

# AI Manakh

## **Dubai Guide**

Moutamarat

## **Gulf Survey**

AMO

## **Global Agenda**

Archis

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Khalid Al Malik

## Foreword

When I explain my personal interest in design as an Arab CEO, I tend to give a straightforward business answer: business anywhere – including in the Arab world – is no longer ‘business as usual’. If as a CEO you expect to be successful, you need to develop new capabilities. If you expect your business to continue to be relevant and meet its clients’ needs, you need to understand how design will reshape their expectations and your business environment.

Moutamarat’s International Design Forum and Initiative will deliver a clear message to CEOs in the Arab world and abroad: companies that incorporate effective design and harness creativity are more likely to succeed tomorrow. In a rapidly shifting environment, CEOs must adopt new approaches to address regional and, increasingly, global challenges. In order to do that, they need new, creative, innovative tools.

One of the most interesting transformations of our era is the changing role of urban centers. The Arab world is experiencing an unprecedented expansion of its cities. As cities grow and evolve in our region, I find it fascinating to understand how the process will forever transform our business environment. For the first time ever, *Al Manakh* gathers together the insights of Arab and international experts on the new role of cities as engines of knowledge and exponential growth.

*Al Manakh* is a reflection on the effect of urban design on our world and what it takes to be in greater command of our future. When solutions to complex problems like developing new industries for the Arab world or improving the quality of education are hard to find, CEOs will need to step forward with creative responses to the challenges ahead. *Al Manakh* demonstrates that there are opportunities for Arab CEOs and positive responses to change.

Design and creativity are about forging new links and finding new solutions; in that context they speak directly to me as a business leader. As my decision-making process becomes more complex, I welcome the creative input of designers to better estimate the impact of urban center growth, demographics, culture, social change and the environment.

New thinking on urban development in the Arab world is a positive signal and should always be welcome. *Al Manakh* offers unique know-how and engages business leaders like me in an interesting dialogue.

It is time the Arab world joined the global debate on design and creativity in order to stimulate our capabilities and embolden us to embrace change, an act which is at times disruptive to our traditional business practices, but can ultimately be uplifting and rewarding.

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Ole Bouman

# An Awakening in Dubai

You have been considered dead for years, leading a vegetative life, dependent on a life support system. Like a somnambulist you murmur words that make no sense and gaze at things that are not there.

Not responding to any stimuli, doctors do not know how to resuscitate you. They take you outside, to see if fresh air will help. They try shock therapy. Then, finally, they find the place for you. The air may not be really fresh, but the locale is certainly shocking.

Waking up, you find yourself where nothing is as you knew it. Things look familiar, but the system according to which they operate is very, very different. These differences do not preclude a learning experience, however. To make your time as productive as possible, we have provided a guide.

After you have found your way from souk to mall, from pathway to ski dome, from desert to golf course, from mansion to skyscraper, you will have acquired an appetite for further navigation in this strange world. A guide will then no longer be enough. You'll need an atlas.

You start to see patterns, grasp relations, and enjoy connections. The awakening continues by resettling yourself in a region that shows unprecedented energies in land use and creation. You are going to have a hard time keeping track, so we will help you with mapping.

Then, as soon as you have a profound understanding of the new realities around you, you finally feel a new urge to intervene again.

The awakening has completed. The coma of a designer who has lost all relevance and inspiration has ended. Re-energized, you want to act, to make a difference. Looking back at the world from which you came, you see entirely new tasks and endeavors. We have started to list them for you. An agenda for design.

Here it is: a guide, an atlas, an agenda... Here is Al Manakh

Rem Koolhaas

# Last Chance?

**We live in an era of completions, not new beginnings.**

**The world is running out of places where it can start over.**

Sand and sea along the Gulf, like an untainted canvas, provide the ultimate tabula rasa on which new identities can be inscribed: palms, world maps, cultural capitals, financial centers, sport cities...

Yet, much like Singapore in the 1980s and China in the 1990s, the recent development of the Gulf, particularly Dubai, has been met with derision: Mike Davis' damning 'Walt Disney meets Albert Speer'<sup>1</sup> echoes William Gibson's characterization fifteen years ago of Singapore as 'Disneyland with the death penalty'.<sup>2</sup>

The recycling of the Disney *fatwa* says more about the stagnation of the Western critical imagination than it does about Gulf Cities.

To be a critic today is to regret the exportation of ideas that you have failed to confront on your own beat, dragons you have been unable to slay; the vast majority of developments that critics deplore originated and have become the norm in their own countries.

The tragic effect of architecture's inability to recognize and think through modernization's inevitabilities is a wistful language of perpetual disappointment with what is produced and the endless recycling of nostalgic panaceas as well-meaning but moribund alternatives...

It is particularly cruel that the harshest criticism comes from old cultures that still control the apparatus of judgment, while the epicenters of production have shifted to the other end(s) of the globe.

Is it possible to view the Gulf's ongoing transformation on its own terms?  
As an extraordinary attempt to change the fate of an entire region?  
Is it possible to present a constructive criticism of these phenomena?  
Is there something like a critical participation?

(To counter the problem of the workers' accommodation, for instance, there is now talk of three-dimensional legislation, which would define an Arab *Existenzminimum* and mass-produce it...)

The Gulf is not just reconfiguring itself; it's reconfiguring the world.

The Gulf's entrepreneurs are reaching places that modernity has not reached before... Perhaps the most compelling reason to take the Gulf seriously is that its emerging model of the city is being multiplied in a vast zone of reduced architectural visibility that ranges from Morocco in the West, then via Turkey and Azerbaijan to China in the East. In each of the countries of this Silk Belt, the Gulf's developers operate on a scale that has completely escaped 'our' attention.

This burgeoning campaign to export a new kind urbanism – to places immune to or ignored by previous missions of modernism – may be the final opportunity to formulate a new blueprint for urbanism. Will architecture grasp this last chance?

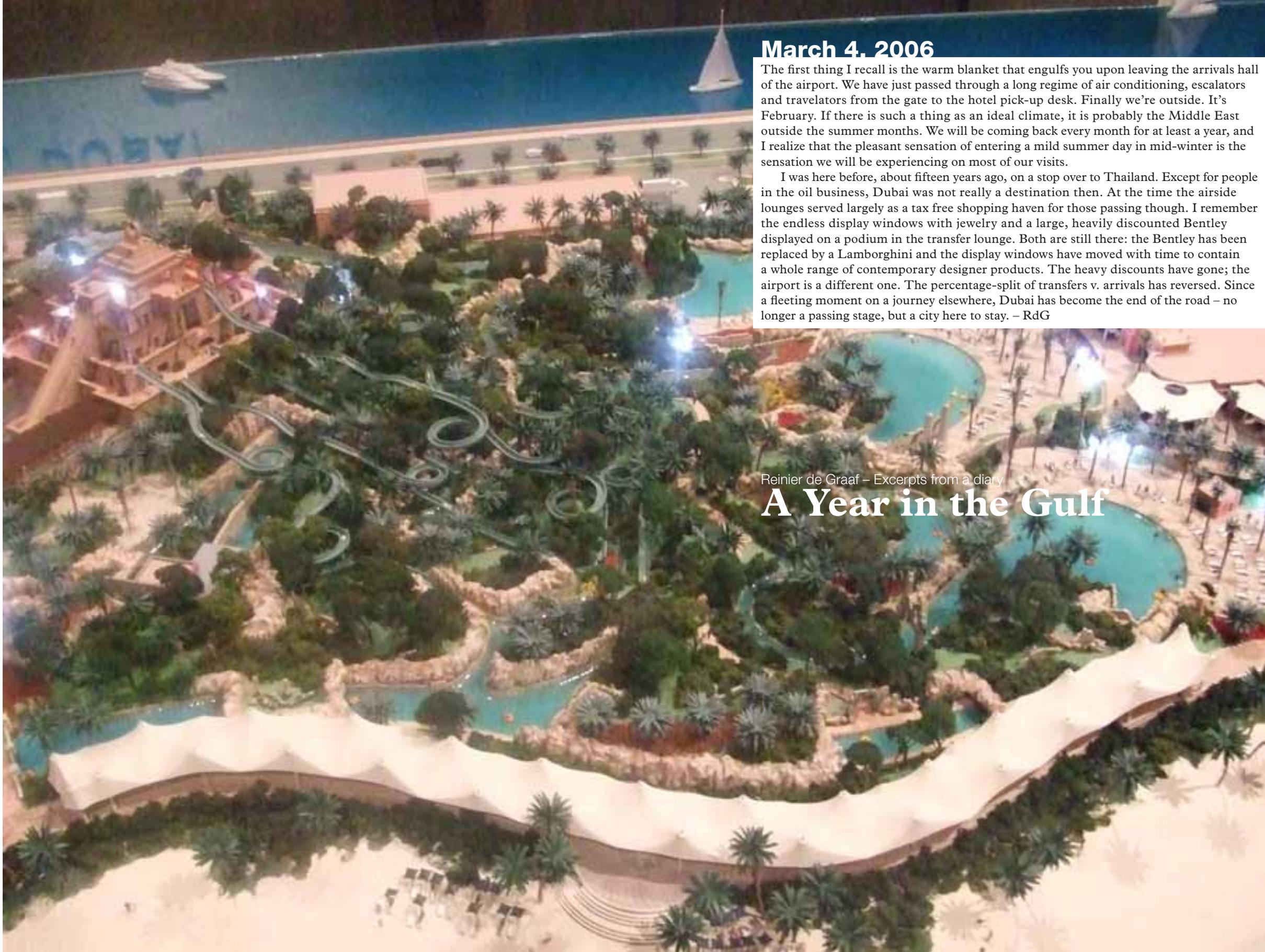
1. Mike Davis, [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com)

2. William, Gibson, *Wired* September 1993

# Dubai Guide

Edited by Moutamarat





## March 4, 2006

The first thing I recall is the warm blanket that engulfs you upon leaving the arrivals hall of the airport. We have just passed through a long regime of air conditioning, escalators and travelators from the gate to the hotel pick-up desk. Finally we're outside. It's February. If there is such a thing as an ideal climate, it is probably the Middle East outside the summer months. We will be coming back every month for at least a year, and I realize that the pleasant sensation of entering a mild summer day in mid-winter is the sensation we will be experiencing on most of our visits.

I was here before, about fifteen years ago, on a stop over to Thailand. Except for people in the oil business, Dubai was not really a destination then. At the time the airside lounges served largely as a tax free shopping haven for those passing through. I remember the endless display windows with jewelry and a large, heavily discounted Bentley displayed on a podium in the transfer lounge. Both are still there: the Bentley has been replaced by a Lamborghini and the display windows have moved with time to contain a whole range of contemporary designer products. The heavy discounts have gone; the airport is a different one. The percentage-split of transfers v. arrivals has reversed. Since a fleeting moment on a journey elsewhere, Dubai has become the end of the road – no longer a passing stage, but a city here to stay. – RdG

Reinier de Graaf – Excerpts from a diary

## A Year in the Gulf



# My Dubai

## It is Hard Not to Fall in Love with Dubai!

As an Arab who has taken the UAE as residence for over seven years, I have developed an intensely emotional attachment to this bewildering, untamable city. I have witnessed Dubai burgeon, turning itself into the locus of an exceptionally ambitious and patently unique enterprise at city making. It is a city where something is made out of nothing, where dreams can come true, where crazy ideas meet attentive ears, and where 'impossible is [truly] nothing'. Not unlike Los Angeles, my home for the decade preceding my residency in the UAE, Dubai is quintessentially distinct: a frontier for adventures, inspiration, and trend setting.

In so many ways, cities are akin to people – they have their own soul, personality, temperament, idiosyncrasy, and even ego. They may embody a set of ideal human traits: beautiful, friendly, ambitious, dreamy, creative, persistent, successful, or happy. Likewise, cities can have much less desirable qualities. And, like human beings, most cities care about their image, about how they see themselves, and about how they would like to be seen by others. Undoubtedly, contemporary Dubai has deeply understood the 'psychology' of cities and has taken such understanding to its utmost extent.

In the past decade or so, Dubai has pursued a daring project most befitting of the twenty-first century global scene of extraordinary challenges anchored in the conditions of postmodernity. Mindful of its image, Dubai has deliberately sought to develop its self-esteem, its confidence in what it has accomplished and what is yet to be achieved. Dubai has (re-)invented itself from a sleepy desert town, to a town in the desert – an extraordinary town, indeed.

What is constant in Dubai is change. There is always a new, discernable 'something' every time I drive around the ever-expanding metropolis. To me, no longer is Dubai in the 'state of being' – it is in the 'state of becoming'. Like Los Angeles before it, Dubai continues to elude comprehension. It persists in defying truism, and refuses to fit neatly into the commonly recognized norms or intellectually constructed categories and compartments. Like other postmodern cities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Dubai is changing fast – too fast for my liking. As an architect and urban planner, fast change makes me jitter. Dubai has accumulated one fourth of the world's construction cranes; the entire city is turned into a big construction site; around the clock, bulldozers and Indian subcontinent laborers choreograph as they reshape the landscape.

