HOW CAN ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL PARTICIPATION AFFECT INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE IN THE PUBLIC REALM AND THE CITY?

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Dubai

Where Strangers Meet: Art and the Public Realm

Foreword/Preface by Jo Beall

'I'm not saying I told you so but rappers have been reporting from the front for years.'[1]

Why is the British Council interested in the public realm? 'The public realm can be simply defined as a place where strangers meet'. So says the eminent urbanist, Richard Sennett.[2] If this is the case then the British Council, a cultural relations organisation that brings people together from different cultures, countries and continents, works squarely in the public realm. For around eighty years, through promoting the English language, the Arts and educational links, the Council has fulfilled its Royal Charter mandate to 'promote cultural relationships and the understanding of different cultures between people and peoples of the United Kingdom and other countries',[3] bringing strangers together from all corners of the globe to encounter each other. While formal or mainstream diplomacy primarily involves bilateral relations between national governments, the pursuit of cultural relations happens largely among people – in and through educational institutions, cultural organisations, communities and cities.

Unlike the private realm, such as the family where we know each other well and close up, the public realm is characterised by incomplete knowledge and, significantly, by place:

'Traditionally, this place could be defined in terms of physical ground, which is why discussions of the public realm have been... linked to cities; the public realm could be identified by the squares, major streets, theatres, cafés, lecture halls, government assemblies, or stock exchanges where strangers would be likely to meet. Today, communications technologies have radically altered the sense of place; the public realm can be found in cyberspace as much as physically on the ground.'[4]

While much of the literature on the public realm focuses on politics and citizenship, class and social identity,[5] the so-called 'performative school' offers a more cultural approach, derived from anthropology, focusing on 'how people express themselves to strangers'.[6] Taking this as our starting point our interest was in how arts professionals and performers, policy makers, and citizens, connect through the arts in different public realms.

Cities exhibit a critical mass of social, educational and cultural organisations, concentrations of actual and virtual communities, public spaces, and physical and digital connections. As such, they present a unique opportunity to use the power of arts, culture, education and the creative industries to power city and regional economies, catalyse urban renewal and to promote and share our cultural assets. The British Council has a presence in five cities in the UK and over 180 cities around the world, with its work extending far beyond this to several hundred cities and their rural hinterlands. From this base we are working to support cities in the UK and abroad to be internationally inspired and globally connected.

By using our knowledge, experience and connections we can support cities to achieve their international ambitions, working in partnership to create more livable, inclusive and vibrant urban spaces and places and to improve the quality of life for their citizens through exchange of knowledge, people, ideas, insight, culture and experiences. Our cultural relations approach is built on a spirit of

mutuality and co-creation, which inform this collection and how we engage with art and the public realm.

Most would agree that a good city is one where people's basic needs are met, where public services are delivered affordably and efficiently, where the economy thrives, the environment is protected and where public spaces are not only safe, accessible and affordable but also interesting and inspiring – alive places in which people can engage with each other and where creativity can flourish. Contemporary urban planners adhere to the view that beautiful cities are more liveable cities and culture-led development has become *de rigeuer* for urban planners in many places around the world. Within the arts the concepts of public art and public space are intertwined and as Geoffrey Crossick writes in *Understanding the value of arts and culture*, the cultural force of the city and its built environment plays a significant role in this. Yet as Crossick acknowledges, the tangible role that the arts play has been largely untested.[7]

This is a contested area with some seeing the harnessing of the arts to promote creative cities and urban economies as the instrumentalisation of culture.[8] Conventional public art can also be viewed as exclusionary, foregrounding the interests of elites over ordinary urban dwellers and artist-led gentrification.[9] The conversation surrounding cultural value is engaging with such challenges and the need to develop appropriate means of engagement and participation in the arts. Cities, with their vast and growing populations, their density and networks of public services, spaces and institutions are central to this wider discussion.

Underpinning our approach and captured in the spirit of this collection is that cities are about people and the character of a city itself and expressions of its attractiveness and liveability is generated as much by those who live in it as by its built environment and infrastructure, its governing body or political leadership. Cities are the sum expression of all their people, civil societies and the institutions that define the experience of being in the city.

Where there is an inconsistency between political rhetoric and local reality then city diplomacy efforts will likely be undermined. We cannot project an image of a city as the 'greatest place on earth to live' if the reality is only that for some of our citizens.[10]

This collection focuses on what happens to both identity formation and place making when people engage in the public realm through the arts. Its starting point is to recognise artists less as individual producers of *objet d'art* and more as collaborators, participants or producers of situations, shifting the focus from 'production to reception, and emphasises the importance of a direct, apparently unmediated engagement with particular audience groups'.[11] It explores facilitating participation in the arts in everyday and extraordinary spaces and shares ideas and experience of the public realm internationally.

The collection shows public artists grappling with often complex, social dynamics and relationships as they play themselves out in and through public space. Because art operates beyond the rational and the functional, it often challenges urban planners who by definition are Cartesian in their approach. Yet planners do recognise that cities are social spaces and that social spaces continually change and in the process, that cities are constantly made and remade. Amin and Thrift see the city, 'as everyday process, mobilised by flesh and stone in interaction',[12] growing and morphing around the actions and engagement of ordinary people. This is at the heart of the British Council's cultural relations approach, sharing international experience in the hope of inspiring understanding and opportunity.

Footnotes

1 *Ice T, Los Angeles Sentinel, 7th May, 1992 at the time of the Los Angeles riots. Cited in Edward W. Soja (2000) Postmetropolis, Critical studies of cities and regions, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, p. 374*

2 *Richard Sennett (2016) 'The Public Realm', Quant, www.richardsennett.com/site/senn/ templates/general2.aspx?pageid=16&cc=gb*

3 *British Council (1993) Royal Charter and Bye-laws, London: British Council*

4 *Richard Sennett, 2016*

5 *See for example, Arendt, Hannah, 'Public Rights and Private Interests." In M. Mooney and F. Stuber, eds., Small Comforts for Hard Times: Humanists on Public Policy. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977; Noel O'Sullivan, 'The Concept of the Public Realm', 2010, Routledge; and Douglas Kelbaugh, 'Three Urbanisms and the Public Realm', Proceedings. 3rd International Space Syntax Symposium Atlanta 2001, www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/3sss/papers_pdf/14_kelbaugh. pdf; and Richard Sennett, 'Quant: The Public Realm', 2016, www.richardsennett.com/site/senn/ templates/general2.aspx?pageid=16&cc=gb*

