Ground Zero: construction, reconstruction, participation
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The reconstruction of Ground Zero is an intricate web of exceptional circumstances and innumerable subjects. It is so complex and multi-faceted that it can be analyzed from various points of view: from the political to the economic, from the social to the institutional, from the urban to the architectural, and from the literary, cinematographic and even to the psychoanalytic (1). This article addresses the planning of Ground Zero in terms of public participation as considered in present-day disciplinary terms in order to reflect upon the following questions:
- effectiveness of participatory exercises within planning and design processes especially in terms of managing exceptional events and situations;
- the role of the media in such processes and the inherent risks of distorting participatory processes.
The article presents an overview of the events and the actors and the most important milestones especially regarding the participatory initiatives of the re-construction process in order to provide the reader with the necessary background for further disciplinary investigation. The events regarding the construction and reconstruction of the World Trade Center site are placed in their historic, political and cultural context in order to facilitate understanding ways of building and transforming American downtowns, particularly regarding the specific practices adopted in such an exceptional and unique place as Manhattan.

Historic notes
The conception and construction of the World Trade Center is a significant episode in an urban history characterized by continuous demolition, by the relocation of functions and buildings (as well as social groups) and by enormous economic pressures which influenced New York's continuous construction, reconstruction and its urban 'reinventions' (2).
Lower Manhattan was born as the outpost of what was the largest multinational corporation in international trade during the 17th century, the Dutch West Indies Company. The growth of commerce and trade in the 'new world' corresponded to impetuous and often chaotic urban growth. The history of New Amsterdam is a continuous series of transformations and changes deriving from the progressive settlement of various ethnic groups that brought about the unrelenting urban march towards the north of the island.
While the Commissioner's Plan (1811) set out the characteristic rectangular grid to the north of the original Dutch settlement, of an extremely elementary and practical simplicity in terms of subdividing land into building lots, the city's development was conditioned, in addition to its zoning plans and building regulations, by a series of specific operations (articulated differently in procedural and financial terms in relation to the specific circumstances and context) which grew mainly out of the spatial requirements and economic pressures of the moment.
The most important projects oriented the city's most important transformation processes, catalyzing and conditioning urban growth and delineating different modes of development,

management and public participation. Among the many significant projects in New York's urban history, three are mentioned briefly here as examples of specific development models in the city and on the island of Manhattan. Central Park was the first large-scale example of a practice that, to further organizational and qualitative improvement in the city's urban development, does not waver in dislocating and relocating both land uses and residents. Rockefeller Center was a project that anticipated a new building type that was to become commonplace in the next decades; it was a project that catalyzed an urban rehabilitation process in the entire midtown Manhattan area in terms of both physical design as well as real estate values. Robert Moses' accomplished his vast projects, mainly infrastructural (3), through the intensive use of the 'authority', public-private agencies authorized to charge tolls in order to finance projects without utilizing public funds. In different ways, these examples can be considered precedents that would later lead to the ideation, the planning and the construction of the World Trade Center.

The World Trade Center
The story of the World Trade Center (4) is inextricably linked to the role and functions of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. In 1916, after a legal dispute between the states of New York and New Jersey regarding port jurisdiction, the courts imposed the regrouping of all port infrastructure under a single administration, which became the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. The Port Authority's statute grants "full power

and authority to purchase, construct, lease and operate terminal, transportation and other facilities of commerce within the port districts as defined by law". As evidenced in the exhibit *Building the World Trade Center* (5), the word 'other' provided the loophole that would lead to the construction of the World Trade Center on Port Authority land almost 50 years later.
As opposed to Rockefeller Center which was conceived and constructed privately by a 'patron prince', John D. Rockefeller, at the end of the 1920s, the WTC was planned, funded and managed by public agencies. Notwithstanding this fact, the principle force behind its realization was provided by another Rockefeller (6) (son of John D. and brother of Nelson, then Governor of New York) together with Robert Moses. David Rockefeller, recognizing the opportunity for increasing the zone's real estate values, decided to move the headquarters of his bank to lower Manhattan, but not before he formed a business association (Downtown, Lower Manhattan Association) to accelerate the area's rehabilitation by transforming it into a center for world commerce much as it had been at the beginning of its history with the settlement of the Dutch West Indies Company.
Yet again, as in the past for other large urban projects, the proposal for the WTC brought about heated public debate. But instead of seeking dialogue and compromise, the Port Authority, notwithstanding the fact that it was a public agency, acted autocratically and, insensitive to criticism, increased the project's dimensions not only vertically but also horizontally by proposing a landfill for part of the river's (partially utilizing material

resulting from the excavations) to create a new neighborhood (and new tax bases) for the city, later to become Battery Park City. The World Trade Center project definitively eliminated port activity from Lower Manhattan so that the economy of the area, once based on trade and commerce, light industry and port activity, was transformed into a service-based economy.