Dubai today has more per-capita entries in the Guinness Book of Records than any other city on Earth – and more records are 'under construction': the tallest building in the world; largest shopping mall in the planet; the biggest airport ever built. Unabashedly, Dubai is a city of superlatives – and there is little hope that this drive for the [missing word] will change in the foreseeable future.

Who could have imagined that a sleepy, desert edge city would turn itself, in three decades or so, into a serious contender of the club of global cities? Who could have imagined that the city has made itself with little natural resources but with remarkable ingenuity, adventure, and perseverance.

Yet, in the haste to do too much in so little time, wise people have warned us not to rush to judgment. The Greek philosopher Sophocles pontificated: 'One must wait until the evening to see how splendid the day has been.' All admirable accomplishments notwithstanding, the jury on how Dubai will turn out to be is still out!

## I Have a Dream!

My Dubai is a public city. While 'public city' may appear a redundant expression, the forces of globalization and the postmodern conditions they impose have increasingly privileged the private! The privatization of all aspects of urban life is evident in the proliferation of gated communities, exclusive shopping areas, and tourist-oriented leisure and entertainment facilities. My Dubai will assert its 'public-ness,' will balance its intransigent embrace of laissez-faire economics with its fervent commitment to the collective good. Dubai, like many good cities, must be people-centered, a place where people and the social life they produce is the driving impetus for its making. Henri Lefebvre, in *Le Droit à la Ville* (The Right to the City), likened the right to the city with the right to urban life, to renewed centrality, and to places of free encounters and exchange. My Dubai is a city of a vibrant civic life and exciting collective engagement.

My Dubai is an environmentally sustainable city. It's a city where residents must have an 'inalienable right' to fresh water, clean air, and tidy beaches. As we devise policies for urban growth, land must be viewed not as something we inherited from our forefathers but rather a resource we borrow from future generations. Dubai must be a city that wisely examines its energy consumption, recycling, and the ecological footprint required for its survival. It must be a metropolis whose reliance on recycling and sources of renewable energy will lead to minimized consumption and better balance with the resources with which we are provided. As Richard Rogers exhorts us in his monograph, *Cities for a Small Planet*, a sustainable city is the one that shirks from linear metabolism to a circular metabolism. Blessed with a sunny, hot climate, Dubai's buildings must turn 'green': they should not only end their energy consumption – they must begin producing energy.

My Dubai is a charming city. It is a city replete with inspiring architecture and memorable places. As such, Dubai will refocus its energy on place-making and not only on place-marketing. Dubai will not be, as Ian Parker declares in *The New Yorker*, an 'advertisement for a city, as much as a city itself.' The quality of its buildings, as well as the spaces between them, will be inspiring. It will be a city that is compact enough to support efficient public transport, big enough to allow for defined boundaries, and legible enough to ensure a 'user friendly' urban experience. Local heritage and natural context must provide guidance towards reinventing originality and reclaiming authenticity.

## My Dubai is a Creative City

My Dubai is a just and inclusive city. It is a city where food, shelter, safety, education, and hope are fairly and equitably distributed among all people. Where people – all people – participate in its governance and contribute to an effective civil society in which decision-making is accessible to all people in matters central to their lives and livelihood. Dubai will be an attractive dreamland, but not a collage of Dreamlands.

Am I too idealistic, too much of a dreamer? Probably so, I admit! But grand undertakings begin with dreams – big dreams. With big dreams, the sky's the limit!



# An Arabian Night's Fantasy, and that's ok

Dubai is an Arabian Night's fantasy. 'Orientalists'<sup>1</sup> hate it and 'occidentals'<sup>2</sup> may find it uniquely radical. Referred to either as a Sin City of decadent consumerism or the leader in the Arab/Islamic Renaissance, Dubai is in fact both. Coming to terms with these seeming polar opposites as the defining character of Dubai is something that has taken us more than 6 years.

As newcomers to the Middle East, we arrived here in 2000 with an 'orientalist' perspective. Our chosen careers as practicing architect (Mark Kirchner) and architectural historian/conservator (Samia Rab) serving the academy (American University of Sharjah) put us at natural odds with the Dubai phenomenon. Instead of an evolving architectural legacy, Dubai seems to have risen up from the sand through what appears to be a singular guiding vision that leads to obvious comparisons to Las Vegas and Disneyland. However, after working and living here for 7 years, we have – as much to our own surprise as anyone's – stopped laughing at the outrageous pace and scale of architectural/urban development in Dubai. We have arrived at an understanding that while Dubai, like any resilient example of urbanism, is an unsustainable organism it is also one that is uniquely situated to achieve its goal of becoming a global trade and tourism hub that rivals any in the world. We recognize the collective aspiration to develop a city that functions around the year with outdoor and indoor public spaces, and re-invent a tradition of modernity, defiantly resisting the pessimism of post-modernity.

Recent architectural projects most certainly reveal, what Sudjic calls an 'edifice complex'<sup>3</sup>, but the importance of 'Big' architecture in Dubai is rooted in its historically transient and impermanent architecture, and the vastness of the desert landscape. While most metropolises aim to create a '24-hour' city to maximize the potentials of urbanism, climatically challenged Dubai, where temperatures can exceed 50 degrees Celsius, struggles to create a '12-month' city through mega-scale projects. The infamous malls in Dubai create controlled environments that provide usable public space for its permanent and temporary inhabitants, distant and regional visitors. During the first few years of our arrival, summers in the UAE were remarkably peaceful, its traffic emptying as most residents left for cooler places in Europe or elsewhere in the region. The foreign policy shifts of many Western nations after the 9/11 attacks in New York



Statistical projections may seem over-ambitious, but in a world struck by crises and terror, two qualities the Emirates offer make it irresistible to visitors and expatriates: cultural tolerance and a reputation for safety



Dubai's urban form is unique in the Gulf as it is divided by a creek (Khor Dubai), separating three villages that over time merged into one city: Deira to the north, and Al Shindagha and Al Bastakiya in Bur Dubai to the south of the creek



The importance of 'Big' in Dubai is linked to its (a) historically transient and impermanent architecture and (b) the vastness of the desert landscape within which it exists



Bigger is better in Dubai, for a reason



Since the late 1960s, Dubai clearly has had an 'edifice complex'



Public spaces in Dubai attract local Emiratis and other inhabitants of different origin

and Washington offered Dubai both the economic opportunity (given the re-investment of regional funds divested from western countries) to realize grandiose mega-projects and the political will to invest, develop, and inhabit regionally.

Given its position as a regional trade hub since the late nineteenth century, Dubai was 'globalized' early on in its history. Though never colonized, Dubai played an important role in mediating trade of goods between East India companies and the rest of the world. In 1903, the ruling Sheikh of Dubai abolished taxes on visiting merchants, making it the most attractive trading portal of the Gulf.<sup>4</sup> Yet it's only been the remarkable post-9/11 and oil-boom liquidity that has allowed it to become prosperous enough to both envision and realize the mega-projects that are either the punch line of jokes by critics of contemporary urbanism or the envy of aspiring cities in the developing world. In this portrayal of Dubai, we include images that oscillate between past and present; between the public and private visions underpinning an emerging metropolis. We will address our 'Orientalist' readers' concerns (yes, your perceptions are partly correct; it is an outrageous, decadent, 'unsustainable' city, whose 'mega-projects' are built by exploited immigrant labor), and, more importantly, illustrate Dubai as not only a tourist 'destination' but a thriving metropolis in the Gulf. Our message to our fellow 'Occidental' reader is: Rest assured, Dubai is not a mere Las Vegas with Disneyland style projects: merchants and not entertainers have and continue to play a fundamental role not only in the economic affairs of Dubai but also in reforming its political structure.

When we read the newspapers, we find few happy stories in the Middle East outside of the developments in Dubai. Most of the new developments portrayed here are promoting a modernizing society's ambitions. This may sadden the 'Orientalist' who expects 'Islamic' virtues from developments in any Arab city. However, the 'Occidental' in us understands that Dubai's development in the past decade is based on recognition that forces of modernization have their roots in Western culture. Instead of distancing itself from western influences, it has embarked on a journey that reflects:

1. Confidence in providing political security within an unstable World Region.
2. A vision to capture the post-9/11 divested Arab capital floating in search of new and geographically viable investments.
3. Introduction of mortgage financing, presenting middle-income professionals from Asia an opportunity to own homes within their lifetime.
4. Availability of infinite supply of cheap labor from Asia, not unlike any other emerging metropolis that is surrounded by less affluent developing nations.

As we sit and enjoy our coffee along the abra stop in a stylized 'neo-traditional' resort hotel, Madinat Jumeirah, it is difficult to be over-critical of a space occupied simultaneously by abayah and dish-dash clad youngsters in national dress alongside colorfully attired expatriate residents, and distant and regional visitors of the Gulf. East and West have found a common meeting place. With skyline pierced by large wind towers, the is hotel with its courtyard villas, and the Souk (bazaar) collectively recreate on a grand



Nearly five million visitors annually chose Dubai as their destination, and the UAE government is aiming for 15 million visitors by 2010



Burj al-Arab is now integrated into the antithetical skyline of the 'neo-traditional' resort, Madinat Jumeirah



The architecture of Burj al Arab is defiantly and theatrically modern



The local Emiratis accept the fantasy as a new reality. SkiDubai in the Mall of the Emirates provides inhabitants an incentive not to flee the country during the hot summer months



Dubai, like any emerging metropolis, is built on immigrant labor that participates in the construction of infrastructure and architectural icons

scale the almost extinct traditional settlements like Al Bastakiya and Al Shindagha that were once home to Dubai's earliest merchants who, in the pre-oil days, lived and prospered from trading goods with Iran and exporting pearls from the Gulf. We can easily criticize the 'fakeness' of the wind towers and the enclosed air-conditioned space of consumption and leisure. We have begun to appreciate the dual use of retail/leisure spaces in projects like Madinat Jumeirah that essentially create a public commons. Though public spaces in Dubai may not be 'public' in a democratic sense, they allow inhabitants to mix with people of different origins who would not in any case be on the streets in the inhospitable climate.

Dubai has not yet managed to mix different social classes in its public spaces (laborers are largely denied entry) but it has successfully managed to create spaces for people of different origins without demanding assimilation. It has also recognized the role of architecture and place in shaping the social landscape. Perhaps most importantly, Dubai's architecture matters because as Arabs and the Asians alike invest in Dubai's outrageous projects, they are perhaps setting the historical record straight by supporting the development of a global hub through public space for the 180 nationalities that call Dubai home (DTCM statistic), for today or forever. Dubai, as an architectural experiment, addresses the realities, ambitions, and perhaps unattainable dreams of an even greater experiment: globalization.

1. Prejudiced outsiders studying Eastern cultures and people. See, Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978)
2. The term is an inversion of Orientalism. See, Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: the West in the Eyes of its Enemies* (2004); also Bonnett, *The Idea of the West* (2004). Bonnett argues that occidentalism emerged from

the interconnection of non-Western and Western intellectual traditions.

3. Deyan Sudjic, *The Edifice Complex*, Penguin, 2005.
4. Fatma Al Sayegh, 'Merchant's Role in a Changing Society: The Case of Dubai, 1900-90', in *Middle Eastern Studies*: Volume 34, Number 1, (Jan. 1998).

Fatih A. Rifki, Amer A. Moustafa

## Madinat Jumeirah and the Urban Experience in the Private City

Amidst its relentless drive to join the club of global cities, Dubai has embarked on a major transformation of its urban landscape. The transformed urban scene of Dubai is characterized by the infusion of new, privately-owned, – controlled, and –accessed urban fragments. These include shopping malls, gated housing developments, leisure destinations, theme parks, office and educational complexes and headquarters of multinational establishments and corporations.

In general, such new developments are physically detached from the urban continuum: barricaded behind well-guarded gates, panned by surveillance cameras, and tracked by the watchful eyes of an army of private security personnel superbly linked to control centers more akin to a prison than a public place. Pedestrians and users of public transit will, at best, find it inconvenient, if at all possible, to access such urban destinations.

Madinat Jumeirah exemplifies this type of urban destinations. In many ways, this complex of commerce and entertainment represents an urban fragment most characteristic of what may be called 'private city' – a city that is determined to deny its collective nature, its *cvitas*. An oxymoron, private city is most fitting an expression that describes Dubai's current and, possibly, future state of being in light of the



'Private City' at its best: Madinat Jumeirah (with Burj Al-Arab in the background).

currently prevailing development trends. 'What's wrong with these new developments?' one might be tempted to ask. 'In light of their considerable popularity, are not they meeting a real demand in the market place?' And, 'what is so disconcerting about the urban experience in such urban destinations?' These are legitimate and compelling questions that the rest of this writing will attempt to address.

