

‘New economy’ discourse and spaces in Singapore: a case study of one-north

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Abstract. In this paper we examine government-led attempts to transform Singapore into, or for, a so-called ‘new economy’. We show how ‘new economy’ may be understood as a powerful discourse rationalising a range of policy and planning interventions. We focus in particular on ‘one-north’, a would-be technopole for biomedical, information technology, and media industries in the southwest of Singapore. We show how the planning of one-north has included the selection and reworking of residential areas as ‘little bohemias’ considered conducive for fostering new-economy cultures. Though it has been gaining prominence, specifically following the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s, one-north is contextualised in terms of broader new-economy interventions by the state in Singapore, which, in turn, have resonances for similar initiatives elsewhere.

1 Introduction

The transition towards a ‘new economy’ is the subject of a large body of work within geography and the social sciences more generally. This new economy is conventionally characterised by two intertwined processes: first, the emergence of an information mode of production in which “productivity and competitiveness are increasingly based on the generation of new knowledge and on the access to, and processing of, appropriate information” (Castells and Hall, 1994, page 3); and, second, tendencies towards the functional integration of economic activities and processes on a global scale, facilitated by advances in information and communications technologies (ICTs) (Castells and Hall, 1994, page 3; see also Castells, 1989). Geographers have paid attention to the sociospatial processes and implications of the emerging new economy as they seek to debunk the ‘end of geography’ rhetoric commonly associated with utopian accounts of advances in ICTs (compare Ohmae, 1990).

Four main geographical dimensions of the new economy are evident in the existing literature. First, geographers have highlighted the continued significance of nation-states in influencing the direction and nature of global flows of capital and talent. Instead of being ‘overwhelmed’ by global forces, there is a reworking of state institutions, policies, and power as nation-states seek to (re)assert their place in the world economy (Dicken, 2003; Yeung, 1998). Second, geographers have pointed out how globalisation and technological processes are contingent upon infrastructures and face-to-face interactions concentrated in specific localities, such as technopoles (Castells and Hall, 1994), global cities (Sassen, 1991), ‘new industrial spaces’ (Castells, 1989; Scott, 1987), and ‘neo-Marshallian nodes’ (Amin and Thrift, 1992). Third, geographers emphasise how flows of capital, people, and knowledges occur through social networks that are grounded in and have effects upon everyday places and spaces (Castells, 2000; Thrift and Olds, 1996). Olds (1995, page 1717), for instance, has noted how the development of urban megaprojects to reimage urban localities, in the context of intense interurban competition to hold down global flows of capital and talent, is bound up with “worldwide social networks of knowledge-based experts who have the resources and power (or the access to power) to impact decisions in ... property

development and planning.” Fourth, geographers elucidate the uneven impacts of the shift towards the new economy upon society and space whereby existing sociospatial inequalities may be reproduced in different forms (Bunnell, 2002; Hubbard and Hall, 1998). On the one hand, global flows of capital and transnational elites are sustained by other flows of low-skilled migrant workers who provide labour at a low cost to facilitate the reproduction of well-paid and highly skilled transnational labour (Sassen, 1991; Yeoh and Chang, 2001). On the other hand, the privileging of groups and individuals possessing technological know-how, speed, creativity, flexibility, and entrepreneurship in the new economy means that those who are unable and/or unwilling to ‘perform’ accordingly may find themselves marginalised (Coe and Kelly, 2000; 2002; Thrift, 1998).

Geographers have therefore stressed the enduring, though reworked, importance of space and place to the reproduction of globalisation and technological processes underlying the shift towards the new economy. However, though the above strands of work provide important insights into the working of the new economy, we argue that it is also important for geographers to examine critically the kinds of discourses that are mobilised by various actors to rationalise and/or legitimise the processes of socio-spatial transformation in specific contexts. At the same time, we stress that often conflicting articulations of new-economy discourses produce material sociospatial outcomes. There has been increasing attention within geography to the complex articulations and material effects of the new economy as a discourse through various engagements with Foucauldian notions of governmentality, culture, and power or knowledge. Whereas Thrift (1998; 2000) critiques the kinds of academic, business, and media discourses about the new economy through which managers seek to realise themselves as “Homo Silicon Valleycus” (Thrift, 2000, page 688), Bunnell (2004) focuses on how utopian discourses of ‘high-tech’ have been mobilised by Malaysian political elites to legitimise the development of the Multimedia Super Corridor, resulting in the exacerbation of existing sociospatial inequalities through the displacement of in situ plantation communities.

