Dubai 2020: Dreamscapes, Mega Malls and Spaces of Post-Modernity

Dubai's hosting of the 2020 Expo further authenticates its status as an example of an emerging Arab city that displays modernity through sequences of fragmented urbanscapes, and introvert spaces. The 2020 Expo is expected to reinforce the image of Dubai as a city of hybrid architectures and new forms of urbanism, marked by technologically advanced infrastructural systems. This paper revisits Dubai's spaces of the spectacle such as the Burj Khalifa and themed mega malls, to highlight the power of these spaces of representation in shaping Dubai's image and identity.

INTRODUCTION

Initially, a port city with an Indo-Persian mercantile community, Dubai's development along the Creek or Khor Dubai shaped a unique form of city that is constantly reinventing itself. Its historic adobe courtyard houses, with traditional wind towers-barjeel sprawling along the Dubai Creek have been fully restored to become heritage houses and museums, while their essential architectural vocabulary has been dismembered and re-membered as a simulacra in high-end resorts such as Madinat Jumeirah, the Miraj Hotel and Bab Al-Shams. Dubai's interest to make headlines of the international media fostered major investment in an endless vocabulary of forms and fragments to create architectural spectacles. Contemporary Dubai is experienced through symbolic imprints of multiple policies framed within an urban context to project an image of a city offers luxurious dreamscapes, assembled in discontinued urban centers. Many have attributed Dubai's development to a pre-dominant capital based economy. As outlined by Mike Davis for many the image of Dubai is a Miami-like beachfront with a chrome forest of skyscrapers, themed malls and world-class projects such as the forthcoming 'Falcon City' which will include replicas of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Taj Mahal, and Pyramids, Dubai's urban fragmentation supports economic functions and segregation of ethnically circumscribed social classes (Davis, 2007). The constant emergence of new projects along Sheikh Zayed Road cannot be fully appreciated at due to the high speeds and distance from which they are viewed due to Dubai's diffused network of highways', bridges and tunnels which is part of Dubai's rapid urbanization process (Bagaeen, 2007). Attempts to reconnect Dubai's urban landscape is currently in process through yet another mega project known as the 'Dubai Canal', initially a much larger project known as the 'Arabian Canal'. The economic crises of 2009 reduced the scale of the project from a 75 kilometer artificial water way that would have reached Jebel Ali, to one much more practical in scale that will now extend the Creek and the Lagoon through Al-Safa Park to exit at the World Islands. Possibly a nostalgic

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effect to connect some of the multiple centers of the city and create new-pan-oramas around the waterway and subsidiary artificial lagoons. In addition to its effect on the real-estate values the new waterway may create a timeline through which visitors can experience the city from its historic center in Al-Shindagha once described by Jonathan Raban as a multi-cultural city likened to Venice (Raban, 1979). The 'Dubai Canal' is planned to enhance the sense of orientation in the city, and has a social effect addressing Dubai's lack of landscape through creating new open air promenades for its residents, a form of integral urbanism, that will connect its building stock of the 1980s to its contemporary fabric and ending to an imaginary future in the World Islands which are still under construction (Nelson et al, 2005). Through this new artificial waterway Dubai is transforming a major part of the city into a grand scale open-air museum, that commences with its reconstructed heritage and explores selected sites of contemporary architectural sculptures such as Burj Khalifa and its new 'Burj Downtown'. This maritime (touristic) journey through the historiography of the city can be understood as a late post-modernist dream, a promise of luxury at affordable cost for a new generation of a transient globalized community residing in the Gulf.