The urban experience refers to people's experience of living in cities; it concerns people's daily encounters with their surrounding environment as well as with other people – people who are strangers to them. The urban experience is a complex process whereby people interact with their environment, both their physical (open spaces, streets, buildings, etc.), and social (other individuals, groups, etc.). It encompasses acts of participation, observation, and accumulation of practical knowledge by city residents as they conduct their daily lives. While some of these acts are intentional and deliberate, others are casual and spontaneous.

The urban experience, moreover, is essentially a public one: it is conducted in the open, and is potentially exposed to the scrutiny of others. Public life represents our collective urban experiences. It takes place in city spaces that are accessible to the public. Publicly accessible spaces are of two types: those that are owned and/or managed by the public and hence are called 'public spaces'. Streets, plazas, and parks, are but a few examples of public spaces. They afford people, all people, the rights of assembly, self-expression, association, and, as is the case for many, the right to 'be left alone' and enjoy the outdoors. World cities have plenty of such public spaces from New York's Central Park to London's Hyde Park; from Boardwalk in Venice, California, to Piazza San Marco in Venice, Italy; Place des Vosges in Paris, to Maidan-I-Shah in Isfahan.

The other type of publicly accessible spaces is those that are privately owned and managed. The Café, Movie Theater, Shopping Mall, and Theme Park, to name a few, are customarily privately owned and operated places that provide settings for public life. Such places, which may be referred to as private urban destinations,



Place des Vosges, Paris: public space for the spontaneous, unrehearsed, and collective urban experience.



Maidan-i-Shah, Isfahan: living room for the public on a summer afternoon

are increasingly becoming the locus of public life in the contemporary city at the expense of public spaces. Unlike public spaces, private urban destinations have certain restrictions attached to their access, use, and the kind of activities that can take place in them.

These private urban destinations are a free enterprise success story. Investors, developers, and designers have joined efforts, and indisputably excelled, at providing a service (the provision of spatial settings for public life) that the public used to (and is entrusted to continue to) provide. A stunning success is evident in Madinat Jumeirah. It delivers a well-designed urban setting intended for a specific kind of urban experience – it provides a contrived, theater-like urban setting that can



Madinat Jumeirah: an ambiance for an orchestrated, themed urban experience.

be stimulating, exciting, and enjoyable. It is a remarkable destination for orchestrated public encounters.

Increasingly, though, private urban destinations are becoming the more popular locations to host public life and, for an increasing segment of society, the only destination for this purpose. In many ways such destinations are substituting public spaces as the locus of public life. There are many possible reasons for this state of affairs. One reason is the generally poor, less attractive conditions of most public places. Another is the societal tendency to withdraw from public life and prefer a lifestyle grounded in the private realm. A third possible reason is the fact that these private urban destinations are hospitable, stimulating, and entertaining. And finally, increased paranoia about personal safety and security has given such destinations an added benefit since they are generally perceived to be safer than city public spaces.

What is disconcerting, however, is that people's experience in such places has become the only experience of public life. In Dubai, these private urban destinations are becoming the substitute location of choice for public life. Given their physical and symbolic detachment from the urban continuum, these destinations are isolated from the realities of society. As such, the kind of public life that occurs in them lacks many of the characteristics central to genuine public life such as spontaneity, authenticity and freedom.

Good cities, Kevin Lynch taught, are those that support viable public life and public spaces.<sup>1</sup> The driving concern of his work is to aspire to making cities that sustain democracy, nurture freedom, and enhance human existence. One fundamental component of a democratic, free, and humane city is the existence of a vibrant public sphere that is supported by the availability of meaningful, functioning urban public spaces.

The privatization of public urban spaces, which is what Madinat Jumeirah has achieved intentionally or otherwise, is a reason for concern in that it displaces social life from the open, outdoor, public 'rooms' (e.g., streets, squares, plazas) to the indoor spaces of malls, clubs, and the like. Not only does this displacement, James Holston argues, reproduce the outdoor city public and its citizenry in a new indoor setting, but it also, more gravely, encourages the privatization of social relations.



Unlike the real ones in Dubai Creek, the abras at Madinat Jumeirah are not meant for public use – 'guests only'

Such privatization avails a greater control over the access to space which, invariably, results in the stratification of the public that uses it.<sup>2</sup>

Madinat Jumeirah is a private urban destination that provides carefully orchestrated urban spectacles where architectural forms are 'cooked' into an eclectic mélange of romantic settings. The ethics of new design are aestheticized and the 'good urban setting' becomes the enchanting, visually stimulating one. Billed as 'a magnificent tribute to Dubai's heritage,'<sup>3</sup> this opulent development is created as an urban destination intended to provide a special kind of urban experience. It is designed to 'resemble an ancient Arabian citadel ... where two grand boutique hotels, courtyard summer houses, a traditional souk, the Six Senses Spa, the region's leading conference and banqueting centre,' among other luxurious facilities, form the basic components of the development.<sup>4</sup> As such, Madinat Jumeirah is braced to offer a unique urban experience. An experience grounded in nostalgia for the 'good old times' when the Arabs, it is presumed, had a much simpler and happier life. Postcards and photographic artwork are employed to reinforce a sense of belonging to a bygone time and place that is now being revived, reinvented as a make-believe place for the 21<sup>st</sup> century urbanites.

Madinat Jumeirah comprises a shopping mall, Souk Madinat Jumeirah, anchored by two five-star hotels: Mina al-Salam and Al-Qasr. In addition, the development includes a Sindbad's Kids Club, a Conference Hall, a world class spa and health club, and a variety of villas of various styles scattered along a man-made canal connecting the various components of the development. Small boats, called 'abras' roam the canal to shuttle guests from Mina al-Salam, the Souq, and Al-Qasr. The free-of-charge usage of these abras is the exclusive privilege of guests of the two hotels. These abras are modeled after the 'real ones', the people-mover boats that have criss-crossed Dubai Creek for the last handful of decades.

Both hotels, together with the Souq in between, combine opulence with eclecticism. A US \$350,000 Bavarian chandelier crowns the lobby of Al-Qasr. Feet away is a dining hall with ceiling fans that perpetually spin while the AC system provides the real cold air. Each of the hotels has over 290 rooms including the villa units. Organized tours of the entire development are available free of charge. A private guide will lead a tour that includes a visit of the Mina Al-Salam Hotel, an abra ride in the canal, a visit to Al-Qasr Hotel, a sampling of the villas, and a final stop at, where else, the Souq. Our guide (January 18, 2006) informed us that since their opening around a year ago, the hotels' occupancy rate has never gone below 95%.

The Souq has 75 boutique shops, over twenty waterfront cafés, bars and restaurants, in addition to open plazas, a nightclub, and air-conditioned walkways. The development website describes the Souq as follows:

'Meandering paths lead visitors through a bazaar-like atmosphere in which open fronted shops and intimate galleries spill onto the paved walkways. The sounds of craftsmen and women at work combine with the aroma from street cafes and boutique restaurants. At Souk Madinat, the emphasis is on unique brands, crafted quality and an interactive experience.'<sup>5</sup>

In sum, Madinat Jumeirah delivers a well-orchestrated urban setting intended for a specific kind of urban experience – it provides a contrived, theater-like urban setting that can be stimulating, exciting, and enjoyable.

While places like Madinat Jumeirah may present exotic, pleasurable, and entertaining urban destinations, they remain ideologically charged. On the one hand, they dissimulate the social relations of their production. And, on the other hand, they divert the attention from social reality. They remain successful for what they are intended to do: promote consumption and enhance profitability.

Michael Sorkin<sup>6</sup> describes this kind of urban configuration as a city of simulations,

a city as a theme park. It is a city where a collection of images has become the most important tool to manipulate urban space. It is a city in disguise, where invented, or perhaps re-invented, images are so composed to hide urban reality. It is a city made up for urban consumption. And the helpless consumers of such urban spaces are offered a range of variety that would match the most special tastes.<sup>7</sup>

In this city of simulations, a city of 'spectacles', to use Debord's expression<sup>8</sup>, manipulated urban spaces with their pictorial, phantasmagorical settings stand in sharp contrast to the realities that exist elsewhere in the metropolis. In fact, this



Not only is Madinat Jumeirah detached symbolically from its surroundings, it is also physically barricaded behind a tame green belt ...

pictorialization of space aims in part to hide or to 'filter out' these other realities so that the urban experience is 'delivered' to the consumer, sanitized, safe, entertaining, and, perhaps, tranquilizing. Such an urban experience is an escape from the harshness of urban reality, from the poor, the homeless, the Other.

To engage in such an exercise in 'virtual reality' at the urban level, is to deny the possibility of confronting the problematic of the real world. 'The pictorialization of space and time,' Boyer writes, '...shatters our place in the city and forbids us to envision a social order that we can reform. Although this pictorialization may amuse, lull, or even entertain us, it does not alienate, nor hold us accountable, nor sustain our resistance.'<sup>9</sup>

'There are no demonstrations in Disneyland' is Sorkin's celebrated motto<sup>10</sup> – it surely did not become a famous slogan without good reason. Despite all the fluff, decorations, and pastiche, private city is the ultimate negation of an inspiring, democratic, and humane city.

While Dubai emerges as a world-class metropolis, aspiring to greatness, it is more urgent than ever to balance private interest, the primary motive for growth, with the public good, the stuff that sustains such growth. As can be seen today, Dubai is making tremendous strides as a private city. Yet, the urban experience that comes with living in great cities is grounded in the public sphere. It is played out in the city streets, plazas, and parks; in a promenade along the Creek, in a square by Emirates



...and a wall

Towers, in a (public) beach along the more than a thousand kilometers of newly created waterfront. Great cities, therefore, can never thrive by their private sphere alone. They need to ensure that the creation of private destinations must go hand in hand with the provision of public places.

Private cities can make happy consumers. Cities, with a thriving public realm, can make responsible citizens. It is worthy to make Dubai's consumers responsible citizens. Attention to the significance of the public side of Dubai deserves immediate attention and incorporation in the city's grand schemes before it is too late.

1. Kevin Lynch, *Good City Form*. Cambridge, Mass. (MIT Press) 1984.
2. James Holston (Ed.), *Cities and Citizenship*. Durham/ London (Duke University Press) 1999.
3. Madinat Jumeirah website: [www.madinatjumeirah.com](http://www.madinatjumeirah.com) (accessed December 16, 2006).
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Michael Sorkin (Ed.), *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*. New York (Hill and Wang) 1992.

7. Matthew Carmona, Steven Tiesdell, Tim Heath, and Taner Oc, *Public Places Urban Spaces*. Burlington, Mass (Architectural Press) 2003.
8. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*. Detroit (Red and Black) 1974.
9. M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments*. Cambridge, Mass. (MIT Press) 1994, p.4.
10. Sorkin, o.c.

# Constructing Fact, Fantasy, and Fiction

Proposed projects characterized by novelty and, in some cases, parody have generated media interest and brought attention to the incredible pace of development in the Gulf. While there is no dominant stylistic tendency, the conspicuous consumption of once purposeful elements transformed into decorative devices remains a favored fallback. New buildings and those that appear to be old reveal how 'traditions' have been constructed and subjected to willful, and often less than skillful, amalgamations. The barjeel (wind tower) and lattice screens employed to ensure privacy while providing sufficient airflow were key components of passive cooling strategies employed in the region prior to the prevalence of air conditioning. Ignoring the potential for adaptation of principles, many designers rely on pastiche and use these elements to decorate high-rise office towers, museums, gas stations and residences. Often claimed to make the building 'regional', it apparently relieves any further responsibility for formal, spatial or technological strategies responding to climate or context. A related tendency has been to conceive of the entire building as a representation of the 'heritage' of the Gulf region. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and its neighbors are populated with structures faintly suggestive of sails and (stereo)typical palaces that can most politely be described as eclectic.

Speculation fueled by foreign direct investment and the peculiar nature of architecture in the Gulf make it difficult to formulate a critique of the built environment that avoids the 'traditional/modern' opposition – the equivalent of an intellectual dead end. And criticism that remains at the level of lamentation and focuses on the loss of a supposed 'identity' is overly reductive and fails to acknowledge the complex fusion resulting from intense labor migration and a history of trade and exchange. Dubai's measures taken to attract mercantile activity from across the region in the early twentieth century provided the foundation for a multicultural population bound together by the pursuit of profit. Just as early traders were enticed by free trade policies, investors are now attracted by relaxed legislation and returns resulting from a seemingly endless supply of low-wage labor. Conversely, criticism that seeks to analyze building booms and their potential consequences is a challenge due to the inherent complexity, lack of information and fluid boundaries between institutions and private enterprise.

When confronted with such rapid transformation, it is difficult to make sense of what is happening in the Gulf and constant change precludes broad generalizations. One tends to either run in fear while ranting about the excesses made possible by the most extreme manifestations of neoliberalism

or to stand frozen while expressing a perverse fascination with what is deemed to be inevitable. Both tendencies do little to explain the development or facilitate an understanding of its impacts.

