Path of the High Line in New York City © Iwan Bahn

Thesis title
The transnational circulation of urban mega-projects. The case of the High Line Elevated Park in New York City and elsewhere

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The conversion of abandoned railway lines today represents a unique opportunity for urban transformation. The project of the High Line - an elevated park which was recently completed in New York City - represents a example of a world-famous large-scale urban transformation: its 2.33 km of abandoned railroad tracks produced a lively and green urban space.
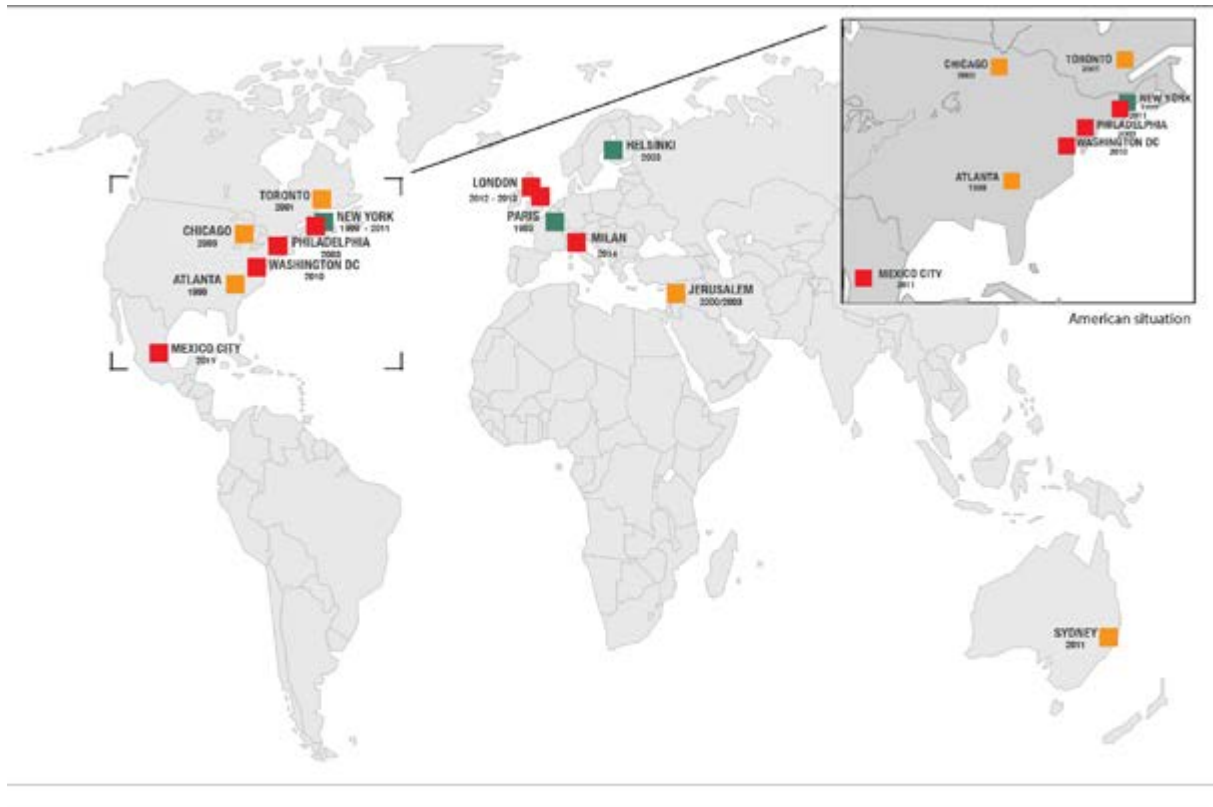
Its triumph is mainly due to the extraordinary influence on the surrounding neighbourhoods. In the wave of this success, in recent years, many cities around the world like Helsinki, Jerusalem, Mexico City, and others, are now trying to implement similar mega-projects, or at least they say so.

The purpose of this research is not to comment the design and engineering components of the various projects, but rather to study how this mega-project model circulates globally, giving special attention to the narrations that characterize this famous "rail to trail" conversion (e.g. heritage preservation, the approach of landscape urbanism, the involvement of local community, the process of gentrification and the planning techniques used).

In the first chapter I present the theory formulated by Siemiatycki (2013, 2014) and others about the possible reasons for urban mega-project circulation in different cities. Furthermore, I explain five issues that affected the design of the High Line Elevated Park project. In the second chapter, I analyze the trendsetter project of the High Line in New York, the antecedent project of the Promenade Plantèe in Paris and the several cases of "surge" projects in Philadelphia, Mexico City, Milan, London, Toronto, Helsinki, Jerusalem, New York and Washington DC, listed according to their current state of implementation: conceptual, under construction and completed. In the third chapter, I will deepen the five narrations characteristic of the High Line Elevated Park project mentioned above. In the three subsequent chapters (4,5,6) I will analyze systematically and compare in detail three particularly relevant projects: the Goods Line of Sydney, the Bloomingdale Trail in Chicago and the BeltLine in Atlanta. These projects present similar characteristics to the High Line in New York City, developed according to the different needs and local opportunities. I would like to stress the fact that this research is not only focused on the comparative analysis of these case studies. In fact the objective is to conduct an in-depth investigation about the transnational circulation of urban mega-projects, which convert abandoned tracks into urban parks.

