accommodate the flows of people, per interviewee 3. The most prominent road link is the Grand Central Parkway, which runs parallel to the fair’s grounds from north to south. This road had already been built in the 1930s, but it plays an essential role in connecting the fair to the rest of the city. Both the Bronx Whitestone Bridge and the Triborough Bridge are built in conjunction with the fair, and connect up with the Grand Central Parkway. Interviewee 3 explains why this connection is made:

“In the 1930s, what we're looking at is a city dream of connectivity between the boroughs”
– Interviewee 3, New York City historian

Also the Queens Borough Bridge is linked to the Fair, indicates interviewee 3, just as the Francis Lewis Boulevard, the Cross Island Parkway and multiple newly built approach streets. Figure 5 provides an overview. According to interviewee 2, these are just a handful of changes to the built environment – anything built between 1936 and 1939 would be tied together by Moses.



Figure 5: the dream of connectivity, visualized (New York Public Library, n.d.).

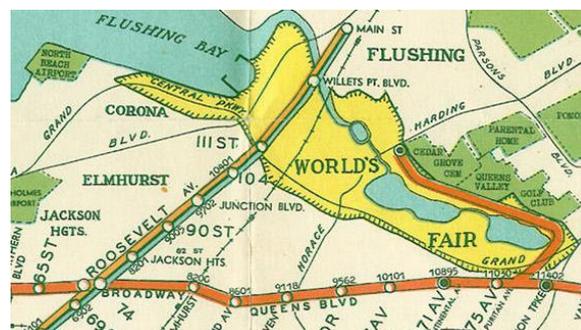


Figure 6: combined subway map, showing the southern, city-owned World’s Fair station and the northern, privately owned Willets Point Boulevard station (Nostrand, 1939).

Even though road infrastructure dominated the entire funding package, other types of infrastructure were funded as well. The subway was yet to become a unified system, and existed out of two private and one publicly owned line up to 1940 (English, 2019). The Fair was served by the already built Willets Point Boulevard station on the northern side of Flushing Meadows, which was rebuilt and expanded to accommodate visitors, as can be seen in figure 6 (New York Times, 1939). Interviewee 1 indicates that partially because of the expanded station, Flushing Meadows became an interesting site for sports stadia, such as the Shea Stadium built for the 1964/1965 World's Fair (Moses, 1966). The city felt, however, that visitors should be able to reach the Fair by public tracks as well, per interviewee 2. The result was that the city line was temporarily extended and looped around the south side of the park, see figure 6. Just as the Fair pavilions, the line was a lower quality, as it was just temporary, interviewee 1 adds.

Furthermore, La Guardia Airport was also built in the same time period, which was linked to the city by the Grand Central Parkway and the Triborough Bridge, say both interviewee 2 and 4. Interviewee 4 also points to the marina on the north side of the park, built to welcome visitors by ship to the Fair. The low-lying topography makes Flushing Meadows a water basin for the entire area. A new drainage system was created, with two pipes running down the east and west side of the marshland, indicates interviewee 3. With the intervention, the moment was seized to build sewage treatment plants as well (Caro, 1974). Interviewee 2 indicates:

“A sewage treatment plant on the East River [...] was part of this same clean-up. So instead of having the sewage flow directly into the East River, which it had been doing, it was now treated so it cleans up the waterway. That too was funded as part of this expansion.”

– Interviewee 2, *interim chief librarian and urban historian*

5.3 SOCIO-CULTURAL LEGACIES

After outlining what physical legacies are associated with the Fair and why they were built, the last part of the results covers what the changed urban environment meant. This is done by exploring the intangible socio-cultural legacies that are connected to the tangible physical legacies, as explained in the introduction and theoretical framework. Both event sequences have touched on the importance of the fair for the regional development of New York City. Thinking of the fair as part of an infrastructure that can lead to further development – per interviewee 1 – points to suburbanization. All interviewees point out that the fair has seriously pushed for a suburban future². Interviewee 3 recalls:

“The Triborough Bridge and the Bronx Whitestone come in [...] and it brings suburbanization almost overnight” – Interviewee 3, *New York City historian*

The type of land use that developed east of the Fair after the Second World War was mostly suburban in nature. In the years between 1920 and 1940, trolley lines determined the type, location and extent of urban development. Likewise, construction ‘follows’ the highways from 1945 onwards, indicate both interviewee 3 and 4. As outlined in the theoretical framework, it is common to use mega-events to push for development

² As mentioned in the case description, the suburban ideal was not only reflected in the physical infrastructure of the fair, but perhaps even more so in the exhibits of the fair. Multiple interviewees were certain that the fair has been essential for suburban development in the whole of the United States.