Some of the consequences are already apparent. Short-term gains resulting from real estate and high hotel occupancy rates will certainly have long-term environmental consequences. According to the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Living Planet Report 2004, the global ecological footprint was 2.2 global hectares per person; the ecological footprint for the UAE was reported to be the highest at 9.9. The global ecological footprint remained the same in the WWF Living Planet Report 2006; however, the UAE increased to 11.9, once again the highest published in the report. The majority of the ecological footprint resulted from carbon dioxide from fossil fuels, and the UAE led the world in this category. Gulf neighbors are not far behind. While the petrochemical and metals industries contribute to the high energy consumption, it has been estimated that during the summer season 75-85% of the total power generated is used for air conditioning; and cooling can cost owners of high rises as much as one-third of the total cost of the building over the life of the structure. And who pays the price? No one for the time being. Subsidies ensure that costs remain low and there is little incentive for change. Ultimately any fundamental modification must be supported by incentives (and penalties) that are financial. As long as actual costs remain shrouded in subsidies, there is little motivation to conserve resources like water and electricity.

However, in spite of the fact that architecture has made significant contributions to negative publicity resulting from environmental degradation, the individual building remains a vital aspect of promotional campaigns for developer-inspired dreams. Given the importance placed



**Representations** A representation of a young lady re-presenting a representation of 'old Dubai architecture'. Although co-opted for promotional purposes, the precedents for the building styles shown in the renderings originate from other cities around the Gulf.

on singular buildings in marketing, one would expect an emphasis on quality of design and construction. But the demand for speed in design and construction processes, the harsh natural environment, and the general skill level of an imported low-wage workforce ultimately affect aspirations. Quickly built high rises and elusive searches for iconic symbols of progress or the past do not help matters.

Projects like Dubai's 'Cultural Village' promise to blend Middle Eastern history with the rich heritage of Dubai. The development will also offer visitors an 'inspired mix of Arabic and old Dubai architecture'. What does all this mean? What is 'Arabic' architecture? The developers have packaged a past that pays no heed to categories such as fact, fiction and fantasy. Projects such as this obscure a truly rich and variegated past that is not so easily described or represented in facades 'inspired' by turn of the century architectural typologies imported via exchanges with settlements across the Gulf.

To flatten the cultures of the Gulf into themed developments perpetuates misunderstanding and threatens to reduce architecture to mere novelty. The economic and socio-cultural conditions that exist in the Gulf defy easy explanation and challenge fixed concepts. Dubai and its neighbors contest accepted notions of public, private, community, identity, etc. One cannot speak of public space in the Gulf without defining which 'public'. Constellations of individuals are fluid, changing with summer migrations to escape the heat and departures when work permits expire.

Picture books and staggering statistics impress, shock and provide material for quotes but do little to enhance understanding – this takes more work and contributions by those within and outside the disciplines of architecture and design. The inherent complexity of the situation provides contexts replete with challenges. This opens new possibilities for investigation and action that transcend our understanding, which presently remains limited by our failure to look beyond constructions delicately balanced between fact, fantasy and fiction.



**Swoops and Swirls** Real estate trade shows and rapidly constructed high rises reveal the desire to differentiate developments and attract attention (and investment)



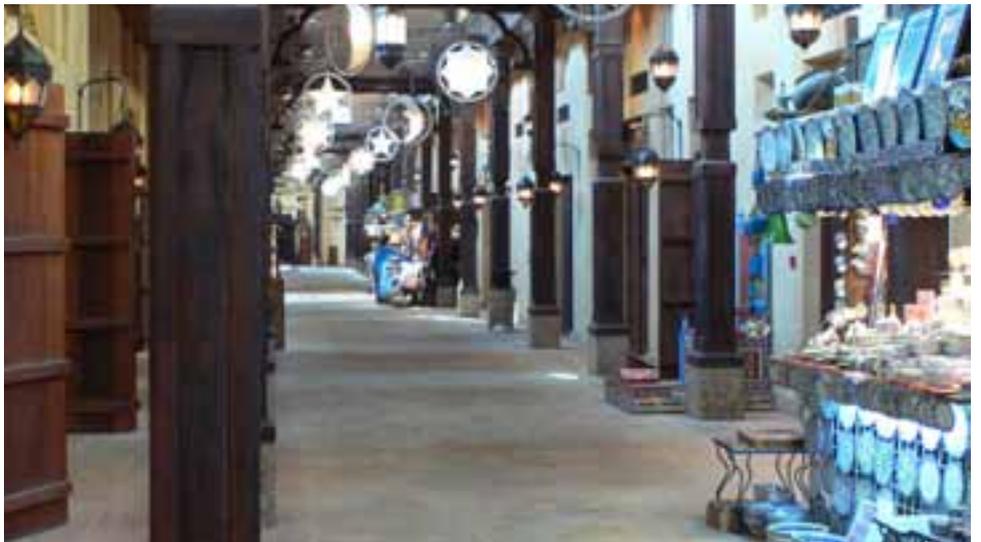
**Exuberant Expression** The individual residence has become a means of self-expression. References are drawn from a variety of disparate sources and provide a challenge to accepted norms of visual coherence



**Sails and Pseudo-Souks** 'Take photograph here': a 'seven star' hotel and windtowers



**From Purposeful to Pastiche** Rather than investigating how formal, spatial or technological strategies responded to particular contextual challenges in the past, functional elements are often reduced to surface level decoration. The transition from purposeful to pastiche does not seem to be conscious and therefore lacks the wit that may aspire to more than the mundane



'Regional' Themes Tea in Tunis and a coffee in Cairo – without leaving the mall. While the fictionalized environments loosely inspired by Ibn Battuta are questionable, the execution is admirable. If one looks (but does not touch), it can almost be believed – almost.



Safe for Consumption Themed shopping malls construct a fantasy world that is far different from the much more interesting reality which exists on the streets of urban neighborhoods in Dubai and other cities in the Gulf.

## April 12, 2006

Much has been written about the building frenzy in this small Emirate:

'A bubble built on debt', 'Albert Speer meets Walt Disney' Dubai is supposed to be a badly planned city with an ill-equipped infrastructure that has not managed to keep up with the city's prolific developments. But upon our arrival for our second visit, approximately 11pm, the city is a far cry from its apocalyptic descriptions. This time of night the generously sized roads hold almost no traffic. The journey from the airport to our hotel (almost from one end of Dubai to the other) takes less than half an hour. On our way we pass the concrete skeleton of the Burj Dubai. Its dark concrete structure fades almost seamlessly into the dark of night, leaving only the regularly dispersed lights as a discreet indication of its presence. Towering over the giant billboards in front, the half-finished illuminated building looks just like another announcement of itself – virtual reality: there, but not quite there.

Albeit exclusively from photographs and maps, the area is all too familiar. Next door we hope to build the world's largest rotating structure – an effort to outdo Dubai in being Dubai..., a project we have been heavily working on over the past months. But at this point, all of that is still highly confidential. – RdG



George Katodrytis

# The Dubai Experiment: 1. Accelerated Urbanism

New building developments in Dubai, especially high-rises, are linked to the global network of trends, forces, finance and trading rather than being related to their locality and community. As such they are alienated from their geographic and physical location. Therefore a dose of self-stylization is necessary, like a surreal machine that reproduces its own identity. Buildings are self-referential and they are held together by virtue of proximity. On a barren landscape anything goes and anything is new. This condition is reminiscent of early modernists' utopian visions where the new city refers to the present and projects to the future. The desert is not the killing field we are accustomed to see in newsreels in the last decade, but the setting of slick developments. There is a new urban and spatial perception of the desert, a renewed mirage, not unlike Las Vegas in Nevada. The new global city is developing 'from scratch': a real tabula rasa, the dream of any urban designer and architect as well as a real estate investor. This is about newness, clean, fresh with little residue of anomaly and deterioration. Buying architecture is like buying a product. Living in it is like acquiring any lifestyle you can afford.

Like any new city, Dubai has no density, no layering. Buildings are detached and isolated, and some communities are gated. Even though architecture appears homogeneous its social reality is heterogeneous. This paradoxically becomes a haven for upper class buyers, seeking exclusive retreats.

Almost overnight, the city has become a juxtaposition of barren desert, 21<sup>st</sup>-century skyscrapers and extravagantly optimistic construction sites. The visual voyage through the city, like in any contemporary cityscape, operates like a continuous shift between eye and mind, as though differences no longer existed between the two. The city has definitely ceased to be a site: instead, it has become a condition. Perhaps it has even lost its site: it tends to be everywhere and nowhere. The urban setting as a large construction site is unique as it can always keep the promise alive and prepare itself for new users, the incoming international nomads: settlers, laborers, consultants, traders, in-transit business travelers and tourists, all seeking and challenged by newness.

This is an accelerated urbanism like none before; it is immediate in its pictorial seduction. The urbanization process is streamlined, effective and fast. Dubai is the largest architectural experiment in progress, soon achieving a critical mass of mega expansion. This is symptomatic of approaches to development in many other regions in the world today. This 'model potential' makes Dubai an ideal case study of urbanization; in a sense, Dubai has become 'required reading'. Yet, a critique needs to be articulated and new strategies proposed.

What is interesting is that this is a new city caught up in unprecedented conditions of the new century: globalization, accelerated technologies of imaging and communication, abundance of investment and mass tourism.



Afina Hamad/era/Photo Utopia

Dubai's rising skyline, changing the perception of the desert from the killing fields of the Desert Storm to that of a megalopolis re-enacting New York a century later.

## 2. Tourism and Constructed Leisure-land

Dubai thrives on consumerism. This is a city that owes its early survival and its current momentum to trading. Everything points to consumption. This turns any city into a theme park seeking to sell the arabesque, tropical, oriental and international, all in one. Tourism and shopping is the new pastime of the middle class, associated with leisure, the resort and the lifestyle experience. We work more efficiently nowadays, and have more free time. Dubai is a constructed leisure land. It is more like a diagram, a system of staged scenery and mechanisms of good time.

Flying over Dubai, one is confronted with a new type of 21st century urbanism, which is both diagrammatic and prosthetic in the form of islands. As a tourist, there is no need to travel to distant destinations, to desolate islands. Islands are now close to shore, in a new typology of hydro-suburbia.

The island is the lowest form of spatial organization. Pure accumulation, it has an iconic form and a certain perimeter and location. It can be reached by dramatic arriving (compare here with Venice's Lido and Florida's Key West). The surface of the island reveals everything there is, all contents; islands are fundamentally consistent and predictable: they give an assurance of security. But they have potentials; they are exclusive.

As Briavel Holcomb points out in his essay 'Marketing Cities for Tourism' (1999), in the tourist realm 'it is the consumer, not the product that moves. Because the product is usually sold before the consumer sees it, the marking of tourism is intrinsically more significant than the conventional case where the product can be seen, tested, and compared to similar products in situ. It means that the representation of place, the images created for marketing, the vivid videos and persuasive prose of advertising texts, can be as selective and creative as the marketer can make them – a reality check comes only after arrival.'

Increasingly, the kind of contemporary architecture and urbanism that simulates mass tourism has to be not only photogenic but also telegenic – buildings that look striking in a sequence of rapid-fire cuts, or that stand out in a static shot as backdrops.

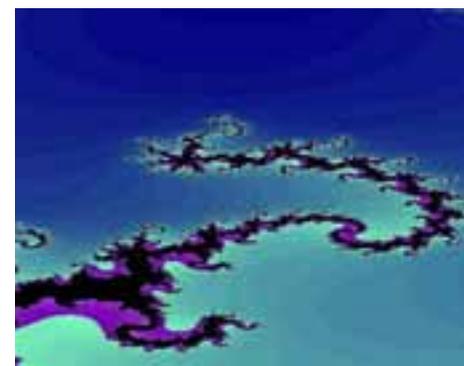
The city of Dubai sprawls out like an exponent of an algorithmically evolving pattern: fractal architecture with forms of increased perimeter and endless topological variations, as two-dimensional patterns, allowing very little for three-dimensional variety. Dubai's recent development has put it on the map of iconic projects, of real estate prospecting and holiday dream destinations.

Motivated by a desire for authentic experience for exotic places, for escape or spectacle, or simply by an urge for new knowledge, the tourist leaves a familiar environment to view other locations. Today, as places increasingly get restructured as spaces of consumption, tourist activities merge with other mass-consumption practices.

Historically, the origin of modern vacation time can be traced back to the 1930s, when workers in France, for the first time, were given the right to twelve paid vacation days. Today, tourism has become a 'total lifestyle experience'. The modern tourist resort is by definition a constructed one. The tourist's perception seems to have shifted away from the pictorial 18<sup>th</sup> century: there is no longer the desire for the panoramic view. The excessively visual contemporary culture has made everything



Dubai's prosthetic extensions: more than two Manhattans



Pattern of an exponent of algorithmically evolving two-dimensional pattern

look familiar. Contemporary tourists are looking for familiarity: they want to feel at home in a strange place.

