



**Gulf Research Centre Cambridge**  
Knowledge for All

Workshop 10

## **Re-engaging with the Gulf Modernist City: Heritage and Repurposing Practices**

Workshop Directors:

**Sultan Sooud al Qassemi**  
Founder  
Barjeel Art Foundation  
United Arab Emirates  
Email: [sultan@barjeel.com](mailto:sultan@barjeel.com)

**Roberto Fabbri**  
Professor  
University of Monterrey  
Mexico  
Email: [roberto.fabbri@udem.edu](mailto:roberto.fabbri@udem.edu)

### **Abstract**

Long-time neglected architectural and artistic productions of the modernization era are now at the centre of a renewed interest. In the last decade, a series of initiatives were launched to understand, analyse and re-engage with the once-modern city, which meanwhile lost its pivotal function and meaning. A city within a bigger city, the urban fabric produced in the Gulf during the modernization era has the potential to narrate the social growth, as well as the East-West dynamics typical of the region and citizens' memories of a recent past. Lately, media reported the news of preservation policies to be issued for the architecture of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. What future can be envisioned for the Gulf modern heritage? The workshop invites qualitative and quantitative contributions that will look at this compelling topic from a cross-country perspective pondering the cultural, historical and sociodemographic aspects of possible repurposing actions.

## Description and Rationale

In summer 2018 the Municipality of Dubai launched the Modern Heritage Initiative, intending to preserve a series of buildings from the 1970s, such as John Harris' World Trade Center and George Rais and Jafar Tukan's Al Khuloud Nursery School, among others. This is one of the rare occasions in which a GCC government agenda puts the word 'heritage' in direct association with the architectural production of the modernization era. For decades, modernist architecture in the Gulf has been equated to the demolition of the traditional *medina*, with top-down plans and the gradual *westernization* of the country. In the second half of the 20th century, the rapid urban and social transformation has been blamed for allegedly superimposing foreign narratives to local customs, blurring the contours of the native culture. As a consequence, people and institutions have demonstrated disaffection and a low sense of belonging to the 1960s-1970s city. Today, it is not the most appealing residential/commercial location, and demolition is normally accepted as a common practice to liberate strategic central plots to attract investors and real-estate speculators. Moreover, since the local population has progressively snubbed the once-*ville moderne*, it has become a vital and informal gathering point for 'other' citizenships.

However, and despite resulting in an incomplete vision, modernist architecture has been the language - for better or worse - of Gulf cities' global aspirations. Modernism again, both in the arts and in architecture, has been instrumental in reconsidering and negotiating fluid concepts like tradition, contemporaneity and identity in relation with society and the built environment.

In the last decade, a new tangible interest for these artefacts has grown stronger, as demonstrated by a variety of new studies and bottom up-initiatives. Scholarly research and publications, students' thesis topics as well as Venice Biennale participations, public debates and exhibitions, place-making campaigns and a few rehabilitation projects demonstrate a raising and compelling need to re-engage with the concrete city of the 1960s and 1970s.

Now, if, as it seems, the Gulf will move towards the preservation of his recent *physical past*, what conservancy can be expected or envisioned? Architecture is meant to perform as a *living organism* in synergy with the urban environment. Given the Gulf cities' tendencies to 'spectacularize' or 'museify' the built environment (e.g. heritage villages or history theme malls), and the wave of nostalgia perceivable especially on the social media, what can be a projected trajectory for these specific artefacts in the near future?

## Scope and Objectives

Within this framework and in relation with the last decade, the workshop intends to map, read and analyse initiatives investigating the notion of modern heritage, its potential and its possible reuse in relation to the Gulf city. The focus is not limited to actions of physical transformation of the space, but it embraces also reflections on cultural practices, strategies of urban re-appropriation and place-making.

The workshop also seeks to interrogate the historical value of urban heritage from the second half of the 20th century, examining how academic research and grassroots plans intervening on the urban environment are expanding the debate on Gulf cities. In the same way, the organisers wish to address how the reuse of this particular heritage could

foster the place-identity sense of belonging and how the re-appropriation of neglected spaces could also address the endemic land consumption in the GCC cities. Finally, the workshop aims to investigate the present condition of this urban fabric as a liminal territory for low-income expat communities, and the possible impact of future urban regeneration projects.

### **The Workshop's Contribution to the Expansion of Gulf Studies**

The workshop will build on the last decade growing interest in Gulf architecture studies, which generated a conspicuous progress in the specific fields of urban and heritage studies research. It will problematize the tendency to show the modernization of the physical environment as a one-directional phenomenon, a West-to-East technical knowledge export and not a bijective relationship. While many scholarships read the city transformation from a historical angle, very few attempts were made to envision future scenarios for modern heritage reuse. Since in most cases the parts of the city where these architectures sit became areas for informal dwelling or gathering, the workshop will also allow to investigate policies of exclusion in relation with the built environment, and how different interventions could rebalance the right to the city.

The workshop aims to collect participations that would offer a broader contribution to heritage studies, employing a multidisciplinary perspective to account for diverse and inclusive contributions to this field.

Since all Gulf cities had a very similar *imprint*, the critical examination of the 1960s and 1970s built environment will allow to consider architecture as an expression of the national narrative in a cross-country perspective, reading the Gulf heritage in its salient possible trait of *Khaleeji* identity. An equally significant contribution is represented by the recognition of Gulf modernist architecture as a paradigm of the relationship between East and West, and between historic patterns, indigenous narrative and cosmopolitan aspiration.

### **Anticipated Participants**

The workshop invites papers that address but are not limited to, the following topics:

- Gulf cities, forms and identities
- Heritage and conservation practices
- Urbanism in the Gulf
- Place identity and Placemaking
- Cultural practice in the GCC
- Modernity, tradition and transition
- Westernization vs modernization
- Youth identity and the built environment
- Heritage, memory and narratives of the past in the city
- Decolonial urban practices
- Liminal spaces and policies of exclusion
- Heritage nostalgia and commercialisation of memory

The anticipated participants of this workshop are researchers, academics, members of cultural institutions and students engaged in research on the region. The workshop will

also welcome contributions from architects, planners, anthropologist, sociologist, practitioners, etc.

## Workshop Director Profiles

**Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi** is a United Arab Emirates-based columnist whose articles have appeared in *The Financial Times*, *The Independent*, *The Guardian*, *The Huffington Post*, *The New York Times Room for Debate*, *Foreign Policy*, *Open Democracy*, and *ArtAsiaPacific* as well as other notable publications. Sultan rose in prominence during the Arab Spring, his tweets became a major news source, rivalling the major news networks at the time, until *TIME* magazine listed him in the “140 Best Twitter Feeds of 2011.” In 2018 Sultan ranked 19th on the "Arabic Thought Leader Index" by the Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute, the oldest Swiss Thinktank. Sultan was an MIT Media Lab Director’s Fellow from 2014-2016, and in the Spring of 2017 Sultan was a practitioner in residence at the Hagop Kevorkian Center of Near East Studies at New York University, where he offered a special course on Politics of Middle Eastern Art. In 2018 Sultan became a Yale Greenberg World Fellow.