In this paper we seek to contribute to existing geographical work on discursive constructions of the new economy by focusing on how this has been used to rationalise state interventions in the national space economy at particular moments in Singapore. Although Coe and Kelly (2000; 2002) have already examined how ‘flexible’, ‘creative’, and ‘innovative’ worker subjectivities are (re)produced through state discourses about the ‘knowledge-based economy’ in Singapore in the period following the Asian financial crisis, they neglect, on one hand, important historical precedents and, on the other, the material geographical implications of such rhetoric. We argue that it is important to examine such absences as they reveal how the new economy is constructed both historically and geographically within the sociopolitical context of Singapore. We address both absences of Coe and Kelly’s accounts by tracing across time and space the planning process at one-north, a technopole for the biomedical, ICT, and media industries to be developed on around 200 hectares of land in the southwestern part of Singapore over the next fifteen to twenty years (see figure 1). In so doing, we show how new-economy discourses have been (re)articulated at certain points in the developmental trajectory of Singapore and their material effects on the planning of one-north. We choose to focus on one-north as this project has been explicitly described in state discourse as not only “the icon of the new economy in Singapore” (Lim N C, 2000) but also an important ‘national’ project to “transport Singapore’s economy into the knowledge age” (Tan, 2001). The project was known as the Science Hub before it was renamed one-north (written in the lower case in official representations of the project) in December 2001 to symbolise “Singapore’s unique geographical location in the globe and its aspirations to be connected to the region, the world, and be innovative”

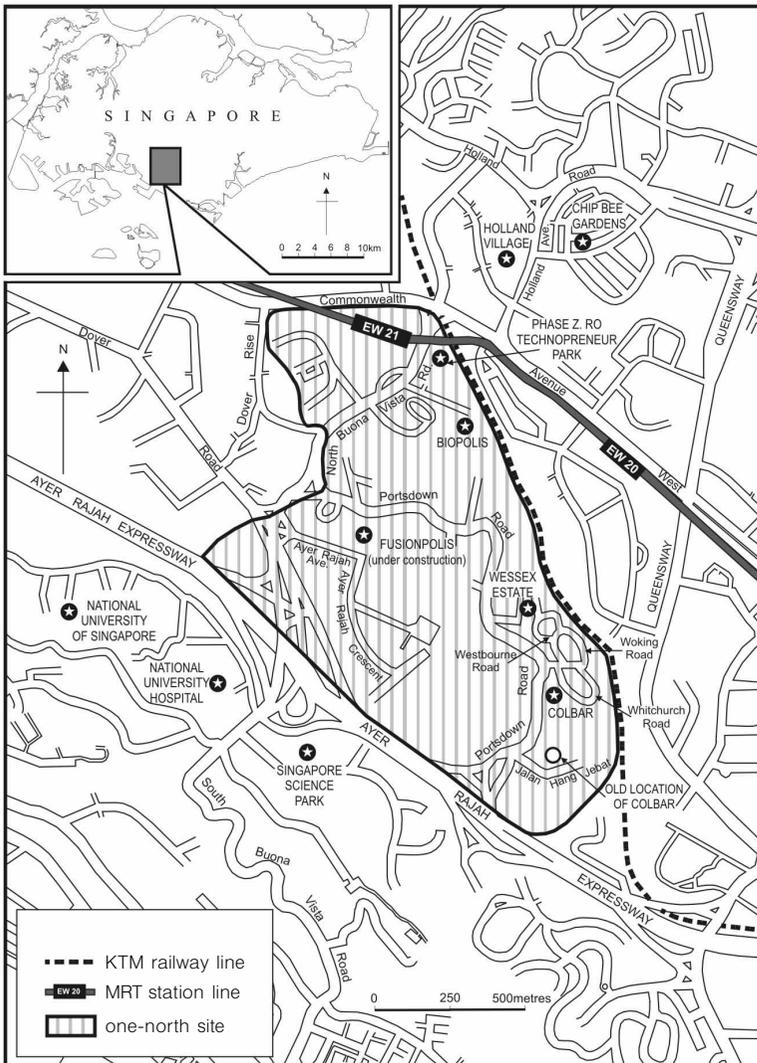


Figure 1. The one-north project in Singapore.

(Lim N C, 2001a). The ways in which the planning process has been carried out at one-north have also been explicitly prescribed and/or rationalised in state discourse in relation to the supposed ideals of the new economy, with planners encouraged to “try new ideas, to experiment, and not be bound by traditional planning paradigms” (Lim N C, 2001b).

Our discussion is organised as follows. First, we examine how new-economy discourses have been (re)articulated at particular ‘crisis’ moments in the developmental trajectory of Singapore, within a political context in which the legitimacy and ideological hegemony of the government, led by the People’s Action Party (PAP) since 1959, rest very much upon sustaining the economic well-being of Singaporeans. Next, we detail how the planning process of one-north, in particular, is intertwined with the latest and ongoing rise to prominence of new-economy rhetoric in Singapore. Finally, we consider how residential areas for those working in one-north have been selected and reinvented as ‘little bohemias’, spaces deemed conducive for fostering new-economy cultures and lifestyles.