At the time, the WTC was accused of 'urbicide' and the buildings were criticized for their scale, their schematic volume and for the desolation of the street level plaza. At the beginning of the 1970's, the PA encountered such tremendous difficulties in renting the space that the agency was forced to lease the space back to itself and to the State of New York for use as government office space. But at the beginning of the 1990s, the buildings were finally turning a profit with an occupancy rate of 96% mostly with a new category of city user, the knowledge worker, employed by banks, insurance companies and in the financial markets. Lower Manhattan was attracting new investments; nearby Tribeca became home for the new dotcom companies and the twin towers, once derided by the public, became both symbols of new global capital and American power as well as an integral part of New York's image, icon and reference point for residents and visitors.

An initial investment failure, the towers became such great income producers that in July of 2001, the Port Authority signed a 99 year lease on the towers and commercial spaces with a consortium headed by developer Larry Silverstein.

September 11
2,998 dead or missing; 6 buildings destroyed, 23

building damaged; 17,965 companies closed or relocated; in October of 2001 18,300 jobs were lost in the commercial sector, 13,400 lost in the restaurant or food services sector, 6,000 jobs lost in transportation and infrastructure, 15,000 jobs lost on Wall Street (as of December 2001); drastic reductions in tourist income for the city; destruction of the PATH station below the WTC, the principal connection to New Jersey with 67,000 trips per day; interruption in subway services (7).

After September 11, both the local and the international public opinion debated over what to do with the WTC site. Some believed that it was in the best interests of the United States to build "bigger and better" to show the world that US enemies could not 'win'. Others, especially the victims' families, believed that the entire site should be consecrated to the memories of those that perished by transforming the entire area into a park. If we consider how the construction of the original WTC was managed, it would be impossible today (with the more stringent building codes, regulations and authorization procedures, with the loss of Port Authority power, with the lack of public funding and especially with the 'interference' of a private leaseholder) to shape a project in the same way. On the other hand, given the tremendous economic interests in the site and in Lower Manhattan in general, it would be equally impossible to transform the area into a park that could not generate an income and tax base comparable to that which existed prior to the attacks.

Reconstruction and participation
In November of 2001,

Governor Pataki and Mayor Giuliani announced the formation of a 'public benefit corporation', the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) (8) for the task of coordinating the reconstruction and the revitalization of Lower Manahttan. LMDC is a company formed by the State and the City of New York and is managed by a 16-member board half appointed by the governor and half by the mayor. The agency does not directly manage funds for public investment and is generously funded by the federal government.

At the same time, numerous organizations, civic association and interest groups were being formed to face the complex issues posed by reconstruction from many different points of view. Among the principle groups were: New York New Visions (9), a *pro-bono* grouping of 21 organizations operating in the areas of architecture, engineering, planning representing tens of thousands of professionals; Civic Alliance (10), a consortium formed by the Regional Plan Association of 85 groups (professional, foundations, universities, cultural organizations, private sponsors, etc) to address the problems of reconstruction in terms of regional and urban planning; Imagine New York (11), an organization sponsored by the Municipal Arts Society, made up of a vast network of partners able to ensure a grass roots based participation; family member organizations, residents groups, local small business owners, etc.

The approaches adopted were different. LMDC, by involving different interest groups (family members, businesses, local residents) in their advisory councils, utilized a stakeholder approach (Marcuse 2002a). But, in reality, decision-

making within the LMDC belongs to the board composed of members of the local and national power elite. As has been noted, given a great urgency for efficient operations and achieving tangible results in a short time frame, this kind of approach faces the inherent risks of being unable to guarantee the space and time for the adequate voicing of all opinions and points of view. On the other hand, the above-mentioned civic groups adopted a consensus approach in an attempt to reach and create agreement, through progressive discussion and sharing of knowledge and viewpoints using different techniques, instruments and media tools, between the broadest based constituency as possible in order to reach a shared solution. The risks inherent in this type of approach are wellknown, in particular excessive generalizing and consequently ineffective solutions that have to appeal to and satisfy the largest number of opinions possible.

New York New Visions (NYNV) took upon itself the task of thinking about planning and design issues in an attempt to accompany and shape the decision-making process with an 'expert' point of view and to sustain the public debate on the city's future in a complementary and qualified manner. The organization instituted working groups to address the problem of the future memorial, infrastructure, land uses, growth strategies, environmental sustainability, and cultural resources producing preparatory studies and responses during the various phases of the planning process.