Sultan is also the founder of the Barjeel Art Foundation, an independent initiative established to contribute to the intellectual development of the art scene in the Arab region by building a prominent and publicly accessible art collection in the United Arab Emirates. In January 2018 an agreement was signed with the Sharjah Museums Authority for a first of its kind long-term display of modern Arab artworks at the Sharjah Art Museum lasting five years.

**Dr Roberto Fabbri** is an Italian architect, researcher and current professor at the Department of Architecture, Arts and Design of UDEM - University of Monterrey. As a designer, he practised in Europe and the Middle East, mostly on adaptive reuse projects. In 2006, he participated to the 10th Venice Biennale. From 2010 to 2016 he worked with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for the rehabilitation of the Kuwait National Museum and the re-installation of the exhibition galleries. In parallel, he completed the repurposing project of the American Missionary Hospital, the Amricani Cultural Centre, which resulted in the 2012 nomination for the Aga Kahn Award for Architecture. In the same years, he was head of design for the museum Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah also in Kuwait, coordinating a number of exhibitions on ancient and contemporary artefacts. Prior to joining UDEM he taught architecture studio and exhibition design at the University of Bologna and at the American University of Kuwait. In 2014 he was visiting researcher at the Center for Gulf Studies in Kuwait. His research lines focus on the modern heritage and its rehabilitation, on middle-east architecture and culture, on exhibition design and display methodologies. He contributed to several international conferences and seminars in Italy, UK, France, Lebanon, Mexico, the United States and Kuwait, and published extensively on academic journals and architectural magazines such as *Domus*, *Faces-Journal d’Architecture* and *IJIA*. He released two monographs on the architectural work of Max Bill (Mondadori 2011; inFolio 2017) and he co-authored the double volume “Modern Architecture Kuwait 1949-89” (Niggli 2016 and 2017).

## Selected Readings

Caline Malek, "Rising Gulf Cities look to protect landmarks," *Arab News*, Sept. 3, 2018.

Yasser Elsheshtawy, "We need to talk about the Modernism Fetish in the Gulf," Dec. 26, 2017 <http://dubaization.com/post/168964409563/we-need-to-talk-about-the-modernism-fetish-in-the-Gulf>

Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi, "Demystifying Sharjah's iconic King Faisal Mosque," *Gulf News*, November 16, 2017.

Amale Andraos, Nora Akawi eds. with Caitlin Blanchfield, *The Arab City: Architecture and Representation* (New York: Columbia Books on Architecture and the City, 2016).

Fabbri Roberto, Saragoça Sara and Camacho Ricardo, *Modern Architecture Kuwait 1949-1989* (Zurich: Niggli Verlag, 2016 and 2017).

George Katodrytis and Kevin Mitchell (eds.), "UAE and the Gulf. Architecture and Urbanism Now," *Architectural Design* no.233, January/February 2015.

Nezar AlSayyad, *Traditions. The "Real", the Hyper and the Virtual in the Built Environment* (London: Routledge, 2014).

miriam cooke, *Tribal Modern. Branding New Nations in the Arab Gulf* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

George Arbid ed., *Architecture from the Arab World (1914-2014) a Selection*, (Beirut: The Ministry of Culture of Bahrain and the Arab Center for Architecture, 2014).

Bambling Michele ed., *Lest We Forget: Structures of Memories in the UAE* (La Biennale di Venezia, 2014).

Pascal Menoret, Abu Dhabi Guide: Modern Architecture, 1968-1992 (Abu Dhabi: NYUAD/Find, 2014)

Karen Exell and Trinidad Rico eds., *Cultural Heritage in the Arabian Peninsula. Debates, Discourse and Practices* (London: Routledge, 2014).

Nasser Rabat, "What is Islamic Architecture Anyway?," *Journal of Art Historiography* no. 6 (June 2012).

*The State of Arab Cities 2012. Challenges of Urban Transition* (UNHABITAT, 2012).

Yasser Elsheshtawy, *The Evolving Arab City. Tradition, Modernity and Urban Development* (London: Routledge, 2008 and 2011).

Sandy Isenstadt and Kishwar Rizvi, *Modernism and the Middle East. Architecture and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle and Washington: University of Washington Press, 2008)



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**2019 Gulf Research Meeting**

**July 15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>, 2019**  
**University of Cambridge**

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## **Re-engaging with the Gulf Modernist City: Heritage and Repurposing Practices**

**Paper Presenter Abstracts:**

### **Udo Kultermann's History of Arab Modernisms**

**Mohamed Elshahed**

Independent Curator and Writer

United Arab Emirates

[elshahedm@gmail.com](mailto:elshahedm@gmail.com)

Abstract:

In his review of the 1983 book *Japanische Architektur, Geschichte und Gegenwart* [Japanese Architecture, History and Present] edited by Manfred Speidel, German American art historian Udo Kultermann (1927-2013) distinguished between early European and American publications on Japanese architecture with more recent scholarship in which “a one-sided Western view has been replaced by a dialogue which takes the publications of contemporary Japanese architects and Japanese scholars into consideration.” One of the major contributions of Speidel’s book and the exhibition it accompanied was the inclusion of Bruno Taut’s works and writings as well as collaborations with several Japanese architects into the wider consideration of the development of Japanese architecture. Taut lived in Japan from 1933 to 1936 and he worked with local architects such as Tetsuro Yoshida and Gonkuro Kume, yet despite the bereft of Taut’s time in Japan Kultermann writes, “it will remain difficult to distinguish between the contributions of Yoshida and Kume on one side and Taut on the other; but, in the context of these architectural masterpieces, Bruno Taut helped establish a Japanese identity that influenced not only the collaborating Japanese architects but also the situation of architecture in Japan in general.” While Kultermann was interested in expanding the scope of art and architectural histories to include geographies such as Japan, Africa and the Middle East, his perspective is characterized

by three main aspects: a Heideggerian notion of identity and difference, considering architectural development in non-western contexts by generally favoring postmodern works by regional and foreign architects, being informed by the voices of local elites, namely architects, scholars and politicians.

In 1980 Kultermann wrote, “the emergence of young Arab architects is the first phase of a most recent development of revolutionary importance. Not only do they have to compete with the elite of large international firms, they also have to re-establish their identity in an architectural language which is linked to their own tradition.”<sup>i</sup> For Kultermann, the fast urbanizing terrain of the Middle East is a new frontier for architecture, developed not only with designs by international firms eager to gain commissions in a region undergoing immense transformations, but also by local architects who in his reading are mediators between a universal internationalism and regional specificity. Tradition and identity are themes that define Kultermann’s presentation of architectural developments in a region he frequented from the 1970s, invited by governments such as Morocco, UAE and Qatar to deliver lectures and to study local architectural developments. Since the 1950s recently independent states across the Middle East invested heavily in architecture and urban development, fueled by the politics of postcolonialism in some cases or in other cases by new wealth generated from oil and gas. In all cases, the region was undergoing geopolitical changes and architectural developments during those decades reflect the changing politics, economics and culture of the post-WWII, Cold War Middle East. Kultermann’s interest in the new architectures of the Arab World culminated in the 1999 pioneering book *Contemporary Architecture in the Arab States: Renaissance of a Region*, the first survey of contemporary architecture across the Arab region with works spanning four decades.