2 (Re)articulating the ‘new economy’ in Singapore

In state rhetoric about the new economy, Singapore is to be a technologically advanced and culturally vibrant global city—an important node in the global flows of capital, talent, and ideas—in which the fostering and leveraging of linkages among the cultural, technological, and economic domains form the basis for sustained economic growth in an era of intense and volatile global competition. First, cultural industries, such as the performing arts, design, and media sectors, which are increasingly tapping into the possibilities opened up by advances in ICTs such as computer-aided design, are recognised as a sector of growing significance (MTI, 2003, page 7). Second, cultural amenities, such as museums, theatres, and nightlife, are considered important in attracting ‘global talents’ who would “augment our indigenous talent pool” especially in the high-technology industries (MTI, 2003, page 14); in retaining local talents who may otherwise migrate to other countries; and in sustaining the local tourism industry. Third, a vibrant cultural ‘scene’, such as pubs, clubs, and coffeehouses, is imagined as crucial for facilitating networking among artists, designers, entrepreneurs, scientists, and venture capitalists, hence enhancing the ‘milieu of innovation’ deemed especially vital to science and technology sectors of the new economy (Tan, 1998). Fourth, an ‘entrepreneurial culture’ is to be fostered in Singapore, with both Singaporeans and ‘global talents’ performing in line with appropriate cultural values such as ‘creativity’, ‘entrepreneurship’, and ‘flexibility’ (MTI, 2003, page 54). These cultural values are deemed necessary for the rapid development of new products and services in response to fast-changing market trends in an increasingly competitive new economy (MTI, 2003, page 10).

The emphasis of the state since the late 1990s on leveraging upon these overlapping links among the cultural, technological, and economic aspects has been translated into several policy interventions in order to encourage the development of cultural industries and high-technology activities—the ‘new’ growth areas of the Singapore economy—as well as the fostering of an ‘entrepreneurial culture’ among Singaporeans. In December 2001 the Economic Review Committee (ERC) was set up by the government to ‘remake’ Singapore into a ‘globalised, entrepreneurial, and diversified’ economy in response to a series of ‘crises’ facing Singapore after the 1997 Asian financial crisis—the downturn in the global electronics industry in 2001, the September 11 terrorist attacks, discovery of ‘terrorist’ networks in Southwest Asia, and the challenges posed by the emerging economies of China and India (MTI, 2003). However, despite the supposed novelty of recent initiatives by the state to remake Singapore into, or for, a new economy, there have been important historical precedents when the importance of linkages among cultural, economic, and technological domains was also emphasised. In April 1985, for example, the Economic Committee was set up to map out ‘new directions’ (MTI, 1986) for the Singapore economy, partly in response to an economic recession in 1985. These new directions included, on one hand, the development of cultural and high-technology industries and, on the other, the fostering of ‘entrepreneurship’, ‘creativity’, and ‘flexibility’ as cultural values that Singaporeans should ideally adopt so as to maintain Singapore’s economic competitiveness (MTI, 1986). However, attempts by the state to exploit the economic potential of the cultural and technological domains after the 1985 economic recession remained largely piecemeal in nature as the export-oriented manufacturing sector dominated by foreign multinational corporations was still considered by the state as the main engine of growth for the Singapore economy (Goh C B, 1995; Kong, 2000; Lim A, 2002). It was only from the late 1990s that the state began paying serious attention to the development of high-technology and cultural industries, and an entrepreneurial culture in Singapore in response to a supposed new era of intense and volatile global competition.

The (re)articulation of new-economy discourses at moments of economic downturn, first in the mid-1980s and then from the late 1990s, may be understood in relation to a political context in which the legitimacy and ideological hegemony of the government, led by the PAP since 1959, rest very much upon sustaining the economic well-being of Singaporeans (see Chua, 1995). The (re)articulation of new-economy discourses by the state helps divert Singaporeans' attention from current economic woes towards the supposedly better economic prospects promised by a futuristic new economy (Goh C B, 1995; Lim A, 2002). In addition, the imagined inevitability of technoeconomic shifts in both 'crisis' periods served to legitimise uneven social impacts. While the National IT Plan Working Committee (1985, page 30), which contributed to the report produced by the Economic Committee, stressed that "[d]espite the anticipated social problems, Singapore cannot avoid becoming an information society", the ERC urged Singaporeans to "understand the changing employment scene and its impact and implications, and adjust their mindsets and expectations" (MTI, 2003, page 180). In so doing, the state rationalised disruptions to the local labour market, such as rising retrenchment and unemployment rates, as an inevitable consequence of the move towards a new economy (Coe and Kelly, 2000; 2002).

This (re)articulation of new-economy rhetoric in turn produced material spatial effects in terms of planning interventions into the national space economy to help put in place the idealised links among the cultural, the technological, and the economic domains. The creation and/or valorisation of sites at which such links may be generated and/or enhanced included industrial and business parks providing facilities and amenities tailored to the needs of the high-technology sectors, perhaps most famously the Singapore Science Park which was developed in phases starting in 1980 and the designation of a civic and cultural district in the downtown area, for the development of museums and venues for the arts such as the Esplanade—Theatres on the Bay, a performing arts centre which opened in 2002. In the remainder of this paper, we focus on the development of one-north, another such planning intervention. In the next section, we trace the planning process for one-north across time and space, showing how its development is bound up with new-economy discourses evident in the mid-1980s and then (re)articulated since the late 1990s.