6 *Richard Sennett, 2016*

7 *Crossick, Geoffrey and Kasynska, P, (2016) 'Understanding the value of arts and culture', AHRC Cultural Value project*

8 *See for example, R. Florida (2002) The Rise of the Creative Class, New York: Basic Books and C. Landry (2008) The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators, London: Earthscan*

9 *See for example Miles (2005) 'Interruptions: Testing the rhetoric of culturally led urban development' Urban Studies, 43(2) pp. 421-440; J. Peck (2005) 'Struggling with the creative class' International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 29(4), pp. 740-770; and S. Zukin (2010) Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places, Oxford: Oxford University Press*

10 *Jo Beall and David Adam (2017) Cities, Prosperity and Influence: The role of city diplomacy in shaping soft power in the 21st century, London: British Council, p. 23 www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/g229_cities_paper.pdf*

11 *M. Kwon (2004) One Place After Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity, Massachusetts: MIT Press*

12 *A. Amin and N. Thrift (2002) Cities: Reimagining the Urban, Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 10*

Where Strangers Meet

Introduction by Claire Doherty

I am making my way along a train station platform in my home town of Bristol in the west of England. It's early summer, a time in which this harbour city reawakens, its public character more extrovert and social for a few short months before hibernating come October. But this morning, most of those around me are moving with the speed of a ritual commute – already mentally occupied with the day. Though physically moving through the concourse of a railway station, these people are already somewhere else – their knees locked under a desk, their faces buried in a screen. There are very few bodies at leisure – unlike the lingering space of the public square, or, for some, the lingering time of the lunch-hour. This is a public space in which bodies are propelled onwards; this is not a place of looking, agitation or agency, nor unexpected encounter. And then something changes…

In amongst the moving crowd are two stationary figures – in worn, khaki soldiers' uniforms. They are standing by the platform edge, waiting, occasionally catching the eye of a stranger. Incongruous due to the anachronistic nature of their historic costumes, they are all the more startling because of their stillness. They're not drawing attention to themselves through any words or movements. They are not exactly theatrical, but they're performing precisely because they should not be here. They are out of time and out of place.

On approaching them, I am handed a card in silence. It bears the name of a Lance Corporal who died on the first day of the Somme in the First World War – 1 July 1916 – and his age, 17. This is a memorial of sorts, but one that understands the public realm not as a stable site, but as a place and a time in a constant state of becoming; a place in which we are all implicated as actors and in which past, present and future are colliding. This is the progressive sense of place that geographer Doreen Massey once evoked as she described 'place' as a collision of events and times, memories, fictions, material culture and meeting points.[1]

My encounter that morning in Bristol was later revealed to be one of over two million uncanny encounters of First World War soldiers in public spaces across the UK on 1st July 2016. Though it felt intimate and specific – it was an artwork of immense scale, disbursed through multiples times and places throughout that single day, accumulating online as a mass public encounter and public memorial.

A project by artist Jeremy Deller in collaboration with Rufus Norris, Director of the National Theatre for 14-18NOW, the UK's arts programme for the First World War centenary, *we're here because we're here* became one of the most celebrated public artworks in the UK of recent years (explored in detail by Kate Tyndall in this collection), and it was a catalyst for my interest in working with the British Council on this new collection of essays: *Where Strangers Meet*.

We're here because we're here is representative of a diverse network of artistic interventions, projects, gatherings and actions globally that are challenging the way in which we think about ourselves, our pasts and our future potential, by changing our experience of the urban public realm. But even within the 12 months since Deller's performers infiltrated my consciousness and changed my perception of the temporal limits of public space, the title given by the British Council to this collection – 'Where Strangers Meet' – seems all the more provocative, all the more politicized than the phrase used by Richard Sennett in 2009 to describe the anthropological character of public space.[2]

Within the past year, as a culture of fear has built around the fault-lines of intolerance, strangers have become the silhouetted figures of potential violence lurking in the shadows of public space. Sennett's promotion of the 'unfinished' city plan, which allows for its inhabitants to adapt and change the public realm, seems all the more fragile.

"In a 'post-truth' world," UCLAN's Professor Lynn Froggett suggests in this collection, "the meeting of strangers in civic space demands ever more effort, reaching across gaps in recognition and understanding, and in urban environments beset by division and discrimination the need arises again and again. It impels the citizen to take a critical and self-reflexive perspective on their relations with civil society and the body politic. One of the key services that art can perform in urban environments is to change the conditions under which 'strangers meet' so that we can know each other better and imagine other ways to live together."

Where Strangers Meet considers the recent artistic, technological and political shifts determining emergent new forms of cultural experience in the public realm and in turn, what is at stake in the emergent forms of our cities' cultures. The voices included in this collection speak from disparate locations across the globe, distinguished from one another by their own set of conditions, and in some cases, distinct political positions. There are, however, some significant shared concerns which emerge globally. These include:

- The encroachment of privatisation on public space and the implications for freedom of movement or cultural expression and new cultural forms;

- The risks of 'artwashing' urban development, thereby disguising social implications and speeding the rate of gentrification at the expense of urgent community needs;[3]

- The growth of a culture of fear which threatens to infringe civil liberties, stalling the potential for individuals to freely adapt public spaces for personal or collective cultural activities, whether that be through exclusions due to political or environmental upheaval or the imposition of state forces of control;

- The rapid development of mobile technology and significant changes to the way in which people are authoring, co-creating and participating in culture and the emergence of simulated experiences and their ramifications for our understanding of what 'public' space might be and how it is constructed;

- A tension between self-initiated, self-directed cultural activity and organised programmatic approaches to city-wide cultural programmes for economic growth.

The collection embraces a broad definition of 'art' in the public realm which encompasses unexpected and unannounced artistic interventions, immersive, dispersed and networked performances and simulated experienced, direct actions and collective, grass-roots resistance through imaginative cultural activities. The collection gives insight into the concerns of architects and planners, but focuses less on form and design, than on the social, political and environmental implications of those creative practices in public spaces. It recognises residents, visitors, commuters and passers-by and new arrivals as active respondents – protagonists in, rather than just witnesses to, the stories unfolding in the public realm.