(Hiller, 1999), but the focus always lies on the mega-event facilities and infrastructure proper – the subsequent (sub)urban growth is rarely considered.

Interviewee 4 typifies the use of the fair to push for road infrastructure as a ‘coverup’: they assert that the public saw a World’s Fair, but that they were not up-to-date on Moses’ strategy. Both interviewee 3 and 4 are convinced that the automobile-focused suburban ideal is permeated by race and class, not or little accessible for people of color or low income. The target group was middle class and up, with the fair advertising using “The Middleton Family” (Uva, 2014). Fotsch (2001, p. 73) shows how highways were seen as vehicles to get away from the “economic and social instabilities” of urban life, and how suburbia offered both improved material environs and abstinence of urban politics. The suburbs were not accessible for everyone (Fotsch, 2001), which is backed up by a poll saying that almost two-thirds of the respondents who did not visit the fair refrained from doing so because they could not afford it (Ley and Olds, 1988). The admission costs, parking and the like was apparently “no small matter” (Uva, 2014, p. 149). Interviewee 3 notes:

“The way [...] modern suburbia of Queens [...] is boosted and promoted, is a rejection of that urban core, that tenement, that overcrowding, that ‘other’” – *Interviewee 3, New York City historian*

Moreover, sequence I describing the exclusionary zoning around the Fair is emblematic for the fixture on grandeur (Ley and Olds, 1988). Interviewee 1 asserts that the fairgrounds have served as a precursor and inspiration for Disney World, and Grover A. Whalen, president of the World’s Fair organization, called the fair an “extravaganza”, a “mad whirl of amusement”, producing an “astounding [...] spectacle” (Whalen, 1939, p. 1). Lastly, corporate interests prevailed on the 1939 World’s Fair, at the expense of organized labor (London, 2014).

Hence, the physical legacies outlined above – the Fair’s grounds, the road infrastructure and subsequent suburbanization – were not available for everyone. That, in combination with a focus on aesthetic value prompts questions about the reality that was built on the World’s Fair. An environment that produces mostly awe and a positive image may not reflect the social and political realities of Queens (and New York City by extension). Exploring these socio-cultural legacies connected physical infrastructure give another perspective on otherwise rather concrete, ‘clear cut’ legacies, showing that they may not be open to all. These findings support spectacle theorist Debord’s conviction that urbanism practices can ensure class lines by ‘spectacularizing’ the urban environment (Pinder, 2000).