3 Planning one-north for the 'new economy'

The planning process for one-north may be traced at least as far back as 1991, when its current site was designated as a 'science habitat' or 'business park' in the technology corridor concept plan for the southwestern part of Singapore (NSTB, 1991, page 76–77). The technology corridor concept plan was recommended in the National Technology Plan 1991, itself an attempt to elaborate upon initiatives announced for the science and technology sector by the Economic Committee (MTI, 1986). Development of the technology corridor to "meet the needs of an economy characterised by knowledge-intensive activities" (NSTB, 1991, page 71) was rationalised explicitly in relation to the planning concept of 'technopoles' (compare Castells and Hall, 1994), with references made to Silicon Valley and Sophia Antipolis as 'well-established' technopoles that Singapore might emulate (NSTB, 1991, page 71). The southwestern part of Singapore was deemed to possess such "key elements of a successful techopolis" as the physical proximity of universities, research institutions, and social and recreational amenities that would "attract and retain scientific talents by providing an environment that will support their creative work through intimate and informal interaction amongst researchers" (NSTB, 1991, page 72). Such idealised characterisations of the crucial role of technopoles in fostering social interaction among the different actors involved in innovative work resonate with notions of 'institutional thickness'

(Amin and Thrift, 1994) and ‘innovative milieu’ (Castells and Hall, 1994) which are evident in much academic work on the spatialities of the new economy. However, despite the supposedly favourable factors in the southwestern part of Singapore, the technology corridor concept plan initially remained largely ‘on paper’, apart from the further development of the Singapore Science Park. Even so, the kinds of idealised interactions envisioned in the planning of the Singapore Science Park did not materialise in spite of its close proximity to national research institutes and a university (Phillips and Yeung, 2003).

The state remained largely silent on the implementation of the technology corridor concept plan until at least September 1998, when Deputy Prime Minister Dr Tony Tan announced plans for a science hub in a speech that stressed the urgency of developing an “entrepreneurial hi-tech business environment”. This was deemed necessary in order for Singapore to retain its economic competitiveness in the wake of the Asian financial crisis which, Dr Tan emphasised, was the “most serious economic crisis facing the region since the Second World War” (Tan, 1998). The Science Hub would play an important role in Singapore’s transition to a “knowledge economy” by “attracting both local and foreign talent” and by providing “an environment where business interactions, technology exchanges and networking can flourish to provide a breeding ground for innovation and technopreneurship” (Tan, 1998). As in the National Technology Plan 1991, notions of ‘institutional thickness’ and ‘innovative milieu’ littered Dr Tan’s speech as he elaborated the supposedly favourable locational factors that would give rise to appropriate interactions in the Science Hub—its physical proximity to the National University of Singapore, the Singapore Science Park, and Holland Village (a suburban centre with a range of social and recreational amenities) (see figure 1). This time round, however, the state was much more anxious to make Science Hub a reality as the Asian financial crisis was perceived by the PAP government to pose a greater challenge to its political legitimacy as compared with the previous recession in 1985, especially with the kinds of sociopolitical upheavals that were taking place around the Southeast Asian region during the period (compare Kelly, 2001).

In September 2000 JTC Corporation (JTC), a statutory board under the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI), was ‘appointed’ as the master developer of Science Hub by the government, after JTC presented its proposals to the Technopreneurship 21 (renamed Entrepreneurship 21 in the year 2001) ministerial committee headed by Dr Tan (JTC Corporation, 2001b). That JTC was described as having been ‘appointed’ as the master developer of the Science Hub, when previously its status as the main government agency in charge of planning and developing industrial estates in Singapore was hardly in doubt, reflected the kind of free-market rhetoric mobilised by the state to rationalise and legitimise the role of the private sector in the development of the Science Hub. JTC would develop key ‘nodes’ (such as Biopolis and Fusionpolis, in which government research institutions are to be located) and the supporting infrastructure (such as roads and utilities) in the Science Hub, and the private sector would develop up to 80% of this zone over the next fifteen to twenty years and with ‘greater planning flexibility’ (Tan, 2001). In a speech given at the launch of the Science Hub masterplan exhibition on 4 December 2001, Dr Tan stressed that,

“For the Science Hub to succeed, there must be a balance between adequate planning—to ensure overall quality and reliability—and allowing sufficient room for the market to evolve and determine what works and what does not” (Tan, 2001).

Such rhetoric in turn resonated with state discourses that stress the need to reduce the role of the government in the economy so as to foster an entrepreneurial culture deemed necessary for maintaining Singapore’s competitiveness in the new economy (MTI, 1986; 2003). In 2001 some departments of JTC were corporatised as part of the government’s efforts to make JTC and other statutory boards “more entrepreneurial

and responsive to the market” and to “subject the corporatised unit to competitive market pressures and discipline” (Lee H L, 2000). In the same year Zaha Hadid Ltd and MVA Asia, both private firms, were appointed as the masterplan and transport consultants, respectively, for Science Hub (JTC Corporation, 2001a). However, despite the free-market rhetoric that has informed the planning of the Science Hub, private-sector involvement in the planning process of Science Hub is still circumscribed by the national spatial planning system. Planning permission must still be obtained from the national authorities on land-use and transport planning—namely, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) and Land Transport Authority (LTA)—for any changes to the land-use and transportation plans, respectively, at the science hub.