The water has always represented an intrinsic element in Islamic architecture as

Figure 1: Burj Downtown and surrounding canals. Photo Credit to the authors.

exhibited by the pools, canals and fountains of Qasr Alhambra, locally a system of water canals known as the falaj is essential part of the United Arab Emirates heritage, in Roman and Western classic architecture the presence of fountains, artificial lakes and water ponds, reflects its importance as in the Hadrian Villa in Tivoli. Canal-scape was/is of the same importance, if not more, like any other part of the architectural/urban landscape composition, representing an essential connection between human beings and their built environments. In the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, water canals were specifically designed to connect the different pavilions of cultures and emerging nation states as a form of compositional tread, developers such as Abbot Kinney experimented with artificial canal-scapes to enhance real-estate value as early as 1905 with the 'Venice Canal District' in Los

Angeles-California, and in Metropolitan Phoenix-Arizona (Ellin, 2010). The Dubai Canal Project set to be finished in 2017 has a similar goals that is increase real-estate value, and to connect several of Dubai's iconic projects forming new compositional images of the city. Dubai's 2 billion dollar project is a reduced version of an 11 billion dollar project that would have connected Dubai's Waterfront to a major part of its hinterland. The project was planned to commence at the area currently occupied by DEWA power plant, close to Dubai Marina, then going round the Al Maktoum International Airport and closing the loop at the outer end of Palm Jebel Ali, creating network of canals similar to those of Hong Kong. The current project extends the natural water body of the Creek and the Dubai lagoon around the CBD of Dubai (Financial District, Burj Khalifa, Burj Downtown development, and Business Bay) intersecting perpendicularly Shaikh Zayed Road with an over-pass bridge to continue to Al Safa Park to end at Arabian Gulf. The project aims to change the visitor's perception of the city and brands the city as one where leisure projects are constructed, and the investment in real-estate is plausible, the Dubai Canal is consistent with the vision to create high-end waterfront projects such as the Palm Jumierah (2008) which is one of the most lavish projects commissioned by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum in 2001, with a cost that reached 12.3 billion dollars. The artificial island is reached through an underwater tunnel from Sheikh Zayed Road to join its central spine, which intern connects to the 17 fronds. The project looks spectacular from satellite images in designed to appeal to the widest range of potential customers with a promise of luxury and exclusivity, giving an allure of Arabian experience but also Spanish and Andalusian, Provencal and Mediterranean, Tuscanian and Venetian styled villas. However, on the ground experience is different; surely living in a villa on the Palm Island represents a status symbol by itself, not for the life style or the costs associated to the investment and resale value of the property but simply because it is having property on the first artificial island in Dubai and the Gulf. A very expensive dream falsely presented by real estate agents and sellers to be at hand-reach, in purchasing as well as in renting, but rapidly revealing maintenance costs comparable and sometimes largely above to top destinations in Europe. Based on the mythology of the sunken city, the Atlantis Hotel was the first to be built on the artificial Palm, followed more recently by several others still under construction reflecting different styles, ranging from Neo-Yemeni, Indo/Mughal, the Baroque styled-Kempinski Hotel, and Ottoman styled Zaabil Sara Hotel. MacCannell argues that such tourist spaces are typically divided into a front/performance space, here represented by the overall design of the resorts themed according to different historic styles, and a back/space represented by Diera, along the Khor Dubai where a real community exists working to serve the modern city (MacCannell, 1973). Thus, what MacCannell calls "staged authenticity", here part of Dubai's Postmodernism is largely in line with Baudrillard's hyper-realism/simulacra, which creates imaginary worlds, microcosms, where time and space is compressed in order to separate the tourist from the real world beyond the tourist enclave. Therefore the popularity of such resorts stems from their reference to real pasts of known reference, and their role to overshadow other parts of Dubai that are less prestigious like Al-Karama and Satwa where a large part of Dubai's South East Asian communities reside.