Civic Alliance (CA) conducted studies, organized workshops and managed a large-scale

public participation exercise "Listening to the City". The first meeting was held in February of 2002 and involved over 600 citizens, leaders and public servants, all of whom were provided with preparatory materials in advance of the meeting, where, in a typical community visioning exercise, participants were asked to describe their Manhattan in 2012. Results were synthesized into a programmatic document or position paper regarding the reconstruction of Ground Zero.

Imagine New York launched their initiative in March of 2002 with the goal of giving voice to as many different visions as possible regarding the reconstruction of the WTC site, the future of the city and the region. The project was conceived on a regional scale and work was carried out by volunteers to collect the impressions, suggestions and ideas of a large number of people. In the spring of 2002, they held 230 public workshops and published on their web site more than 19,000 ideas and suggestions coming from all over the world, distilling them into 49 visions statements regarding the future of the city, the state and the region.

The work undertaken by these, and other, groups until the spring of 2002 can be described as a reflective/predictive/shaping process-participation that can prefigure and influence future events through brainstorming and overall collective learning processes. This basically self-directed and self-managed orientation was soon modified by a number of events. While these groups worked in transparent ways, driven by the new sense of solidarity and civic commitment that seemed to pervade the city after 9/11, LMDC and the Port Authority were

proceeding with their own planning and design work conducted by their consultants. It was in May of 2002 that LMDC held its first public meeting to prepare for the announcement of the preliminary design study for the WTC site.

From this moment on, it seems that public participation was greatly conditioned, both in terms of substance and in terms of timing, by the actions undertaken by the true holders of decision-making power, above all LMDC which, notwithstanding the fact that they declared to proceed with an 'inclusive' process, seems to have utilized a communications strategy of a cautionary-informative type tending to prevent criticism and control possible damage that might have derived from the perception of a lack of transparency and communication with public opinion during the planning process.

The preliminary design study, while declaring to take into account the results, visions and criteria elaborated by the different groups in the preceding phase, in fact proposed a series of approaches to the site in volumetric and functional terms (called 'menu' by the LMDC), consisting basically in a combination of elements deriving from economic and functional requirements. The different approaches offered solutions of a quantitative nature to the problems of public transportation, the location of public space, the form and amount of space to dedicate to the memorial and the integration of the site with the rest of Lower Manhattan through the partial or complete restoration of the street grid that had been eliminated in the original WTC project. The concept plans had the declared goal of catalyzing

a process of public dialogue to reach a point where it could be possible to "direct and refine these urban design concept plans toward the selection of a final, recommended plan" (LMDC, PA 2002, p. 5). But the true goal seemed to be to obtain, in an apparently transparent way, the economic result that had been previously determined by the institutions and by the private lease-holders. With the preliminary design study, the LMDC also set out a time-table which was followed quite precisely and which no participatory process, demand or new idea was able to slow down. This was probably the key factor which transformed the process from an open one to a closed one, modifying the parameters of the participatory process and directing it towards a kind of action that could be defined as political/reactive, which, in reaction to external factors over which there is little control, tends towards intensifying interaction with public opinion through the use of the mass media.

Following the announcement of the results of the preliminary design study in July of 2002, "Listening to the City" (12) organized a 'town meeting' for 4,500 people to discuss the proposals set forth by the Port Authority and LMDC. Analogous to the prior initiative, groups of 10-12 met around tables to exchange opinions and express their preferences, sharing them in real time with the rest of the participants through the use of *ad hoc* communications technologies. The face-to-face initiative was integrated with an on-line dialogue involving over 800 people over a two-week period. From this activity, which was widely publicized in the local and international press, emerged a completely negative

judgement regarding the preliminary concept plans which were considered banal and aesthetically naive (like the rearranging of children's' blocks), mediocre in terms of design quality and lacking the befitting sensitivity towards the site's sacred nature. According to many observers this result was largely attributed to the fact that the study was presented too hastily without having concluded a planning process that was well-coordinated among the various agencies and institutions such as LMDC, city government, State, Port Authority, etc. More probably, the presentation of these schemes sought to set the parameters in terms of building volumes and real estate values; the participatory process could then choose among the various proposals. All of this in order to begin, as soon as possible, to restore the site to its income-producing state.