After JTC was appointed as the master developer of Science Hub in September 2000, it immediately started work on Phase Z.Ro Technopreneur Park in the northern part of the site in order to build up a “vibrant technopreneurial community of researchers, innovators, business angels, venture capitalists, [and] corporate lawyers” in the Buona Vista area even as the design brief for the Science Hub masterplan was being drawn up by JTC (JTC Corporation, 2000) (see figure 1). The Technopreneur Park finally opened on 6 February 2001 to start-up companies involved in ICT sectors (JTC Corporation, 2001b). Meanwhile, JTC has started an international selection exercise to choose the masterplan and transport consultants for the Science Hub. As part of this selection process, JTC planners have gone on trips, mostly to Europe and the United States, to study the planning practices adopted in established technopoles such as Silicon Valley; to solicit views from prominent architects such as Kenzo Tange; and to invite overseas architectural and planning firms to submit proposals for the Science Hub masterplan. After three rounds of evaluation, Zaha Hadid Ltd (based in London) and MVA Asia (based in Hong Kong) were finally appointed as the masterplan and transport consultants, respectively, in June 2001 (JTC Corporation, 2001a). Whereas MVA Asia was chosen for its technical capabilities such its “track record, experience and knowledge in transport planning and People Mover system technologies” (Lim N C, 2001b), the appointment of Zaha Hadid Ltd was rationalised in relation to state discourses about ‘creativity’ and ‘flexibility’ as cultural values that Singaporeans should ideally perform in the new economy (MTI, 1986; 2003):

“In selecting the master planner, we looked for the firm’s ability to ‘think out of the box’: offering a fresh perspective on master planning issues for technology nodes, whilst relating to the existing cultural fabric. The panel opted for a master planner with the creativity to devise vibrant public space, the foresight to cater to organic growth and the facility for dynamic planning” (Lim N C, 2001b).

The above kind of new-economy rhetoric and creativity and flexibility has also been alluded to by the state to rationalise and legitimise other aspects of the planning process for the Science Hub. Dr Tan, for instance, emphasised that:

“While knowledge, innovation and speed are important factors [for the Singapore economy to keep] going forward, the willingness to experiment and break out of existing mindsets will give us a new competitive edge In this respect, I am glad that JTC [has] taken a radical approach in planning the Science Hub” (Tan, 2001).

Whether the everyday realities of the planning process actually live up to such utopian imaginings of creativity and flexibility is another matter. During an interview, Steven, head of the one-north planning team, rationalised the planning process using similar rhetoric:

“Singapore must catch up and overtake fast In this new economy, by the time you finished planning everything, it is already outdated since the market is moving so fast Planning is now a dynamic and strategic tool ... it is about how you learn to be more flexible, get things on the ground and improve on it ... there is no such thing as the perfect plan” (personal interview, 12 July 2003).

However, Steven was also critical of the resultant planning practices. He recalled the ‘very tight schedule’ that he had been given, after JTC was appointed the master developer in September 2000, to draw up the design brief that would serve as the criteria for selecting the masterplan and transport consultants for the Science Hub. Moreover, Steven expressed reservations about the ‘dynamic planning and development process’ at the Science Hub in the sense that planners were unable to finalise most aspects of the project before starting the actual development works. Instead, development works were carried out on parts of the project even as the plans for other parts were being modified in response to changing market conditions. This meant that timely interventions were expected from the planners involved in the project.

The appointment of Zaha Hadid Ltd and MVA Asia as masterplan and transport consultants, respectively, for the Science Hub in June 2001 coincided with the formation of a Resource Advisory Panel (RAP) comprising “prominent international and local architects and private sector individuals ... to provide advice and new perspectives to the project” (Lim N C, 2001b). Kisho Kurokawa, and architect whose Tokyo-based firm has been selected for the Fusionpolis project, and William Mitchell, Professor of Architecture and Media Arts and Sciences at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, were among the members of the RAP. The establishment of the RAP came after the setting up of a steering committee comprising senior civil servants from various ministries and statutory boards in April 2001 to “facilitate inter-agency co-operation in the development of the Science Hub” (Lim N C, 2001b). Both the Steering Committee and the RAP were rationalised by the state in terms of the “importance of this national project” in moving “Singapore’s economy firmly into the knowledge age” (JTC Corporation, 2001a)—rhetoric that belied the anxieties of the state to make the Science Hub a success in generating and sustaining economic growth, which has been the basis of the political legitimacy of the ruling party (PAP) since 1959.

The Science Hub was renamed one-north on 4 December 2001 at the launch of the masterplan exhibition at Phase Z.Ro Technopreneur Park by Dr Tan, who considered that the “unveiling of the masterplan is symbolically important to Singapore’s journey into the next stage of economic development where knowledge, creativity, talent and experimentation are key” (Tan, 2001). The masterplan seeks to create an “intellectually stimulating and creative physical environment where a critical mass of talents, entrepreneurs, scientists and researchers would congregate, exchange ideas and interact” at one-north (JTC Corporation, 2001c). This is to be achieved by locating key institutions, such as university campuses and government research agencies, in close proximity with private firms in high-technology industries; by providing residential options such as home offices to create a ‘work–live–play’ environment; by fostering a ‘vibrant’ cultural scene with art galleries, restaurants, pubs, and cafes; and by facilitating pedestrian movement within and across the different developments in one-north. These planning strategies are intended to result in a compact, mixed-use, pedestrian-centric urban form which will ideally foster the kinds of face-to-face interactions that are deemed important for sustaining the innovative processes of the new economy (Barth, 2003). However, although Zaha Hadid’s masterplan for one-north has been valorised as a “next-generation model for the integration of business, research, and urban living” that “acknowledges and incorporates the synergies between urban life and today’s research-driven industries” (*Architecture and Urbanism* 2002), the planning strategies suggested for one-north resonate with familiar notions of ‘institutional thickness’ and ‘innovative milieu’ that had been alluded to earlier in the technology corridor concept plan of the National Technology Plan 1991 (NSTB, 1991).