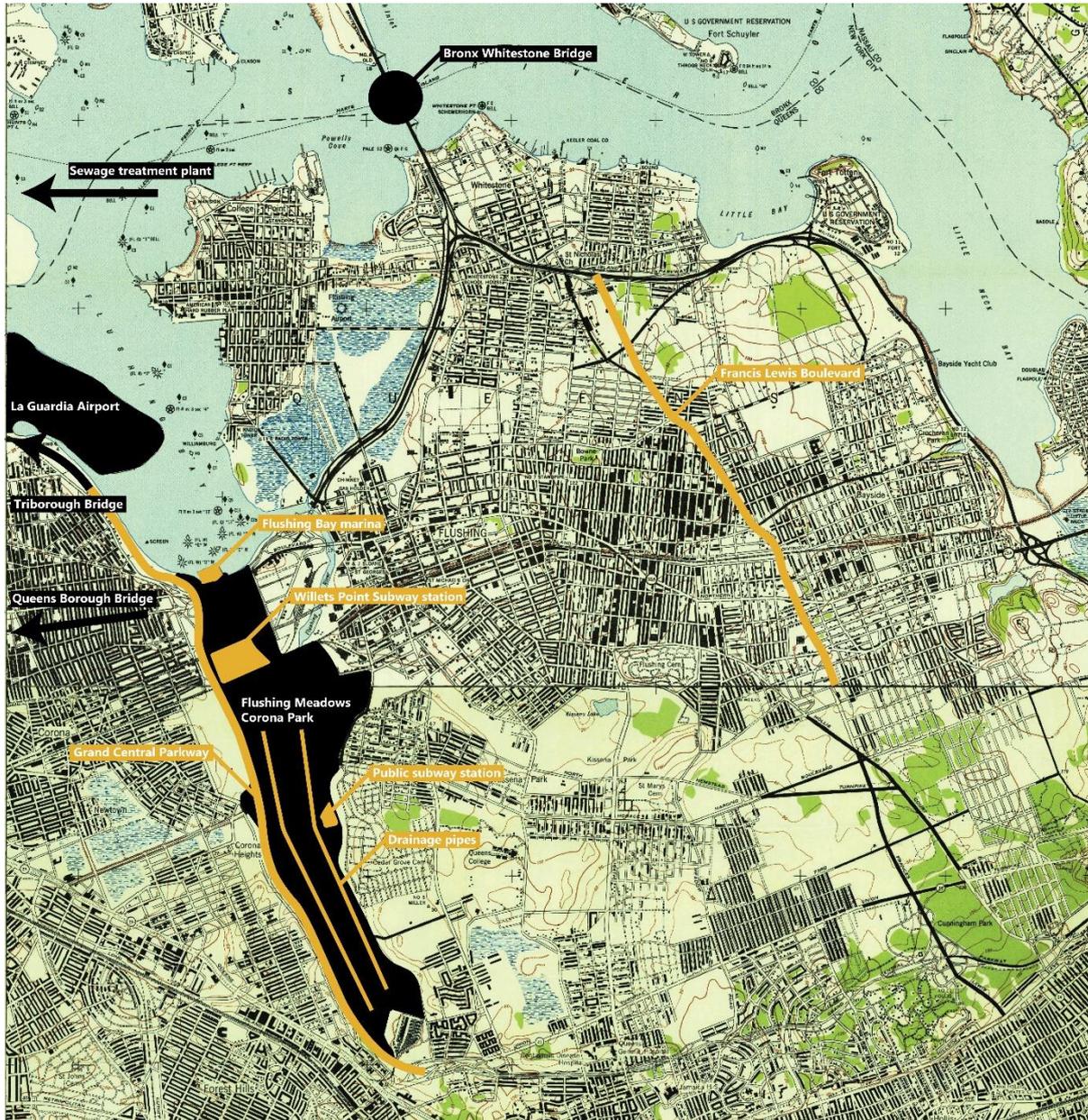


Figure 7: map with physical legacies in Queens and greater region ('Flushing, NY', 1947; 'Jamaica, NY', 1947; edited by author).

6. CONCLUSION

This study has sought to reveal the importance of the physical and socio-cultural legacies built in conjunction with the 1939/1940 World's Fair for the urban environment of Queens. By uncovering how a mega-event is intended, what it does to an urban environment, and what that means, a contribution is made to ever-growing skepticism (Brownill, Keivani and Pereira, 2013; Drummond and Cronje, 2019; Talbot, 2021) about the relevance of mega-events for city residents themselves. Ultimately, an attempt was made to shine a light on who benefits from events like Fairs, and how much of these events are built for the sake of grandeur and image. Interviews supported by literature led to the construction of two event sequences. These 'storylines' revolve around two categories of physical infrastructure, and provide urban-historical context and intentions behind choices to build these structures. Thereafter, the socio-cultural legacies connected to the physical legacies were explored in order to derive meaning. Coherence between interviewees could be found to a large extent, but the results may have been swayed by the limited amount of interviewees and the purposive sampling. Therefore, the results presented here do remain in an explorative realm.

The 1939 World's Fair shows that mega-event built legacies can be far-reaching. The interviewees indicate that the "World of Tomorrow" symbolizes an opportunity that was seized with both hands, and the infrastructure built in conjunction with the fair has left a definite imprint on New York: Flushing Meadows Corona park itself, road connections, bridges, subway connections, sewage systems, a marina and La Guardia Airport. In that sense, this is an example of a mega-event that has delivered on its "transformative potential" (Kassens-Noor *et al.*, 2015, p. 665), and was of great importance for the urban environment. The interviewees indicate, however, that the 1939 World's Fair was built under the unique circumstance of the New Deal and under the reign of Robert Moses. The case shows how urban circumstances may be crucial for the success of mega-events, and provides a reason for more focus on contextual factors in mega-event literature. Also this study has not taken everything into account, such as the 1964-1965 World's Fair, which may bear implications for the validity of the results.

The road infrastructure, formally to accommodate World's Fair visitors, had bigger repercussions as well: it set the stage for a suburban future, where development was guided by highways and the automobile, according to the interviewees. Regardless of whether suburban growth was intended or not, it a subsequential result of the World's Fair legacies. It demonstrates that importance of mega-events for urban areas are not always *directly* visible, but may become apparent over a longer period of time. Moreover, it displays the relevance of researching 'older' mega-events. However, the exhibits on the fair also boosted the suburban future. Therefore, it is necessary to critically assess how much of Queens' suburbanization was caused by physical forces – the infrastructure described above – and how big of an influence exhibits such as Futurama have had. These considerations do not invalidate the importance of physical infrastructure, but add another caveat.