From brainstorm to competition
The total refutation of the concept plans might be considered the most significant tangible result in the participation process and the only one which influenced decision-making, driving the LMDC to change its course and publish a design brief to choose, from over 400 requests for qualifications, 7 groups to participate in what was called the innovative design study. This study was to be a high-powered brainstorming session, but at a certain point, perhaps due to the publicity surrounding the renowned figures invited to participate or perhaps due to the great expectations that the names of the star architects aroused in public opinion, what should have been a highlevel discussion of ideas was transformed into a media event, giving life to

a kind of 'beauty contest' born out of the ashes of September 11.

On December 18, 2002, coinciding with an important planning workshop on Ground Zero organized by the Regional Plan Association and by the publication of the Mayor's Vision for Lower Manhattan (demonstrating the lack of coordination among the various groups and institutions), the participants presented their proposals for the site to the public. The event was televised on the local TV station and webcast over internet, with many websites giving their users the possibility of voting for their 'favorite' project. Subsequently, many of the specialized, as well as general news sites, held discussion forums and provided vote counts. The exhibit of the projects, which provided the possibility for visitors to express their preferences, attracted an enormous number of visitors. 'Mediafication' and 'spectacularization' (13) are recurring themes in the story of Ground Zero running throughout the entire planning and design process and are especially highlighted in this final phase of the presentation and exhibition of the proposals. In fact, Harvey's cynical affirmation "By the standards of spectacle, September 11 had to be close to the greatest show on earth" (Harvey 2002, p. 64) could be applied not only to 9/11 but to this whole story.

At this same time (14), in reaction to the different solutions presented, New York New Visions published a document evaluating the proposals using criteria that had emerged from their earlier work; Civic Alliance sought without success to organize another Listening to the City event on the lines of the one that had changed the course of events earlier in the

process; Imagine New York provided users with the possibility of commenting on the proposals on their web site; LMDC organized a series of meetings throughout the city to discuss the projects, but few people attended. It is as thought the media 'orgasm' or frenzy surrounding the presentation proper led to a decreased interest in participating in the communications and discussion different initiatives after the publication of the innovative design study.

In the beginning of February 2003, LMDC, still apparently acting within the sphere of brainstorming and reflection, chose two projects to be further explored in terms feasibility, economics, etc. (perhaps using the time to 'negotiate' with the architects behind closed doors). At the end of the month, LMDC proclaimed the 'winner' of what had become, notwithstanding the premises, a true architecture competition. Of this result, Peter Marcuse stated that LMDC "acted without any contribution of public ideas and followed a hurried and antidemocratic planning process, ignoring critical planning and political questions" (Marcuse 2003).

In May of 2003, the competition for the memorial was held, definitively separating the 'symbolic' part of the project, earlier closely tied to the emotion of the event as well as to the many appeals which emerged from the participation process, from the 'commercial' one. Larry Silverstein and his consortium, leaseholders and beneficiaries of the insurance monies essential for beginning construction in earnest, became the principle players in the game. During the summer, alongside the Port Authority and LMDC, Daniel Libeskind, winner of the

'competition', signed an agreement with Silverstein's architects, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, in which SOM was named 'design architect and project manager', and Libeskind 'master plan architect'. This could possibly mean that, after having utilized the evocative images of the international architecture stars, including the winner, the real design work is being done by Silverstein's architects, as had been contemplated from the outset (15). The deadline of the memorial competition was in June of 2003: LMDC received 5,200 projects making it the largest design competition ever held. Following these events, with LMDC planning a series of public outreach activities, the associations, which previously had been so active, communicated almost exclusively through press releases. It seems that, in this phase, their contribution to the process, consisted in different kinds of technical-scientific analyses giving the impression that some are still attempting to carve out a niche in the reconstruction process.

But more probably, these last culminating events can be placed in a broader time frame and interpreted as the closure of a feedback loop within a vaster planning and collective learning process where the tangible, and apparently inevitable results (in light of the city's urban and real estate history) become raw materials for a new planning phase. With the aid of past experience, this new planning cycle might reestablish a reflective-predictive-shaping process where the issues and results which emerged previously can be explored and worked upon.

In this case, associations like Civic Alliance, Imagine New York and NYNV and the many others who contributed to the process

might proceed with new participation processes and exercises to explore the future of the city beyond the time frame set for reconstruction (15 years) and pose new and more incisive questions regarding:
- the most appropriate kind of planning and participation for highly complex, important and representative parts of the city;
- the appropriate kinds of activities that are necessary to avoid the risk that an overly rapid time frame can upset a complex and multi-faceted participation process;
- the role of public opinion in complex urban processes;
- the role of the mass media which can heavily condition and 'subvert' traditional participation processes.