Actual development works on one-north started soon after the launch of the masterplan on 4 December 2001. On 6 December 2001 construction work began on

the Biopolis, a biomedical hub comprising seven buildings between eight and thirteen storeys high, five of which were designated for national biomedical research institutions. Less than two years later, on 29 October 2003, Biopolis was officially launched even though the buildings were not fully completed. The 'blistering pace' at which Biopolis was built was deemed important to "Singapore's bid to become a leading biomedical science hub with world-class capabilities" given the highly competitive and dynamic nature of the industry (Lim N C, 2003). Meanwhile, construction of the Fusionpolis, a hub for the ICT and media industries, started on 20 February 2003, and is scheduled for completion in 2005. Fusionpolis, as its name suggests, is to be where the "fusion of ideas from the arts, business and technology" may ideally take place so as to "generate more value" and create "new jobs for Singaporeans" in the new economy (Lim T E, 2003).

4 'Little bohemia': fostering new-economy cultures in Singapore

Apart from commencing construction works on the Biopolis and Fusionpolis, the two key 'nodes' in one-north, JTC has also started exploring residential options in the vicinity. On 1 July 2002 JTC took over the management of Chip Bee Gardens, a residential area in Holland Village (a suburban town centre located close to one-north), from the Singapore Land Authority (SLA) (see figure 1). JTC also planned to take over the management of black-and-white houses and walk-up apartments on Portsdown Road, from SLA, in order to provide another residential option in one-north (Chong, 2003). The designation of Chip Bee Gardens and Portsdown Road as residential areas in one-north was bound up with rising interest in so-called little bohemias in which an 'entrepreneurial culture' may be fostered. In this section we consider the selection and reworking of these residential areas as bohemian spaces for the new economy at one-north.

The notion of 'little bohemia' rose to prominence in Singapore following the inaugural Ho Rih Hwa Leadership in Asia Lecture by Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew on 5 February 2002. Responding to a question about how an entrepreneurial culture might be fostered in heavily regulated Singapore, Lee suggested, "Now, we must have little bohemias in Singapore where you can do your own thing but not disrupt the heartlands⁽¹⁾ Diversity is something we must not only allow but also encourage but not at the cost of disrupting our society" (*Straits Times* 2002a). In particular, Lee cited Holland Village as an example of a "little bohemia where creative people could do odd things" (*Straits Times* 2002a). His reply was consistent with the theme of his speech, in which he called for the fostering of an 'entrepreneurial culture' to retain Singapore's competitive advantage in this "new era of the global economy". Lee argued that Singaporeans should adopt 'new values' that draw upon "America's entrepreneurial culture": "personal independence and self-reliance", "respect for those starting new businesses", "acceptance of failure", and "tolerance for a high degree of income disparity" (Lee K Y, 2002). However, though Lee valorised US 'entrepreneurial culture', he concluded his speech by stressing that "the remaking of Singapore does not mean we throw out every strength and virtue we have developed". This resonated with familiar discourses about 'Asian values' and the key to Singapore's sociopolitical stability and economic vitality vis-à-vis the supposed moral decadence of the West (see Chua, 1995). Hence, the representation of certain areas in Singapore as little bohemia served two seemingly contradictory ideological agendas of the state.

⁽¹⁾ 'Heartlands' is the term commonly used to refer to the public housing estates in which the majority of Singaporeans ('heartlanders') live. In political discourse, heartlanders are conventionally considered to hold 'conservative', 'Asian' political and social views.

On one hand, these are spaces in which an entrepreneurial culture is to be fostered to sustain Singapore's economic growth, which forms the basis of the political legitimacy of the PAP government. On the other hand, they are marked out as spaces in which 'alternative' values, ideas, and lifestyles may be tolerated, without contaminating the Asian values of a supposed silent majority living in public housing estates (that is, the 'heartlands'), which constitute much of the electoral support for the PAP government.

'Little bohemia' resurfaced later that year at the National Day Rally on 18 August 2002, when Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong alluded to "studies in the US [that] have shown that entrepreneurship is closely correlated with the level of cultural vibrancy" (Goh C T, 2002). As part of a 'remaking Singapore' process to meet the economic challenges posed by globalisation and the rise of regional economies, especially China, Singapore was compelled to become a "culturally vibrant city", in order to "help individuals become more creative" and to attract "global creative talent" who "want an authentic street and neighbourhood environment, a thriving music and arts scene, openness and diversity" (Goh C T, 2002). In fact, "Singapore needs a new little 'Bohemias' like Holland village, Siglap, and Club Street, where [global creative talent] can gather, soak in the ambience, and do their creative stuff" (Goh C T, 2002). The prime minister's comments about little bohemia captured the attention of the local English-language press as journalists sought to assess the 'bohemia factor' of the areas identified by Goh (*Straits Times* 2002b). As Holland Village was proclaimed the "granddaddy of bohemia in Singapore", Portsdown Road in the vicinity on one-north was 'discovered' as another 'little bohemia' in Singapore (*Straits Times* 2002c).