The book is best understood within the context of Kultermann’s oeuvre, a historian with a keen interest in global modernism who published thirty-five books including *The History of Art History* (1987), *New Directions in African Architecture* (1969), and *New Japanese Architecture* (1960), in addition to ground-breaking publications on female performance artists, new sculpture and architecture of the seventies. He contributed to Kenneth Frampton’s multi-volume series *World Architecture 1900-2000*, with a volume dedicated to central and southern Africa. The volume dedicated to the Middle East in the same series was edited by Hasan-Uddin Khan, a key interlocutor with Kultermann, and published in 2000, just a year after Kultermann’s own survey of contemporary architecture in the Arab States. The two volumes are distinctly different, while Khan’s volume consists of 100 buildings selected from across the Middle East, including Turkey, Iran and Israel, and spanning the twentieth century, Kultermann’s focuses on the Arab States from the 1960s to the 1990s. Throughout the 1980s Kultermann published a series of articles in *Mimar* magazine, edited by Hasan-Uddin Khan, on the architecture of Egypt, Iraq, the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, and Jordan. Kenneth Frampton’s ideas with regards to critical regionalism are strongly echoed in Kultermann’s writing on the region.

Twenty years after it was first published, this paper critiques and provides a close reading of Kultermann’s book on contemporary Arab architecture, placing the work in its historical context. As modern constructions across the Middle East continue to face ambivalence in the global discourse on architecture, risk demolition and continue to face an uncertain future, and as individual efforts across the region aim to catalogue

modern and postmodern constructions within various national contexts, Kultermann's regional record of constructions in the Arab world during the second half of the twentieth century is a unique and important publication. *Contemporary Architecture in the Arab States* is a pivotal yet often overlooked attempt to construct a historical canon for the modern and contemporary architecture of a region that is largely elided from the historiography of architectural modernism.

## **a[n] Absent Architecture. The Hybrid Nature of Modernity**

**Suha Hasan**

KTH Royal Institute of Technology

Sweden

[suha.hasan@abe.kth.se](mailto:suha.hasan@abe.kth.se)

Abstract:

The changes that have taken place in Bahrain and the region in which it is located during the past century are implausible; to name a few the rise, fall and emergence of new governance systems and nations, the transformations of economy, the changes of the trade routes, the changes in governance and the demographics. What is remarkable, as previously noted by various scholars, is the restructuring and rebuilding of history that is taking place through the framing of the heritage of the country creating a nationalistic accepted view of how the city-state should be perceived. Perhaps in a country that has over the years developed a high level of diversity having such a singular narrative is needed to create cohesion. This, however, entails a coercion of (an)other urban narrative(s). Therefore, by investigating an absent architecture, both the demolished and the unrealized, a different urban narrative can be constructed to demonstrate the development of the city and the spatial manifestations of social structures. By inverting the framework and looking at what is absent, the research would be conveying a social order within the city-state and producing a documentation of these invisible spaces to highlight their overlooked agency within the urban history. The objectives of the paper for this conference shall be achieved through a study of the absence and presence with the Customs House in Manama, Bahrain through three different archival spaces; a) the Special Collections in Exeter University, b) the National Archives, and c) Bahrain's National Charter Monument. Through a careful navigation between these spaces, the case study brings together fragmented histories in order to contemplate simultaneously on processes of deconstructing and reconstructing historical narratives. Concurrently the paper will be critical of the use of the word modern to describe the era that is being explored, burrowing this criticism from three different bodies of works that are of relevance; one relates to the region, another to the concept of modernity and the last to the notion of temporalities and concepts. This paper is part of a broader research project that investigates the invisible architecture of the city; deconstructed and unrealized spaces / projects in Manama, Bahrain.



## **Urban and Social Regeneration: The Case of Makkah**

**Jawaher Al Sudairy**

LSE Cities & Al Nahda Center for Research

United Kingdom

[Jsudairy@gmail.com](mailto:Jsudairy@gmail.com)

Abstract:

Makkah is represented as the sacred center of the Muslim faith, and the host of the annual pilgrimage. This status has rendered Makkah conditionally open to Muslims around the world who seek to visit or reside in the city. Allowing such access has resulted in a growing flow of immigrants and pilgrims over the decades. The magnitude of this flow has produced a population that is multi-cultural and largely foreign. It has also oriented the city's economy and physical territory around religious tourism.

Overwhelming demand for improved infrastructure and services has inspired an extensive regeneration project, the first of its scale in the country. The redevelopment program aims to rebuild the city centre and expand its capacity to accommodate incoming pilgrims. Accordingly, Makkah's city centre underwent major reconstruction, including expansion of the holy sites and development of a multi-modal transportation network of highways, metro lines and a highspeed railway. Further, through this program, the city succeeded in attracting major private development projects, such as retail malls, hotels, serviced apartments and commercial high-rises.

Carrying out this program has brought Makkah's immigration reality to the fore, as most developments are concentrated in the city centre and overlap directly with neighbourhoods that are predominantly comprised of immigrant communities. Hence, as the Governorate determines approaches for developing the city centre, it must also reconcile with the chronic socioeconomic segregation of immigrants in the city.

This paper will trace Makkah's redevelopment program as an extension of a prevailing model of urbanization through regeneration. The research question will focus on the motivations and implications of Makkah's regeneration as it relates to migration, and the practices that have been deployed or innovated towards its realization.

## **King Khalid Street: Modern Urbanism Revisited**

### **Lulu Almanana**

Arup

United Kingdom

[Lulu.almana@gmail.com](mailto:Lulu.almana@gmail.com)

### **Atef Alshehri**

McKinsey & Company

United Arab Emirates

[atef.aa@gmail.com](mailto:atef.aa@gmail.com)

Abstract:

King Khalid Street in the city of Al-Khobar represents the image of modernist experiment of new city planning in Saudi Arabia of the early 1950s. It is also an ideal urban street for its human scale, mixed land use and medium density. From a design perspective, the street has the physical qualities that promote a lively streetscape and can strengthen the social fabric of the communities around it. On both sides of the one way street, a new urban scene was staged with new building types, new architectural forms, materials and methods. The street became like a public display of how a modern Saudi city should look like.

