Planning Middle Eastern Cities
An urban kaleidoscope in a globalizing world

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The desert on the other side was, most of the time, flat, hard and desolate; nothing and no one came from its depth except rarely... The bedouin who had at first refused to go near the sea or take part in unloading cargoes from the small boats were soon won over. It seemed to them curious, arousing and somewhat risky, and before long they went closer to the sea. They did so hesitantly, in stages, with a sense of experimentation and secrecy... but their fear never left them, for 'water is treacherous, a swallower who never is satisfied'... Later on they waded into the shallow water. It was enticing, caressing their feet with its coolness and density, and with the passing of time they did not hesitate to bathe in the sea...

Abdelrahman Munif, Cities of Salt

The city-state of Dubai, a small emirate located on the Arabian Gulf, has been a crossroads for transient residents and travellers since its establishment as a small fishing village in the nineteenth century. Within the last two decades it has witnessed rapid urban growth due in part from the income generated from oil revenue, but mostly from various economic and industrial developments (figure 8.1). Its multi-cultural (hybrid) nature is evident from its unique population make up: a city of approximately 1 million residents, where locals form a minority (the number varies from 8 per cent to 20 per cent) while the majority are of Arab, Asian and Western nationalities. Given this unique population as well as its location at the tip of the Arabian peninsula, Dubai has become a border region in which one can detect a variety of ‘conflicts’: West/East, modernization/fundamentalism, Arab/Asian and so on. These conflicts are resolved spatially through a policy which on the face of it attempts to reconcile through co-existence, but a closer examination reveals an exclusionary direction through the development of clearly defined ‘borders’ i.e. zones or enclaves.

This is evident in modern projects such as the luxurious Burj Al-Arab (Tower of the Arabs) Hotel and the more recent Palm Islands development in which authorities have created an instant, easily recognizable image of a city which is on the verge of joining the global community (figures 8.2 and 8.3). Burj Al-Arab has, as this chapter will show, become a symbol of Dubai; in its imagery it evokes the sail, thus ‘recognizing’ Dubai's

Chapter 8

Redrawing Boundaries: Dubai, an Emerging Global City

Yasser Elsheshtawy
historical seafaring tradition. Located next to this tower is another mega project in which the city is embarking on a $1.5 billion development to create ‘the largest man-made island’ in the Arabian Gulf, a project which, it is claimed, is ‘visible from outer space’. Shaped like a palm tree (in its site plan) the island is appropriately known as ‘The Palm-Jumeirah’ and will contain exclusive residences, hotels and shopping/entertainment facilities. The palm was chosen because it is ‘one of Dubai’s most enduring symbols of life and abundance’ — another allusion to the past. Both of these projects are physically removed from the shore and are accessible via bridges, thus highlighting their exclusive nature. Their image — whether it is sails or palms — is directed towards the global media thus affirming what some have described as being ‘the most globalized of all Arab societies’.1 This chapter, in critically assessing these projects, will first place them within the current globalization discourse with its emphasis on the notions of hybridity and the inevitable outcome of ‘polarization’. This is followed by a brief historical background of the development of the city with a specific focus on the rapid growth witnessed within the last two decades, illustrating the dramatic urban transformations within the twentieth century while highlighting the city’s multi-cultural nature. The current ‘megaprojects’ undertaken by the city are then discussed, and this discussion is followed by the two case studies. They are presented to illustrate the extent to which, firstly, they represent a continuation of modernization efforts in Dubai which began early in the twentieth century and, secondly, are a natural response to the current globalization discourse.

The Globalization/Hybridity Discourse

Many would argue that globalization has been part of the socio-political landscape in the Middle East since colonial times. Finding theoretical justification through disciplines such as ‘Orientalism’ — the study of Eastern cultures — which were meant to establish the superiority of the West, and an establishment of an ‘other’ which needed to be carefully studied, analysed and in turn ‘domesticated’ to fit with a ‘universal’ notion of appropriateness (Said, 1978). However, a theoretical shift has occurred recently whereby the cultural imperialism perspective and the ultimate hegemony of Western forms has been replaced by a ‘cultural hybridization’ paradigm.2 What this view leaves out however is that there is an inevitable outcome of ‘polarization’, particularly in so-called ‘world cities’ which have come to symbolize the ultimate triumph of globalization. In such cities ‘... the view down below appears to be inhabited by a swirling mass of immigrant populations, competing for low wage jobs’ and this is associated with a ‘... growing ethnic, racial and cultural heterogeneity, coupled with social and spatial polarization’ (Oncu and Weyland, 1997, p. 1). The structure of these world cities has generated new forms of spatial and class polarization or what Friedman in his article ‘The world city hypotheses’ termed ‘intersecting scape’ (Friedman, 1986).

The case of cultural hybridization is made through the existence of various emerging cultural forms such as blended musical genres (the proliferation of the Algerian/North African Rai mixed with the Western form of contemporary rock, for example). A happy marriage between East and West is thus envisioned, effectively displaying a rather optimistic view of these global tendencies. Yet one might clearly argue against, and in effect refute, the theoretical shift paradigm: in essence the imperialist/hegemony
perspective is alive and well. Furthermore, by changing terminologies the whole notion of a globalized world would become more palatable. Nowhere is this more evident than in various development projects in Middle Eastern cities. In this respect, efforts are made to respond to the global economy and to recreate the city through the ‘tourist gaze’. The metropolitan experience is thus ‘…intricately involved in the global circulation of images’ (Oncu and Weyland, 1997, p. 11). Traditional cities such as Cairo or Beirut effectively manufacture their heritage and culture – their ‘image’ – to attract investments, tourists etc. Increasingly, Arab oil cities – not burdened by history – are becoming models to be emulated. Their soaring glass towers, glitzy shopping malls, and various events are looked at as a ‘true’ sign of progress and modernization. This, however, poses questions pertaining to authenticity and socio-political equality. And – most importantly – are they truly ‘hybrid’?

In these cities identities are constructed among expatriates, a continuation from the colonial period strengthened by continuing links with home countries – further enhanced by realities of the new ‘global system’ which enables one easily to maintain contact: easy travel, access to media. Within the United Arab Emirates, for example, each group maintains its own set of institutions. The existence of these groups has prompted many to claim that a hybrid culture ‘image’ that is being propagated – a small fishing village to a ‘world city’ in the making, rivaling its neighbours – Hong Kong and Singapore. This transformation which happened within only the last 30 years or so makes the emirate of Dubai a perfect setting for examining the tendencies discussed above.

While this should not be seen as an argument against hybridization it, nevertheless, is a suggestion that there is a negative outcome. Parts of the city are exclusively associated with ‘elite’ global elements – those that can afford the multi-million dollar (or euro, dirham etc.) price tag associated with these developments/renovation efforts. The city is being created to respond to globalizing tendencies – tourism, large corporation headquarters, events (conferences, rock concerts, etc.) – thus increasing catering to transient populations. No real effort is made to resolve social problems, address concerns of the lower class, or try to make the urban environment more ‘livable’.

Globalization has thus become another form of domination – primarily catering to those who have the necessary resources. While the imagery associated with the production of spatial forms is linked to cultural elements – an essential post-modern condition – thus suggesting hybridity, it ultimately caters to elite elements, thereby excluding ordinary citizens. Unfortunately, hybridity becomes a ‘consipratorial’ act by concealing its real intentions, cloaking itself in the mantle of tradition and (manufactured) heritage.

The Case of Dubai
During 2003 the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank held their meeting in Dubai, with more than 14,000 delegates descending on the city which had undertaken massive construction efforts, from a new convention centre to new roads, in preparation for the gathering. In many ways such an event marks a remarkable transformation from what used to be a small fishing village to a ‘world city’ in the making, rivaling its neighbours – Hong Kong and Singapore. This transformation which happened within only the last 30 years or so makes the emirate of Dubai, an exciting example of examining the tendencies discussed above.