The meaning of 'public realm' itself is stretched and redefined through these essays by contributors who are concerned less with the theoretical discourse around the terms 'public space' and 'public realm' (see Habermas, Arendt, Mouffe and Sennett) than with the lived experience of publicness. There are clearly defined cultural differences of course in the conditions of public space across these distinct localities: for example, the provisional nature of public realm

from Mexico City to Rio to Cairo and Lagos contrasts starkly from one other, each with its own particular set of political and social conditions, ritualised public practices, architectures and topographies; furthermore the formal character of interior public space evolving through the privatised urban development explored by architect Diba Salam in Dubai contrasts significantly to that described by Karolin Tampere in her consideration of Oslo's harbour area and the work of artist collective Futurefarmers or Dave Haslam's exploration of the club scenes of Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham.

What does emerge are a common set of tactics that use degrees of subversion and collective action as a means to work as artists and cultural producers in the gaps between planning and lived experience. In his description of two consecutive forms of exclusion which emerged in Cairene public space following the momentous events of the spring of 2011, for example, Omar Nagati describes the revolutionary reclamation of public space by the public which led to exclusion through fragmentation, and the securitisation of public space by state control. "Art intervention in public space", he suggests, "work[s] through the cracks of the system, both geographically and politically, using design as a negotiating tool, and subversive tactics to mediate the different forms of exclusion resultant from the periods of flux and of securitisation." This responsive and agile mode of operating by artists, designers and creative practitioners is a common thread to emerge particularly where a city is in flux.

As this collection unfolded in 2017, a 7.1 magnitude earthquake hit Mexico City, rendering contributor Gabriella Gomez-Mont's words all the more resonant, as she spoke of cities who are in the process of imagining themselves out loud. Yet equally, whilst some are becoming acutely attuned to the need to adapt to environmental shifts and changes, so for others the public realm is increasingly mediated and filtered; this is a disbursed and connected public, largely occupying a virtual public space. Rather than explore specifically the internet as a form of public space, however, three writers have considered the implications of creative technology on our experience of physical spaces.

Professors Lynn Froggett and Jill Stein explore how 'play' through digital interaction in this shifting landscape holds out the promise of integration and connection. Stein surveys the digital platforms for collectively authoring spaces, such as location-based and location-specific mobile ambient storytelling; location-based mobile games; augmented reality experiences; and social location tagging/sharing, all of which, she suggests, "blur the lines between the digital and physical public realms by engaging city dwellers with a persistent layer of ambient information."

Froggett asks: "What is the impact on the public consciousness of this repetitive simulation, widespread engagement in flow states... and the 'Disneyesque' aesthetic of much game design? How does it affect human interaction in public space?"

Both authors look at critical, creative practices which are emerging as a form of resistance to a simulated, anodyne public realm to enable what Froggett refers to as a kind of 'deep play' whereby critical reflection and individual agency is triggered, rather than repressed. Furthermore, Tony White offers an insight into a live-streamed takeover of libraries by young people in the West Midlands of the UK as a means of considering the library as a public place free from judgement and catalyst for co-created content and unregulated behaviour. This chimes with Dave Haslam's assertion of the need for self-organised, uncontrolled spaces. "The fact is," he suggests, "great ideas come from the margins."

There is no shortage of future forecasting against which to set these reflections on arts and the public realm, but as William Gibson suggested, "the future is here, it's just not very evenly distributed."

Froggett suggests, "The capacity to affect and be affected by the needs and claims of others – who are not of one's friendship group, community or kin – is a neglected aspect of civic life. Affect flows in public space, as it does in private lives, informing how we act into the public realm as embodied and emotional subjects."

In a recent research inquiry into the civic role of arts organisations, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation identified common characteristics and operating principles shared by arts organisations committed to a strong civic role, namely they are rooted in local needs; develop community agency and build capability and social capital; as well as championing artistic quality and diversity and provide challenge.[4] Such principles are shared by the artistic projects gathered here which work upon the public realm, modelling new civic acts of tolerance, of resolution, resistance and challenge.

This collection tracks starkly different approaches to addressing the inequities of the present – through direct action, through collaborative exchange and by modelling potential new behaviours or processes. In his study of Utopia, Richard Noble suggested that, 'for artworks to be utopian, they need to offer two things which seem to pull in rather different directions: on one hand a vision or intimation of a better place than the here and now we inhabit; and on the other some insight into what Ernst Bloch terms the "darkness, so near", the contradictions and limitations that drive our will to escape the here and now in the first place'.

Former Queens Museum Director, Laura Raicovich spoke, when spearheading a new vision for the museum in 2017, of the importance of the civic role cultural institutions play with reference to the museum's Immigrant Movement International, a community space in Queens that provides free educational, health and legal services. IM is a partnership between the museum and Cuban artist Tania Bruguera, who is interviewed by Gal-dem editor, Liv Little for the collection. Bruguera describes her notion of *arte util* (useful art) as art which is "the elaboration of a proposal that does not yet exist in the real world and because it is made with the hope and belief that something may be done better, even when the conditions for it to happen may not be there yet. Art is the space in which you behave as if conditions existed for making things you want to happen, happen, and as if everyone agreed with what we suggest, although it may not be like that yet:

art is living the future in the present. Art is also making people believe, although we know we may have not much more that the belief itself. Art is to start practicing the future."[5]

The approaches considered in this collection can be seen to embody this contradictory pull: between the dream of an ideal society and the circumstances of the world in which we live. Some, such as Tania Bruguera's Arte Util and the work of Futurefarmers here explored by Karolin Tampere, draw upon the aesthetic strategy of 'modelling', as a process through which ideals are tested as types of micro-utopia, whilst others are more assertively direct actions. This difference is often determined by the ways in which the artworks have emerged: some are the result of commissioning processes, outreach programmes or as part of larger-scale urban developments, others are self-initiated and/or the result of collective action.

A consideration of these provisional, unfolding set of works and movements reveals the potential of art in public to expose and respond to the encroachment of corporate interests on public space, to the diminishing opportunities for social cohesion and to the invisibility of the displaced and dispossessed in public life. The significant risk, however, as outlined in the recent discourse on 'artwashing' and critiques of the 'creative city'[6] is "the deliberate use of arts and culture to secure future profitable gain rather than social inclusion or commentary."