Goh's reference to 'global creative talent' and its locational preferences resonated with Richard Florida's (2002a; 2002b; 2002c) recent focus on mapping the geographies of innovation in the United States. Florida sought to demonstrate statistically the relative importance of different locational factors in attracting and retaining 'creative talents', the presence of whom arguably generates innovative and high-technology economic activities. Florida's work (2002a, page 67) contends that the "relationship between the bohemian index and high-technology concentrations is particularly strong". This is said to be because the strong presence of bohemians, or persons involved in arts-related occupations such as writing, design, music, fine arts, photography, and the performing arts, in an area reflects "an underlying set of conditions of milieu which is open and attractive to talented and creative people of all sorts (including those who work in high-technology industries) and thus create[s] a place-based environment that is conducive to the birth, growth and development of new and high-technology industries" (Florida, 2002a, page 68). Steven, head of the one-north planning team, explicitly referred to Florida's work during a personal interview when he talked about how his team of planners had to conceptualise spatial strategies for attracting 'creative talents' to one-north so as to make the project a success in generating innovative activities (personal interview, 12 July 2003).

The above kinds of discourses linking artistic and creative pursuits on one hand, and innovations in science and technology on the other, had material effects in Chip Bee Gardens in Holland Village and Portsdown Road. In both of these locations JTC attempted to enhance existing bohemian spatial qualities so as to attract more creative talents who would in turn further contribute to the 'innovative milieu' at one-north. At Chip Bee Gardens, a refurbishment and renovation programme was initiated to "enhance the aesthetics of the estate yet [retain] its unique tranquility and rustic charm" (JTC Corporation, 2002). Walk-up apartments at Block 43, Jalan Merah Saga, in particular, had been refurbished into home offices in the Work Loft @ Chip Bee project which was opened only to companies involved in the 'creative' fields of

media, the arts, and advertising and public relations (JTC Corporation, 2003). This was part of the JTC strategy to “attract foreign talents and companies alike to gravitate to Singapore” by “offering premier and varied lifestyle options to complement a conducive work environment” at one-north (JTC Corporation, 2002).

The Portsdown Road area, in contrast, was valorised for its ‘heritage elements’. The black-and-white houses and walk-up apartments at Portsdown Road were formerly living quarters for British military personnel based in the Pasir Panjang Military Complex, which was the largest British military area in Singapore. The complex included facilities catering to the medical, social, recreational, and educational as well as residential needs of the British military personnel and their families. Pasir Panjang Military Complex was established in 1949 as part of the postwar expansion of British military installations in Singapore. However, with the complete withdrawal of the British military from Singapore in December 1971, the land was returned to the Singapore government, which selectively adapted the military infrastructure to land uses prescribed by the developmental imperatives of the postcolonial state (Lim A P, 1974). The government has leased the black-and-white houses and three-storey walk-up apartments as residential units. Most of the units are rented by non-Singapore citizens—in part because they are not allowed, under the Residential Property Act, to purchase vacant land, landed residential property, and residential property in buildings of less than six levels in Singapore (Singapore Land Authority, http://www.sla.gov.sg/what_we_do/what_we_do_land_registry.html; Singapore Statutes Online, <http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/>). Now, however, the colonial landscape of Portsdown Road is considered ideal for creative talents, Singaporean or otherwise, who will work in one-north. The black-and-white structures are to be conserved in the development of one-north—“a project that recognises our heritage”:

“While we experiment with the new, we must do so building on our current strengths. If we disregard our heritage and past, we risk losing those elements that have brought us success so far ... We have decided to intensify land use while selectively preserving some of these lovely black-and-white bungalows and infusing them with new elements ... [JTC has] also proposed that Portsdown Road, though winding and narrow, should be preserved. All these will add diversity to [one-north], giving it many facets to make it an exciting place that inspires” (Lim N C, 2001a).

The recognition by JTC of the black-and-white houses and walk-up apartments on Portsdown Road as ‘our heritage’ was bound up with ‘little bohemia’ discourses in which the ambience of Portsdown Road was valorised for its supposed ability to draw and retain global creative talents, who would in turn contribute to the innovative milieu at one-north.