Origins and Developments
The Gulf region has been an area of contestation and struggle since the fifteenth century when the Portuguese, followed by the British, attempted to gain control over parts of what used to be then known as ‘Historic Oman’. Motivation was primarily commercial, to control the vital spice trade and an important commodity at that time due to its use in the preservation of food. The United Arab Emirates or UAE – as it is currently known – was initially part of Historic Oman. As an important trading centre it dates back to antiquity and Mesopotamian documents dating as far back as 2000 BC mention trading activities in ‘Magan’, as it was then known.

The Portuguese were the first Europeans (i.e. Western) powers to ‘colonize’ the Gulf in a period lasting from 1500 to 1750. Some have argued that the fall of Grenada in 1492 and the expulsion of Moors from Spain followed by the Portuguese invasion of the Gulf could be seen as a continuation of the war against Islam carried out on Moorish lands (Smith, 1991). No doubt such ideological conflicts cannot be discounted but the area was also attractive as a centre of trade, located between European markets and those in Africa and Asia. While the Portuguese were emerging as a major power in the region other developments taking place were influential such as the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the emergence of the Ottomans as another hegemonic entity. Meanwhile the Portuguese continued their expansion with a series of battles culminating in the capture of Hormuz, Persia in 1507 and subsequent domination of the entire Gulf area.

A local population did exist in the area, however, a series of tribal migrations occurred at the time which formed the nucleus for the current population’s make-up. Tribes began to emerge from the desert and migrate to Historic Oman in the 1700s attracted by the promise of prosperity due to trade. Of significance are the Qawasim who came from Persia and the Bani Yas tribal grouping who came from the Najd area – in what is now Saudi Arabia. At that time the British showed interest in the area, and the Qawasim were perceived as a serious threat to their territorial ambitions. The influence of that tribe extended from Sharjah to Ajman, Um Al-Qaain and Ras Al-Khaimah (current Sheikhdoms – or Emirates). They also had a significant maritime fleet numbering close to 500 ships. The Qawasim formed an alliance with the newly formed Wahabi – or Munawh’iidi – movement in Central Arabia between 1795 and 1799. The Ottomans and British came to see the Munawh’iidi expansion as a threat to their dominance. As a result to this alliance, and the Qawasim attempt to charge the British for navigational rights in the Gulf, it was decided to launch an attack against Ras Al-Khaimah in 1805. The Qawasim were ultimately defeated in 1819 thus establishing British colonial rule in Historic Oman which lasted until 1971 – although some have divided this period in two parts: 1820-1945 (end of World War II) and 1945-1971 (Kazim, 2000).
As opposed to downright physical occupation with all the responsibilities it entails, the British preferred to construct a series of treaties with a few select Sheikhhs—tribal leaders. This was, of course, aided by the lack of any ‘structured’ state, or a unifying entity, a functioning civil, urban society as can be found in Egypt, for example, which would necessitate radical measures such as occupation. These treaties came to be crucial factors in the formation of the UAE and the emergence of various emirates such as Abu Dhabi and Dubai. One of the most significant is the 1820 treaty signed by the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi, to be followed by other Sheikhhs including the Sheikh of Dubai which officially designated the British as the rulers of Historic Oman. This treaty extended to the Sheikhhs’ descendants as well. In 1922 another interesting treaty was signed specifying that in the case of the discovery of oil, concessions would not be extended to any non-British entity. This was prompted mainly by oil discoveries in Abadan, Iran in 1908 and in Trucial Oman during World War I. During British dominance in the area some resistance did exist which eventually culminated in independence, and in other low-level employment (Kazim, 2000). One could clearly argue that Dubai early last century contained several classes and ethnic groups, and these cut across lines of ethnicity and gender.

Britain’s influence was strong because of its interest in maintaining ports of call in the Gulf for two reasons: first, as an alternative overland and maritime route between India and Britain and, second, to reinforce British presence to prevent Russian influence in Persia (Kazim, 2000). In 1904 steamers were calling at Dubai on a weekly basis, encouraged by the abolition of a 5 per cent customs duty thereby declaring Dubai a ‘free port’. The city also became a distribution centre for goods to a number of cities along the Gulf as well as the interior of the country and the Sultanate of Oman. The city itself was divided by the creek in two parts: Deira and Bar Dubai. Deira, to the north, was considered the mercantile sector, Bar Dubai to the south was the government centre housing such buildings as the customs house and the residence of the Sheikh. Ferries connected the two parts.

During the 1947–1971 period, following World War II, Dubai continued to maintain itself as a mercantile city. However it still remained more or less a British protectorate, a status enhanced by a series of political measures and development projects. For example, numerous contracts were extended exclusively to British firms; in 1947 the British Bank of the Middle East was established, in addition to the construction of Al-Maktoum hospital, a joint project with the British, in 1953. At that time Dubai replaced Sharjah as the seat of the British political agent. Under Sheikh Rashid, a series of development projects—all carried out with British assistance—greatly helped in strengthening the city’s position as a centre of trade. These included the electrification of Dubai in 1961, a year which also saw the dredging of the creek for which funds were borrowed from Kuwait to pay for the British firm of Halcrow & Partners. In this project the port was deepened through dredging and the building of breakwaters. Finance for many of these projects was arranged in anticipation of oil revenue. Oil in commercial quantities was discovered in 1966. British companies to which all these contracts were extended needed cheap labour which was readily available from India and Pakistan. Many came from other parts such as Iran, Europe and Arab countries. In 1966 immigrant labour constituted 50 per cent of Dubai’s population. These workers had considerable
cultural impact but they had no political power within Dubai's civil society — for example, they were not permitted to form unions. The influx of these 'foreigners' strengthened the identity of locals in relation to these immigrants. Also 'Dubayyan' perceived themselves to be superior to northern sheikdoms due to their economic privilege — despite the fact that they all lack substantive quantities of oil.

In spite of the presence of diverse cultures the city enjoyed relative stability — a fact paradoxically enhanced by fragmentation. Each societal segment became too self-contained to be able to unite with others and in turn challenge the status quo. Furthermore, tribal divisions were less significant in Dubai than in Abu Dhabi, for example, which is where most of the tribal groupings presided.

**Forms of Resistance and Anti-Colonialism**

Attempts at reform and in turn removal of colonial power did occur. In 1930 armed conflict occurred between Sheikh Saeed Maktoum and the *majlis* — a grouping of merchants acting as advisor to the Sheikh and led by the trader Sheikh Maani — which eventually led to a British intervention, the installation of a new *majlis*, and Sheikh Maani going into exile. Also termed the 'Reform Movement' they were pearl merchants reacting to the declining income from pearl revenue. Other mercantile groupings refused to join however. This event prompted some to declare that '...behind Sheikh Saeed was British colonial power' (Kazim, 2000, p. 203). Interestingly, the origins of this movement can be traced to a variety of factors such as the opening of the Suez Canal, development of steam shipping and a postal system, all of which led to the spread of ideas through the media prevalent at the time such as newspapers which advocated nationalist movements and the construction of an 'Arab' identity in relation to the colonial powers.

Another relevant event pertains to the construction of the airport. The British, encountering resistance in Ras Al-Khaimah, set their sights on Dubai — at the end of 1931. Many of the Sheikh's relatives as well as merchants wanted to prevent Dubai from becoming the outright centre for British hegemony in the Gulf. However, a small airport accommodating flights between Alexandria and India was finally built in 1937, thereby establishing a British presence in the city.

The period following World War II saw a weakening of British hegemony and the emergence of the United States as a replacement. This was of course linked to a rising global anti-colonial movement in the period between 1945 and 1965 which manifested itself in forced withdrawal from many Arab countries. This was, in contrast to what happened in the Gulf, however, which witnessed an early British voluntary withdrawal for a number of reasons. The more peaceful transition here ensured that oil concessions would remain intact and that British firms would be hired for maintenance and expansion of infrastructural installations. A stable political structure in place ensured the continuity of ruling entities and prevented the emergence of an armed insurrection.