But what emerges from this collection is a more subtle set of arguments for the involvement of artists and artistic practices in the development of our cities through collaborative action, resistance, creative invention and by offering productive alternatives through the occupation of the centre to reassert the periphery. Futurefarmers' proposition for a public bakehouse in Oslo for example operates as the means by which radical approaches in food production enter the space of corporate urban redevelopment.

Rhodes must fall © Schalk van Zuydam

Alongside this utopic modelling of potential futures are the equally resonant issues of grappling with a city's contested past. It is worth remembering that Jeremy Deller's soldier performers disruption of the temporal limits of public space in Bristol last year also occurred in a centre promenade in Bristol overlooked by a statue of slave-owner Edward Colston – a site of consistent and increasingly urgent debate in a city built on the slave trade. Historian David Olusoga explores the implications of public monuments as sites of contested histories through the protest movement for the removal of the Cecil Rhodes statue at the University of Cape Town and the subsequent violent rallies which erupted around the confederate statue in Charlottesville this August.

The act of commemoration has always been closely aligned to strategies of storytelling, by which a particular history of the past is sanctioned by those in the present to bring about a particular future. As Boris Groys suggests, 'The future is ever newly planned – the permanent change of cultural trends and fashions makes any promise of a stable future for an artwork or a political project improbable. And the past is also permanently rewritten – names and

events appear, disappear, reappear, and disappear again. The present has ceased to be a point of transition from the past to the future, becoming instead a site of the permanent rewriting of both past and future – of constant proliferations of historical narratives beyond any individual grasp or control."

As Deller's significant work of art in the public realm indicated on 1 July 2016, the potential of art in the public realm is to assist us with rewriting and reimagining how we live together in the future, but essentially by revisiting the past with new eyes, lifted from our screens, to feel the materiality of being in the physical environment and to look the stranger in the eye.

Footnotes

1 *Doreen Massey, 'Landscape as Provocation: Reflections on Moving Mountains', 2006 republished and downloadable at oro.open.ac.uk/7227/1/Journal_of_material_culture_pdf_version.pdf*

2 *Richard Sennett, 'Quant: The Public Realm', available to read and download at www.richardsennett.com/site/senn/templates/general2*

3 *See journalist Jack Shenker's recent article in The Guardian who characterised the threat of privatisation as the "insidious creep of pseudo-public space" where the control of 'acceptable behaviour' ranges from covert policing and surveillance to the less obvious 'planning-out' of free movement*

4 *Gulbenkian Foundation, Rethinking Relationships, downloadable from civicroleartsinquiry.gulbenkian.org.uk*

5 *Tania Bruguera, 'Reflexions on Arte Útil (Useful Art)', available to read or download at www.taniabruguera.com*

6 *See Oli Mould, 'Why culture competitions and 'artwashing' drive urban inequality', Open Democracy, Sept 2017. Download at www.opendemocracy.net/uk/oli-mould/why-culture-competitions-and-artwashing-drive-urban-inequality and Alexander Nazaryan, 'The 'Artwashing' Of America: The Battle For The Soul Of Los Angeles Against Gentrification', read at www.newsweek.com/2017/06/02/los-angeles-gentrification-california-developers-art-galleries-la-art-scene-608558.html*

How can artistic and cultural participation affect individual and collective experience in the public realm and the city?

Text by Diba Salam

Who is involved in the making of culture in the public realm and how might everyday culture be celebrated/reconsidered?

In 2014, '54 per cent of the world's population lived in urban areas, a proportion that is expected to increase to 66 per cent by 2050. Projections show that urbanization combined with the overall growth of the world's population could add another 2.5 billion people to urban populations by 2050, with close to 90 per cent of the increase concentrated in Asia and Africa,' according to the United Nations.[1]

Designing for such a significant growth in population along with climate change is a global challenge for all cities, new and old, emerging and established, big and small. New infrastructure developments should address this challenge and account for political aspirations too. At present rising 'populous' sentiment is placing an aggressive spot light on the important subject of national identity. It is perhaps even more pressing that our public realm is representative of the society it seeks to serve, which is vital for any city defining its identity. This subject area is vast and beyond the scope of this essay; yet the way in which we define artistic and cultural participation on an individual and collective level in the public realm is essential.

As a London-based architecture studio with bureaus in South East Asia and the Middle East, we approach this undoubtedly

prescient issue in the context of a city we are actively and practically involved in, this being Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. Dubai presents a very interesting case and is an undisputed success story in terms of its growth and resilience. Tremendous flows of capital, resources and tourism have transformed a once humble port city into one of the world's great business capitals. Much of this has been achieved through an intensive capitalist development market.

As an architect who experienced Dubai as a student in the nineties and a project leader pre-2009, today I experience the city as the owner of a dynamic SME,[2] Studio DS. Macroeconomics, (such as the recession in 2009), a reduction in crude oil prices, regional conflicts, a diverse population and the Arab Spring, among other factors, have shaped Dubai's evolutionary map into the city it is today. Its emerging cultural landscape is inspiring its urban design agenda, which in its current form needs regeneration – it is this shift that has attracted Studio DS to Dubai.

Before we define our interpretation of artistic and cultural participation at an individual and collective level in the public realm, we start by providing an overview of Dubai's federal system, its approach to governance, the extent of its public realm, and who creates and curates them, in what is now one of the most diverse cities in the world.

Background

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a constitutional federation of seven emirates: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Qaiwain, Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah. The federation was formally established on 2 December 1971. 'The rulers of the seven emirates agreed that each of them would be a member of a Supreme Council, the top policy-making body in the new state, and that they would elect a President and a Vice President from amongst their number, to serve for a five-year, renewable, term of office.'[3]

Downtown Dubai © Richard Brew

Jumeirah Beach, Dubai © Romrodphoto

Dubai's government, under the visionary leadership of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE, and ruler of Dubai oversees all policies and acts as a significant property developer. Many leading real estate development companies are owned, or part owned by the government. These semi-public companies represent the rise of business as a way to govern society,[4] reflective of strong emerging markets.