DREAMSCAPES

The contemporary heritage of Dubai is vanishing due rapid urbanization which is in turn almost completely demand-driven and highly influenced by global economic fluctuations. There is no doubt that today the Arab world, and especially

Gulf state cities are becoming urban, at diverse rates and with comparable characteristics, they have become perhaps more connected to a globalized realm beyond their hinterland (Malkawi, 2008). The collective memory of Dubai's heritage houses no longer exists as a result of the restoration by the Dubai Municipality in the late 1970's. Such restorations represent a contrasting image to the actual past, here, the remaking of a historic narrative creates a forged experience similar to that of Heritage villages, where the notion of authenticity becomes a tricky concept (Young, 2006). Dubai's urban development beyond the boundaries of Al-Shindagha and Deira can be understood as part of it's strive to join a global city network that apparently compete to collect iconic pieces of architecture, without taking into account social and contextual functions. The juxtaposition of constructed/themed heritage in contrast to Dubai's skyscrapers is common, for example in the 'Burj Khalifa and Burj Downtown development', that offers pluralistic images for Dubai's endless urban expansion through its diversification of designs around artificial lagoons and Arabian architecture, creating clustered buildings simulating an organic fabric like a medina, which would have been only possible in light of the historic vacuum of a city constantly replacing its building stock (Acuto, 2010). The dilution of Dubai's heritage through trans-

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formation into an urban museum sets the stage for tourist resorts like Madinat Jumeirah (2003) to surpass in scale and communal acceptance the local heritage from which its forms and fragments are adopted. The resort is designed to recreate an urban Oasis along 5.4 kilometers of waterways where visitors can take boat trips to replicate the experience of the traditional boats-Abra crossing the Dubai Creek. Madinat Jumeirah constructs panoramic landscapes that support MacCannel 'staged authenticity' as visitors experience a sanitized version of Jonathan Raban's Dubai as traditional heritage including the textile bazaar are replicated, and integrated in an urban-scape shaped by artificial canals extensive open areas of palm trees. Madinat Jumeirah's Al-Qasr Hotel and the Royal Miraj Hotel exhibit ecstatic adobe textured facades while their interiors are lavishly decorated with mosaics, horseshoe arches and stucco moldings adopted from

Figure 2: The Palm Jumeirah - Private beach community and the Atlantis Hotel in the background. Photo Credit to the authors.

North Africa—Moorish-Hispanic, Moroccan. The resort seems to be constructed from textual descriptions and novels such as Raban's Arabia through the Looking Glass (1979), where the author highlights Dubai's vernacular development around the Dubai Creek (al-Khor), as well as the cosmopolitan Dubai's diversified community, and hybridized Indo-Arabian language. However, Raban's prediction for Dubai's future as an open city of socio-cultural and integrated urbanism have only partially been realized within Deira, because in the 1970's many parts of contemporary Dubai were unimaginable. Al-Qasr in Madinat Jumeirah with its lavish interiors constructs a new form of 'Post-modernity' desirable and attractive for Western educated customers in search of recognizable vocabularies of tradition (Jameson, 1990). A realization of eclectic architectures that appeared in the early 20th century as a result of the dissemination of the works of Orientalist artists such as Pascal Coste and the Grammar of Ornament by Owen Jones (1868). The contrast between exterior facades, that are partially true to local tradition, and the lavish interiors adopting arts and crafts from a broad spectrum Islamic material culture constructs a plurality that overlaps the symbolic and spatial orders of the real and hyper-real. The experience forms no confusion for its visitor between remnants of Dubai's real heritage and the hyper-real or simulacra because Madinat Jumeirah, the Miraj Hotel, Bab Al-Shams and Al-Maha resorts offer only brief tastes of 'reality' triggered by nostalgia to validate the remaining presence of local tradition through a collage of 'Islamic' cultural produce (Steiner, 2010).