In the JTC ‘heritage’ conservation plans, 60%–70% of the black-and-white houses and walk-up apartments would be conserved and refurbished according to guidelines that differed from those stipulated by the URA for conservation areas in Singapore. The remaining black-and-white houses and walk-up apartments would be demolished and new structures built on the open grass lawns at Portsdown Road (Steven, head of one-north planning team, personal interview, 12 July 2003). For instance, Wessex Estate, a neighbourhood on Portsdown Road, was identified as an “ideal location for the creative industries as a wide mix of creative talents already live there” with JTC intending to “keep up to seventy percent of the units for residential use and convert the remaining thirty percent into work space for the creative industries” (Chong, 2003). In particular, Colbar (or Colonial Bar, a neighbourhood eatery that has been operating at Portsdown Road since 1953) was relocated by JTC to another site in the vicinity in order to facilitate the construction of a new road linking Queensway and Ayer Rajah

Expressway in order to cope with the expected increase in traffic volume owing to the development of one-north (see figure 1). The relocation of Colbar was rationalised on the basis that it was a “gathering place for the Wessex community and bohemian people” (Chong, 2003), thus showing how the relocation of Colbar was bound up with imaginings of Portsdown Road as a little bohemia.

The discursive and material transformation of Portsdown Road into a bohemian residential site for one-north meant that existing residents would eventually face eviction to make way for global creative talents. Ironically, many of these existing residents are themselves non-Singaporean ‘foreign talents’ whose position in Singapore is, in part, attributable to labour-market policies intended by the government to broaden the limited national skills base. It might be suggested, therefore, that the one-north eviction process reveals a shift in the transnational labour hierarchy, in which certain kinds of skills are considered more ‘relevant’ than others at different points in the developmental trajectory of Singapore. In the current round of new-economy transition, ‘global talent’ with ‘entrepreneurial and creative flair’ has become the new focus of Singapore’s foreign-talent policy so as to add to its “dynamism and cosmopolitan character” (MTI, 2003, page 65). This is highlighted by the conferment of the inaugural Honorary Citizen award upon Dr Sydney Brenner (Nobel Prize laureate in Physiology or Medicine, 2002; founding member of the Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology in Singapore) and Mr Pasquale Pistorio (president and chief executive officer of STMicroelectronics) on 27 October 2003, for their “pioneering efforts to establish Singapore as a hub for biomedical sciences and microelectronics respectively”:

“The Honorary Citizen award not only recognises individuals for their long-standing contributions to Singapore, it is also a show of our commitment to welcome new ideas and innovation that will drive the next level of growth and development for Singapore” (MOM, 2003).

Although the Honorary Citizen award is not equivalent to a Singaporean citizenship in that “the rights and duties of Singapore citizens, such as voting and National Service, do not apply to Honorary Citizens” (MOM, 2003), it is a clear signal of which kinds of foreign talents the government valorises in the new economy. In ‘bohemian’ Portsdown Road existing residents—themselves conventionally valorised as foreign talents—are to be replaced by a new generation of creative talents who are valued for their potential contributions to the innovative milieu at one-north.

5 Conclusions

Through a case study of one-north, the supposed “icon of the new economy in Singapore” (Lim N C, 2000), we have shown how ‘new economy’ discourses have been mobilised by the state to rationalise and/or legitimise the sociospatial processes and consequences of a shift towards a supposedly ‘utopian’ stage in the developmental trajectory of the city-state. In a political context in which the legitimacy of the PAP government rests heavily upon its ability to manage the economy, it is significant that such new-economy rhetoric has been (re)articulated precisely at times of economic downturn in Singapore, first in the mid-1980s and, more recently, since the late 1990s (Lim A, 2002, Goh C B, 1995). At the same time, however, the kinds of disruptions to the labour market associated with the transition to a new stage of Singapore’s developmental trajectory are deemed ‘inevitable’ and ‘necessary’ (Coe and Kelly, 2000; 2002). Such rhetoric in turn produces material sociospatial effects as the state seeks to realise linkages among the cultural, economic, and technological realms deemed necessary for sustained economic growth in an idealised new economy. For instance, the (re)imagining of Portsdown Road as a ‘little bohemia’ that is conducive for the lifestyles of the ‘global creative talents’ who would work at one-north means that the mostly

non-Singaporean residents of Portsdown Road face eventual eviction from the area. This shows how, even among the valorised 'foreign talents', there is a shifting hierarchy in which certain kinds of skills are considered more 'relevant' than others for the 'remaking' of Singapore's economy. It is important, however, to emphasise that our case study of one-north is situated at a specific historical–geographical juncture in the developmental trajectory of Singapore. Ongoing (re)articulations and material effects of new-economy rhetoric discussed in this paper for the case of one-north, may be more fully elucidated in the future. This is especially so given that, at the time of writing, the plans for one-north have largely remained on paper, other than those for the completion of the Biopolis (at which biomedical research work has proceeded for less than a year) and ongoing construction work on the Fusionpolis.

Though our case study is situated at a particular moment in the specific context of Singapore, it has wider significance. As our discussion in the above sections reveals, state rhetoric about one-north and the new economy in Singapore echoes academic discourses about the spatialities of new economy, in particular, notions of 'institutional thickness' (Amin and Thrift, 1994), 'innovative milieu' (Castells and Hall, 1994), and 'bohemia' (Florida, 2002a). Nigel Thrift (1998; 2000), among others, has noted how academics may be complicit with the dynamics of the new economy that they are studying. Hence, our case study of one-north demands that academics reflect critically on the development of technopoles in other parts of the world, where similar kinds of discourses may be mobilised, while also being inflected with the specificities of local planning contexts.

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