This has led to concentrated tourist infrastructures and mega-structure complexes (hotel + apartments + mall + cinema + expo + anything), which are clustered together. In this sense, architecture and landscape are part of a single system, characterized by stratification and controlled spatial experience.

In mass tourism, a dose of familiarization is required. Whereas it was once uncommon to shop for ordinary clothing items while on vacation, brand-name stores and outlets mall have popped up all over the world. Similarly, with the spread of franchised restaurants and hotels, it is possible to eat and sleep in circumstances that are remarkably alike, and tune into the same TV channels almost everywhere.

Mass tourism is indeed like mass media. The lure of the new works best when the new is both anticipated and well-packaged. In 1925, in his essay 'travel and dance', Siegfried Kracauer already remarked that tourists are prepared for foreign places though the perusal of illustrated magazines. Nowadays, through coffee-table books, television and movies, tourists are well-prepped for on-site architectural experiences. A profusion of tour guides, and especially Internet sites, launches the tourist into touring weeks or months before the actual trip begins. What is striking about this body of preparatory information is the degree to which issues of touring comfort and efficiency take precedence over historical information about architecture or place.

From the airport to the air-conditioned bus to the four- or five-star hotel, package tourists spend much of their time within a cocoon. They might as well be at home, or at the mall. This tropical but not so dangerous adventure appeals to millions of tourists.

Dubai there is little difference between holiday accommodation and housing. Architectural programs are becoming fused and undifferentiated. The morphology

of the landscape and seascape is becoming fabricated to the point that it may soon be difficult to differentiate between the natural and the constructed. Artificial islands will add another 1,500km of beachfront, turning the coastline and the city into an inexhaustible holiday resort. This constructed landscape, like a stage set, provides edited scenes of adventure and entertainment.

No matter which part of the world, whenever architecture is built from nothingness, it seems to be fond of a universal language of spectacle and the exoticism of the new. It might be useful to look at another aspect of the exotic at this point, and ask in what ways specific examples of architecture are elusive and foreign to the city itself. This is also a way of asking how the exotic intervenes in the cultural politics of global tourism.

Jean Baudrillard has analyzed contemporary culture through the model of Disneyland, thereby inserting a form of simulated architecture and tourism into the heart of his definition of hyper-reality. Disneyland is presented as an imaginary kingdom, set aside from the values of everyday. As such, it serves as a 'prop' to make us believe that the world outside is 'real'. For Baudrillard, however, the world outside is not 'real' but 'hyper-real', and Disneyland is no different. The logic of role-playing and theming is not limited to Disneyland. It has permeated the whole of the Western society.

Everyday life is colonized by fantasy, dominated by escapist dreaming. Both the 'authentic' architectural icons, and the simulated architectural icons, such as Disneyland or Las Vegas, are inscribed within the same logic of escapist dreaming.

Escapism is an ambivalent, even negative word when juxtaposed against realism or authenticity. Yet we are inescapably escapist. Animals flee when confronted by some sort of threat. Humans are no different. What makes us different is that we are not only pushed, but also pulled by some imagined reality that is either already in existence 'out there', to be discovered, or by the possibility of its realization and manifestation. We escape from the given into the desirable through theme parks, shopping malls, and suburban developments.

### 3. Transmitted Imagery

Architecture serves emergent economies to express the fascination for symbols of economic development, national progress in a context of inflationary globalization and international economic competition. In the first half of the 1990s, several countries in Asia invested much effort and ingenuity in the construction of skyscrapers, which not only challenged the legendary supremacy of the American high-rise, but were also meant to represent these countries' new role on the international stage. The Middle East and Gulf states have been slow to take on the construction of high-rises, despite abundance of land and investment. This is not the case anymore. Dubai has surged into the global market of finance and fantasy and is now expressed in the construction of hundreds of high-rise buildings. International architectural firms have found an expanding and profitable market. Transnational practices place their designs within the more general framework of globalization with speed and easiness. The simplicity of transmitting digital documents of both building imagery and specifications allows for complex designs to be prepared in New York, outsourced

and detailed in Mumbai, and delivered to a project manager in Dubai within days. The universality of curtain wall detailing allows for a 'common architectural language' without barriers to be constructed and delivered on site equally fast. Furthermore, the speed of transmitting the image of the building itself allows for a chain of global real estate networks to sell the product, i.e. the architectural space, long before its completion on site. Dubai's heavily invested digital and telecommunications infrastructures allow its continuous presence in the Internet and electronic space. This is the city of transmitted imagery.

Urbanism as an art form in the Arab World has an interesting precedent. The Muslim Middle Ages was marked by the formation and development of new art style, which found its reflection both in the art as well as in architecture and city planning. Abstract geometric forms and woven urban spaces have been established very early on in the Arab World. Cities became basic generators of new art styles, and the urban culture of this period obtains the role of a system forming factor. It was a period of self-identification of urban mentality and formation of new aesthetic of Muslim Urbanism. Grunebaum wrote: 'From its birth Islam, by its spirit and main centers, had urban character'. This tradition is carried on. Urbanizing large areas and introducing a new aesthetic and 'art' is very much inherent in the creation of the contemporary Arab city.

The earliest stage of urbanization was connected with the transition of the nomads to the settled life way and cultivation of fertile lands which goes back to the 2nd millennia B.C.

The unification of the aesthetic principles in the Muslim world as a whole had become a new cultural dogma – a period of universal aesthetic canon had started. Therefore, some generalized and standard vision of the oriental city as a composition of blue domes and slim minarets has some basis to be reasonable. The universal style spread over not only over plastic forms of culture, but verbal ones too. Ornament



Arifa Hussain and Marco Urban

Constructing the constructed leisure-land

and words' ligature became a distinguishing feature of new aesthetic. Even though this is a case of complex art forms and craftsmanship, it was rarely exported or exploited in the west, except in the case of Orientalism. This imagery was exported, exhibited and eventually bought by wealthy Europeans in the form of exotic decoration. Nevertheless the Arab urban form and art was unique and unified.

This urge for unification and expansion as a cultural need is now changing. The fast transmission of architectural imagery is now part of everyday advertising marketing practice. The sky is the new medium of Satellite Urbanism. This turns the land, desert and water via military technology into spectacle and consumption. GIS and reconnaissance technologies turn into telegenic (as opposed to photogenic) postcards for selling real estate markets as well as mass tourism destinations. Satellite imagery of unfinished projects gives rise to the exciting promise of the future. Satellite technologies used to monitor wildlife development, hydrography, and land drought are now a tool for global transmission of projects under construction, reconnaissance tourism advertisements and construction theatre.

Dubai and the UAE Ministry of Labor currently use the Swiss-based firm Infromap and high-resolution satellite technology to monitor construction sites and projects. Using high-resolution photography a team monitor the minute details of construction sites beamed back to the ministry by Digital Globe satellite technology, also used by the US military.

This is the new global capital of the world in the making. Its imagery is transmitted long before its reality. It is therefore not surprising that all the housing on Dubai's Jumeirah Palm Island was sold out in fifteen days. Virtuality dominates over reality. Eventually, 70,000 islanders on Jumeirah Palm will be privileged in that their neighborhood will be clearly visible and identified in Google Earth.



'Spirit of the UAE' collage; the ideal future city



Google Earth Urbanism



Ibn Battuta Shopping Mall



Emerging global city in the making



Linear Sheikh Zayek road skyline



# The Cloud of Dubai

Now, at the dawn of the new millennium, we find ourselves in cities in which tension and (the threat of) violence remain the underlying forces influencing political, economic and cultural development.

In an intimately interconnected world, creative disciplines are fusing, aesthetics for its own sake has been abandoned and architecture, art and design are all implicated in the same quest for a visual philosophy. Dubai and other Gulf region cities are at the forefront of this quest, evolving most rapidly in scale and sophisticated technology today.

The contemporary pressure for speed is endangering the identities of our cities and the dreams of their inhabitants. Nadim Karam & Atelier Hapsitus seek to create conceptually groundbreaking landscape, architectural and urban art projects, digging out the stories, conflicts and memories of the city and giving them contemporary expression.<sup>1</sup>

The result is not urban design as we commonly experience it. It is a concentrated distribution of energy in the city through forms injected with imagination and illusion that activate memories of the place. Layers of shadow, wind and light add suspense. The story is told by Urban Toys. They provoke moments of enchantment and what lingers in the mind is the memory of the place.

## Cloud

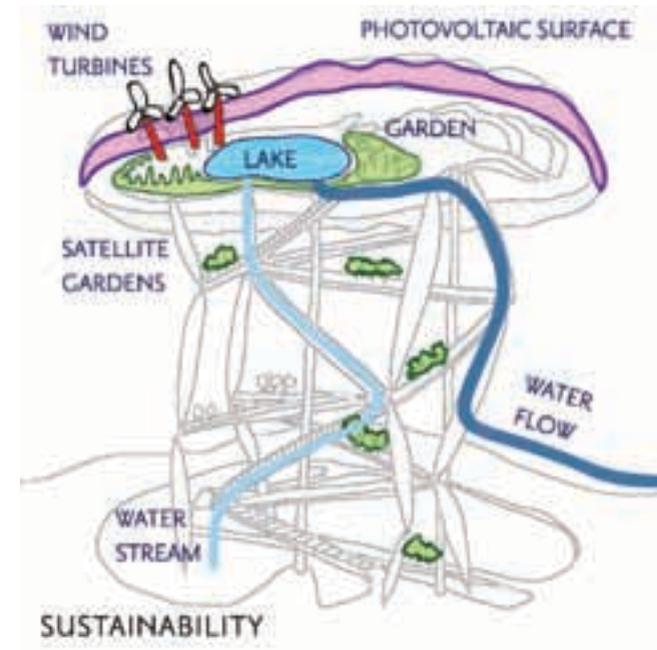
Dubai is one of the few cities in the world experiencing exponential growth. Its economy, like its towers, is soaring. Its transient population makes Dubai the ultimate city of mutation. Within its ever-changing scenery and growth, Dubai needs a dream that expresses its actual transient phase. If cities can dream, does Dubai have a dream? For Dubai, the cloud is a design initiative that could start a debate about the culture and essence of the city. The Cloud takes its inspiration from nomads who wandered freely, like the clouds they sought. Now, people move vertically instead of laterally, the landscape seen from their towers is one of clouds instead of sand. The Cloud is a bridge between dream and reality. It resonates with many Oriental legends in which figures dream of flying and traveling.

## Structure

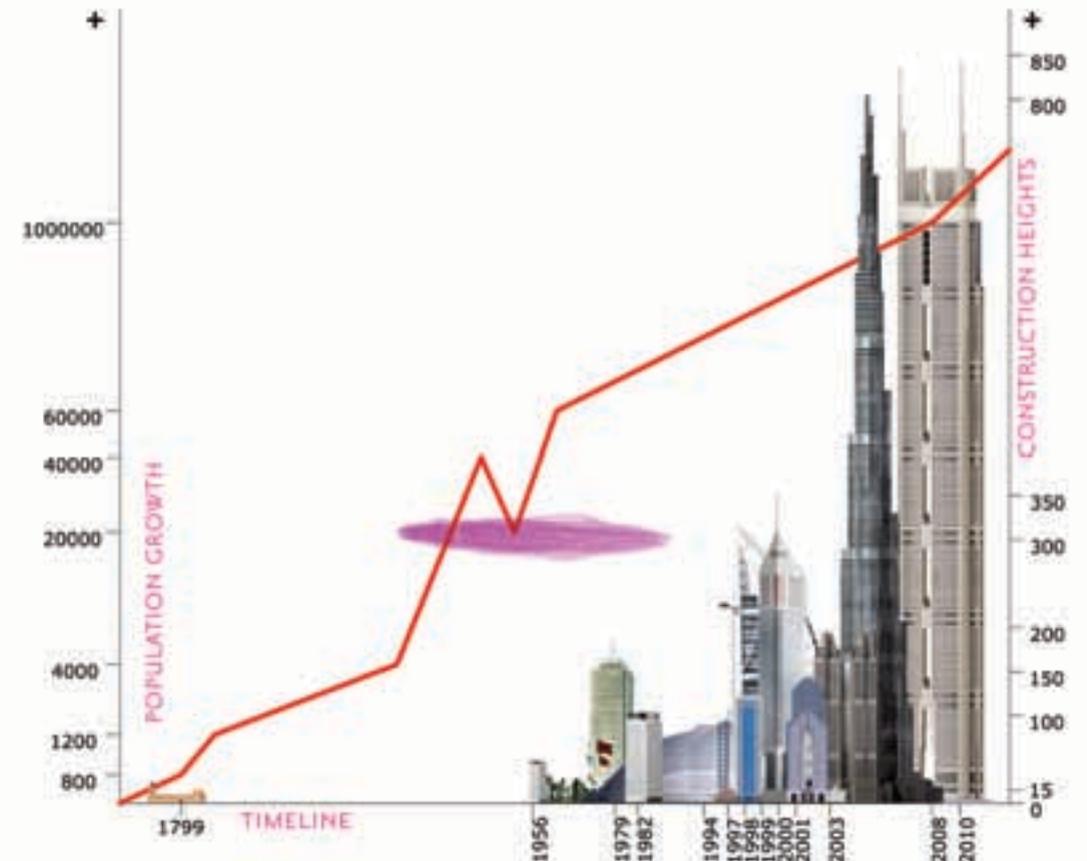
The super-structure consists of 2 zones – the ‘Support Structures’ and the ‘Cloud Structure’. The Cloud Structure is a three-dimensional hierarchical steelwork lattice that extends within the entire cloud volume – 300m long, 30m high and 100m wide – and is perched 300m in the air above the support structure.