However, in spite of all this, the region did witness anti-colonial activities which, while not reaching a stage of armed insurrection, were nevertheless critical in establishing — or constructing — a 'UAE' identity among others. The first stage of this struggle was, of course, the short-lived reform movement in the 1930s which was not explicitly anti-colonial, its focus being mainly on governmental reform. The second stage, however, made British withdrawal one of its key demands — deriving inspiration from Egypt's Nasser. A third — armed stage — as happened in Oman and Aden — did not occur mainly because oil revenues led to massive development projects resulting in prosperity and the beginnings of consumerism. Furthermore, the lack of development of an indigenous working class contributed to this. Workers, brought by the British retained identification with their home countries.

On 2 December 1971 what had been known as 'Trucial Oman' became the United Arab Emirates. There were many unifying factors which smoothly paved the way for this transition: the same series of treaties imposed on each emirate; pearl fishery; tribal interconnections; and, of course, being subject to the control of the British government of India. The occupation of the islands of Greater and Lesser Tunbs by Iran — one day prior to the announcement of Independence (?) — helped in strengthening the newly emerging UAE identity.

**The Establishment of Dubai as a Global Centre**

The narrative so far has discussed the formation of the UAE, and Dubai, by examining various historical, social and political factors. It has shown that Dubai developed an economy based on international commerce because it has been playing the role of a commercial entrepôt since the late 1800s. Attesting to the ingenuity of the local population, they have been able to overcome the decline of the pearling industry due to the manufacture of artificial pearls in Japan and following the great Depression. They began a re-export business using the tax-free zone and the Dubai Creek. Due to the dredging of the creek, and the discovery of oil noted earlier, the city witnessed an unprecedented expansion and construction boom. Oil revenues were used to spur infrastructure development such as schools, hospitals, roads and a modern telecommunications network. A new port and terminal building were built at Dubai International Airport. A runway extension that could accommodate any type of aircraft was implemented. The longest man-made harbour in the world was constructed at Jebel Ali, and a free zone was created around the port which was an ingenious response to changing market conditions. In contrast to transnational corporations operating within Oman toward the end of the colonial period, the ones operating in the 1980s and 1990s were more flexible, provided more rapid service, worked with more resources and changed more quickly according to market conditions, both within the UAE and globally. Nowhere is this more evident than in Jebel Ali — Dubai's free zone — where these corporations could operate freely and without restrictions.

Managers and stockholders are the main beneficiaries of Jebel Ali free zone but there are other segments (strata) as well — these include low-wage workers and service sectors: accountants, bank personnel, market analysts who link the transnational corporations' Dubai headquarters to the 'world'. One of the main attractions, however, is the availability of low-wage, non-unionized workers. In addition, companies have been able to avoid some of the tax and environmental regulations which may exist in their home countries. Also, there are no numerical restrictions on expatriate workers or any wage parameters. The last factor was particularly significant in the 1980s and 1990s when emphasis was on manufacturing which was labour intensive.

Thus the city set the stage for becoming a major global centre for trade and commerce at the end of the twentieth century by providing the necessary infrastructure for global corporations. All of this had major spatial implications on the urban
growth of the city and on its architecture which will be discussed in the following section.

Contemporary Dubai: Urban Expansion and Rapid Urbanization

The massive and rapid expansion of Dubai is the most tangible manifestation of urbanization that has transformed the city from a small fishing village to a major city. This ‘spatial expansion’ is manifested in size, appearance, and urban morphology (figure 8.4). Three factors contributed to this growth: economic affluence, technological advancements in transportation and public utilities, and government land-use policy (AlShafieei, 1997). Before discussing these factors it is of interest to note some numbers pertaining to the status of Dubai at the turn of the twentieth century: At that time the population of Dubai numbering 10,000 was centred in three areas: Deira which consisted of 1600 houses and 350 shops whose population was primarily Arabs, Persians and Baluchis; Shindagha which had 250 houses and only Arab residents; and Dubai which had only 200 houses and 50 shops dominated by Persian and Indian merchants. There are no detailed data as to the character of these houses except that they were built of clay and coral fragments. In 1956 the first house using concrete blocks was built (Gabriel, 1987).

The first phase of urban development extended from 1900 to 1955. Dubai’s urban growth in this period reflected a pattern of slow and limited physical expansion due to constrained economic activities and marginal growth in population. The entire population of the city was confined to three small enclaves located at the mouth of the Creek. Both the Creek and the Arabian Gulf were considered as the main source of income for the local population who were predominantly involved in fishing and pearl diving. Until 1955 the urban area did not exceed 320 hectare (3.2 km²) and the land use was predominantly residential with extremely limited commercial space. The vast majority of the local inhabitants were living in extended families in ‘Barasti’ houses (houses built of palm fronds). Residential quarters were built in clusters to serve the purpose of privacy and collective tribal security. The internal parts of each enclave were connected by narrow walkways intended for pedestrians and domestic animals that were used for transport of goods and drinking water. The only source of drinking water was four public wells near the enclaves and water was carried directly by the families (Heards-Bey, 1982). The second phase of Dubai’s urban development can be characterized as compact growth, extending from 1955 to 1970. Developments followed a master plan prepared by British architect John Harris in 1960. It called for the provision of a road system; zoning of the town into areas marked for industry, commerce and public buildings; areas for new residential quarters and the creation of a new town centre. These rather modest goals were in line with the emirate’s limited financial resources (oil had not yet been discovered in sufficient quantities). In 1971, due to the city’s expansion and the availability of economic resources, a new master plan by Harris was introduced. The plan called for the construction of a tunnel running beneath the creek connecting Bur Dubai and Deira (Shindagha Tunnel) and the construction of two bridges (Maktoum and Garhoud); in addition the building of Port Rashid was also envisioned. A large area extending toward Jebel Ali was designated for residential use (now known as Jumeirah) and a further large area was reserved for industrial use; to the city’s south additional areas were dedicated to health, education and leisure/recreation uses (Gabriel, 1987).

Dubai is now undergoing what some have called ‘planned suburban growth’, a period of rapid expansion which began in 1970 (AlShafieei, 1997). Of particular note is the city’s growth corridor along Sheikh Zayed Road towards Jebel Ali. Dubbed as the ‘new Dubai’, this area is emerging as the new commercial and financial centre of the city. Numerous projects are constructed along this stretch of highway and the skyline of the city is changing as a result. These rapid developments have emerged both as a result of increased resources and an attempt to provide alternative sources for revenue.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, the city took a strategic decision to emerge as a major international-quality tourism destination. As a result investments in tourism infrastructure have paid off over the years. Recent statistics suggest that visitors numbered three million, greatly exceeding the one million population. According to some observers it is ‘... perhaps the world’s fastest-growing global city and intercontinental hub’ but it is also a ‘... non-Arab society planted in the heart of Arabia’ (Hirst, 2001).

It is this last point, frequently cited, which is of great interest, particularly if one examines the population make-up. The city is composed of an immigrant population which, proportionate to the natives, is the highest in the world. In the UAE as a whole, with a total population of 2.5 million, nationals are outnumbered seven to one by mainly non-Arab aliens: 1.2 million Indians, 600,000 Pakistanis, 100,000 Iranians and contributions from dozens of other nations, including 50,000 Britons. In Dubai, nationals fall to a mere 8–20 per cent out of a million-plus. This has prompted some to term it not a melting pot but a ‘... polyglot polity in the making’ (Hirst, 2001). The society however is open-minded, business is encouraged and recently freehold ownership has been opened for expatriates. This atmosphere of openness has encouraged investment and tourism. Furthermore, additional sources of wealth have contributed to this rapid urbanization.
The Creation of a ‘Global’ Image

One observer recently commenting on the developments taking place in Dubai noted: ‘Map-makers in Dubai must be constantly frustrated. No sooner have they finished their latest in-depth representation of the city when another major project is announced to send them scuttling back to the drawing board. The map of Dubai is constantly being rewritten’ (Smalley, 2002).