MEGA_MALL(S)

Today Dubai disseminates a multitude of images overlaying the fragmented geometry of the 'No-stop-City', in a sense, these mega projects are mini-Dubai's or partial-Dubai's each searching in different ways to "capture" or "project" some coherent if non-totalizing "essence" of the city. Dubai's Mega Mall represents a radical form of post-modernism where the well known categories of form, space and place have been substituted by an endless collection of introverted spaces connected by a diffuse network of roads and car parking spaces. Dreamscapes and cultural consumption developments act as trophies with explicit links to branding Dubai, artificial islands and waterfront developments often reflect culinary and ornamental spaces were multi-ethnic populations gather to experience glimpse of Dubai's modernity. Another evident sign of its recent capitalist based urban development is the multi-dimensional character of iconic architecture tinged by hybridization and hyper-realism, emphasizes only the positive aspects of Dubai's spatial localizations regardless of its divided communities and urban fragmentation. Dubai is represented through images of the Burj Khalifa, Dubai Mall and Burj Al-Arab in the same manner that congregational mosques and their minarets represent Cairo and Istanbul. (King, 2004). The marketing power of the Dubai as a brand name and lifestyle by Emaar and Nakheel, and the instability created by the Arab Spring have contributed further to support Dubai's policies to create rich dreamscapes and massive malls where the customary practice of mass-commoditization and consumption has its epiphany. This form of urbanism is what Kenneth Frampton coins as the 'Catalytic City', a city composed of a group of super-structures that construct mini-cities and introverted urban enclaves leaving the remaining landscape marked by universal 'placelessness' (Frampton, 2003). A panorama of Dubai is almost impossible to construction from within the city because of the conglomeration of groups of towers around artificial lagoons, intercepted by in-between spaces, heterotopias created under bridges, Salik highway overhanging toll stations, the new metro, and raised monorail. Dubai

continues to stretch endlessly along the Sheikh Zayed road towards Jebel Ali, creating a realization of the 'No-Stop-City', a term developed and presented in 1966 by the Italian group of architects Archizoom Associates, was a manifesto more than a project shedding light on the problem of super-architecture and spatial quantity versus quality coined as 'cities without architecture' (Branzi, 1966). Dubai's manifestation of the 'No-stop-city' is reflected in its attempt to create a modern Arab city that attracts investors through a promise of luxury at affordable cost all-inclusive for a new generation of transient globalized bourgeoisie. As highlighted by Anthony King today historic monuments such as grand mosques and cathedrals of the past are no longer the main medium of attraction, rather they have been replaced by morphed glass towers that compete with other signature styled towers in emerging modern cities. (King 2004) Choosing to reduce a strong preconceived historical image, in favor for a modern city facade, the Emirate allowed for an easier construction of a global city with splintered centers that cater to diverse ethnicities and social groups. Its cultural diversity policy is supported by its divided urbanism that does not necessarily have physical boundaries or walls in the traditional manner, however virtual boundaries do exist, with every new development the infrastructure designed to connect them such as the network of freeways, bridges and tunnels effectively by-passes less-favored places and the communities within them, thereby redefining the concept of the gated community (Graham, 2001).

Dubai is one of the cities that has become more than ever concerned with its image and brand value and has come to realize that in the competition for inhabitants and investors it is not enough to invest in infrastructure, cultural facilities and other amenities, rather it is necessary to highlight its status and prestige, structuring a dialectical relationship between the place and its residents. Here Dubai's mega projects play upon the global aspirations of the middle class seeking out lifestyles that mark them as having made it in the global economy (Haines, 2011). The city's urban development is closely supervised by the Al-Maktoum Family whose interests are to create a city that attracts investors through its display of ability to create architectural spectacles that can be part of the Guinness Book of Records. Unlike traditional Arab Cities with dense centralized urban fabrics forming their core that gradually decentralizes towards the peripheries, Dubai's highways offer fragmented glimpses of a modern city such as the Burj Al-Arab, Burj Khalifa and Dubai Mall, Mall of the Emirates and Ibn Battuta Mall. As spaces of consumption of commodity and culture, these spaces seem to be heading towards further evolution with plans being prepared for the Expo 2020, as they annex more diversified spaces of consumption of commodities and cultures. Under essentially the same forces and agendas, cities like Dubai have tended to create two mutually exclusive forms of spatial development: hyper-modern high-rise towers and shopping complexes, on the one hand, and carefully renovated historic buildings; open air urban museums, on the other. These two basic models can be understood as an attempt to express in spatial form the public importance of culture and heritage while at the same time recognizing the benefits of participating in an increasingly global economy. Wafi Mall (2001) and Ibn Battuta Mall (2005) further cement this idea through their themed interior spaces presenting various traditional styles from the Maghreb to China, they gather and reconstruct cultural backdrops similar to those constructed for the 19th century World Fairs, albeit, in Dubai, in a very specific context of retailing and consumer spending (Steiner, 2010). Wafi Mall with its predominantly Ancient Egypt theme and continued to expand its constructed representations of Ancient cultures to