## Experience

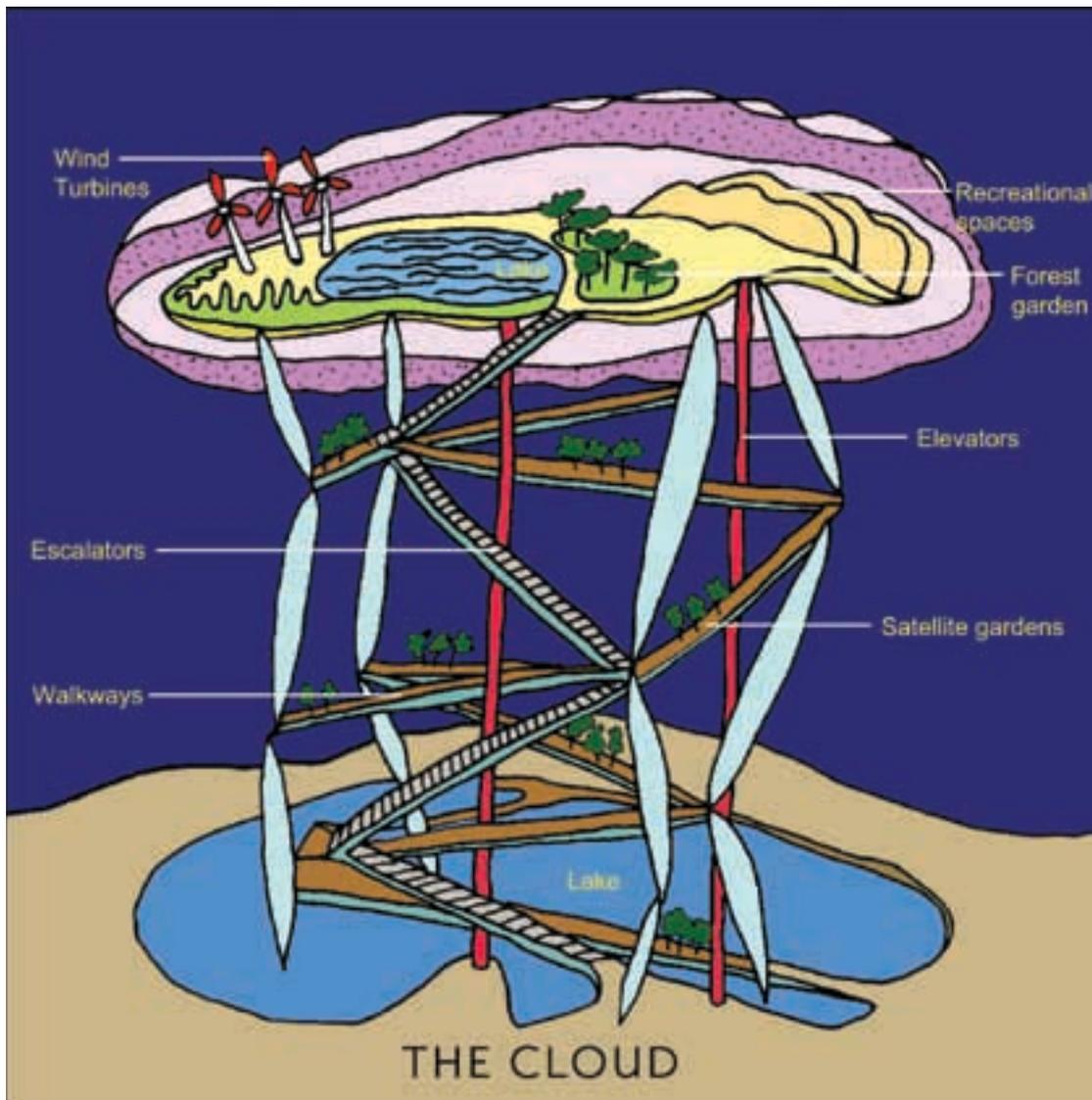
The open lattice structure of the cloud works at several scales and densities and defines the basic volumetric shape of the cloud. Density changes allow the opening up of large and small fields that contain a multitude of functional spaces, viewing platforms, and dynamic and static sculptures as well as large and small linkages between them. These platforms and spaces are at varying levels and are connected by a network of walkways and escalators. The intention is for the vast majority of these spaces to be external with climatic conditions controlled by a number of passive and active measures as outlined below. The smallest scales of the structures



The cloud is a trip, a playful adventure in the city. It is a horizontal presence on an elevated platform, an antithesis to the sum of skyscrapers all over the gulf region.



The cloud is an instigator of events for the city of Dubai.  
It is beyond context but generates its own context.



support many of the active climatic control and special effects devices that create the 'heaven like' Cloud Experience. Emphasis is on open structures and devices as opposed to enclosing facades, skins and surfaces.

### Support

The Support Structures are the legs and stability bracing that hold up the Cloud Structure. They are spread across the majority of the footprint thus enabling a structure of minimum density consisting of long, near vertical raking columns known as 'Ladders' and long, near horizontal bracing trusses called 'Snakes' that zigzag upwards in three-dimensional lattices.

### Circulation

In addition to being the primary structure, the Snakes and Ladders also form the primary slow route up to the Cloud. This consists of runs of travelators and/or funicular elevators as well as graded ramps and stair/escalators along the Snakes, and steep stairs and slides on the Ladders. At key nodal and turning points along the Snakes small viewing and 'experience' platforms open up. The secondary circulation system consists of a number of fast, non-stop elevators from the ground to Cloud levels that consist of enclosed elevator capsules on minimal vertical structures.

### Environmental Engineering

Both the journeys up the Snakes and Ladders as well as the majority of space within the Cloud are external and hence the project can be considered a vertical 'park'. Controlling the harsh and hot climate of Dubai in a low energy and sustainable manner, enabling users to experience a comfortable environment is one of the key goals of the project. The 'open' nature of the project architecturally and structurally is also manifest in the climatic control methods whose systems will be fully visible and explained to the visitor in the form of a sustainable climate control story. A variety of methods are being studied and assessed both for generating energy as well as for cooling devices and microclimatic controls. A mix of the following will control the microclimates:

- **Shading – both natural as well as that achieved from the structure and architecture;**
- **Adiabatic cooling, achieved using seawater sprayed onto a multitude of specifically designed moist meshes and membranes designed into the lower levels of the structural hierarchy.**

Energy will be generated by active solar panels and small active wind turbines both of which will be distributed throughout the cloud and rotate to meet the prevailing wind direction or angle of the sun. The energy will be used as a power reserve and to pump seawater up to the cloud for use in adiabatic cooling devices.

The Cloud stands at a height of about 300 meters. An independent structure carries the Cloud and transports citizens up to it. The concept for the independent structure takes its imagery from the ancient Eastern game of vice and virtue; snakes and ladders. The 'snakes' and 'ladders' double as supporting structure and transport to and from the cloud. The innovative and technological significance of the Cloud will make it a landmark and statement of identity for the city of Dubai. The Cloud can contain up to 20,000 m<sup>2</sup> of floating gardens, a lake, restaurants, a palace and an open museum of Oriental legends with an extraordinary view of the city. The Cloud is a place to dream. It generates a unique sense of place. It is a fantastic encounter with the sky. It is a megastructure that forms an iconic sculpture fully experienced by visitors and users.

1. Nadim Karam & Atelier Hapsitus, in collaboration with AGU (Advanced Geometry Unit) ARUP, London, are creating 'Urban Reverie'; potential projects addressing the

contemporary Arab city with the intention of combining original conception with cutting edge-technology through works that are essentially sustainable.

# Project with the Secret Name

Dubai is one of the fastest growing cities in the world; its global relationships are increasingly determined by economic factors such as shortages of natural resources. In addition to architectural and urban superlatives, Dubai is facing strong shifts within its social fabric and ecosystem: with the highest consumption of energy and water per capita, Dubai has the dubious distinction of having the largest ecological urban footprint in the world. The tourist economy that consumes a good portion of these resources is expected to double within the next three years to fifteen million visitors per year. Responding to the urgency caused by those shifts, the project with the secret name<sup>1</sup> examines a piece of desert in Dubailand scheduled to become the Disneyland of the Middle East as a test case for sustainable urban development.

While projects within Dubai are typically theme-based, the project with the secret name<sup>1</sup> takes sustainability as a non-theme, shifting from asking first ‘what does it look like?’ to ‘what does this do?’. Rigorously comparing common Dubai practices and the project with the secret name), Dubai must choose between a purely revenue-oriented machine and a context sensitive ‘Dubai’ urbanity – an answer to the local conditions and needs.

The urban master plan for T.P.w.t.S.N., set on a parcel of 45 hectares, is composed of a number of dense urban clusters located within a uniquely (un)landscaped setting. The proposed landscape is predominantly arid and green areas are concentrated in humid zones mapped out from satellite imagery of existing vegetation, thus leaving the remaining area for development. The shape and composition of the clusters not only recall the forms prevailing wind currents carve in desert sand, but also permit the development to profit from the cooling sea breeze. This is beneficial both from a bioclimatic point of view and for the sake of human comfort.

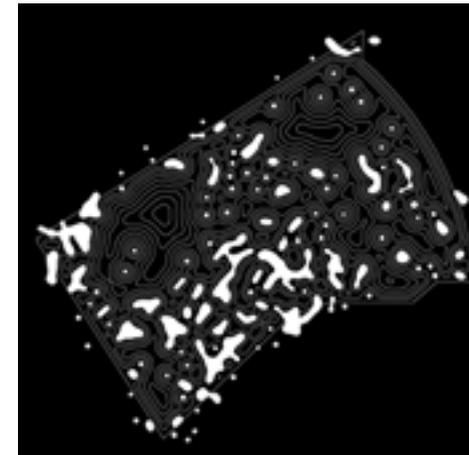
## Solar Powered Streetlights and a Shaded Promenade

An urban promenade surrounds and interconnects each cluster. It ties together the café, restaurants, hotel lobbies and retail stores on the one side of the boulevard and the landscape on the other. The urban sun shade – a continuous hybrid structure that includes photovoltaic discs, solar powered street lighting panels and seating elements – combined with flowing water channels turns the boulevard edge into a place for strolling, sitting in a café or window shopping. Narrow, shaded alleyways lead to the cluster cores – in the case of the largest cluster to an urban green and aviary.

The urban clusters accommodate diverse functions including boutiques and tourist hotels, townhouses, patio villas, apartments and furnished apartments juxtaposed in non-prototypical combinations to create a vibrant social fabric.

Each parcel is situated to maximally benefit from its close proximity to the landscape, the improved micro-climate and the grand vistas. The landscape, a primary component of the development, can be explored via a jogging and cycling track which runs through it. Additional public nodes such as a library, desert museum, public pool as well as the mosque act as attractors at either end of each cluster turning the T.P.w.t.S.N into a destination in its own right with urban flair and close ties to a characteristic local landscape.

1. Commissioned by an anonymous developer.



Extrapolation of humidity mapping. Isographs suggest a possible site layout including specifications for development and areas to be left open.



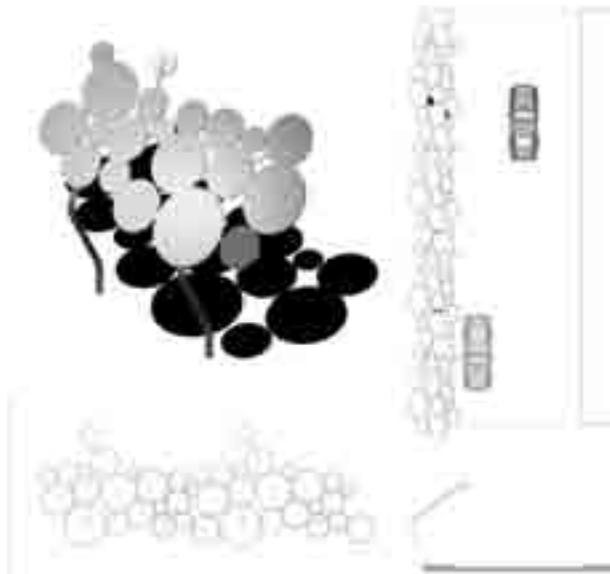
Humidity map of desert site. Scarce tree distribution on a real photograph indicates hidden water resources.



