Skybridge Case Study Visit: New York City, 22-23 March 2019

Researchers Dr. Peng Du and Daniel Safarik and students enrolled in the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) seminar course “Talking Tall” traveled to New York City for two days. The agenda included presentations, workshops, and meetings with architecture firms involved in the design of significant horizontal spaces at height, as well as an onsite investigation of the American Copper Buildings, a two-tower development connected by a skybridge, completed in 2017. The group visited the offices of SHoP Architects, Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates and Bjarke Ingels Group, where excellent presentations of 3-D vertical urbanism were given. A copy of the report follows. The research from the site visit to American Copper Buildings directly translated into the initial case study template for the Technical Guide.

The Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) “Talking Tall” seminar course visited the American Copper Buildings, New York City, including the “swim-across” skybridge, as part of the research into skybridge case studies.
NEW YORK CITY – An important aspect of the CTBUH Research Project “Skybridges: Bringing the Horizontal into the Vertical Realm,” kindly supported by thyssenkrupp, is the collaboration with the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) College of Architecture, in the form of a research-based seminar course entitled “Talking TALL.” Led by CTBUH China Office Director and Academic Coordinator Dr. Peng Du, with teaching support from Daniel Safarik, CTBUH Editor and Jason Gabel, CTBUH Communications Manager, the course addresses the design, operational and management aspects of skybridges in multi-building complexes around the world.

As part of the research agenda and course program, Dr. Du, Safarik and the students traveled to New York City for two days of presentations, workshops, and meetings with architecture firms involved in the design of significant horizontal spaces at height, as well as an onsite investigation of the American Copper Buildings, a two-tower development connected by a skybridge, completed in 2017. The project received the Best Tall Building Americas 2018 award from CTBUH.

The group first visited Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates (KPF), where Elie Gamburg, director, gave a tour of the office and a presentation on several of the projects KPF has designed with significant horizontal elements at height over the past decade, including the Shanghai World Financial Center; Hysan Place, Hong Kong; Concord Cityplace Parade, Toronto; and the Royal Atlantis, the Palm, hotel in Dubai. Gamburg outlined both the technical aspects of skybridge construction, such as “strand-jacking” or lifting skybridges by rope into position; as well as the philosophical design approach to skybridges as part of a design trajectory that extends back through thousands of years of place-making, to Chinese palace architecture.

Among the highlights of the trip was the visit to SHoP Architects, where the students received a tour of the office tour, which includes an extensive in-house model shop, from Michelle Fowler, a project principal. The group then traveled to the American Copper Buildings, which the firm designed for JDS Development Group, with a tour led by Director...
of Cultural Projects Ayumi Sugiyama. Attendees were able to tour the upper and lower floors of the skybridge, which contain a lounge and a swimming pool, respectively, as well as ancillary areas within the connected buildings. The program includes meeting/all-purpose rooms, a rentable large kitchen and dining area, a juice bar, a hammam/sauna, and two-story gym with rock-climbing wall. The skybridge plays several important roles, Sugiyama said. In addition to providing an exciting gathering place for residents, it also allowed the twin towers to have mechanical equipment consolidated on only one of the two rooftops, leaving the other open for a roof deck. As the project is in east Murray Hill, an area with fewer amenities within walking distance than a typical Manhattan neighborhood, it was important to the client to provide extensive common space and amenities within the complex.

One of the advantages of living on the eastern edge of Midtown Manhattan is across-the-street connectivity to ferry services, which in some cases represent the fastest way from point A to B around the five boroughs. The journey from 34th Street and FDR Drive to Fulton Landing in Brooklyn took the group past a number of familiar landmarks, as well as some new ones, such as the Domino Sugar Plant Redevelopment, which features two “building-as-skybridge” residential towers.

Upon arriving in Brooklyn, the group made its way along cobbled streets and past old warehouses to the new offices of Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), which has an entire floor of a massive building that formerly stored furniture. The students got the opportunity to see the eclectically decorated BIG offices, which includes a materials library with furniture and fixture lines as well as buildings. They were also given presentations from the project leads behind The Spiral, VIA 57 WEST, and The XI, New York; the Amager Bakke Waste-to-Energy Plant in Copenhagen; the Miami Produce Center and Grove at Grand Bay in South Florida; and Telus Sky and Vancouver House in Calgary and Vancouver, respectively.

CTBUH would like to express its gratitude to thyssenkrupp for supporting the research and travel; and to KPF, SHoP and BIG for providing an enriching experience for the researchers.