These projects are based on a recognition that oil resources will eventually dry up. Therefore, the city has embarked on a multi-billion dollar drive to establish itself as the Gulf’s hub for leisure, services and commerce. This involved increasingly ‘bold’ architectural projects: Palm Islands, Burj Al-Arab Hotel, Dubai Marina, and the twin Emirates Towers. Other projects are geared to the global economical infrastructure of the media and internet: Dubai Media City and Dubai Internet City (DIC) and Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC). Other cities are in the making: Healthcare City, Textile City and International Financial City (initially called Chinatown).

Described by some officials as ‘megaprojects’, they distinguish themselves by using superlatives to ascertain their uniqueness. Furthermore, these projects are seen as a continuation of major developments in the city which contributed to its rapid urbanization – the dredging of the Creek thus facilitating commerce, and the creation of the largest man-made artificial port, Jebel Ali, a free-zone and industrial area located north of Dubai. The following is a brief account of some of the more visible of these projects, which will provide a contextual framework for understanding the importance and significance of the two case studies.

The Megaprojects

We already live in a town of cities: Internet City, Healthcare City, Media City, Festival City, is the Sheikh Zayed road soon to be renamed Skyscraper city? Perhaps eventually each activity will have its own city, and we will find ourselves visiting Hamburger City for takeaways, Gritty City for car washes, Ditty City for CD’s and music, . . . we do wonder though why the most important thing of all – knowledge – only warrants a village and not a city.

In discussing the major projects in Dubai – in essence the spatial characteristics of its recent expansion – it will be useful to group them according to certain themes. In other words some projects are geared towards the communication industry with its emphasis on Information Technology and the ‘New’ Media; another group falls within the domain of traditional mixed-use real estate developments; some projects provide a setting for an emerging financial industry, and of course the ever growing hospitality/leisure industry. The retail sector, with its accompanying shopping malls is the most visible among this group. Cultural projects such as museums, cultural centres and the like are, interestingly, lacking. Many of these projects are located along a stretch of highway linking Dubai to Abu Dhabi known as Sheikh Zayed Road, a spine which will form the centre of the ‘New Dubai.’

IT/Media. Dubai has emerged as a leading centre of Information Technology in the region, a fact which is accentuated annually through its GITEX exhibition (an IT trade show). However, a more proactive response was through what has become known as ‘Internet City’ which was one of the first ‘megaprojects’ to be built. Announced by Dubai’s crown prince Sheikh Mohamed Maktoum in 1999 it was completed in less than a year. According to official statements ‘The mission of Dubai Internet City is to create an infrastructure, environment and attitude that will enable Information and Communications Technology (ICT) enterprises to operate locally, regionally and globally, from Dubai, with significant competitive advantage’. Within the short time span in which it has been operating it has become home for some major companies who have set up regional offices; for example, Microsoft, Oracle, Canon and many others.

Comprising a series of office buildings overlooking an artificial lake and lush gardens, the city is located adjacent to Sheikh Zayed Highway, a newly formed corridor along which the city is currently expanding. Entry is through a gate which is designed to reflect a traditional wind tower and a series of screens which contain a set of ‘Islamic’ motifs, and leads to a series of glass buildings such as one may find in any high-tech park in Malaysia or Silicon Valley for example. The entire project is protected by a fence although entry is free to anyone (provided they have a car) (figure 8.5).

Located nearby is Media City, a similar arrangement to Internet City, although in this case related to the Media Industry. This city is also comprised of office blocks within an artificial landscape. It houses studios, newsrooms and has become a regional centre for many media companies such as Reuters, CNN, MBC and others. The anonymity of the office blocks in either of these two cities, only distinguished by the logo of their inhabitants, highlights the fact that they operate primarily on a global level, in some way disconnected from the surrounding reality (figure 8.6).

Mixed-Use Real Estate Communities. The city has its share of these large-scale developments which have become a defining feature of global cities everywhere. Of the more ambitious is one known as Festival City – due not only to its size but also its location. This waterfront ‘city-within-a-city’ spans 3.5 kilometres along the shores of the Creek and is set to transform, according to its developers, shopping, living, leisure and working lifestyles in Dubai. Designed as a centre-place destination, Dubai Festival City, a privately funded project of the Al-Futtaim Group, will offer a ‘world-class’ and ‘unmatched’ mix of entertainment, dining, shopping, a marina, hotels and residences, as well as an 18-hole recreational
golf course, and sports and leisure facilities. It will have fifteen communities, each with sub-zones, which will be developed in line with the Emirate's market demand. The masterplan also includes a 50-storey 'Promontory Tower', which according to officials, will become another Dubai landmark because of its 'iconic design'.

The project's location along the Dubai Creek is a 'vivid reminder of the long sea-going tradition of this Arabian port, representing not only Dubai's geographical centre, but also its birthplace, from which the modern Emirate emerged'. Thus the city is '... respectful of the past, yet designed for the future'. It is located in an area known in Dubai as Deira, the traditional mercantile centre and is close to City Center, a Mega-mall development by the Al-Futtaim group. Also, the 'city is relatively close to the centre of Dubai and has not been built in the 'new Dubai' to the north which is the site for many new projects. In this way the development is attempting to create an aura of accessibility which it also claims in advertising the project. Contextual references are made by noting that the development is based on two natural 'contextual features' – the desert and the sea – which are 'intertwined' throughout the plan to 'deliver powerful human experiences'.

Further away, close to Dubai Internet City, the world's largest master planned waterfront development of its kind, Dubai Marina is EMAAR's, a governmental real estate company, large-scale project where construction is well advanced on building the region's first 'intelligent city' that will eventually house 35,000 people in luxurious residential apartment towers and villas in a 'spectacular' waterfront location. This man-made marina is strategically located on the Arabian Gulf in close proximity to leading five-star hotels, beach clubs, international restaurants and prestigious landmarks such as the Dubai Internet City and the Dubai Media City. It is approximately 3.5 km long with 10 km marine frontage. Spanning an area of some 2,800 square metres, the project comprises 10 districts, each of which will be developed as a distinct community with a mix of hotels and apartments.

According to company officials 'the most advanced information technology systems are made by noting that the development is based on two natural 'contextual features' – the desert and the sea – which are 'intertwined' throughout the plan to 'deliver powerful human experiences'.

Financial Centres. An initiative announced in 2002 was the creation of a financial centre. This entails a multi-billion dollar real estate development on 450,000 square metres of desert, featuring a 50-storey headquarters and up to 14 other skyscrapers. Intended as a financial market for a region comprising the GCC, the Indian subcontinent, Caspian States, the Levant and east Africa, according to an official declaration the centre is '... perfectly situated between the financial centers of Europe and Asia, Dubai International Financial Center (DIFC) is a bridge between the east and the west serving as a gateway for the flow of capital to and from the region thus strengthening the regional links to international capital markets'. Described by some officials as a 'missing piece in the puzzle', the centre is intended to complement other financial markets such as Frankfurt and Singapore. The project has not been without its critics however, with some noting that it is just another example of 'desert parceling'. Overall, however, the project is seen by officials as a way for Dubai to establish its presence on the global map by claiming to serve '... a market of 1.5 billion people'; it also is seen as a continuation of other initiatives such as Internet City, Media City, etc.

Construction began with The Gate an imposing office complex, modelled on the Parisian Arc de Triomphe building in La Defense, Paris. Similar to its Parisian counterpart the opening in the building is meant to establish an axis with a city landmark, in this case the World Trade Center, one of Dubai's 'oldest' modern landmarks built in the 1970s. The gate will lead to a gigantic open plaza which will be lined with a series of office buildings, media screens and other modern urban amenities – more or less establishing a new city centre.