The Dubai government is therefore a very active facilitator in enacting policies, which aspire to continue their growth strategy. New sectors are emerging, such as innovation and smart technological advancements, along with a more personalised cultural voice. Nowhere is this more apparent than Expo 2020 Dubai. The central theme, *'Connecting Minds, Creating the Future'* introduces three sub-themes:

- **Opportunity:** Unlocking the potential within individuals and communities to shape the future.

- **Mobility:** Creating smarter and more productive movement of goods, people and ideas.

- **Sustainability:** Respecting and living in balance with the world we inhabit.

The world will meet at the World Expo; the first in the Middle East and Africa. The event and legacy should act as a symbol for change for semi-public and private businesses.

Semi-public companies, such as those part-owned by the government, have a strong civic agenda, leading design and innovation compared to privately-owned companies. They can experiment where private business cannot afford to. We draw on conversations held with some of those semi-public companies tasked with evolving Dubai as a city, such as Dubai World Trade Centre's (DWTC) Gurjit Singh, Senior Vice President, Real Estate and Meraas where Michelle Saywood,[5] Senior Vice President of Design explains that her Group Chairman's

direction *'was not to solely create revenue and sell real estate, but to evolve and grow the city'.* This is evident in places, such as City Walk and The Beach in Jumeirah.

Some private companies, such as Emaar, also invest in the public realm through their large masterplans based on touristic retail and leisure. These destinations are probably the most recognisable public spaces and make a significant contribution to Dubai's international brand. Dubai Mall is a perfect demonstration of a commercially driven public realm along with Emaar's future Dubai Creek development plans.

Dubai's cultural activities are managed by the government through Dubai Culture & Arts Authority (Dubai Culture). Dubai Culture's vision is to establish the city as vibrant global Arabian metropolis that shapes culture and arts in the region and the world. The Dubai Plan 2021 sets out the city's ambition:

The People: "City of Happy, Creative & Empowered People"
The Society: "An Inclusive & Cohesive Society"
The Experience: "The Preferred Place to Live, Work & Visit"
The Place: "A Smart & Sustainable City"
The Economy: "A Pivotal Hub in the Global Economy"
The Government: "A Pioneering and Excellent Government"

So, with this level of drive and investment what type of city will emerge and is the concept of public realm and collective participation understood?

Dubai's urban planning decisions must recognise how design can contribute to the 2021 plan. In its current form, Dubai's urban structures do not reflect regional historical models which have evolved over centuries. Dubai's first masterplan was created by the British architect John Harris in 1960.[6] But subsequent attempts to masterplan the city were compromised due to not anticipating the rapid growth

that followed the discovery of oil in the mid-nineteen sixties. When oil was first discovered, Dubai's, population stood at '40,000'.[7] Today Dubai's population stands at 2.79 million[8] with a UN projected growth rate of over two per cent per year.

It is evident that the city of Dubai evolved by reacting to its rapid growth, adopting urban sprawl models from the US, resulting in urban islands of residential and work facilities, consequently isolating communities. Consideration of how these cities within a city would connect and create sustainable urban communities, with active public realms serving their residents and visitors over time, do not appear to be to have been on the agenda. As a result, the native population, and a significant expatriate community along with foreign workers, often live siloed lives. Noting this, the government has invested in many public realm projects, such as public parks, mosque construction programme and heritage villages.

Dubai's active government cultural programme is impressive and inclusive. The balance between encouraging artistic expression freely and staged events is yet to be addressed, in part, this is attributed to the lack of public realm.

Defining the Public Realm and Artistic and Cultural Participation

Academic interpretations of the public realm vary from physical spaces inspired by idealist political systems to any medium providing a platform for communication between strangers. We are drawn to the Richard Sennett's words:

> 'The public realm is, moreover, a place. Traditionally, this place could be defined in terms of physical ground, which is why discussions of the public realm have been, again traditionally, linked to cities; the public realm could be identified by the squares, major streets, theatres, cafés, lecture hall, government assemblies, or stock exchanges where strangers

Jumeirah Mosque © Nadezda Murmakova

would be likely to meet. Today, communications technologies have radically altered the sense of place; the public realm can be found in cyber-space as much as physically on the ground.'[9]

A city comprises and is made by its people. The purpose of a city is to serve its people, primarily within the remit of economic and residential functions. However, the very fact there is an intrinsically homeostatic relationship between the conceptual and physical edifice of the city and its population necessitates the concept of public realms. A city simply cannot exist without the spaces between which one works and lives. The flow and confluence of people demand spaces without specific utility or purpose. These spaces form what can be called the 'public realm', which through thoughtful design and planning, should enrich and enhance the lives of its inhabitants through cultural participation.

The inescapable formation of public realms is clear, whether through intentional planned creation, or the inevitable consequence of city making. These places must exist, but why do people need them?

Human beings are, in evolutionary terms, social beings. No one lives in absolute isolation. The human imperatives for congregation and settlement are fundamental. The development of the human progress is determined by the extent and quality of interaction between us. The social health of a city is the social health of its people. Healthy lives within thriving social communities depend on the moments in between time and place. While the economic and family units find their place within the workplace and domestic dwelling, it is the informal interaction of peoples that facilitate cultural growth and human development, whether through active recreational activity, retail, places of worship or simply places where people go to meet. The public realm is again vindicated as essential for the adequate functioning of a city and its citizens.

Nonetheless, the public realms must serve the purpose of the city's residents and visitors, and be sufficiently adaptable to change with them. It is therefore vital that all citizens, are stakeholders within a community. The landscape of the public realm should not merely be an alien space of separation between other spaces or structures within a city, but rather a place of active participation and a sense of belonging.

Participation can only be truly achieved if all branches of society are represented as stakeholders, whether culturally or politically in arts and culture. No doubt institutions facilitating such interactions are being developed, which will enable participation, such as higher education and cultural organisations such as museums. In this moment, one is able to experience the individual and collective experience of participation and a true sense of belonging. Dubai's diverse population will relate to these moments and spaces differently, but this will add to the diverse and inclusive cultural of the region.