In conclusion, I have identified that the transfer of the model is addressed only to particular cities, in specific regions of the world. In fact, speaking of specific geographies, this study showed a greater tendency to transfer mega-projects in similar contexts with a particular urban political order and planning system. The circulation, moreover, only involves parts of the project which are represented by specific "narrations". The narrations are used by transfer agents in order to be adapted to specific local characteristics and integrated with other plans, projects and urban policies. However, local communities and planning authorities still play a central role in critically adapting and hybridizing the narrations and implementing a place-based project. In addition to narrations' circulation, I noticed even a transfer of orgranizational devices of management tools inspired by the original association set up in 1999 by Joshua David and Robert Hammond "The Friends of the High Line". In fact, in cities as Philadelphia, Toronto and Chicago non profit groups called "The Friends of .." have been formed in order to promote the initiative and raise the necessary funds for the projects.

On the basis of several examples I could finally state that the narrations' transfer does not guarantee any correspondence with the contents of the trendsetter project, nor with specific technical qualities of the project, nor with its urban effects. Instead, the circulation of both communities' devices and narrations' circulation allow the conception of innovative.

American situation

■ CONCEPTS ■ UNDER CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS ■ COMPLETED PROJECTS

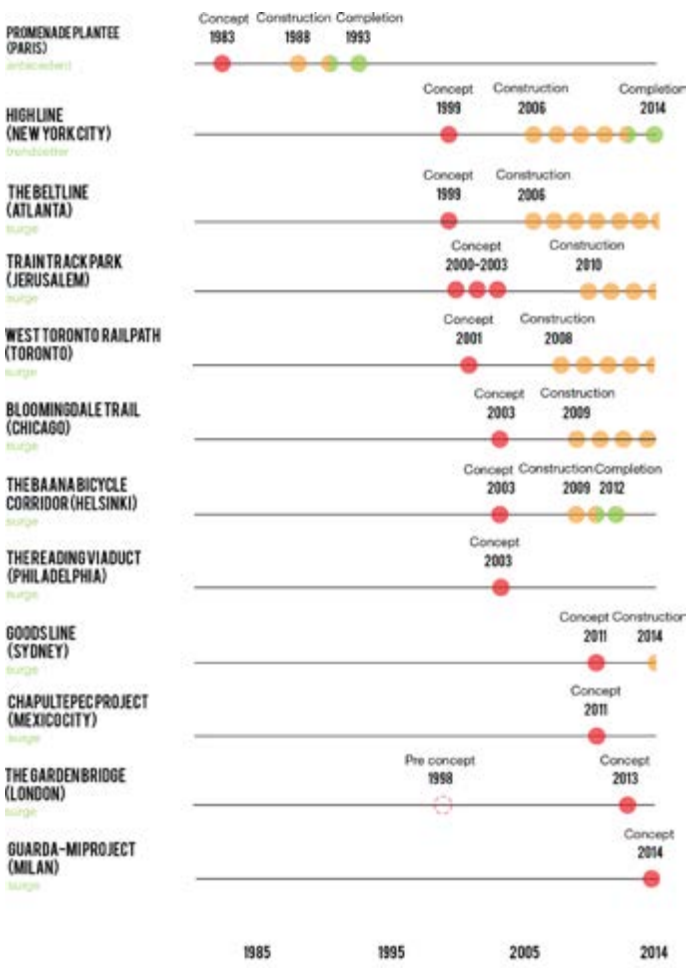|	Concept 1983	Construction 1988	Completion 1993			
PROMENADE PLANTEE (PARIS) antecedent						
HIGH LINE (NEW YORK CITY) trendsetter		Concept 1999	Construction 2006	Completion 2014		
THE BELTLINE (ATLANTA) surge		Concept 1999	Construction 2006			
TRAIN TRACK PARK (JERUSALEM) surge		Concept 2000-2003	Construction 2010			
WEST TORONTO RAILPATH (TORONTO) surge		Concept 2001	Construction 2008			
BLOOMINGDALE TRAIL (CHICAGO) surge		Concept 2003	Construction 2009			
THE BAANA BICYCLE CORRIDOR (HELSINKI) surge		Concept 2003	Construction 2009 Completion 2012			
THE READING VIADUCT (PHILADELPHIA) surge		Concept 2003				
GOODS LINE (SYDNEY) surge		Concept 2011 Construction 2014				
CHAPULTEPEC PROJECT (MEXICO CITY) surge		Concept 2011				
THE GARDEN BRIDGE (LONDON) surge	Pre concept 1998	Concept 2013				
GUARDA-MI PROJECT (MILAN) surge		Concept 2014				

1985   1995   2005   2014

1980   1990   2000   2010

Fig. 3
Plan of the segments of the High Line Elevated Park project © Urban Media