What urban processes should be considered in this new planning phase, also in light of some trends that already underway before 9/11? Marcuse (2002b) and others speak of the 'fortification' of the city and the relocation of urban functions elsewhere; of the decentralization of the workplace and services with their relocation in edge cities and exurbia (which are progressively providing more urban structures and services recreational, cultural, etc.), of the increasing depopulation of commercial and residential areas due to the high costs of congestion, environmental decay and social tensions and rendered possible by new communications technologies. Davis (2001) speaks of the globalization of fear where satellite offices, telework and multilocalized regional networks (much like the al Quaeda structure, he points out) or the use of well-protected 'bunkers' will substitute the skyscraper's traditional role giving life to the idea of the distributed workplace. Regarding such

tendencies as the privatization of public space and the barricaded city (16), Davis (2001, p. 45) again asks whether the forces of public order are not becoming the real urban planning agencies in our cities and whether "security will not become a full-fledged urban utility like water and power" in the near future.

We might ask ourselves if this could lead to the elimination of the public spaces available for public discussion and assembly (17), activities at the heart of a true democratic society, and to the consequent restriction on citizen freedom of movement (in both physical and socio-political terms) in our cities and thus to the diminishing of open participation in government-based planning and decision-making processes.

Notes

1. These latter aspects are explored in: Page (2002), Ockman (2002), or in Davis (2001).
2. Case studies of cities (Berlino, Rotterdam, Hiroshima, Lisbona, etc.) reinvented after wars, catastrophe or natural calamity are included in Ockman (2002).
3. 400 miles of parkways and expressways, 13 bridges and numerous public housing projects.
4. For the history of the World Trade Center's construction see Darton (1999).
5. Exhibit by Museum of the City of New York on line at http://www.mcny.org/exhibiti ons/wtc/wtc3.htm
6. The role of the Rockefellers in New York history is a story unto itself and is critically explored in Fitch R. (1996), Assassination of New York, Verso, New York.
7. For some of the statistics see: The Century

Foundation, Economic Impacts of Terrorist Attack, New York City Fact Sheet, http://www.tcf.org/publicatio ns/terrorism_fs.pdf, New York Partnership and Chamber of Commerce.
8. For further information see: http://www.renewnyc.com/
9. For further information see: http://nynv.aiga.org/
10. For further information see: http://www.civic-alliance.org
11. For further information see: http://www.imagineny.org
12. For further information regarding teh participatory techniques utilized see http://www.listeningtothecity. org/; http://www.americaspeaks.o rg
13. It is obviously impossible to provide a complete round-up of the media coverage of the event. Some overviews of the press coverage are provided in: http://www.gothamgazette.c om/rebuilding_nyc/topics/gr oundzero/older_news.shtml; http://archrecord.constructio n.com/news/wtc/; http://www.september11new s.com. Some of the more interesting articles: Goldberger P., "Up From Zero", *New Yorker* 29/7/2003; Goldberger P., "Building Plans", *New Yorker* 24/9/2001; Iglauer E., "The Biggest Foundation", *New Yorker* 4/11/1972; Muschamp H., "At Ground Zero, the Freshest Architecture May Be the Answer", *New York Times* 18/12/2002; Muschamp H., "In Latest Concepts for Ground Zero, It's Reality vs. Renaissance", *New York Times* 23/12/2002; Rybcznski W., "They Rise, but Do They Soar?", *New York Times* 20/12/2002; Russell James A. (2002), "Ground Zero Planning", Architectural Record, September; Sorkin M. (2002), "Power Plays at Ground Zero", *Architectural*

Record, September; Wheelwright P., "What Is An Event and What Is Its Duration? Assesing the Cultural and Architectural Aftermath of September 11th", conference held at MIT on 5/3/2002 and on line at http://archrecord.constructio n.com/inthe cause//0402WhatisEvent/MI T.asp. Paul Goldberger is now writing the 'definitive' history of Ground Zero's reconstruction.
14. Aside from the LMDC website, issue 856 of *Domus* (February 2003) and the 02/2003 issue of *Architectural Record* provide ample coverage of the project proposals.
15. In fact, as Edward Wyatt ("Ground Zero Plan Seems to Circle Back") reports in the *New York Times* on 14 September 2003 Libeskind's project is undergoing the inevitable modifications of any competition in the design development phase and seems to resemble more and more, devoid of the architect's characteristic language, one of the site plan menus of the original LMDC concept plans.
16 Foreseen in Giuliani's New York with his policies, seen as drastic in terms of their social implications, with the closure of City Hall Park one of the city's most traditional spaces for public assembly.
17 Muschamp in Marcuse P. (2003)

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