It's not a coincidence then that this particular street holds a significant space in the local community's memories of the city during the 1950-70s, when the street was buzzing with interaction, exchange and movement and was dubbed as the 'Champs-Élysées' of Saudi Arabia. Those memories are integral to the identity of Al Khobar and the image of its public spaces and vernacular architecture. King Khalid Street ties together the story of the city by connecting its pre-oil boom history, how it grew and why, to the contemporary urban development occurring today in Al Khobar and will unfold in the future.

Despite its central and accessible location, currently the street is extremely deteriorated and suffers from abandonment. The retail shops are plastered with 'to let' posters, the quality of buildings is degrading, and on a pleasant evening in December there is no street activity in sight. King Khalid street and its wider context is an area of modern urban heritage that has been neglected by local municipalities and local retail and is very vulnerable today to collapsing under socio-economic pressures.

This paper traces the evolution of King Khalid street as an integral part of the wider planning and development process of Al-Khobar city. It also aims to clarify why this street in particular is a valuable strip of modern heritage in the Gulf, understand what caused it to decline over the last 30 years, and then explore realistic strategies to unlock the potential of the neighbourhood starting with repurposing and revitalizing the Street. Inspired by the urban structure of Manhattan, Aramco designed and built the neighbourhood of Al-Khobar Al-Shamaliyah (northern Khobar) in 1947 to accommodate some of its Saudi workforce, and provide accessible urban amenities for its foreign staff. Nestled in the middle of an orderly grid of 50 x 70 m blocks, King Khalid Street is a unique street in its design layout as well as the character of modern buildings that were built along it and the urban plazas between them. It is associated

with many under-represented oral stories and particularities of the city that are known to local citizens that lived and passed regularly through the street. It was the place to interact with one another intentionally and coincidentally, where street vendors, oud musicians and young children playing football shared the street surface, until retail boxes started to appear in far-flung places and cars dominated the street network and made it what it is today.

Defining local urban heritage and integrating it within city planning is important in every urban area and requires attention to detail and careful planning. However, given that Saudi Arabia still doesn't have laws and regulations that ensure heritage preservation, it is especially important to protect built heritage from various stages of history, and incorporate that as a key part of the urban image and urban experience of the city. Situated in a central area this under-utilized street is a prime example of modern urban development in Saudi and Gulf cities, where housing shortages continue to increase and there is a clear demand for regeneration but little know-how. King Khalid Street needs immediate attention for regeneration so that it saves Al Khobar from more sprawl, boosts the local economy, strengthens its resilience against climate change and promote tourism and cultural diversity. A great urban street is a dynamic public space that continues to redefine itself and evolve.

## **Operational Modernity, An alternative view of planning mechanisms in Riyadh**

**Faisal bin Ayyaf Al-Mogren**

University of California, Berkeley  
Department of City & Regional Planning  
United States of America  
[FAlmogren@Berkeley.Edu](mailto:FAlmogren@Berkeley.Edu)

Abstract:

The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time that bore witness to the transformation of Gulf cities from a series of small self-sufficient towns into large modern cities of global reach and economic prosperity. The typical narrative is one where this transformation is aided by well-intentioned western planners. Following a common Gulf scenario, 1952 was a critical year for Riyadh, when the discovery of oil and the relocation of governmental agencies to the city triggered large-scale shifts that transformed the small town into the largest metropolis in the region. A monumental figure in this process was Doxiadis, the Greek planner to whom was assigned the task of preparing the city's first masterplan in 1968. The plan was officially adopted in 1972. Doxiadis was a different breed of modernist planners. While he did follow few typical modernist ideas, he differed in that he believed in planning as a scientific enterprise; he considered cities as living organisms; and he held that task of the planner is to facilitate their growth. Based on data and science, on one hand the masterplan was emblematic of those main planning conceptions, but on the other hand it exhibited popular modernist notions such as the dependency on automobile and the strict separation of land uses. What is undeniable, however, is that Doxiadis left a major legacy on the city, and his plan remained a forceful tool in shaping intense future urban expansion.

The plan became a subject of passionate debate. While it is sometimes presented with a positive tone as a much-needed solution to an urgent situation, the popular attitude is to portray it negatively as the source of the city's current urban challenges. This article's scope is to explore the Doxiadis legacy in Riyadh, and to provide an alternative reading of the plan's influence as a reason for its continued relevancy in shaping the city's urban morphology, despite its many well-documented and often publicized limitations. The article suggests that both the project's critics and devotees share a limited reductionist view of the plan that overlooks Doxiadis' sophisticated understanding of the field as a dynamic process rather than a static entity. His efforts to modernize the city are commonly discussed as a physical exercise, yet, as this article contends, the plan's main strength lays in the rarely-noticed urban processes it initiated. What the plan created for Riyadh was not a physical structure. On the contrary, it devised a flexible framework for growth that adapts to the changing conditions, and that allowed the city to territorially expand in the following years. This framework is an extremely sophisticated approach to urban planning that Doxiadis is rarely recognized for, but this article suggests that it is Doxiadis' true legacy, his plan's main strength, and the reason it has endured the test of time.

## **Stories of re-use in contemporary Doha**

**Trinidad Rico**

Rutgers University

United States of America

[Trinidad.rico@rutgers.edu](mailto:Trinidad.rico@rutgers.edu)

Abstract:

Examples of re-use of modern architecture for contemporary purposes in the city of Doha are few and far between. Besides the much-publicized project of refurbishment and re-use of the Fire Station Building by Qatar Museums that has resulted in a thriving center for art and artists, many of these practices of re-use happen more casually, under the radar, hidden in plain sight but without the publicity afforded by traditional modes of production of cultural heritage sites. These are found in more residential areas of the city and involve the re-purposing of modernist residential structures for new commercial purposes (for example, for trendy cafes and restaurants). Remnants of the modernist city have also been part of the inventory of little stores scattered across the city that focus on architectural salvage, but these spaces are also falling out of style.

Yet, examples of safeguarding of modernist structures through the practice of re-use stand in stark contrast to two more visible and familiar processes of cultural development and re-development in Qatar: on the one hand, a growing concern with safeguarding the fabric of traditional structures (often referred to as 'heritage' in the traditional Eurocentric way, for example, under the auspices of UNESCO), and on the other hand, a project of modernization that seeks to revamp the fabric of the city along ultramodern, sustainable yet authentic, designs. The latter, invariably, has involved the indiscriminate and large-scale bulldozing of pre-modern and modern structures alike. It is worth noting that the field of 'historic preservation' that ordinarily supports the preservation and re-use of historic structures – as distinct from cultural heritage management - is not a noticeable part of the heritage discourses that have emerged in

the last decade in Qatar. There are, however, isolated initiatives by local and foreign experts to bring value to the modern architectural fabric of the city and attach ideas of cultural heritage safeguarding to these otherwise under-valued styles and structures. Some of these are run by expat consultants who have taken an interest, for example, in the ‘Doha deco’; while others are fueled by young Qatari experts who seek to revalorize those periods that have been obscured in the historical and economic development of the country.