Office/Hotel Complex. The city's skyline, long dominated by the World Trade Center building, has undergone a dramatic transformation, which has occurred within the last 10 years. A defining landmark are the twin buildings of the Emirates Towers, an office/hotel complex. At 51 storeys and a height of 380 m for its office tower it is the tallest in the Middle East and Europe (figure 8.7). Other projects are being constructed nearby which will include Burj Dubai, the tallest building in the world, claimed to be a 'city within a city'. The project's developer is EMAAR properties and the design has been awarded to Chicago-based Skidmore, Owings and Merril (SOM). Official statements describe the design as being inspired by '... the cultural and historical influences of the GCC [Gulf Cooperative Council]' and this is achieved in the tower's base where the '... geometry reflects the six petal desert flower of the region'. It is hoped that the building will surpass the tallest buildings in the world such as the Petronas Towers in Malaysia and...
few years, thereby occupying a large chunk of Deira. A hotel has recently opened which is linked directly to the centre. Malls such as these are constantly being developed, expanded and improved. One of the more innovative which has recently opened is the Mercato mall which in its architecture represents a medieval European cityscape, complete with signs of deteriorating paint. To understand the importance of these malls, in particular as they resonate with the city’s historical mercantile tradition, the current expansion of the Burjuman mall is of particular interest. A Dh 1.4 billion (0.4 billion US$) development, it will, according to officials, ‘take its place in UAE history as one of the world’s most breathtaking retail developments’. History and tradition are ‘essential’ elements of this development which, by ‘maintaining the core elements of Arabic heritage and tradition while introducing the latest architectural designs and concepts’, provides a ‘beautiful look of modernity without losing its connection to the past’. The project is supposed to ‘usher in a completely new shopping culture’ by being ‘the one place for discerning shoppers of luxury brands’. Thus it will enhance ‘Dubai’s image as an international shopping and leisure destination’.24

The foregoing offers only a glimpse of the projects currently under construction. Hardly a day passes without an announcement of a new ‘megaproject’ promising its uniqueness in the world; for example, ‘Dubai Pearl’, a ‘landmark downtown concept’ which will include the Gull’s first opera house in addition to a mixture of residences, retail and leisure facilities, is to be located next to Internet City and the Palm.26 Another project aims at creating an underwater hotel.27 Yet all of these activities have not been without their critics. There is concern that a ‘real estate bubble maybe inflating.’ While it is argued that demand for office space is high some have noted that ‘this demand is generated by firms migrating from lower-quality buildings and many of these older buildings in less fashionable parts of town are increasingly sparsely occupied’.28 Thus, while most of these developments are geared towards ‘New Dubai’, the traditional city is in danger of being neglected – a characteristic of many urban global centres.

Evoking Symbols: The Sail and the Palm

The sheer scale and enormity of the monumental Palm development embodies the spirit of Dubai as we forge a bright new future into the 21st century. The Palms are by far the largest man-made islands in the world and form complete, virtually self-contained communities, richly indulging all earthly desires for comfort, convenience and overwhelming beauty. The Palms are a feat of ingenuity, imagination, and engineering which is sure to become one of the modern wonders of the world.

From the Palms’ development promotional pamphlet

It is easy to exhaust superlatives when describing Burj Al-Arab, a hotel that has already become an international landmark. Burj Al-Arab’s sail-shaped structure, soaring 321 metres above the Arabian Gulf, has become as much a point of reference in Dubai as the Eiffel Tower is in Paris. From Burj Al-Arab Hotel’s website

While the projects discussed previously are impressive in terms of scale and size they are nevertheless not seen as national landmarks or symbols. In other words, these megaprojects are perceived primarily through their economic impact and the revenue they may generate. However, within this list two projects stand out: Burj Al-Arab (Tower of the Arabs) and the Jumeirah Palm Island, a hotel and a real estate venture. These two projects are being used as symbols to represent the new Dubai – while aiming at
economic revenue as well, their semantic value, particularly in their choice of architectural symbols will offer some interesting insights within the context of this chapter. It will be shown how, through architectural devices, images are created which are directed at a global audience and this is done intentionally to further highlight the fact that Dubai is a global city. Issues of heritage, identity even authenticity become meaningless expressions in such a context.

Tower of the Arabs

_**Burj Al-Arab**_, or _Tower of the Arabs_, is a 56 storey (28 double height floors) 7 star hotel containing 202 suites, three restaurants, a conference centre and health spa. The hotel is built 290 metres out to sea on a man-made landscaped island (figure 8.8). The accommodation wings enclose two sides of a triangular atrium that runs the full height of the building. Its height is 321 metres making it the tallest hotel in the world and the fifteenth tallest building. The hotel contains a helipad at a height of 212 metres above the sea, a 60 metre mast at the top and a cantilevered restaurant 27 metres long and 200 metres above sea level. The total size is 111,600 square metres. Access is via a heavily controlled bridge. Only hotel guests and those who can afford the expensive entrance fee are allowed entry. The helipad is for those arriving from the Dubai Airport – as an alternative guests are whisked away in Bentleys.

The hotel was designed by British firm W.S. Atkins and its chief architect Tom Wright. They claim that the hotel is the ‘ultimate landmark of Dubai and indeed the region’. Furthermore, the project had to be ‘Arabic, extravagant and super-luxurious and – most importantly – become a symbol for Dubai’. Emulating such world city symbols as the Eiffel tower, Sydney Opera House etc. the architect looked at:

... historical-arabian themes like wind-towers before realizing the potential of the seafaring theme. But instead of picking on the time-honoured shape of the dhow sail, as many expected, he fine-tuned the design to incorporate the profile of a J-Class Racing Yacht, itself a symbol of opulence and technology. Eventually he had a design which would be easily recognizable worldwide as Dubai’s Burj Al-Arab – Tower of the Arab – a balance of east and west.

In describing the design process the architect notes that his main aim was to find an ‘iconic form’. His search eventually led him to discover that an easily, instantly recognizable form would be the proper approach. Regarding the issue of culture, the architect, after noting that initially he did not know the location of Dubai argues that its people were forward looking aiming at the future, hence his decision to move away from the ‘limiting’ historical context.

Stepping inside the hotel atrium – claimed to be the world’s tallest – one is confronted with gold coated pillars, extravagant fountains, and brightly coloured furniture pieces – in fact the atmosphere of ‘A Thousand and One Nights’. The sheer extravagance and scale is unprecedented – perhaps to justify the steep price tag (approximately $2000–$5000 per night). This opulence is justified by being cast as a form of traditional Arab hospitality. Planning for the hotel began in 1993 and it was officially completed in 2000. Since then it has become the ‘official’ symbol of Dubai. Its image is used extensively in the advertising industry, as well as replacing the ‘old’ symbol of Dubai – the Fahidi fort and Sheikh Saeed house (one of the first built structures in the city) – on car licence plates. The project has not been without its critics. While some have noted its extravagance others have pointed out that it displays a schism in its dealing with local culture, by trying to ‘have it both ways’ – suggesting ‘deep cultural roots’ even though the real point is to show the city’s sophistication and modernity – and that the project primarily aims to convince people that Dubai has more to offer than sand and distant views of oilfields. Also, in official publications the surrounding context is never clearly shown. The hotel appears isolated in the midst of a wide expanse of water – somehow hiding the inescapable and harsh reality of the surrounding desertscape. Edward McBride, expressing the official architectural reaction to this project, noted that the hotel is symptomatic of an era where ‘the medium is the message’ although unlike in Las Vegas, where one has roulette wheels, magic shows or night clubs, here the ‘spectacle’ is the structure itself (McBride, 2000). He further noted the projects exclusiveness: ‘the management has tried to heighten the hotel’s allure by preventing people from visiting it’ (p. 118). He describes it as a ‘ritzy haven from Arabia’s sandstorm’ and that the hotel has become a symbol of ‘the triumph of money over practicality’ by ‘elevating style over substance’ (p. 125). The project was thus designed from the top down by starting from a desired image and moving to its physical manifestation. Such a reaction is typical from professional architectural circles yet it belies the real intention behind the creation of these icons.
- namely the construction of identity which will be discussed in the conclusion.