To derive meaning, the socio-cultural legacies connected to the physical legacies have been explored, by contemplating the 1939 World's Fair as an urban spectacle. Interviewees indicated that race and class exclusion penetrated the fair regarding who could come, who was targeted, who could open a business around the Fairgrounds, and who was part of the suburban future portrayed in the exhibits and brought about by the Fair's infrastructure. It calls into question how much of a fair is a genuine reflection of the urban and society as a whole, and how much is grandeur and aesthetics, averting eyes from the social realities of the city onto the "super fountains which [...] call into play a thousand jets, some of them rising to a height of

150 feet” (Whalen, 1939). Therefore, using mega-events to redevelop the urban environment remains a thorny and somewhat questionable practice.

The supposed meanings of the Trylon and Perisphere that John Peale Bishop referred to in the introduction, is perhaps that they symbolize a focus on the aesthetic. The World’s Fair teaches how a balance between social and aesthetic values in urban spaces is desirable. Perhaps it can be called ironic that Flushing Meadows Corona Park now a beloved park for many ethnic minorities living in Corona and Flushing. Hence, mega-events can produce contested urban spaces, whose struggle between aesthetics and social reality may be carried far into the future.

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Word count: 6594

8. APPENDICES

8.1 SELECTION PROCEDURE FOR INTERVIEWEES

Determining the amount of participants for qualitative studies cannot be determined on the basis of some rule-of-thumb. Instead, a couple of factors should be considered (Morse, 2000; Baker and Edwards, 2012). Below, the criteria outlined by Morse are reflected upon:

<p><i>Scope of the study</i> How broad or narrow is the question that the research aims to answer?</p>	<p>The questions posed are not ‘clear cut’. They are rather explorative, as there is not one answer to be found or correct. Yet, this research can be considered narrow in the sense that is a bachelor thesis, which are always relatively narrow.</p> <p>→ Relatively limited scope.</p>
<p><i>Nature of topic</i> Is the topic relatively obvious or difficult to grasp?</p>	<p>The topic is relatively difficult to grasp, as the study aims to uncover something that is intangible. This would point towards having more participants. Yet the data sources used alongside these interviews (historical map analysis, archival footage) do also provide a considerable amount of data.</p> <p>→ Difficult topic to uncover with interviews, yet supplemented by other data sources.</p>
<p><i>Quality of data</i> How rich and experiential is the data, and by extension, how much have participants to say?</p>	<p>The quality of the data is high, partially due to the list of criteria that helps to select adequate participants. All interviewees are professionals with proper knowledge</p> <p>→ Quality of data is high with the help of a list of criteria.</p>
<p><i>Study design, use of shadowed data</i> How much data can be produced based on the design, and how much data is obtained per participant? (linked to the research method)</p>	<p>In-depth, semi-structured interviews of one interview of 1-1,5 hours per participant produces detailed and a considerable amount of data.</p> <p>→ Design provides for much data per interview.</p>

In short, every interview is meant to uncover much information, the interviews are supplemented by other data sources and the scope is relatively limited due to it being a bachelor thesis. Taking all factors into considerations, it seems fitting that around 5 participants are selected (Morse, 2000), provided that they meet a number of criteria set beforehand. These criteria are described below.

Interviewees are not meant to be representative for a larger population, such as with quantitative methods, but rather show experience with the research topic (Longhurst, 2016). The selection will therefore be based on a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling. The former holds that the judgement of the researcher is used whether to include a person in the research, and the latter refers to using one contact to recruit other future participants (Battaglia, 2008; Longhurst, 2016). These points will be taken into consideration. The fact that the case for this study – the 1939 World’s Fair – has taken place eighty years ago needs to be taken into account as well.

The following criteria were drawn up:

1. It can be logically assumed that the prospective participant has experience with at least one of the following topics:
 - The history, development or aftermath of the 1939 World’s Fair;
 - New York City’s, Queen’s or Flushing’s urban development;
 - Physical structures (e.g. subway lines, highways, etc.) that either can be logically assumed to be linked to the 1939 World’s Fair or has been indicated by former participants.
2. The prospective participant has either a scientific, professional, hobbyist or community background in which they have experience with the topic;
3. It can be logically assumed that the prospective participant is able to answer a good majority of the interview questions.

8.2 INTERVIEW GUIDE

Before we begin, I would like to ask whether you agree with me recording our conversation, so it becomes possible to transcribe it later. I will ask you once more to consent to you being recorded when I have started the recording.

START OF INTERVIEW

I am writing my bachelor thesis about the World’s Fair, which was held in New York City in 1939/1940. I am interested how significant this event has been for the city. Currently, the site where it was held is called Flushing Meadows Corona Park. Now, I’ve read up on the many facets of the Fair that have touched lives in the city. That is why I have put the focus on the physical side of things: highways, urban expansion, subway lines, the construction of parks, that kind of stuff.