Therefore, in this paper I examine case studies of architectural re-use that are excluded from these two narratives and can go practically unnoticed, as part of a 5-year ethnographic project that examines the emergence of heritage preservation instruments in contemporary Qatar. I bring attention to re-use projects that may not invoke famous architectural authors or visible contemporary patron institutions, and appear to have been carried out for practical and economic reasons rather than in alignment with a historic preservation dogma. In examining these narratives, I invoke various intersecting discourses: the establishment of state-sponsored attitudes towards modernization in general; imported value-systems brought about by projects of urban development and their experts; and local agency and innovation. This work does not seek to construct an overarching and total narrative that justifies the direction and appreciation of modernism in a country of the GCC, but rather highlight the untidy ways in which a care for a specific and idealized past is carried out independently of national initiatives.

## **Curating the Corniche: Retelling the Narrative of a Hotel to a Museum**

**Jumanah Abbas**

Masters of Critical, Curatorial, and Conceptual Practice.

Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation.

Columbia University

United States of America

[Jma2255@columbia.edu](mailto:Jma2255@columbia.edu)

Abstract:

When tracing the urban development of Qatar’s shoreline, the *Corniche*, most scholars focus on the causes and the final outcome of Corniche’s appearance, and most literature reviews disregard what happened in between. The Sheraton hotel by William Periera and the Museum of Islamic Museum by I.M. Pei, two Modern objects dominating the landscape of Corniche, initiated an unparalleled urban development that projected futuristic imageries and imaginaries. By examining the role of Hisham Qaddumi and other utopian interventions, the project will explore Doha’s realized and unrealized architectural proposals that forged a modern, liberal city. The essay will be divided into three sections; the first two will focus on the role of Hisham Qaddumi, a Palestinian architect and urban planner, who initiated and led the planning for the city’s urban morphology along the Corniche. His most noteworthy contribution was the Sheraton Hotel, the Corniche, and the Ministry Complex that connected the hotel to the museum. The third part of the essay will examine how the traces of Qadummi’s legacy was significant when the museum was constructed on the opposite side of the hotel. Therefore, the initiative of the project is to unravel how the waterfront line from the

1972 to the early 90s became spatially defined by an unimagined architectural practice, and most importantly, how Qaddumi's role framed the postcolonial architectural imagery of Corniche's urban development, one that arguably occurred within a curatorial practice.

## **National Identity between the Modernity and Political Agenda: The University of Baghdad**

**Ula A. Khalel Merie**

PhD Candidate

Sheffield School of Architecture: University of Sheffield

United Kingdom

[ulamerie@gmail.com](mailto:ulamerie@gmail.com) & [uakmerie1@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:uakmerie1@sheffield.ac.uk)

Abstract:

The post-independence phase could be considered as one of the most challenging stages in the development of modern Iraq. It witnessed several dramatic events and changes at Iraqi, as well as wider Arab and international levels. By the end of the second World War, and particularly during the 1950s, Iraq entered an era of progress regarding its economy, its social-cultural development as well as its urban development where the oil industry and its generated revenue have to be considered as one of the main factors that influenced the new image as an independent nation. Yet, questing this newly to be defined national identity was one of the main problematic issues in the post-colonial city's transformation. It was intrinsically linked with the political ideologies and its transforming powers, which aimed to manipulate the urban environment in a way to enhance national identity and enforce political independence. This could be highly factual in the case of Baghdad, which has witnessed extraordinary efforts to modernize and develop its image as a modern capital, when architecture was one of the principals means that generated these changes on the ground.

This paper will explore the relationship between establishing a national identity and the modern architecture in Iraq. As its case study it takes the University of Baghdad and analyses specifically the commission for the new university campus, designed by Walter Gropius, that should become one of the most influential post-independence urban projects of Baghdad and Iraq. Originally conceived and approved by the Iraq monarchy yet constructed during the Republic of Iraq, this paper argues that the university campus, which s Gropius described "The ideal project", was manipulated to promote the national identity between two political ideologies and become an icon of modernity for the city. The underpinning research draws hereby on various unpublished and un-translated archival material in combination with fieldwork conducted in Baghdad.

## **Gardens and Generators: Demarcating Dubai’s Modernization**

**Todd Reisz**

Yale University

United States of America

[toddreisz@gmail.com](mailto:toddreisz@gmail.com)

Abstract:

This paper seeks to engage the conference description’s observation that most modern architecture in Arab Gulf cities happened as a “city within a bigger city,” and specifically one of the earliest and most instrumental examples of the phenomenon. In 1948, British officials pursued land on Dubai Creek for the site of a new political agency. After over a century of less intensive oversight, the new agency was to trigger a more dedicated British intervention into the internal affairs of Dubai and the other Trucial States. The site studies, design process, and construction of the new Political Agency Trucial States (PATs) would in the end influence how subsequent modernization projects were pursued in Dubai. Referencing and analyzing public-record documents not yet investigated for the purpose of documenting Dubai’s modern urban development, this paper will provide evidence that Dubai’s modernization – defined as a centralized authority’s project of urban development and technological advancement – began several years earlier than many histories suggest. Nearly a decade before Dubai’s first hospital and twelve years before the creation of Dubai’s first master plan, the rules of Dubai’s modernization were already being set in place. These rules would go on to determine how Dubai’s leadership designed hospitals, schools, a business centers, and the city’s first “free zone.” For this paper, modern architecture is not a matter of style or an assembly of resources and manufactured materials; rather it is a suite of procedures.

## **Our Version of the “Hood”: The Endurance of Dubai’s Traditional Corner Stores**

**Rend Beiruti**

New York University

United States of America

[raa411@nyu.edu](mailto:raa411@nyu.edu)

Abstract:

Following steps taken by the United Arab Emirates’ capital of Abu Dhabi, Dubai Municipality announced the standardisation of traditional corner stores in the city and its replacement with franchises of the multinational supermarket chain 7-eleven in 2015. Government officials stated that traditional corner stores, also known as *baqalas*, were no longer suitable for the city’s standards of living. Since then, a growing number of *baqalas* in Dubai have been adopting a new uniform appearance.

This paper discusses the standardisation policy of *baqalas* in the UAE and the discourse that ensued as a result of the policy. After a brief discussion of the Abu Dhabi standardisation process, I zoom into the Dubai standardisation policy and its

requirements. Looking into the discussions that followed the standardisation announcement, I argue that the proponents of the standardisation (the officials) and its critics (some residents) use similar language in speaking about the *baqala*. Both sides discuss the *baqala* as an old urban entity and situate it in the past, though in different ways.

Using a combination of textual analysis and ethnographic research, I argue that the *baqala* is an active part of contemporary life in Dubai. Specifically, I discuss the social and imagined role that the *baqala* plays, emphasizing the *baqala* as a space of multitudes of experiences and encounters.

