

The LINK

As one of the most basic form of architecture, the fundamental function of a bridge is to connect. Whether it is a threshold between buildings, or path to move a person from point A to B, essentially they all serve as linkage of space. However, often what is forgotten is that a bridge is also a linkage of people. Imagine the brief moment when two strangers' eyes meet as they walk pass each other from opposite ends; how about the exchange of "hello" between friends when they meet by coincident?

This project, "the LINK" is a celebration of people and interaction. Extending the basic concept that a footbridge is a vehicle that moves people, LINK reinvents it as a place of rest and play. Visitors can now sit at the bridge looking at its beautiful surroundings; enjoy an afternoon of fishing; or play in the water as the water is very shallow here.



The footbridge is sited in the suburban parts of Toronto. It spans over a little creek in a small park; a popular and lively hangout place for locals in the summer. The LINK opens up opportunities to connect residents from the two sides of the creek, in addition to defining an anchor point for the community. As a new community gathering hub, the LINK is sun and rain protected with the fan like canopies hanging above. Each side of the bridge has a step down platform for accessing the water. Low wooden seats are also provided for those who enjoy chatting with friends and neighbors. There is a generous amount of space on the bridge that accommodates

various community activities. The goal of the LINK is to enrich the well-being and safety of community members in the area. By day the LINK is a central point for community activities, by night the glowing structure creates a safe passageway for night visitors. At the present, the two neighboring community is separated by the creek. There is no direct route that links the two, thus the new bridge would be an important connecting member that bridges the two neighborhoods.



Performances at the Hokoten festival

This concept of transforming a city infrastructure into a gathering place is strongly influenced by Japan's Hokoten festival. The Hokoten festival is a pedestrian festival located in Harajuku district, between two of Tokyo's major commercial districts. Hokoten is held every Sunday, it is also known as Pedestrian Paradise. Here at the festival,

young people express their individuality and freedom through performances and fashionable garments. To prepare for the event, a section of Harajuku's major road is blocked off to become a public square for gathering and performances¹. The concept of movement vs. rest and interaction is an interesting concept that has been integrated into the design of the LINK. There is a push and pull relationship between people and event in making the success and liveliness of a civic space. To make a civic space work, the flow of people traffic is quite important, without people to "charge" up the space, it is a deserted area which potentially becomes a neglected and danger zone in the neighborhood where unwanted activities like drugs and crimes takes place. On the other hand, if there is nothing to stop or attract people to stay, the "place" is only another street that people walk through. The strategy of the LINK is quite simple. First, the location of the bridge naturally attracts traffic flow as it is the connecting point of the

¹http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/pdf/education/teachersnotes/fruits_teachers_notes.pdf

two neighborhoods. Secondly the LINK is already in a lively hangout spot; the addition of the bridge can only enrich its setting.

As the theme of the project focuses on interaction, it is important to note that the quality and richness of the project is conveyed through experiences. The physical structure of the LINK defines a stage for these experiences. This explains the simplicity of the design. LINK is a stage that provides an opportunity for various activities to take place, which makes the project interesting. There is no single function of the space, its characteristics and usage is constantly changing, although its form remains the same. This stage concept is taken from MCA Plaza, Chicago designed by Garofalo Architects.

The MCA Plaza project is temporary structure exhibited in the front plaza of Chicago's Museum of Contemporary art. The pavilion is designed to host various events in addition to demonstrating the new, innovative possibilities in the usage of public spaces. The different design elements are successful in enhancing this plaza as a place for gathering and social interaction, aside from defining the entrance to guests as a place of importance². Although the design features are important in the aesthetics of the exhibition, a comparison of photos with and without people tells us the importance of human interaction in this project. The "life" of the project relies strongly on human interaction; the true qualities of the project can only be seen when in use by people.



MCA Plaza. Performances and people gives "life" to the space

Definitions of boundaries and enclosure in LINK have also been given special attention to. As an anchor point and gathering place for the community, boundaries

² <http://garofalo.a-node.net/mca.html>

needed to be set, to define where the center of attention should be. Again, without something to define the LINK as a special gathering space, it can easily be seen as just another foot bridge. At the same time, it is important that the LINK blend harmoniously with its site. There are also a few architectural features that needed to be considered. No longer an ordinary bridge, the LINK is considered as more of a pavilion. It needs to provide minimal protection from light rain and the intense summer sun. The solution is to design a light canopy that gently forms a pavilion-like space. The canopies with its slender supporting columns provide adequate shading and shelter from the sun and rain, without obstructing any views. This strategy offer protection yet allows visitors to feel connected with its surroundings.

Like Frank Gehry's Jay Pritzker Pavilion, enclosure is dealt with in a subtle and almost transparent manner. Gehry's pavilion is an outdoor performing theater, with a large stage and fix seats. Behind the seats is the "Great Lawn", an open field where the public is free to picnic and listen to the show from afar. The trellis structure is overwhelming in forming the "roof" of the theater which doubles as the framework of the sound system³. There is a strong sense



Jay Pritzker Pavilion. Visitors picnicking at the Great Lawn

of enclosure, but with the blue sky visible from above and soft grass beneath, one is still strongly connected with its environment. As an outdoor theater Gehry's trellis structure is very effective in defining a sense of enclosure that blends well with its environment in highly transparent way.

Construction of the bridge is designed with typical connection and construction methods; there would be no complex detail due to the nature of the project. The

³ <http://www.chicagoarchitecture.info/ShowBuilding/250.php>

supporting columns of the structure are concrete. This is small scale project for local community usage thus fast; simple construction would be most suitable in considering maintenance and economical factors. The basic structure of the bridge is composed of Wide-Flange steel members, put together with bolt or welded connections. As an experimental project, it is possible that this project is mass produced to be located at different parts of the community, therefore easy assembly is desired. In recent years, the town of Markham has a growing interest in protecting the environment by implementing various environmental friendly programs, with environmental concerns recycled steel is used as structure.



Pier in Borghetto Sano Spirito.

The detailing of the Pier in Borghetto Sano Spirito project by Marco Ciarlo has been examined prior to detailing the LINK. The Borghetto Sano Spirito project's main architectural feature, the floating canopies has a similar look to the fabric canopies in the LINK project⁴. Although the canopy is constructed of steel, it still conveys a floating appearance because of its slim form and clean connections. Aesthetically, this light weighted appearance is important for the design of LINK; the details of this project have been an important influence in the construction and assembly of the bridge.

Although LINK in its physical form is a bridge, the projects that inspired its design are public or civic space type of work. This is important to note because the project is not just about a linkage of two spaces, but more importantly a linkage of people.

⁴ Detail. P652-653

Work Cited

Chicago Architecture Info. The Jay Pritzker Pavilion

<http://www.chicagoarchitecture.info/ShowBuilding/250.php>

Detail Magazine. April 2000. Pier in Borghetto Santo Spirito, Italy. P. 652 - 655

Fruits. Tokyo Street Style.

http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/pdf/education/teachersnotes/fruits_teachers_notes.pdf

Garafalo Architects. MCA Temporary Plaza Structure.

<http://garofalo.a-node.net/mca.html>

On the Street @ Tokyo. Harajuku Hokoten 1985-1995.

<http://www.hispic-cafe.com/street/e-index.html>

Parametro.it. Marco Ciarlo

<http://www.parametro.it/architettorepu-marcociarlo.htm>

Pbase.com. Tanaka, Kenneth: The Jay Pritzker Pavilion

<http://www.pbase.com/tanakak/pritzker>