**An Island shaped like a Palm Tree**

Located near the Burj Al-Arab Hotel is the Jumeirah Palm Island, a palm tree shaped resort island on land reclaimed from the sea (figures 8.9 and 8.10). The official numbers and statistics pertaining to the project are quite impressive: it will add 120 km of sandy beaches and will include 2000 villas, up to 40 luxury hotels, shopping complexes, cinemas and a marine park. The island will be built in the shape of 17 huge fronds surrounded by 12 kilometres of protective barrier reefs, extending 5 kilometres into the sea south of Dubai city. They will be accessible by barrier reefs, extending 5 kilometres into the sea. The island will be built in the shape of 17 huge fronds surrounded by 12 kilometres of protective barrier reefs, extending 5 kilometres into the sea south of Dubai city. They will be accessible by 300-metre bridges from the mainland or boat to two marinas, while the main causeway will also have a monorail system.

![Figure 8.9. The outer crescent of the palm.](image)

![Figure 8.10. Aerial View of the Palm Island.](image)

The island is claimed to be the biggest man-made island, and ‘...like the great wall of China it will be visible from the moon’. The palm was the brainchild of Dubai’s crown prince Sheikh Mohamed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, essentially responding to the expected increase in tourists. To cater for them additional shoreline was needed and the island – measuring 6 km by 5.5 km will give Dubai 120 km of new, sandy coastline. According to the Palm Development Company the project will ’... encourage Dubai worldwide, it will encourage tourism, it will encourage business people’.24 The date palm design was chosen because it is ’... one of Dubai’s most enduring symbols of life and abundance’.25

Interestingly the project was conceptualized by a New Zealand architect based in Australia – Warren Pickering. He was asked in 1995 to create a design for a proposed island. His proposal for an island shaped like a palm was eventually adopted. During three years of planning the project involved a total of 42 consulting firms and more than 50 studies, all especially commissioned to include key aspects such as marine ecology.

According to official publications, to reflect the ‘global outlook’ of Dubai, the development company is offering 32 architectural styles for its residences ranging from Islamic to Mediterranean to modern. These are shown to potential buyers in the form of external perspective images. Following the sale, owners may change the interior. According to the architect, the villas represent a new approach in residential architecture in Dubai. Rather than being enclosed on all four sides by a wall, as one may find elsewhere, only three walls are built and the fourth side will face the sea so that ‘people... enjoy the benefits of living by the sea’ – hardly a revolutionary concept but nevertheless offered as an incentive for buying.

In addition to these residential units 50 ‘boutique’ hotels will be constructed as well. These will offer different themes and will be built on the ‘crescent’ an 11 kilometre long crescent shaped breakwater protecting the residential fronds from the seaward side of the island. All hotels on the crescent will be low-rise not exceeding three storeys.

The architectural style for some of the elements of this project is described as ‘Arab-Eclectic’. According to US-based architect Larry Ziebarth (whose clients include Disney, Universal Studios and Sea World) this style offers a ‘sensitive blend of Islamic tradition with new architectural elements’. His company HHICP Design International has been asked to inscribe this style on some of the developments taking place on the palm. Further, describing this ‘style’, he notes that: ‘We have sought to create a building style that is deeply rooted and borrows from regional Islamic traditions, but with a strong dash of fantasy – which will become synonymous with the entire project’ (Belbin, 2002, p. 30). The result, as can be seen in the Palm Sales Center located on the shore and facing the island, is a ‘Disneyesque’ creation – not surprising given the architect’s other clientele (figure 8.11). It is interesting that all these descriptions are primarily directed at laymen – what is in essence described as Arab eclectic is nothing but a reminder of postmodern excesses of the 1970s and 1980s which are finding...
a re-affirmation in Dubai. That description, however, has been adopted by officials and is being used extensively in the media. Also, the literal and figurative are used not only in the site plan of the islands but extends to the design of some of the major buildings such as the Palm Centers – which will include a transport interchange for boats and a retail setting – where the design is ‘inspired by the Nymphaea or Water Lily and resembles a large flower on a reflecting pool’.37

The project is marketed as a means for individuals to realize a dream of owning property.38 Yet at a price tag of $500,000 plus, that dream may not be in everyone’s hands. Aware of such criticism, that the island caters for the super-rich or will become a ‘rich man’s retirement colony’ an official notes: ‘I don’t think it is only for retired people and it is not only for the rich either. The rates are very reasonable and many will be able to afford them’.39 According to recent sales records, taken from quarries around the UAE it is expected to be completed in 2004 (figure 8.12).

As a footnote to the above, further developments are being created. The Palm Jebel Ali, a similar island as Jumeirah built further north, is set to become an entertainment destination and offers some unique housing typologies. These include houses located on the water. The arrangement of these houses will reflect a poem by Sheikh Maktoum.40 Apparently the sale of these ‘water homes’ has been a huge success.41 Also, the Palm Company is building another island called ‘The World’ comprised of a series of small islands whose overall shape will be that of a global map. Each island may thus present a country or a continent. In advertising the project, the company highlights the exclusive nature of this development in that it is only accessible by boat. The chairman of the developer, Nakheel Properties, notes that these islands are for an investor who would ‘wish to own his own island’ and that these islands will ‘consolidate Dubai’s credentials in the super exclusive list of global destination spots’.42 The company is also responsible for non-water/island related projects such as Chinatown (now International City), a mixed-used project, with the aim of developing the ‘emirate’s increasing trade and tourism interest with China’.43

**Fragmentation and Mythical Environments**

While these projects are admirable in their sheer scope and ambition, they tend to highlight the downside of globalization. One might argue that they represent a form of hybrid development – at a purely formal level, but also in terms of adding value to the city and the country – they nevertheless emphasize ‘polarization’ and ‘exclusive-ness’, an unfortunate by-product.

The two projects have a number of commonalities. First is the use of superlatives to describe them: whether it is the ‘tallest’ hotel or the ‘largest’ man-made island.44 In using such attributes the distinctiveness of these developments is ascertained, thus setting them apart. Their exclusive nature is further highlighted by locating them offshore, and controlling access through a variety of means: security guards, entrance fees, and by their sheer extravagance, prohibiting (or inhibiting) ordinary folk from entering (figure 8.13). In that same vein, the projects are located outside the relatively dense urban context of Dubai – thus playing a large role in the development of ‘New Dubai’ which will supposedly replace Singapore or Hong Kong as the financial and leisure hub of Asia.45 In terms of imagery, the hotel and the islands are using easily recognizable symbols – the sail and the palm. While the sail can be seen from a general view, the palm is essentially a planning device meant to be seen from the air – not an everyday occurrence. Thus, the purpose is for this ‘image’ to be used as a marketing ploy; but also to become a symbol for Dubai. In the case of the hotel, the sail shaped image has replaced the traditional Sheikh Saeed house on all Dubai licence plates (figure 8.14). The palm aerial view is used in advertising and media campaigns for a variety of companies and financial institutions. While it is claimed that these ‘symbols’ are inspired by local and traditional elements, they acquire a more universal character: the sail, or the palm, are associated with many places throughout the world and are not necessarily exclusively linked to Dubai or the UAE.

The use of direct symbols such as can be found on various roundabouts and in other public spaces (the ‘coffee pot’ or ‘dal la’ appearing periodically in towns throughout the UAE) reflect a desire to connect with the past and to construct an identity vis-à-vis a predominantly migrant population.46 The Palm Island or Burj Al-Arab could be understood or comprehended as a continuation of such thinking, albeit on a gigantic, i.e. global, scale. In such a way the stage is set for Dubai as a global entity. Simple, humble developments will
not achieve such an effect. Projects will have to be big, unprecedented, and constructed quickly. Issues of scale (large) and aesthetism/symbolism (easily understood and communicated quickly, no time for abstract reflections) are becoming paramount!

