Research Grant – Fall 2009

Title or Proposal:  Exploring “Found” Space: the untapped urban public domain

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Abstract:

“Found” space in the city will be studied for its richness of social meaning and use. The research will explore the potential of this non-traditional public space to be elevated from marginalized waste to legitimate space for expected and unexpected activities of diverse populations of urbanites. The funding for the research project will be mainly used to hire a student in the Spring 2010 semester to help the applicant with the research.

Proposal:

Open public space in the city consists of traditional spaces such as pedestrian-friendly streets, sidewalks, plazas, squares, urban parks, and so on. But urban open public space is also made up of non-traditional typologies of public space consisting of “found” spaces appropriated by people to suit their needs and as a means of expression. These spaces may be situated at the fringes of neighborhoods and districts, often at urban conditions fractured by infrastructure, in the vestiges of the changing post-industrial landscape, or at locations rendered derelict by some change in social or natural conditions.

Much like traditional public space, “found” space has significant value in the city. And because this non-traditional space is not bound by typology, it is manifest in myriad shapes, dimensions and configurations that provide possibilities for unique experiences in the city. This non-traditional space is much more elastic (and loose) in its ability to support a wider range of expected and unexpected or non-traditional activities. In doing so, this space allows for a wide range of interpretation and becomes meaningful to several groups of urbanites whose activities, and in many cases even their presence is deemed inappropriate in traditional public space. At the same time, this non-traditional public space along with its users is marginalized and has no real permanence in the urban landscape.

The goal of this research is to investigate the possibilities of non-traditional “found” public space in the city. We will study non-traditional public spaces in the Tampa Bay area to understand its use and meaning to the people of the community. Ultimately, we are interested in exploring how designers and artists can re-conceptualize this “found” public space to give it legitimacy in the urban cultural landscape. The deliverable for this project will be a portfolio showing the richness, significance and possibilities of non-traditional spaces.

Such studies of public space that investigate multiple perspectives especially further the goals of the University by providing a better understanding of diverse groups and cultures in our local context. Examining the full spectrum of public spaces in the city provides us with the unexplored possibilities of use and meaning of the public realm in our society. Such inquiries help us to better understand and engage with communities locally; a goal shared by the School, College and the University. Findings from this research will result in scholarly papers for publishing and for presentations at conferences at inter- and cross-disciplinary national and international forums and a portfolio of drawings and sketches. The dissemination of research through these forums will afford the visibility aspired by the School, College and the University.