My research contributes to the discourse by studying a burgeoning body of artwork dedicated to *baqalas*, including visual installations and music videos. Discussing these artistic representations, I argue that the artworks open up the narrative about the *baqala*, beyond claims of the standardization's proponents and critics. I highlight the ways in which UAE-based artists claim ownership to the city through their *baqala*-centred work. Further, through interview materials, I explore notions of identity, belonging, and nostalgia that underpin the artworks and the artists' relations to the artworks. In doing so, I argue that reading the artistic representations allows for a more nuanced way of viewing Dubai and the social relations that comprise it.

## **Coffee Shops, Restaurants and Malls: Social Lives and Meanings in Dubai's "Glitzy" Spaces**

**Rana AlMutawa**

Ph.D. Candidate at St Antony's College, the University of Oxford

United Kingdom

[rana.almutawa@sant.ox.ac.uk](mailto:rana.almutawa@sant.ox.ac.uk)

Abstract:

Much of the existing urban studies research on the Arab Gulf has not kept up with international scholarship that explores the different social meanings that are created within what are commonly described as commercialized or neoliberal spaces, such as shopping malls. While Miller (2003), Abaza (2001) and others have studied social meanings people create within these spaces in the UK, Egypt and elsewhere; many scholars of Gulf urban studies still view these spaces with a myopic lens, claiming they are "inauthentic" spaces (ElSheshtawy 2002) that are unable to "foster any kind of exchange other than economic exchange" (Al-Nakib 2017). Through this dissertation, I hope to explore with more nuance the urban spaces of the "glitziest" city in the Gulf – Dubai. I will do this by conducting an urban ethnography "from the middle": with middle-class Emiratis and long-term residents of the city. Through this ethnography, I explore how middle-class Emiratis and long-term residents of Dubai create social meanings in Dubai's "glitzy" spaces, and how these groups use "tactics" (de Certeau 1984) by re-appropriating spaces and using them in different ways than they were intended to be used. I also investigate who feels included and excluded from these spaces, and who feels empowered and alienated. This research aims to fill a gap in the existing literature of Gulf urban studies which has dismissed the "commercialized"



spaces of the city as unworthy of exploration in terms of understanding the communities and social meanings created within them.

## **Building Identity: Authorship and Transnational Exchange in the Construction of Modern Gulf Heritage**

**Michael Kubo**

Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture & Design, University of Houston  
United States of America

[mkubo@uh.edu](mailto:mkubo@uh.edu)

Abstract:

A central stake in recent discussions of modern architectural heritage in Gulf cities has been the difficult question of authorship that surrounds many significant buildings of the 1960s and 1970s. Both the binary classifications of “local” and “foreign” architects and the theoretical framework of critical regionalism—in which local architectures are valued for their perceived resistance to a universal modernism from abroad—have obscured the complex networks of material, labor, and expertise through which much of the postwar urbanization of Gulf cities took shape. In this paper, I address the role of team-based U.S. design firms in the construction of modern Gulf heritage after the 1950s, a persistent elision within histories of both modernism at large and of Gulf cities in particular. I explore these issues through the under-examined work of The Architects Collaborative (TAC), the largest dedicated architecture firm in the U.S. by the 1970s and a key actor in modernization and nation-building efforts in Iraq, Kuwait, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia for over three decades after the 1950s.

This paper centers on two recent heritage debates surrounding projects by TAC in Abu Dhabi and Kuwait, in which differing assessments of authorship and signature have conditioned the contemporary value of these buildings in the midst of ongoing preservation challenges. In the case of TAC’s Abu Dhabi National Library and Cultural Centre (1974-80), the current preservation of the building has relied on problematic claims that the building was authored by an Iraqi architect while an employee at TAC, distorting the collaborative history of its production in order to present the Cultural Centre as an important example of singular creative authorship. Such claims that the building is both uniquely authored and “local” evidence of a modern Gulf regionalism have worked in favor of efforts to meticulously restore the Cultural Centre as an iconic monument of nation-building in the UAE. A rather different fate has surrounded a series of commercial parking garages, or souqs, designed by TAC in collaboration with Pan Arab Consulting Engineers (PACE) in Kuwait in the same years (1973-79). Despite their success as crucial parts of the city’s modern urban heritage after the 1960s, these souqs have commonly been regarded as elements of anonymous infrastructure, despite their provenance from the same office (and featuring many of the same design techniques and motifs) as signature icons of Kuwaiti nation-building such as the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (1968–73). Despite their status as prominent examples of the new, hybrid building types that marked Kuwaiti urbanization in the 1970s, and their value as pioneering cases for new material and construction technologies developed through joint ventures between Kuwaiti consultants and U.S. firms, these souqs have remained largely neglected in debates on Kuwait’s modern

heritage, leaving them vulnerable to recent threats of demolition or alteration.

Questioning the construction of the local/foreign binary in assessing these buildings, I explore the transnational and multidirectional forms of authorship and exchange through which such emblems of Gulf modernism took shape. Addressing the discursive ellipsis between conventional histories of modern architecture and the heavy reliance of U.S. firms on collaborative commissions in Gulf cities, I trace how, paradoxically, post-colonial critiques of such work as Orientalist have often served to preclude a more detailed account of the sustained, reciprocal influence between local consultants and engineers, team-based foreign design practices, and the transforming economies of the Gulf states.

## **Urban Portraits: Preserving the memory of modern architectural heritage in the UAE by adaptive reuse and recording of the existing fabric**

**Marco Sosa**

Zayed University  
United Arab Emirates  
[marco.sosa@zu.ac.ae](mailto:marco.sosa@zu.ac.ae)

**Lina Ahmad**

Zayed University  
United Arab Emirates  
[lina.ahmad@zu.ac.ae](mailto:lina.ahmad@zu.ac.ae)

Abstract:

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), comparatively to European countries, is a relatively young nation. The country was established in 1971. The period after formation or “Etihad” as it locally known (1971-1991), saw the construction of a nation not just in geographical and political terms, but also physically, forming cities and infrastructure where once, there were small settlements and sometimes only desert.

Architecturally, the country is internationally recognized, defined by older architectural heritage such as the Qasr al Hosn royal palace in Abu Dhabi (1761) and the very new and extraordinary such as the Burj Khalifa in Dubai (2010). The buildings from the Etihad period can be categorized as ‘recent or modern’ architectural heritage.

It is important for communities to understand the value of these buildings, not only from an architectural point of view echoing the design and construction practices of the time, but also as places engraved within the memories of the cities' dwellers, past and present.

Architecture of this period was celebrated and acknowledged at the 1<sup>st</sup> National Pavilion UAE for the 14<sup>th</sup> Venice architectural biennale, 2014. This platform provided an opportunity to integrate modern heritage research into our Interior design studios at Zayed University, Abu Dhabi campus.