Figure 3: Downtown Dubai - constructed traditions and modernity. Photo Credit to the authors.

Figure 4: Wafi Mall - Egyptian and Greek entrance. Photo Credit to the authors.

include a Greco-Roman Façade, and an Islamic Moorish Hispanic entryway to Khan Murjan. As Zeynep Celik highlights built heritage was diluted from its initial context to decorative compositions (Celik, 1992). This similitude is apparent in the organized hierarchy, and also eclecticism and pastiche of the pyramidal shaped Raffles Hotel (2007) fronted by the Greco-Roman entrance of the Mall, and a wide range of decorative motifs in Khan Murjan, ranging from Syria, Iraq to North Africa, representing fragments of a multitude of cultural produce, de-historicized in a constructed space of post-modernity. (Jameson, 1990). These new tourism enclaves have become spaces to stage new but more or less convincing narratives of post-modernity by weaving narratives of hybrid traditions that build on chosen sections of 'modern' heritage and distant history to satisfy touristic demands for "new" experiences (Baudrillard, 1988). Through a gathering of simulacra of monuments representing a multitude of cultures past and present, Dubai constructs worlds of plurality and overlapping symbolic and spatial orders that replace traditional monuments of the past with dreamscapes and hyper-realities. While Dubai is, of course, necessarily more than this, it is indeed a contemporary city similar to Kula Lumpur, Hong Kong and Singapore that are also constructing the past on very little of their local tradition (Haines, 2011).

CONCLUSIONS

Part of Dubai's branding promoted by its media builds on its ability and availability to deliver on the promises of achieving its dream projects; facilities, resources, and expertise. The Expo 2020 will be the first to be held in the Arabian Peninsula with the theme "Connecting Minds, Creating the Future". It is expected to reinforce the image of Dubai as a city of hybrid architectures and new forms of reviving the long tradition of the Expositions Universelles as inherited from the past: the very occasion to display the cultural diversity intertwined with technology. Following the announcement of Dubai's hosting of the 2020 Expo another mega mall project was announced titled 'Mall of the World' to be located between Madinat Jumeirah and Mall of the Emirates intersected by Sheikh Zayed Road. This mega mall with its forthcoming 48 million square feet of indoor facilities, complements Dubai's existing projects such as Burj Khalifa with its towering height of 828 meters, and Dubai Mall's 13 million square feet of air-conditioned streetscapes World's largest aquarium. Burj Downtown's 20 billion dollar development with its towering Burj Khalifa, representing its adherence to a new global world order, is the closest realization of concepts such as 'super-architecture'. Dubai's forthcoming 'Mall of the World', to be located between Madinat Jumeirah and Sheikh Zayed road, will include more theme parks and replicas of the Ramblas Street in Barcelona and London's Oxford Street, and reconstructions of selected landmarks such as London's West End and New York's Broadway. This new mega mall collages even more hybridized buildings, and reframes history on a much larger scale than its precedents. Its scale and scope enforces the concept of the 'Catalytic City', and goes beyond geo-political contexts to 'furnish' a city with forms and fragments of diverse cultures, practically dissolving national boundaries, with the intention to substitute for the absence of the profound reality of the natural development of a city (Graham, 2001).

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