background

I worked as an architectural designer in New York for nearly three years. From 2003-04, I partook in the design of One Bryant Park, a 2.1 million-square-foot tower located at the intersection of 6th Avenue and 42nd Street in Manhattan. Developed as a joint venture between the Bank of America (the primary tenant and currently America's 6th largest corporation) and the Durst Organization, the 51-story skyscraper will employ a number of advanced green technologies (leading to an expected LEED platinum rating) and provide a direct interface with the Times Square subway station. With $650 million in Liberty Bond subsidies, both the City of New York and the developers view this "signature" building as a prime opportunity to generate "extraordinary value" in monetary terms and as a major physical addition to midtown Manhattan.

proposal

In his 1989 work entitled *The Informational City: Information Technology, Economic Restructuring, and the Urban-Regional Process,* Manuel Castells identified a process of polarization in the labor force fueled by the techno-economic restructuring forces of globalization and information technology[1]. He asserted that this process was taking place in most major cities and metropolitan regions across the world, causing sectoral growth and decline in "a complex pattern that combines the creation of new, highly paid jobs in advanced services and high-technology sectors, the destruction of middle-level jobs in old manufacturing, and the proliferation of new, low-paid jobs both in services and in downgraded manufacturing."[2]

Castells claimed that these processes were fuelling the rise of what he termed the "dual city"[3] -the spatial coexistence of a large sector of professional and managerial middle-class with a growing urban under-class, in which the contradictory developments of information technology became spatially evident in the "conflictual appropriation of the inner city by social groups who share the same space while being worlds apart in terms of lifestyle and structural position in society."[4] Years later, Saskia Sassen echoed Castell's claims in her article entitled *Whose City is this? Globalization and the Formation of New Claims*. Sassen voiced her concern that global cities were creating a new "geography of centrality" by becoming "sites for the over-valorisation of corporate capital and the de-valorisation of disadvantaged workers" –a process clearly visible in the "vast territory that has become increasingly peripheral, increasingly excluded from the major economic processes that fuel economic growth in the new global economy."[5]

The social-economic chasm present in the 1990's between different sectors of the labor still exists today. In fact, it may be growing wider. In a July 2004 article in the Washington Post, economists Frank Levy and Richard J. Murnane warned that although there is no "normal" state of the economy and the labor market is in a constant state of flux, there is a "disquieting" trend in current US employment, which has been growing primarily in only two sectors: the managerial/professional and services. In other words, their data show that the economy is experiencing an occupational shift in favor of knowledge-intensive jobs in which "trade and technology –the engines of our growth- now favor those with more education and more skills."[6] In theory, this transition could help the process of upgrading the general social structure of the labor market; in practice, however, the mismatching of skills due to inequalities in the educational system leaves the majority of marginalized populations (both within and around the city) unable to match the skill requirements required by the new labor trends[7].

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[1] Castells, Manuel. "Information Technology, the Restructuring of Capital-Labor Relationships, and the Rise of the Dual City." The Castells Reader on Cities and Social Theory. Ed. Ida Susser. P. 285.
[2] Castells in Susser. P. 285.
[3] Saskia Sassen. "Whose City is it? Globalization and the Formation of New Claims." Proceedings of Metropolis Inter Conference (International Conference on Divided Cities and Strategies for Undivided Cities. Göteborg, Sweden, May 25-26, 1998. P. 2, 6, 9.
[4] Castells in Susser. P. 285
[5] Castells in Susser. P. 285
[6] Levy, Frank and Murnane, Richard J. "Got a Routine Job? Not for Long." The Washington Post. 4 July 2004. Section B03.
[7] Castells in Susser. P. 286

What do these factors have to do with what we are defining as "New Century City Projects" (NCCPs)? Global cities such as Cambridge, Copenhagen, Helsinki and Seoul; as well as cities on the global track, such as Florianopolis and Zaragoza, will act as NCCP sites/hosts. As global and globalizing cities, each metropolis is –or will be– privy to the contradictory forces that accompany this transformative process. So it is essential to ask: who exactly will these expansive, hi-tech, hi-profile, mixed-use developments serve? Will they cater to the needs of the upper crust of the corporate world –only those who can in fact afford such undertakings? How will "mixed-use" be defined –will it mix a luxury hotel and a corporate headquarters, or low-income housing with a university? Where will they develop –in "safe" areas insulated by moderate to high property costs, in city centers, in brownfields? What will make them "eminently livable" –will they breathe new life into neighborhoods, extend public space and provide unprecedented opportunities to a broad spectrum of the population, or will they remain inaccessible to all but a select group of business elite?

Envisioning a progressive use of technology in his well known book *e-topia,* Bill Mitchell suggests that we would do well to develop "a broad, critical, action-oriented perspective on the technological, economical, social, and cultural reality of what's actually going on, around us, right now.[8] We know today that "the articulation of territory and people is being constituted in a radically different way at least in one regard, and that is the speed with which articulation can change."[9] New Century City Projects, as ambitious undertakings affecting the City and driven by at least one kind of value –economic, could prove to be a new model by which technology, architecture, multilateral investment and planning integrate to foster urban change. My research proposes to adopt a critical stance with regards to one NCCP, in an effort to understand how it will function, who it will serve, and what it will impact, within the larger context of its host city and the environmental, social, political, and economic challenges it faces.

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[8] Mitchell, Bill. "E-Topia." The MIT Press, Boston 1999. P. 12
[9] Sassen. P. 9