Furthermore the perpetuation of ‘mythical environments’ is another feature shared by these developments – which occurs at a variety of levels and scales. The Burj Al-Arab reflects an aura of ‘A Thousand and One Nights’ opulence and decadence; also a simulation of a submarine ride to reach a seafood restaurant is one of its dominant features. However, the Palm in particular has taken this concept to interesting levels. The residences being sold are distinguished by created stylistic forms (Mediterranean, Islamic, Asian, etc.) thus offering buyers a ‘created’ environments catering to their desire — the formal language for establishing stylistic links is, of course, purely personal (effectively mythical); furthermore, the propagation of these mythical environments is taken below water in developing coral reef landscapes based on different regions in the world (the Red Sea for example); visitors may thus move from one underground environment to another without having to leave Dubai.

This water theme is of particular significance. Arabs have, traditionally, shunned the sea in favour of the endless horizons of the desertscape — yet they have always been fascinated by water. In many respects both the Palm and the Burj are attempts to connect with the sea and to move away from the desert thus becoming ‘modern’ and ‘advanced’ by overcoming the perceived image of a nomadic people confined to the desert — similar to Harran Munif’s fictional settlement in *Cities of Salt*, a seaside city constructed by the ‘Americans’ to house the Bedouins, relocated from their original inland settlements. The sea is initially viewed with suspicion yet with time becomes a source of fascination. Here, however, the settlement is initiated by the colonial power and Munif’s nomads have to go to incredible lengths to overcome their fear of building and living near water!

**Conclusion: Redrawing Boundaries**

In trying to place these developments within the larger context of globalization, questions of ‘urban identity’ ultimately must be addressed. Yet the unique situation of Dubai, unburdened by history and heritage, led to a *fabula nova* approach whereby the city is constantly being re-invented. In the course of this progressive ‘redrawing of boundaries’ there has been an apparent ‘... evacuation of the national’ (Oncu and Weyland, 1997, p. 10), and fragmented developments are geared towards a global audience. The city is thus being re-created through the gaze of the tourist, the look of multi-national corporations, and the stare of real estate development companies. In such a context it becomes quite natural for developments to become isolated and fragmented islands (figure 8.15). McBride argued that the overall effect of these projects is one of a ‘film set’ and not a city. While there are plenty of extras enacting scenes within rows of tall buildings — outside the frame is a ‘trackless desert’. He notes that ‘Dubai has built itself the body of a city without the soul’ (p. 125). However, and this is perhaps one of the main objectives of these projects, for many residents in Dubai they are a source of pride and a symbol of national identity. In fact they are used as tools to construct a national identity since they ‘reinforce the local identity among UAE citizens in relation to others ... and link [them] to a certain version of (sic) past’ but this identity-creation also serves pragmatic functions by ‘... attracting tourists
and investors to the UAE thereby linking the UAE to (sic) new globalism’ (Kazim 2000, pp. 428–429). But in doing so divisions are created by reinforcing the identity of a privileged segment (multinational corporations and their beneficiaries) versus an ‘other’ (low-wage immigrant workers). Given Dubai’s unique social structure, in which its fragmentation is in fact a source of its stability, such divisions may not prove as problematic – but the problem lies in the city’s (underestimated) influence.4

These images are being emulated by other (more traditional) cities in the Arab world. Suzanne Kassab in her analysis of post-war Beirut noted that the reconstruction of its old business centre follows a tabula rasa approach which relies on ‘fragmentation’ in part inspired by Arab oil cities (Kassab, 1997). Cairo is following a similar course as Farha Ghannam argued, whereby the global discourse has led to a ‘displacement of the local’. She notes, in discussing the displacement of local residents in Cairo from a poor neighbourhood, that:

... many ... families experienced the force of the global in their displacement from their ‘locality’ in the centre of the city. Their houses were demolished to be replaced by buildings and facilities that cater to upper class Egyptians, international tourists and the transnational community ... relocation [is] utilized as part of the state efforts to ‘modernize’ Cairo and its people. (Ghannam, 1997, p. 120)

Recent developments in Cairo also suggest that Dubai is continuing to exert a strong influence. In 2002 Al-Futtaim group opened a City Center, complete with a Carrefour supermarket, on the edge of Cairo – near to what is being called New Cairo. The incongruous nature of such a development, particularly as one moves through Cairo and observes the advertisement for the centre, is striking.

Thus, while hybridity suggests that questions of identity are finding some form of reaffirmation, by examining developments in newly created cities – those located at the East/West divide – one discovers that globalization may in fact lead to an erasure and a reconstruction of identity and a recreation of the city to respond to universalizing tendencies. The city of Dubai does provide a perfect example for such a course, yet in many ways it also offers a model for other, more traditional cities. It should however, in its strive to become a global centre, uncover ‘the real Dubai’ which does exist along the shores of the Creek and its marketplaces. This ‘identity’ needs to be strengthened, not in a superficial manner, but in a way which would make the city liveable for all.

**NOTES**


2. For a discussion of this issue see Ozcu and Weyland (1997). See also, AlSayed (2001) and Jacobs (2001)

3. It is interesting to note that Ashari, Yemen remained in Arab/Moslem hands throughout the entire Portuguese period.

4. Named after its founder Mohammed Ibn Abd Al-Wahab (1703—1791) who advocated a ‘return’ to pure Islamic values and abolition of ‘inventions’.

5. An interesting event known as the ‘Hyacinth incident’ occurred in 1910. The Sheikh of Dubai, at that time – Butti Ibn Suhaib, refused British demands for the installation of a British political officer, telegraph station and post office. In turn he was accused of hoarding ‘illegal’ arms, which led to an armed incursion into Dubai supported by the British warship, the Hyacinth, causing the death of 37 locals. Interestingly the charge of ‘illegal’ weapons was never proven (Kazim, 2000, p. 143).

6. Different identities were constructed among the various Trucial Oman sheikhdoms evidenced in the use of currency. During the period 1820 to 1945 all of Trucial Oman used the Indian Rupee because they were administered by the government of British India. After Indian independence in 1947 all sheikhdoms adopted a special Gulf Rupee. In the 1960s separate currencies were adopted. Abu Dhabi used the Bahrain Dinar whereas Dubai used the Qatari Riyal (Kazim, 2000, p. 224).

7. There is no consensus on how Dubai or Dibai, as it was widely known until relatively recently, was named. Of two theories widely espoused by historians, the possible favourite is that Dubai is drawn from Dab, the Arabic name for a spiny tailed lizard which was common in the desert of the Lower Gulf, although little known today because they avoid urban areas. Others believe that Dubai is a derivative from an Arabic word meaning ‘land devastated by locusts’.

8. As further evidence of British dominance they argued in the 1960s that given the various treaties signed with 'Trucial Oman' they had the 'right' to be their sole representative in the UN.


10. At the time of writing this chapter there were still some questions pertaining to the legality of this. The UAE federal law does not allow ownership by foreigners (see ‘Dubai — but do be careful’ FT.com, The Financial Times, 16 August 2003). A ‘one country two systems’ formula – similar to Hong Kong – has been proposed (‘Hong Kong model solution to Dubai’s land ownership issue’ Khaleej Times, 29 July, 2003).

11. The city is viewed as a completely independent entity to highlight further its global status and connectedness to a wider regional and international network. It is advertised as follows: ‘It is the Middle East’s biggest FT infrastructure, built inside a free trade zone, and has the largest commercial Internet Protocol Telephony system in the world. Dubai Internet City is a strategic base for companies targeting emerging markets in a vast region extending from the Middle East to the Indian subcontinent, and Africa to the CIS countries, covering 1.6 billion people with GDP $1.1 trillion. In line with Dubai’s liberal economic policies and regulations, Dubai Internet City offers foreign companies 100 per cent tax-free ownership, 100 per cent repatriation of capital and profits, no currency restrictions, easy registration and licensing, stringent cyber regulations, protection of intellectual property’.