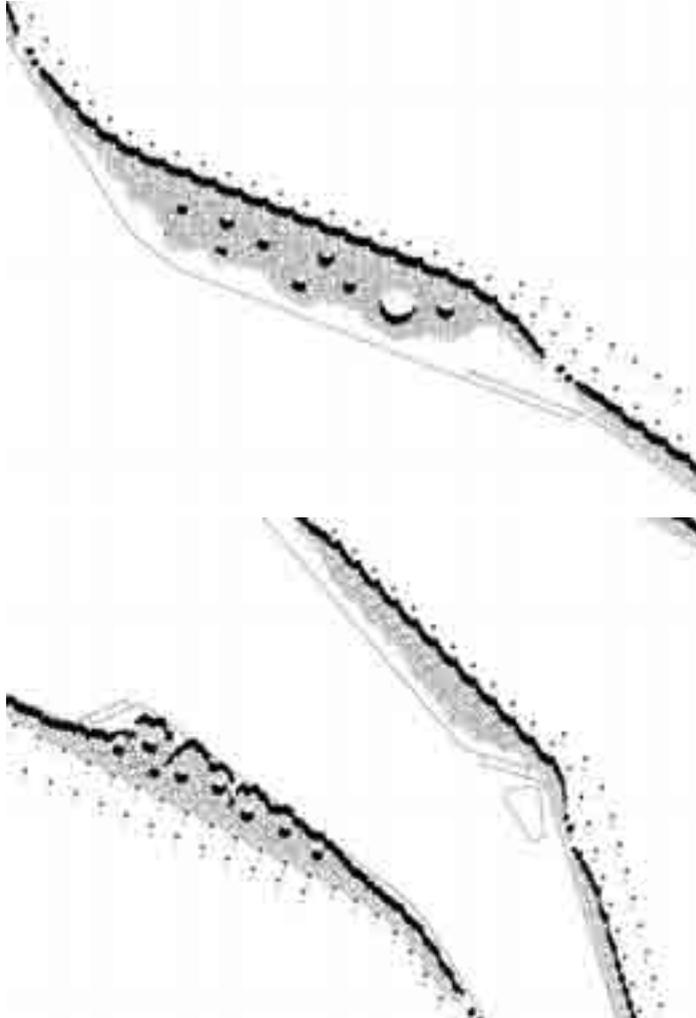
Five islands of development contain hotels, apartments, villas and community buildings. They are connected via a system of vehicular and pedestrian loops forming a mixed – used public promenade in close connection to the landscaped areas.



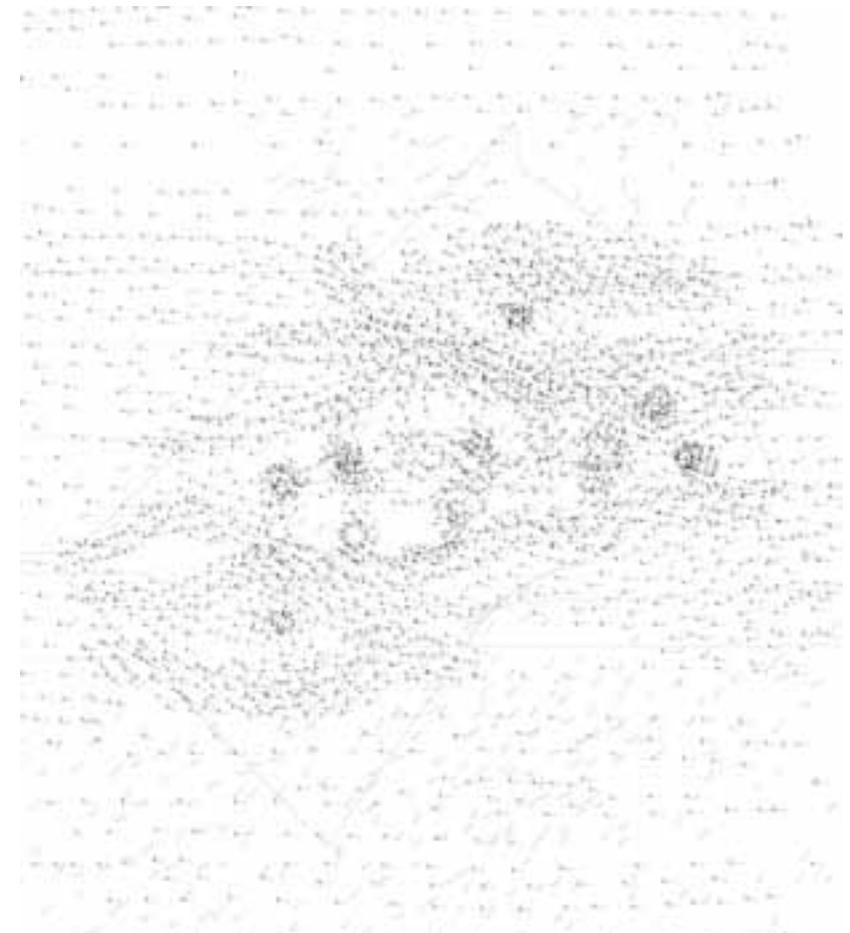
Project diagram on actual site. Island layout facilitates the shading of pedestrian east – west alleys.



Solar powered shading and lighting system. Iso, plans and section. The public promenade is shaded with a system of photaic cells. These provide energy for promenade and street lighting.



Solar powered shading and lighting system. Partial plans of the public promenade.



Wind circulation. The project is conceived as a local modification of the desert climate. Urban layout with its east – west orientated landscapes and routings lets moderate west winds stream through the development while hot south winds are hindered from penetrating the islands. Towers (up to 15 floors) create wind turbulences and facilitate additional air circulation.



# The Necessity of an Enlightened City

With the highest number of 'first place' entries in the Guinness Book of World records, there is hardly any modest way to describe the exposure that the City of Dubai in the United Arab Emirate receives in the media as the world's fastest growing, most architecturally dazzling, most touristy and award-winning city. From real estate and tourism promotion packages, to television documentaries, in-flight magazines and newspapers, there is no scarcity of news about Dubai's status as the world's 'wonderland,' one whose breathtaking (critics say outlandish) projects are currently causing experts to consider re-drawing the geographic map of the world.

Yet, for all its feats in various aspects of growth, there are, as in the case of great cities in history, concerns about the long-term economic viability, environmental sustainability, and socio-cultural harmony of Dubai. Some statistics may help to capture the sources of these concerns. Dubai Statistics Center disclosed recently that the 2005 census counted the city's population at 1.3 million. Of these, 75% are male and 25% are female. Interestingly, people aged 30-34 years comprise 19% of the population. This group grew by 84% in just five years from year 2000. The next largest group, those aged 25-29 years, is also 19% of the population and grew by a huge 88% over five years.

The growth picture is equally dazzling on the employment front. The Labor Ministry reported, for example, that the number of expatriate workers in the country was 2.74 million in 2005, a 17% increase over 2004 when there were 2.34 million expatriates. Estimates from consulates and embassies representing the bulk of the UAE workforce put the figure at 2.8 to 3.4 million expatriates, with India contributing about 1.1 million, Pakistan 750,000, Bangladesh 4-500,000, Iran 3-400,000 residents and workers, Jordan 200,000 residents and workers, the Philippines 200,000, Sri Lanka 150,000, the UK 120,000 residents and workers, Nepal 70-80,000, and Lebanon 60,000 residents and workers.

From the standpoint of future sustainability, the data on Dubai's phenomenal growth pose policy, planning, economic, environmental and social questions. Socio-culturally, for example, citizens (also called locals) are disquieted by the overwhelming impact of 'western-type' development and lifestyle on their indigenous culture. It is common to hear the suggestion that development firms and the government build separate camps, away from the city, for workers. On the planning front, Dubai has literally become a nightmare in the areas of traffic congestion, urban access, environmental impact, the growing distances between home, work and school, and other physical planning issues. On the economic front, perhaps some of the most serious concerns are in the areas of skyrocketing living costs, stagnant or declining wages, high rents and high service costs (parking, schools, tolls, etc.).

I submit that the issues exemplified above are typical of cities of Dubai's status. However, I believe that they are surmountable. The critical question, therefore, becomes how the citizens of Dubai would cope, succeed and make their city competitive in the modern world. I posit that a people's capacity to be productive determines their city's competitive edge. Productive capacity is a factor for enlight-

enment, what some would call education. Finally, enlightenment is the collective responsibility of all stakeholders (individuals, governments, corporations and non-governmental organizations) in society. Cities of the future must be enlightened cities in order to thrive and be competitive. The bulk of this challenge faces governments, primarily because enlightenment from an institutionalized standpoint is a public good. An example of this is the public education system, a service we all need, but whose cost we cannot all afford. Herein lies the need for governmental leadership, that is, to cushion, subsidize and oversee the provision of quality education for citizens in order to permit people to be productive and make society livable and competitive. Enlightenment is an additional 'E' I have advocated in my work, in addition to the famous three 'E' principles of sustainable development: economy, environment and equity. I continue to argue that without massive investment in public enlightenment, sustainability will not be achievable in cities or rural areas. This singular factor is also the greatest threat to achieving the noble endeavors of organizations such as the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals and the aims of other world trade and human rights efforts.

Relating the enlightenment issue to Dubai's viability and competitiveness in the future, the case is made from the standpoint of pointers that Dubai's remarkable boom may be threatened by some of the factors responsible for the boom, as well as factors resulting from it. An example of factors fuelling the growth is imported labor from various developing countries. The literacy and competency of workers, many of whom have made Dubai their home by choice, intermarriage or for other reasons, should be of great concern. Most of these workers are utility or day workers in construction, without the education and skills necessary for life beyond their current low-skill jobs. The pathetic plight of these workers is covered in the daily media. From oppression and exploitation by their formal employees, through extortion by employment agencies and loan shark firms, to abuses by informal employers (domestic workers) and even shady entrepreneurs (prostitution and drugs barons), I argue that these inhumane treatments are largely related to the inability of these victims to improve their employment, earning and socio-economic status because of limited or lack of education. There are shocking incidents of road accidents, petty crimes, and unsanitary behavior that are clearly attributable to ignorance and illiteracy among most workers in Dubai. Civility and decorum are at simply deplorable levels, a well-known cause for discontent among locals and highly educated professional expatriates toward a large segment of the low-skilled labor class. Sadly, there are subtle, increasing and disturbing evidences of classism, ethnocentrism, racism, sexism and xenophobia and all the ugly 'isms' that can undermine the charm, attraction and livability of a global city like Dubai.

The problems of illiteracy and inadequate skills are also serious among the locals and must be addressed aggressively in order to create an indigenous workforce to sustain Dubai's huge and sophisticated economy. In a career fair organized early in 2007 to recruit Emiratis for career jobs, for example, an organizer noted to the media that, 'around 800,000 jobs were created in 2006, still many UAE nationals are unemployed and in search of jobs. Our obligation towards the future generations is to create suitable conditions for them to participate in their country's growth.' There also are silent and controversial debates about the durability of locals in professional and demanding jobs in the modern workplace. The arguments for and against this issue notwithstanding, the efforts of the national and regional governments must be commended and must be intensified to train and elevate the skills and knowledge capacity of Emiratis. An example of these initiatives is the Knowledge and Human Development Authority, set up early in 2007 by His Highness Shaikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Ruler of Dubai to develop

a comprehensive human development strategy and find radical solutions to challenges that face the education system in the Emirate. There are other complementary initiatives nationwide, for example, the national Emiritization program aimed at boosting the rate of local employees in all corporations and agencies nationwide. Another example is the Sharjah Tatweer Forum, an initiative to develop the skills and competencies of national youth in Sharjah Emirate. Efforts are also targeted at the education of women, in recognition, according the Dubai Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research in a media report on a March 2007 'Women in IT' conference, that without the full participation of women in its economy the country will never be able to reach its full potential. He noted that employing women has serious implications for the entire country as well as for the national strategy for social development.

Finally, I present examples of how Dubai can create an enlightened citizenry, thereby making the city more cultured, livable and competitive. First is an education system that prepares citizens for the world of work. The system must be rigorous and experience-based. The system must be decentralized throughout the city, with community branches where people do not have to travel distances to get an education. A critical aspect of the system must be continuing and non-credit education, aimed at older and even retired workers who desire to keep abreast of modern trends in various fields, from computers to social etiquette and cultural awareness. The government should require appropriate programs in institutions of higher education, such as social work and health sciences, to undertake community outreach and partnership programs, in communities in which universities have a concrete presence. The government and corporations should fund public awareness programs, using dedicated channels on local and national television and radio to enlighten citizens about topical issues in governance, the economy, the environment, art and culture, and life in civil society and a world city like Dubai. I am convinced that the viability, competitiveness and sustainability of cities in the future can be assured only by enlightened citizens. There will be no room for mediocrity in future cities that aim not just to survive, but to thrive.