Historically, the concept of the public realm has often been correctly linked to the idea of citizenship. In relatively nascent cities or communities, the importance of the public realm in facilitating social cohesion and a sense of belonging cannot be underestimated. Art, architecture, monuments or sculpture are the instruments of design to that end. This calls into question the relationship between institutional authority, art and the citizen. Often art and architecture within the public realm follow a global-to-local dynamic, a spectacle created perhaps by the state or an institutional authority. These potentially powerful monumental forms of art within public spaces serve to forge a link to a certain heritage and sense of shared national identity and pride. But if local heritage sites are limited, if the public realm are not open to all, then addressing the void requires active participation and, if need be, reinterpretation of how these moments and spaces are expressed.

This does bring about a necessary acknowledgement of changing social norms and interactions. Social media and connected devices, not to mention virtual reality, have fundamentally altered how we consume information, including art and culture. The pace of life and the immediacy of things is getting quicker all the time. Lives are busier and fuller. The influence of traditional models of art and culture within city spaces is perhaps waning, especially amongst younger generations. While there is certainly a space for traditional monuments of art, adaptive interactive systems within the public realm are more relevant for today's youth.

Today, social media is the space where thoughts and ideas are expressed, where participation is apparent. Though it has its challenges, how it is used is changing and will continue to evolve. The median age of Emiratis is 30 years. This generation has grown up with social media, which is why some of the most connected youth are from the Middle East. Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi is a columnist and Twitter commentator on Arab affairs, spoke at a RIBA & DiT[10] tour we participated in. His articles on the changing use of social media in the

Middle East, highlights the tension between the need to express and growing government surveillance considering increased use of social media by terrorist groups such as ISIS.[11]

In time, the artistic fabric within the public realm can be so fluid and changeable that it creates a self-generating culture, constantly reflecting the collective evolution of the citizens' perspective. Temporary or pop-up installations that are utterly impermanent may well have a greater effect on individual and collective consciousness. The aim of such art within the public realm, should in part be, to promote the thinking of citizens; to begin that journey of discovery through generating enquiry, analysis and introspection, and then through cumulative association to generate a collective culture and a form of representative identity.

My interpretation of the public realm and participation within that realm, physical or otherwise, is inspired by my creative experience as an architect. The importance of active citizenship, representation and adaptive spaces that recognise a society's evolving culture is essential. Our designs should be adaptable to respond to growth, evolving cultural dynamics and promote active interactions at the street level, whilst providing forms which inspire the city's sense of identity and belonging. For it is at the street level where we believe strangers have the potential to meet in a way most places cannot compete.

Dubai's Public Realm and How Citizens Participate

It is difficult to consider the condition and types of public realms within a city without paying heed to the political, cultural, security, societal and even religious environments in which they are created. These matters must go hand-in-hand, in an ever more uncertain world. Art within the public realm can have many roles. It can and indeed does often reinforce widely held non-controversial values and sentiments that are easy to endorse. However, public art and public spaces also have an important role as a disruptive influence. This is

where the political landscape becomes intensely relevant. Why is it that so many protests, uprisings, and even revolutions take place within public realms, aside from the practical significance of being able to congregate within spaces large enough to accommodate a large body of people, they are also where institutional-state-citizen negotiations are brokered. Public realms can therefore be a site of power.

The flow of power can and has been witnessed in monumental terms as an institutional authority or even a monarchic rule displaying its dominion over the population. These very same symbols of power can also be subverted by the people who occupy the public realm as part of the political discourse of a city.

The Arab Spring influenced a generation of social media users to share their experiences. Sultan Al Qassemi's commentary elaborates on this point.

'A lot of the art that was created during the uprising in Egypt was ephemeral; much of it was graffiti, and if it weren't for technology, we would never have documented this art. A lot of graffiti artists would have their art painted over by the authorities within hours. But because of Twitter and Instagram, as soon as they finished their artwork, they'd take photographs of it, upload them to the internet and preserve the images forever. This art came to represent the culture and history of the country, whether in Egypt or elsewhere in the Arab world.'[12]

The legacy of the Arab Spring continues to allow many Arab artists to publish their work using social media. However, at some point, the need to occupy a physical space is essential in the creative process. Dubai Culture's program of activities seems endless, but it is a key platform for artist to promote their work in the physical sphere.

One project that captures Dubai's ability to address collective artistic participation and the government's insatiable desire to compete is the city's graffiti wall created in 2014. It entered the Guinness Book of World Records as the longest graffiti wall, at 2.245km long, and provided an opportunity for 150 international artists to use over 7,000 cans of eco-friendly spray paint to illustrate the history of the UAE. Countless other events map the culturally diverse calendar. As architects, we focus on providing a physical space where there is no distinction between place and public art. Sometimes this can be simply open land.

The key point is that the public realm plays a very important role as the backdrop or foreground to major political or societal events. These instances are not perhaps the most common uses of the space but are worthwhile considering in anticipating how the public realm, and in particular how art within it, can and will evolve over time, taking Dubai as the case in point. More acutely observed everyday specifics must also be accounted for. Dubai's national religion is Islam, in terms of place-making it successfully fuses western liberal values with Islamic tradition and custom. One of the most successful and

numerous public realms is the institution of the mosque and majlis.[13] Ignoring briefly the fact this institution's primary function is as a place of worship, it serves the purpose of a public realm remarkably well.

From an architectural standpoint, the mosque and majlis are often beautifully built with the precise Islamic geometric tradition and well invested in. They tend to be sited in easily accessible locations, viewable and audible to all. Anyone can enter them, and if correctly run they can be used as thriving community centres. In an ideal scenario, mosque can and should be harmonious centres of human congregation and, among Muslim population such as Dubai's, are perhaps sufficient as public realms, albeit carrying a far deeper purpose both spiritual and cultural heritage and purpose. Nonetheless the creation of what might be termed more secular spaces, that do not suggest any religious affiliations are also definitely necessary.

Emaar's recently launched open design competition for the design of a new 'iconic' mosque as part of their Dubai Creek development invites a global design dialogue on the mosque, which is traditionally a sensitive structure both spiritually and culturally. How the form stands in a greater mixed-use masterplan and the creeks natural habitat is an engaging debate open to all to participate.

A major hurdle to overcome within a city such as Dubai is, very simply, climate. European city squares, national parks, or other forms of open public spaces, are not as challenged by environmental climate as in Dubai. Temperatures in the summer can reach 50°C and up to 90% humidity, as a result Dubai's government restricts activities and hours based on the local climate for health and safety.