12. Overall there are 23 TV and radio companies which are helped by a ‘favourable business environment for...


14. Omar Al-Futtaim, CEO of Al-Futtaim Group; ibid.

15. Lee Tabler; ibid.

16. Babak Es Lehjou of CORE (Core Architects Inc) Toronto, personal communication.

17. Other projects included in the EMAAR portfolio are Arabian Ranches, which has an equestrian theme, and the gated communities of Emirates Hills, which has a golfing concept. In 'Building dreams into reality', Gulf News, Supplement, 11 May, 2003.

18. The project is located behind the Emirates Towers complex, and Shaikh Zayed Road.

19. From the official DIFC website – www.difc.ae

20. The basic premise is that there is a piece missing in the puzzle. There isn't a financial center between Frankfurt and Singapore, said Dubai International Financial Center (DIFC) spokesman Geoff Rapp; International Business, October, 2002.

21. Another official noted that DIFC 'will be a center like London, Frankfurt, Singapore, Hong Kong and Tokyo', stressing it would not be competitive but complementary to the existing markets. 'We are not creating another offshore unit, but a center at the same high financial level as established international financial markets', he said, adding that the market was expected to be in business by the end of 2002. International Business, March, 2002.

22. One Dubai-based fund manager, however, described the initiative as 'another example of the government parceling up the desert'. 'Any initiative has to be welcomed as a step in the right direction, but it seems that at the moment it's another real estate venture whose only added value will be an alleviation of the country's red tape situation.' International Business, October, 2002.

23. 'After having successfully established Dubai Internet City, Dubai Media City and having launched Triajri and other technology enabled initiatives such as e-government, the launch of DIFC was the next logical step and an indispensable second pillar for making Dubai and the UAE a major hub in the global "knowledge economy"' (Gulf News, 17 February, 2002, p. 30).

24. The project has already attracted international attention as witnessed in a recent International Herald Tribune article which notes: 'Dubai is set to reach maturity as a global financial and business center by establishing the region's first money, capital and reinsurance markets. These new markets, brought together under the Dubai International Financial Center (DIFC), will add a new dimension to an entity that has already built a reputation as the region's trading, tourism, sports and information-technology capital. Blue-chip companies and financial institutions from all over the world are now established in Dubai... These companies are attracted by Dubai's pro-business philosophy, cultural diversity and first-class infrastructure, which includes the information technology demanded by international business.' (International Herald Tribune, 20 May, 2002).

25. 'Emaar opens registration for Burj Dubai; names Chicago firm for design consultancy' Gulf News, 22 May, 2003. Also see 'Tall Order', Identity, August/ September 2003 – a real estate promotional publication based in Dubai.

26. 'Burjuman to usher in new era; size and scope of the project have been enhanced by the finest features in architecture and technology.' Gulf News, 23 June, 2003.

27. 'Work on Dubai Pearl to start soon.' Khaleej Times, 24 August, 2003.


30. In 'Atkins wins world's best new building award.' (www.atkinsglobal.com). Also the architect describes the hotel consists of 202 duplex suites. The two royal suites, which rent for $6,000 a night, are occupied only occasionally. The basement seafood restaurant, enveloped by walls of an aquarium and reached by an elevator designed as a faux submarine, is not always fully either. But who cares? The hotel, with its revolving bed in the royal suite, is more talking point than opulence. But Bill Clinton, twice a guest, talks up Dubai as an exemplar of the possible marriage between Islam and modernity. (Khan, A. (2002), 'Dubai Financial, Technology Corporation Hub', The Nation, Online Edition (www.nation.com).

31. In 'RMJM to design Palm Centers; firm is selected from short-list of 11 architects.' Gulf News, 10 May, 2003.

32. According to officials UAE nationals account for 75 per cent of buyers while 5 per cent constitutes other Gulf nationals. Of the remaining, 15 per cent comprises long-time UAE expatriate residents and 5 per cent is from overseas. Other estimates place nationals at a much lower percentage.


34. A Palm official noted that 'this is definitely the most exciting time ever in Dubai's real estate history; for the first time expatriates can buy their own property and really feel a part of this boom... the increased demand for property has been a major boost to the economy. It is creating thousands of new jobs in the construction sector as well as other professions such as architecture and interior design, and, of course, the hospitality industry'. (Belbin, 2002).

35. 'Biggest man-made islands rise from the Gulf.' The Times, 1 January, 2002.

36. 'Our problem was that Dubai had run out of beach', Mr. Gergawi said. 'We were brainstorming one day. Someone said, "Why don't we make an island?" But just one blob in the sea was insufficient. The plan for a series of finger islands arranged in the shape of palm trees evolved as the best way to maximise the amount of beach front,' he said... Environmental concerns? Mr. Gergawi said they had been taken into account. Even if every detail of how so many people and structures would exist on slender slivers of sand is not quite clear, it is the attitude that matters. Khan, A. (2002), 'Dubai Financial, Technology Corporation Hub', The Nation, Online Edition (www.nation.com).

37. 35. 'Biggest man-made islands rise from the Gulf.' The Times, 1 January, 2002.

38. According to officials UAE nationals account for 75 per cent of buyers while 5 per cent constitutes other Gulf nationals. Of the remaining, 15 per cent comprises long-time UAE expatriate residents and 5 per cent is from overseas. Other estimates place nationals at a much lower percentage.


40. In a 2002 newspaper article a sales agent notes: 'There is so much demand from buyers, it is hard to meet the requirement with one island. Palm office currently has a waiting list of over 800 firm orders. With almost 90 per cent of the units put on sale already sold, they believe the 1,100 units on the nine fronds will be sold out in the next 10 days', said Zubair S. Mostafa, Marketing Manager of Al Khayat Real Estate. 'Buyers comprise mostly Arab nationals, Europeans and people from the [Indian] subcontinent who apparently prefer the Palm Island to other beachfront properties in Cyprus and Greece. Some 70 per cent of the buyers are UAE nationals.' "Palm project records biggest-ever booking wait list", Khaleej Times, 21 May, 2002.
41. According to official statistics buyers comprise Arab nationals, Europeans and people from the subcontinent (India). No specific numbers exist, although officials note that 70 per cent are nationals – an unlikely number given the population make-up of the city. Other sources indicate that the majority of buyers are expatriates – mostly GCC nationals. Khaleej Times, 21 May, 2002.

42. A newspaper article describes this as follows: The new residences will be laid out in a pattern resembling a verse from an Arabic poem penned by General Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum... which translates into: "Take wisdom from the wise people; [sic] Not everyone who rides is a jockey." M. Nair, 'Palm introduces residences on water concept in Jebel Ali'. Gulf News, 6 May, 2003.

43. This is reflected in numerous newspaper articles such as 'Investors lap-up Palm Water homes; over 40 pc sold on first day'. Gulf News, 9 May, 2003; also 'Water homes draw good response'. Gulf News, 7 May, 2003.

44. Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem as quoted in 'There is a market for individual islands'. Gulf News, 12 May, 2003.

45. The project is located in the Al-Aweer area of Dubai, 'Nakheel Properties to develop Chinatown'. Gulf News, 12 May, 2003.

46. A distinct Dubai characteristic. A 2001 newspaper account notes that 'It rejoices in superlatives. The Guinness Book of Records is on permanent stand-by to record them. Normally they apply to the biggest and best of everything that "Maktum Inc", can boast. It may be the tallest and most luxurious hotel in the world, like the phantasmagoric Burj Al-Arab, or the world's largest man-made port at the world, a metropolis which will merge East with West – Dubai as a mixture of Singapore, Seattle, and Saint Tropez. (Spiegel Special, February, 2003, pp. 126-129).

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