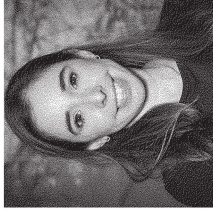


# ECONOMICAL KEYNOTE CITIES AND THE ECONOMY: A STORY OF PROSPERITY AND INEQUITY



## The Political and Economic Contradictions of the 21st Century Urban Landscape

In the 21st century, cities have emerged as dynamic hubs where economic growth, cultural diversity, and political activism converge. However, beneath the façade of progress and innovation lies a complex web of contradictions that demand our attention. Cities truly are beacons of opportunity and diversity, yet they simultaneously stand at the forefront of a global struggle against rising inequalities, ineffective housing policies, insufficient public transport and environmental crises. As cities grow in number, size, and population, the intricate network of factors influencing their emerging architecture becomes increasingly challenging to fully comprehend. In today's urban landscapes, what we design and build is not a passive recipient of external forces; rather, it actively occupies a pivotal position where politics, economics, and our interactions with nature and society are mediated.

Despite the prevailing notion of globalization's homogenizing influence, economically, the urban landscapes of North American cities exhibit substantial diversity. While Silicon Valley and Silicone Alley stand out as epicenters of tech innovation and finance, other cities' development is propelled by their strengths in healthcare, education, manufacturing, or industrial sectors. Recent global supply chain changes are rapidly restructuring the way these cities relate to one another and boosting construction and great speculation within urban areas. Balancing economic growth with the preservation of a city's character and the well-being of its existing residents is and will continue to be a challenge.

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**Karen Hinojosa** is an Associate Professor at the School of Architecture, Art, and Design at Tecnológico de Monterrey, where she also holds the position of National Director for the urbanism program. Her expertise and research focus on sustainable urbanism, participatory development, public space, and inclusion. Dr. Hinojosa's work in academia has been recognized with the Inspiring Professor award on multiple occasions (2019-2021). She is a member of the research group Sustainable Territorial Development, as well as affiliated with the International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP), the Mexican Association of Women Architects and Urban Planners, and the Monterrey Region Urban Planners Society (SURMAC). She serves on the scientific committee of Madrid Polytechnic University's International Seminar on Urban Research and guest editor for a Gender and Architecture issue at DEARQ. In addition to her academic pursuits, Dr. Hinojosa is a co-founder of Trama Urbana, an urban consulting firm. Her commitment to education, inclusion, and participation fuels her research, teaching, consulting, and design endeavors, with the aspiration to bring about positive transformations in territories by addressing inequities. She holds a Master's degree in architectural design from the University of Navarre in Spain and a PhD in Urban Affairs from the Autonomous University of Nuevo Leon.

Amid this urban transformation, it is apparent that architecture holds the potential to enhance communal living. However, it also faces the risk of being driven solely by economic interests, potentially becoming a commodity or a mere investment vehicle with little consideration for its inhabitants. This outcome could compromise the fundamental social role and purpose that architecture serves as a habitat. Considering issues of spatial justice can serve as a valuable framework to analyze how resources, opportunities, and power are distributed. Whether we observe Monterrey's bustling construction boom or Chicago's ongoing urban revitalization, stark disparities emerge in terms of access to housing, public services, economic prospects, and even clean air. These disparities underscore the pressing need for architecture not only to be practiced ethically but also critically, recognizing the broader societal implications of its decisions.

Ultimately, the 21st-century city is a complex tapestry of contradictions and potentials. It is a place where architecture, as exemplified by the projects, people, and practices we celebrate, has taken an undeniable social turn in recent years. Yet we must recognize that the system itself remains resistant to comprehensive change. We cannot overlook the pressing need to engage with the broader systems of urban planning, politics, and economics as essential tools for manifesting the spatial dimensions of our shared aspirations. Only by understanding this intricate interplay between architectural form and its economic and socio-political context can we unlock the potential for transformative action. It is within this awareness and action that we find the path to a more equitable and sustainable urban future.



Dr. Hinojosa at the podium during her keynote speech at the PhD Symposium in S.R. Crown Hall. Photo courtesy of Cipek Karatop.