## April 14, 2006

'How is Denmark?' Is the first question that His Highness fires at us. We are seated on a sofa in one of the quarters of what we are told is his 'working palace' (supposedly designed by his wife who is a keen interior decorator).

After a mild correction that we are actually from Holland, a polite introduction session ensues, in which we describe our office and he explains his vision for the city we are supposed to design. He comments on the increasingly cluttered infrastructure and traffic congestion of elsewhere in the UAE and recalls memories of the fort as the ideal symbiosis between working, living and playing, involving all its inhabitants: members of the family, servants and... slaves. His speech is held briefly before mentioning this last category, followed by a discreet 'sorry'.

For somebody who thinks we are from Denmark, his discourse holds a remarkable number of familiar terms: generic city, critical mass, density, the culture of congestion... His oration continues uninterrupted for about fifty minutes; even as he feverishly shakes his empty coffee cup at one the servants for a refill. (He is served instantly.) Less than an hour later we are outside. His Highness did not wish to see examples of our work, he will await the results.

'That went well... very well!' comments our contact 'Sheikh was happy.' – RdG



Rodney Fitch

# Designing Dubai's Future I

In 'As You Like It' Shakespeare characterizes the human condition in a wonderful passage describing the ages of man. By stretching both the analogy and the imagination, Design might also be placed in a similar context whereby it grows in power and influence parallel to the City States' own emergence and growth from birth through to full, mature Statehood. Yet, as Rome discovered, when expressed by grand buildings, impressive public works and infrastructure of themselves, this maturity is not enough.

There is something of the designer in all of us, for creativity is quintessentially human. This is as true of Dubai as it is of London or New York.

The challenge for the Arab World is to connect its citizens to the world of Design, to engage and educate them in the process, to educate them in its discovery and to provide the educational and technological tools to unlock those channels that encourage dialogue about the nature and role of design in the National lifestyle.

A fulcrum for this might be some form of National Design Center that codifies and coalesces around an appreciation of the Arab World's indigenous design culture and thus reaches out beyond the Arab world to connect with the wider world of Design.

Elie Domit

# Designing Dubai's Future II

Dubai has prospered for decades from an investment-led economic strategy focused mainly on services industries. As we transit into an innovation-fueled economy, the driving force in the next phase of our development will be the imaginative and creative capacity of our people. The new architects of the global economic landscape are those who apply their imagination, creativity and knowledge to generate new ideas and create new value. Multi-dimensional creativity – artistic creativity, business entrepreneurship and technological innovation – will be the new currency of success.

The creative cluster (arts and culture, design and media) is one of the fastest growing sectors of developed economies such as the UK and the US. Creative industries not only contribute towards the economy directly, but also have a powerful, indirect impact on the rest of the economy by adding style, aesthetics and freshness to differentiate products and services. To succeed and thrive, Dubai must tap the creative cluster and recognize its components as vanguards of economic growth.

With growing access to better technology, industries are increasingly competing at equal price and functionality. The new competitive advantage lies in the ability to carve out or create new markets through the fusion of business, technology and the arts. Design, which facilitates this convergence, will emerge as the key component in any differentiation strategy for business. Changes in world demographics and trends and convergences in new technologies have created new challenges that demand greater design sensitivities and solutions from the tools we use and the spaces in which we live. Design will therefore play a critical role not only in business but also in the national agendas of many countries by driving the innovation process (and industrial competitiveness), by contributing to the level of creativity, cultural buzz and the attractiveness of the location to global talent, and by strengthening the marketing and branding of the country's products and services to the world.

# Design in Retail

Citizens of the Arab world will engage with design in many different ways and most certainly one of them will be whilst shopping. Retailing is a very competitive commercial activity where innovation in the form of store formats, product development and design are paramount. This short piece offers some simple, though strategic principles for retail success.

As one looks at the dynamic world of retail, it is obvious that no two businesses, brands or retailers are alike. Many different factors contribute to successful retailing and subsequent business growth. So the subject matter of this very practical paper is almost as large as the topic of retailing itself.

Here we outline five key principles that demonstrate different ways in which a strategic approach to retail design can contribute to business growth.

## 1. Translating the unique attributes of a brand into a store design through an understanding of the truth of your brand

The fundamental questions we ask ourselves at the beginning of any retail project are:

- what is at the heart of the brand?
- what differentiates the brand from the competition?
- what do you want consumers to think and feel about your brand?

The design for the Lego brand store now rolling out globally is a perfect illustration of how store design must be grounded in the unique truth of the brand to create a store that could only come from Lego.

At the heart of the brand are the core values of creativity, imagination, learning, fun and quality. This store is created to engage children, but also the child within each of us. The design solution is driven by a 'see the environment through the eyes of a child' mind-set and seeks to foster engagement, discovery and interaction.

The results have been a growth in sales of 31% per sq. foot and a 3% increase in transactions. In addition, the design has resulted in a positive qualitative response to the brand.

## 2. Tailoring store design to meet an identified customer mind-set

The second principle is grounded in the fact that consumer tastes and needs vary from location to location. Understanding and responding to these unique needs is a vital prerequisite to creating a compelling and relevant retail experience.

As a world-class retailer Tesco understood this and asked Fitch to see how they too could ensure that their store formats closely targeted different customer needs in different localities.

Using the wealthy district of Kensington in London as a prototype, Fitch developed a profile of the store's upmarket consumer base. Starting with these insights, we worked to create a design solution that addressed their unique needs.

The result was a store interior that incorporated a new color palette making categories and products stand out, directly connecting with the food consciousness of the audience in this locality. Consumer mind-sets should always be the driving force behind any design solution.

## 3. Extending a store design to retail consistently and flexibly for different shopping habits and needs

Taking the second principle one step further, whilst store design has to adapt to different locations and markets, it must also ensure that the core values of the brand remain consistent the world over. Getting this balance right is the key to success.

Vodafone is a clear example of how this can be achieved on a global scale. By developing a series of consistent retail planning principles, overlaid with the unique brand visual language and experience it culminated in a flexible yet consistent design blueprint.

What Vodafone have ended up with is a design that is 80% Vodafone wherever you go and 20% adapted to meet local needs.

Since June 2006 Vodafone has experienced a 25% increase in contract volume and a 10% increase in upgrade volume.

## 4. Making shopping a real experience

In today's world of product and brand proliferation, it is often said that 'shopping is the purpose of life'. If so, it is important to create a store design that makes every shopping trip memorable, turning it from a simple experience into a voyage of discovery that appeals to all of the senses.

Central Food Hall in Bangkok is one such experience. The challenge was to create not only the best food store in Thailand, but in the whole of Asia.

The result was a design that replicated a bustling street market filled with multi-sensory experiences. At the center is 'The Street' offering freshly cooked, authentic Thai food in a contemporary environment. The layout was designed to encourage shoppers to meander through vibrant displays and visit the variety of gourmet food counters.

Since opening in December 2005 foot traffic has risen by 25% with a corresponding rise in sales.

## 5. Creating a unique brand signature

Coming full circle, it is important to differentiate yourself in a crowded retail market. You must look 'inside' and discover what's unique about your brand, then work to transfer these qualities into an ownable visual platform.

Hyundai Motor Company in Korea did exactly this by translating their strong visual equities into a compelling and distinctive retail expression.

The strategic journey started by identifying the elements that Hyundai already owns from its logo to its strapline. Hyundai now talk about their brand signature and are proud of the distinctiveness that it delivers for them in the marketplace. As a result 80% of distributors are using the guidelines and using them happily.

### In conclusion

If one stands back from the five principles just illustrated by the retail design examples above, what do they have in common? Simply, that a brand owner must truly understand what is at the heart of their brand and how to express it. They have to understand who their target consumer is and how their brand can speak to them uniquely to meet their needs and desires. Above all, a brand owner must be willing to invest in and commit to innovation if his brand is to meet the challenge of consumer expectations and aspirations.

# Branding the Gulf

Majdoleen Till is managing director at Fitch Qatar, the Doha branch of the international design company.

Success in oil development encouraged many international companies to come to the Middle East in the late 1980s. At that time, there was an appreciation of all that came from the West because of a perception that Western meant professional.

This belief remained unchanged up until the late 1990s. By 2001 and right after September 11, things started to change. People in the Arab world still recognize the importance and value of globalization. However, that awareness is now crucially and significantly tempered by a strong emotional need to represent a particular regional and cultural identity.

We see this new sense of self-identity expressed in the replacement of Burger King in the last two years as one of the biggest fast food chains by Za'tar wi Zait. As brand design consultants, we have had to be acutely conscious of managing this interesting cultural tension when developing brand design solutions for our clients in this part of the world.

As companies develop their brand identities, we have to navigate a very subtle course between being Western in the professional sense but still clearly reflecting expressively Arab roots. Take Orry the Mascot for the Asian Games 2006, for example: while it is unmistakably Arabic, it also resonates with an international audience. The JCC brand language and the Cultural Festival are also examples of designs that have successfully taken into account the two aspects of cultural identity in this part of the world.

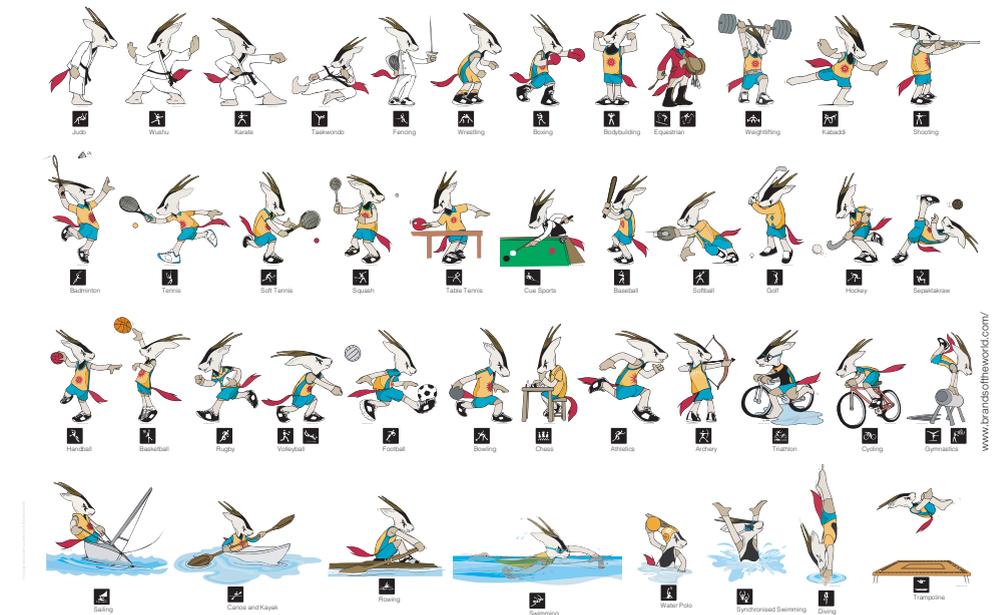
The creation of new brand names has also revealed an undergoing change. As companies create brands in this market environment, there has developed a trend away from purely Western approaches to naming. Words such as HORIZON, CONCEPT, FINE, and SOFT have subsided. The new paradigm is centered on names that are Arabic, but also easy to pronounce by speakers of other languages: Tabreed, Sorouh, Tamdeen, KARWA. We now put forward names that are both Arabic and international because the market tells us that this works.

At Fitch, we believe that design is a reflection of consumers' needs, beliefs and emotions. There is no question that the global political situation affects what consumers want from design in the region. AMERICANA, an Arab food chain, was badly affected after September 11. General feelings against Arab Muslims in America provoked a subsequent boycott against American products in the Middle East. AMERICANA paid the price because of the name, and millions of dollars were spent on ad campaigns that stated AMERICANA isn't American.

During the same period of political conflict, the Arab world created

'Mecca Cola', which reflects a Muslim identity for a soft drink. This drink has become very popular in the Arab world, partly because it is a fundraising product for charity. Mecca Cola: the name is Muslim, but the graphics are Western.

We live in a very dynamic and exciting environment. The number of educated people is increasing by the minute in the Arab World. Individualism is on the rise. The importance of family as the key structure in social order is receding. The Gulf States are no longer seen as one, Dubai is different from Qatar, which is different from Kuwait. Each of these small states works hard to identify and brand itself as different. Each uses icons different from its Gulf neighbors, though all of them belong to one landscape, one climate, and one history. As brand design consultants we need to be aware of these emerging dynamics but be very careful not to generalize them.



Orry the Mascot for the Asian Games 2006



Mecca Cola – the Muslim identity for a soft drink