Interior air-conditioned spaces are almost mandatory all year round, however alternative spaces for people to gather during high temperatures must be creatively thought of. There is a strong desire to venture outside, hence why evening social activities are more prevalent. Dubai has the wealth and creative knowledge base

to negotiate these specific criteria and circumstances. Our work actively provides creative solutions to address this fundamental issue. However, the places focus must shift from purely retail, commercial spaces and tourist attractions, to place-making for all citizens. The creation of public realms within such a city-scape will, in time allow for the natural and organic growth of cultural enterprise. Segregated networks of peoples can integrate, increasing mutual understanding, learning and development, breaking down existing social barriers and fostering a collective sense of identity.

This sense of place-making should be the aim. While there is no guarantee, one element is clear, the critical principle is that the capacity for change and fluid evolution must be built into the design. Expo 2020 Dubai legacy should herald such places. Spontaneity is very often the visible result of highly ordered events. This is key to allowing a city to breathe and grow at its own pace. Whatever the public realm is to be, it should not be an imposition or a forced action. Culture is a voluntary exercise. The public realm must simply give space and opportunity for its fruition.

In terms of actual urban morphology and spatial conditions, the relationship of art within the built environment is essential and occurs in varying forms, however, more important is the power and use of art in public spaces. It can be commemorative and collective, or highly personalised and local. It should be part of the very fabric of the city.

Finally, urban planning cannot credibly overlook security. By definition, public realms must be places where citizens can exercise their rights of freedom and self-determination. None of these rights exist without security. Public spaces must be especially sympathetic to security issues and make adequate provision for law enforcement and visible surveillance. Beyond managing the patent security threat posed to all major cities of the world, properties of cities such as public spaces and art can serve as part of preventative measures. All too often we see fractured components of a society splintering away, feeling isolated and

being open to influence by more sinister fringe elements. Hence, why fostering a sense of belonging or at the very least a place to go is vital, especially in the context of the public realm.

It would be unrealistic to expect any of the aspects of urban design or art in the public realm discussed to fully mitigate a global security threat. However, the root of these problems is perhaps social and cultural amongst other factors. One might postulate that a more cultured, integrated and social a city is, the safer and more resilient it can become, a subject matter beyond the scope of this paper.

In a national context, there is an argument to suggest that infrastructure rather than geography plays a greater role in ensuring long-term peace and security, in much the same way as resource and trade links can promote enduring security by means of increasing co-dependency and shared prosperity.

Dubai's Public Realm Today

The issues discussed in this essay are global and complex. Our critique of Dubai's urban design, and appreciation of its cultural evolution, is motivated by the realisation that a shift in approach has already begun. No project can be a success without a strong client. There are a few companies who have changed the discourse in urban design in the city. We met with two visionary companies, Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC), one of Dubai's oldest companies, and Meraas, which is leading the way in actively translating the importance of place-making and cultural participation into popular developments. A quote from the Gulf News[14] reveals words simply not used in the past:
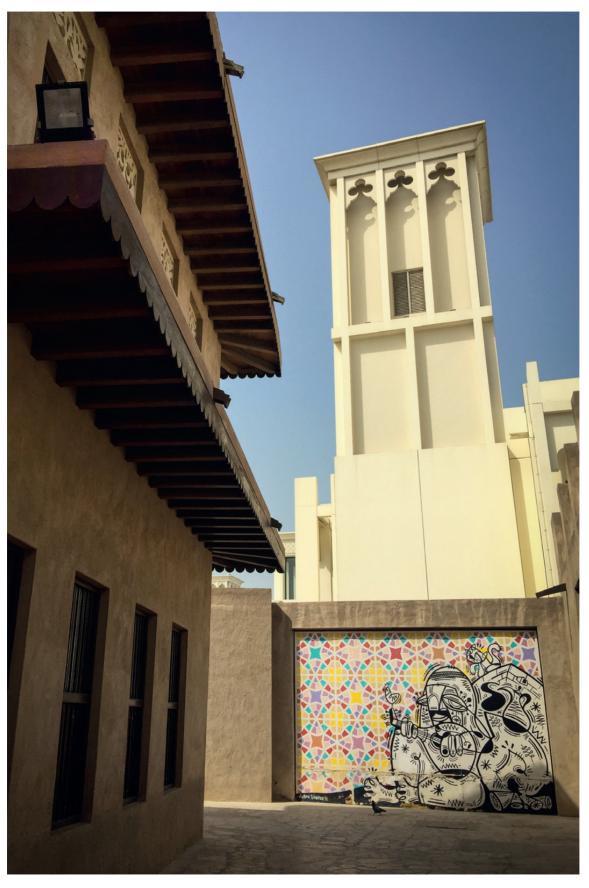
'The layout [at Bluewaters], according to Michelle Saywood, Meraas' vice-president of design, is meant to encourage residents and visitors to socialise and not to isolate certain sections of the community. "Those courtyards, those squares, those alleyways, those streets and the big plaza that sits below Ain Dubai, those are moments for celebration, socialising and gathering," says Saywood.'

A fundamental understanding of the public realm has produced parts of the city which define modern Dubai. Place-making and commerce produced at a human scale are serving the community and enriching the urban fabric whilst celebrating cultural participation at Meraas destinations.

Meraas's approach is also said to have become a social economic study, Saywood describes 'the whole group collaborating to create places. What is the environment I need to create? Why would people want to go there and therefore how do we get value out of that site? By creating great places people will want to come together. You exist in a city, where you are not forced to perform a task, you are engaging with the city in a public manner that few other developers in the past would do. Inherently you spend money because it's a nice place to go.'

The Beach is a destination by Meraas that captures all the above and has redefined my experience of the city. It is an open place which in my opinion encapsulates the very best of Dubai's character:

'Dubai has many assets, from its retail to its tallest towers, but perhaps its best asset is its natural asset, the coastline. When we first started working on the Beach, many places were hard to get to and the ones that were accessible had no amenities or integrated urban landscape as far as traditional notions of the seaside go. We wanted to surprise residents so we hoarded off the project but people were not sure what to expect. Some said Meraas was building a mall on the beach, which led to criticism from stakeholders because of the size of the 600m long and 100m wide development opportunity, but we only developed 30,000m² of the area. When people saw The Beach, the sentiment changed and the destination has become very popular. Footfall per year is around 16 million and The Beach generates high revenue,' explains Saywood.