The proposed paper presents how the design studio in the learning environment can become a conduit for understanding the value of these buildings within the local community. This is demonstrated in a series of case studies of adaptive reuse design proposals for buildings in Abu Dhabi. The proposed provide a glimpse into the design consciousness of young Emirati females, who are yet to play a role as the future builders of their nation.

The second part of the paper describes adopted processes for developing different methodologies for recording the UAE's architectural modern heritage. The devised systems attempt to capture something beyond the metaphysical appearance of the structures. By using different media such as photography, reproduction of building facades and 3D scanning.

How to preserve a memory of a city? How do you prolong its architectural identity in the consciousness of its inhabitants?

## **The Historic Hotels of the Gulf**

**Ahmed Shubbar**

United Arab Emirates

[awshubbar@hotmail.com](mailto:awshubbar@hotmail.com)

Abstract:

On August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2018 the Dubai Municipality, in collaboration with other Dubai government entities, launched the 'Modern Heritage Initiative' (the Initiative). The aim of the Initiative is to "preserve the heritage of Dubai," by protecting those buildings "dating back to the sixties and seventies that are considered part of the memory of the place and that contribute to the story of the development of Dubai."

The period 1960-1980, as we will see below, was a crucial era for Dubai, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Gulf region generally, as it coincided with independence, new leadership structures and an oil boom that ushered in rapid, large-scale urban expansion. The body responsible for the Initiative has already drawn an initial shortlist of buildings and structures from this period that are earmarked for special protection and preservation including the Dubai World Trade Centre, the Dubai Clock Tower, amongst others.

In this paper, I make the case that the "Historic Hotels of the Gulf" are prime candidates for this Initiative and deserve preservation. Many of these 'historic hotels' fit the parameters highlighted in the Initiative: they were built in the period highlighted (i.e. 1960-1980) and, as I will argue, play a crucial role in "the story of the development of Dubai" and the UAE and Gulf generally. Indeed hotels and the hospitality sector have always played a leading role in the UAE's society and economy, whereby "hotels become destinations in themselves."

This paper begins by providing a historical and a geographical context to better understand the "Gulf Modernist City" and help us define what exactly a "Historic Gulf Hotel" is. It will then highlight some of the threats that these hotels face as well as

discuss some of the hotels already lost in the Gulf's relentless and continuous urban development drive. It should be noted that, due to space and time limitations, this paper focuses primarily on the historic hotels located in the UAE. Even then, discussions are limited to Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah. The city of Al Ain and the emirates north of Sharjah have been overlooked. The same is true for hotels in other Gulf countries that share similar cultural as well as developmental histories as the UAE. In order to illustrate 'historic hotels' as a Gulf-wide phenomenon, only the example of Qatar will be examined here. Again, this is due to limitations imposed on the author and may be covered in an extended version in the future.

## **Industrial Promises: Speculative thinking for the industrial districts of Gulf cities**

**Jason Carlow**

American University of Sharjah

United Arab Emirates

[jcarlow@aus.edu](mailto:jcarlow@aus.edu)

Abstract:

The top-down planning and privatized nature of the gleaming towers, expansive shopping malls, multi-lane highways and luxury villas of rapidly developed Gulf cities are examples of what urban sociologist, Richard Sennett might call a closed urban system. The closed nature of parts of Dubai and similar cities are in part due to the "over-determination both of the city's visual forms and its social functions."<sup>1</sup> These closed systems have, ironically, been built and are serviced by crews of migrant workers from across the Global South who do not have equal access to the closed city they live in. As rapidly developed cities like Dubai are built on real estate development, tourism and a finance industries that are fueled by global capital, a very large income gap between the wealthy and the working class has subsequently developed. The provision of affordable housing has become an increasingly important issue in a country with a large expatriate, working-class population and a large income gap between groups of residents across the socio-economic spectrum. Although developable land is seemingly limitless in the United Arab Emirates, due to tight governmental control over land policies and a relatively high cost of living, the demand for comfortable, affordable housing for working-class expatriates is significant. Many working class individuals are forced to live in cramped, corporately owned dormitories or within industrial areas of the city that offer few public amenities or open space. In reaction to the lack of public amenities, open spaces and space for leisure, the working class residents of the UAE's industrial zones have constructed, developed and inhabited an informal layer of leisure spaces between factories, in vacant lots, between parking spaces and at the periphery of the city. The informal occupation of the interstitial and peripheral zones of the rapidly developing, twenty-first century city by the working class reveals potential for the design of strategic, infrastructural amenities and new forms of affordable housing. This paper features site research that outlines the ways in which industrial areas have potential to become models for mixed-use, urban development. It also describes speculative design work that proposes architectural and infrastructural strategies for the transformation of industrial districts into re-purposed sites able to support a more equitable urban environment based on Sennett's definition of an open city.

## **Kuwaiti cultural modernity: an unfinished project**

### **Asseel Al-Ragam**

Associate Professor of Architecture

Director of the Graduate Program in Architecture

Vice Dean for Academic Affairs, Research and Graduate Studies

College of Architecture

Kuwait University

Kuwait

[alragam@gmail.com](mailto:alragam@gmail.com) & [asseel.alraqam@ku.edu.kw](mailto:asseel.alraqam@ku.edu.kw)

### Abstract:

An increase in the construction of “cultural centres” in Kuwait calls for a re-examination of the relationship between the production of space, heritage and cultural identity. The first modern wave of heritage production began in earnest as part of a nation-building project in the late 1950s. However, this more recent trend marks state re-engagement with conceptions of heritage, display and performance after a cycle of derisive policies and conservative values in the post-1991 Gulf War period. This expansion signals an alternative mode of cultural output tied to regional socio-political tensions and an fluctuating post-oil economy. Similar to other Gulf countries, Kuwait is addressing these challenges through rebranding strategies that, in part, rely on the performance of designing and constructing extravagant cultural buildings. In concert, new galleries alongside well-established ones challenge prevailing methods of understanding artistic and design practice. Often embedding themselves into the existing building stock, they regenerate the surrounding urban fabric through adaptive reuse strategies; and, as a result, participate in re-defining exhibition space and display. These competing public and private repositories of culture can be traced back to mid-twentieth century spatial adaptations in Kuwait that helped different members of society forge modern identities. Thus, “space”, in its abstract and physical definitions, encourages and frames discursive practices in the built environment that are just as important as the knowledge produced and disseminated through displayed artefacts.

The paper briefly examines the evolution of Kuwait’s “Janus-faced” condition of cultural production and the ways in which it has propped up certain institutional, urban and architectural imaginaries. This sets the context for a critique of contemporary spatial practices that reuse existing buildings to reinterpret and re-appropriate aesthetic values and tastes. This critique challenges top down proposals for heritage building construction and display. It also expands on existing literature that examines the discursive relationship between formal and informal approaches to artistic practice and offers, through this case study, an alternative method of understanding the relationship between space, heritage and identity.