In a nutshell, that is what I am interested in. I am going to ask you some questions which hopefully will help me answer my questions about the Fair.

Q1 → To start off, can you perhaps tell me a bit about yourself?
What background do you have, what do you currently do in everyday life?

Q2 Now, you must have some connection to Flushing Meadows Corona Park or the World’s Fair.
→ In what way did you come across this site or this event?
How does it connect to your background?

Q3 I have read a bit about the way the site for the World’s Fair was selected, but I am very interested what you know about the developments.
→ Why do you think that the current site was selected to host the World’s Fair?

- Q4** → In what ways did the built environment for citizens change due to the construction of the Fair?
- Q5** → How did that change the way citizens lived their everyday life?
- Q6** → What did it mean for the citizens of New York/Queens that the World's Fair came to their city?
- Q7** → Were the residents of the neighborhoods around the site happy that something was happening there?
- Q8** If you look on maps, you can definitely see that the built environment changed physically because the Fair was built. That is both in the direct vicinity of Flushing Meadows but also further away. For instance, I have read that La Guardia Airport has some sort of relationship with the Fair, but also that a specific subway line was extended to meet the Fair's grounds.
- If you know about those instance, maybe you can tell me something about how the airport and the Fair stand in relationship with each other, but perhaps you also know other examples of how roads, railways, subway lines, buildings and so forth have some connection to the Fair?
- Focus on the most significant ones. Ask follow-up questions to allow the participant talk about all the things they can think of.*
- Q9** I can imagine that some of these changes to the built environment were more useful to residents and citizens than others.
- Which of these constructions changed how the residents of New York lived/interacted with their environment, which didn't change too much?
- Q10** All these changes to the built environment happened in the 30s and 40s of the 20th century. I am interested in what kind of climate these things were built. I am looking for things like the outbreak of World War II or the zeitgeist of that time.
- What could you say about the New York or Queens of those times?
- Examples: FDR's New Deal, upcoming car culture, etc.*
- Let the participant expand on each 'type of context' they raise.*
- Q11** The Fair was not only built for the fun of it, but there must be some intentions with hosting such an event.
- Can you say anything about how the government/organization approached the World's Fair?
- Focus must lie on how the Fair had a local effect, but there a large geopolitical element to it as well. The conversation may be more free if I don't put restrictions on what to talk about immediately.*
- Q12** → Would you say the city government was concerned with what the Fair was doing for the locals/how locals might use the site/facilities/infrastructure afterwards?
- Q13** Let's jump ahead to today.
- How is the park used nowadays?
- Q14** Thank you very much for all the information you've given me, I'm sure it'll prove to be incredibly helpful. I have some closing question, which are bit more practical.
- For finding participants of interviews, I use the snowballing technique. That means that I'd like to ask you whether you would have anyone in your network that would perhaps be willing to participate in such an interview.
- Q15** → Function title.

NB The colors correspond to the colors in the data analysis scheme (see figure 3).

8.3 CONSENT FORM

PURPOSE

This study aims to uncover the importance of the physical legacies of the 1939 World's Fair for the urban development of Queens, New York. Among other methods such as a literature review, in-depth interviews will contribute to all questions posed in the study.

COLLECTED DATA

A recording of the in-depth interview held with the participant, and a function title that is discussed and agreed on by the participant will be collected.

DATA HANDLING AND PROTECTION

The data will be collected via the online videocall software Google Meet. The recording will be stored safely online on Google Drive. This storage location is chosen to minimize the risk of data loss. The account on which the data is stored is protected by multi-factor authentication. Subsequently, The recorded interview is transcribed using oTranscribe and subsequently coded in the Atlas.ti software. The participant will be pseudonymized by giving them a participant ID. In the study, nothing else than the participant ID and he function title as agreed on by the participant will be used to label the participant.

RIGHTS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

The participant has the following rights:

- Access, rectify and erase the accounts that are stored of them in every step of the study;
- Withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice, now or in the future, up until the time of publication (11th of June, 2021). Withdrawal can be requested via email (w.b.wijbrands@student.rug.nl).

END OF THE PROJECT

The data of the participants will be stored for a maximum of three months after the completion of the study. No data will be used for subsequent study.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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The participant declares that:

- ✓ They have read and understood the information about the research project and the purpose of the data processing.
- ✓ They had the opportunity to ask questions;
- ✓ They voluntarily agree to participate;
- ✓ They have been informed of their rights;
- ✓ They understand that they can withdraw at any time without giving a reason.
- ✓ They understand how their data will be processed and protected.