## **History, Memory and Narratives of the Past and Future: Three New Souks in Kuwait**

**Edward Nilsson**

Nilsson + Siden Associates, Inc., Architects & Planners

United States of America

[enilsson@nsaarch.com](mailto:enilsson@nsaarch.com)

Abstract:

Worldwide post-war modernization in the guise of “urban renewal” often included wholesale demolition of neighborhoods, later regretted because of the loss of historical fabric. While the mid-20th century world-view often focused on the future, a common response to 21st century globalism in countries undergoing change is a growing interest in past histories. Noted architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable observed that “One faces a dilemma peculiar to the very process of preservation: in saving the thing, the thing is lost and a substitute provided; the past is as evanescent and irretrievable as time itself.” On the other hand, Muhannad Albaqshi notes that:

“One may regret that the demolitions of the 1950s were not more carefully handled; however, they did usher in a new era and spirit. Kuwait City is not a place frozen at a particular moment in history. The history of Kuwait’s urbanity continues to unfold, but the memory of the old city will always be there guiding the future.”

This paper will explore a broad application of the concept of memory image in the context of Kuwait’s erasure of traditional urban fabric during the 1950s and 1960s. It will offer an interpretive reconstruction of the traditional housing type and the ancient souk found in the Old Town and combined together in modernist form during the 1970s economic “Golden Era” of social and environmental change. Traditional design elements will be described that were utilized to link the city’s past with its then projected future.

There is a demand today for greater sustainability in the design and operations of an existing building, and recognition of the embodied energy consumed by all of the processes associated with the production of a building. In addition, there is also interest in preservation of modernist structures from that era that reflect the unique period of the country’s historical narrative. The buildings are currently vulnerable to neglect and speculative interest amid rising land values; however, the construction type and substantial materials are useful assets for considering alternate scenarios. The paper will offer an example of how the useful life of these structures can be extended through adaptive reuse to meet the needs and spirit of the 21st century, while preserving links to its near past.

## **Beyond Formalistic Shells: Thoughts on Architecture and Identity in the Gulf**

**Kevin Mitchell**

American University of Sharjah

United Arab Emirates

[kmitchell@aus.edu](mailto:kmitchell@aus.edu)

Abstract:

As part of a major building program in Kuwait the Danish architect Arne Jacobsen was invited to develop a proposal for a new building to house the Central Bank of Kuwait in 1966. Although Jacobsen died prior to the initiation of construction in 1973 the building was completed by Dissing+Weitling, an office that was initially founded by Hans Dissing and Otto Weitling to carry out Jacobsen's work following his death. The design of the Central Bank of Kuwait exhibited the formal clarity and minimalist approach to detailing that characterized Jacobsen's work. There were also clear lessons drawn from the National Bank of Denmark project in Copenhagen, which Jacobsen had began work on in 1961 after being invited to participate in a closed competition. Jacobsen's highly refined initial design was responsive to the climate and resulted from a clear formal strategy that fulfilled functional demands. However, a major renovation that resulted in an addition and a new façade rejected the abstraction that characterized Jacobsen's late work in favor of an acceptance of the appearance of the "traditional".

As preparations were being made to begin construction on Jacobsen's Kuwait Central Bank another Dane, Jørn Utzon, received an invitation to participate in a limited competition for the Kuwait National Assembly Building. The choice was certainly informed by the fame that Utzon had gained as the architect of the Sydney Opera House. The first requirement listed scope of work document that accompanied the invitation stated, "The Architect should investigate the potential of local traditional forms of architecture, and the extreme climatic conditions of the area."; in Utzon's handwritten annotations on the document he made specific reference to climate but not to the traditional forms of architecture. This is not to say that there were not references but, like Jacobsen's design for the bank building, they were contained within the formal structure rather than expressed through "traditional" façade treatments. In an interview on the Kuwait National Assembly Building, there was mention of the importance of shade to protect from the harsh sunlight, but Utzon focused primarily on the approach to organization that was derived from broader regional precedents: "I have organized the building complex in a fashion close to traditional Arabian bazaars [...] All departments of the building (offices, meeting rooms, reception rooms, library, Assembly Hall, etc.) are arranged along a central street, similar to the central street in an Arab bazaar. The departments consist of modules of various sizes built around small patios or courtyards – connected to the central streets by side streets."

Both Jacobsen and Utzon adopted precedents from the broader region and adapted them in order to meet functional requirements: the Central Bank of Kuwait is based on an internally focused courtyard typology that is transformed into an atrium building; and the Kuwait National Assembly Building, as Utzon noted in the interview referenced above, is based on what he terms "traditional Arabian bazaars". The reliance on precedents is of course fraught with potential problems when the formal structure is

taken in isolation from the broader social and cultural factors that influence, and are influenced by, the spatial configurations. There is also the danger associated with making generalizations that deny the differences across a geographical area as large and diverse as the MENA region and, most significantly, succumbing to Orientalizing tendencies that are prohibitive to more substantial engagement with contexts and their complexities.

This paper will explore the relation between the particular approaches to modernism evident in the work of Jacobsen and Utzon, and analyze how the approaches were adapted for building within the context of the Gulf. The paper considers how notions like “modern”, “traditional” and “identity” were interpreted and manifested in buildings like the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Kuwait National Assembly Building.

## **Oman’s 1000 Earthen Towns: Analysis of the Abandoned Historical Settlements Phenomenon**

**Eithar Al Hasni**

Ministry of Heritage & Culture

Oman

[Either.althasni@gmail.com](mailto:Either.althasni@gmail.com)

Abstract:

This paper analyses the abandonment of the inhabitants of Harat (noun,sing: Harah, Historical Settlements) and the collective reasons that caused those exceptional earthen architecture historical sites to be uninhabited abruptly in a span of less than 20 years. There are over 1000 registered historical settlements in Sultanate of Oman, all of which are currently abandoned by both: inhabitants and urban planners.

Starting from 1970 up to approximately the mid-80s, mass migration from harat occurred due to the major economic boom in the region. This paper aims to understand the causes of such sudden migration from what was considered the way of life in Oman, which has been evolving for centuries, in terms of earthen architecture techniques as well as generations of social structure. This left the government and various stakeholders with a multidimensional problem regarding managing those massive abandoned sites. Though the urban progression of Oman is less drastic, and relatively more controlled than its Gulf neighbors, little was done to address the current city fabric and concentrated efforts were given to iconic monuments such as Bahla Fort which has been a UNESCO world heritage site since 1986, one of the earliest in the region. The major issue the paper addresses is the “architectural development stunt” that Omani vernacular architecture suffered due to this phenomenon. This sudden reset caused by eagerness to modernize and “catch up” left many unanswered questions after almost half a century of exclusively developing concrete cities.

Such topics are critical today, since many investors and locals are seeing the economic value of cultural tourism, this 50 year of dis-connectivity from vernacular architecture and construction techniques caused ill-advised decisions in restoration and rehabilitation, which is as counterproductive as abandonment to the built heritage of Oman.



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