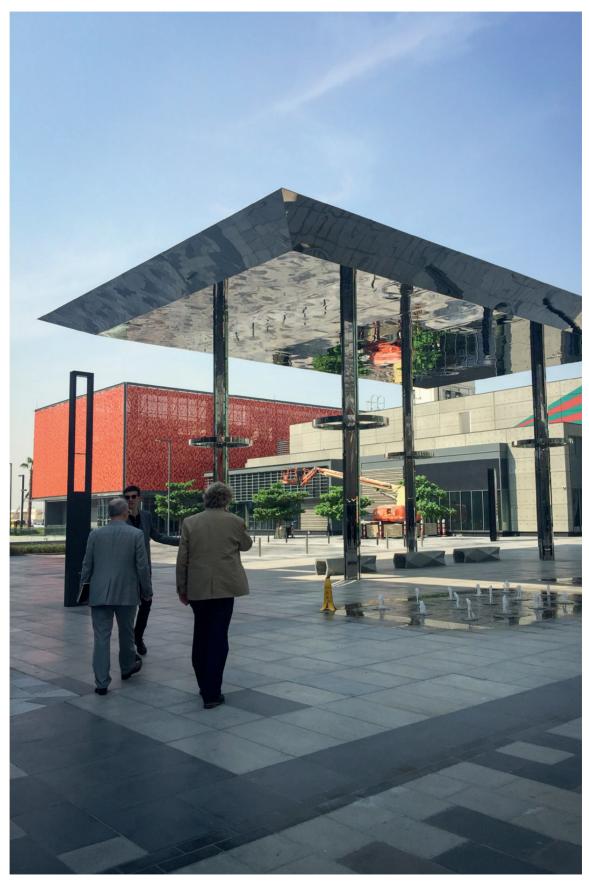*Al Bastakiya © Diba Salam Mawaheb*

Al Bastakiya © Diba Salam Mawaheb

Meraas is responsible for a portfolio that includes City Walk and The Beach, with Al Seef, La Mer and Bluewaters. The importance of recognising the current system and a creative approach to challenging that system is highlighted by Saywood.

'It's important to create addresses in Dubai. There was a lot of disassociation with place, landmark buildings were used for general direction. Other cities have addresses such as Oxford Street, Leicester Square and Covent Garden. They are named after a place or a square or street. They are addresses, it's not a building, rather it's associated with a character or activity. Naming is very important, the destination, such as The Beach or City Walk. You associate that address as a destination you will go to enjoy. All these bits of urban fabric start to knit together as part of an urban realm. Rather than creating a singular thematic lump, which doesn't connect to anything. For example, City Walk's active retail frontage encourages the street on the other side to be activated to create a real streetscape. Creating an environment people can enjoy. The value of public realm was very much part of it and in doing so we start to create a series of addresses that develop a character of their own and result in cities within cities.'

These narrative echoes similar themes of the historical quarter of Al Bastakiya in Bur Dubai. The heritage site was built by Persian merchants in the 19th century. Its density, punctuated only by courtyards and narrow streets is perhaps the most picturesque site in Dubai. Today, through restoration and adaptive re-use a mixed use of the site provides a rich place to meet and participate in artistic and cultural events such as SIKA Art Fair and Mawahed,[15] or simply to enjoy traditional tea and coffee. This place has inspired other private and public developers to realise the potential of heritage tourism and is leading the regeneration of old Dubai, and the reawakening of a national sense of identity and pride.

As these modern places, new and restored emerge in the city, the modern interpretation of traditional places to meet is being reimagined. Retail spaces are very often the catchall place-maker

City Walk © Diba Salam

within which people congregate, especially within Dubai. However, they do not often serve to enhance the cultural or artistic experience of the collective or the individual. Such locations do draw large amounts of footfall, and careful planning can no doubt still enrich the participants experience. Emaar's Dubai Mall, with its vast themed public spaces, is one of the key destinations in Dubai. It continues to be the leading retail and leisure destination. Dancing fountains, operatic performances and large open spaces overlooking the Burj Khalifa[16] have made this piece of Dubai the epicentre for celebrations. Dubai's diverse population all congregates under the universal principles of commerce. This model can be seen as the modern-day equivalent to the UK's Oxford Street or Trafalgar Square. In contrast Meraas's agenda is more complex in terms of urban design intervention and cannot be compared with Emaar.

With such developments enhancing Dubai's civic agenda the government has looked at future innovations in developing their plan. Dubai's Future Foundation established in 2016, established its core values:

1. **Individual,**
2. **Organizations and**
3. **Sectors.**

The districts surrounding the Museum of the Future captures Dubai's plans for making the future happen now.

Capturing innovation and cultural participation in the design of new places is very much part of DWTC's agenda for new developments. Gurjit Singh, Senior Vice President of Real Estate highlights the importance of this:

"Place Making and Place Development with Place Branding. Recognition of the importance of active frontages and open spaces which encourage performances and participation at an individual and collective level is a key part of 1 Central and future developments. Designers understanding of regional and

cultural components in city design needs to be enhanced to encourage an aesthetic particular to modern Dubai."

These two companies are amongst a host of new property developers engaged in determining Dubai's identity. No doubt quality of the products will vary, but if there is to be meaningful change and build of the success mentioned in this paper than the understanding of the dynamics which foster good and exceptional design must be understood.

The role of the informed client, creative lead and public participants is an essential balance. If managed correctly, this balance provides positive creative tension through independent thinking and more rigorous testing of ideas, thus bettering the developments and ultimately the city and its people. The growing trend of developers acting as architects and city planners should be addressed by government given its potentially damaging impact on the city's urban fabric. If quality of thinking is driving this trend than opening the market to more innovative and culturally sensitive design agencies should be encouraged.

Conclusion

In many senses Dubai is lucky in that so many aspects of the city are so successful. It has a very well-engineered infrastructure, commercial prosperity, high quality of life, and superb transport and tourism links. One could say the hard parts are done.

Furthermore, despite Dubai's youth as a city, its ambitions in the arts are significant. UAE cultural program are establishing museums on a scale not seen in over a century, such as the Louvre in Abu Dhabi. It is by this realisation that the city has achieved so much through the use of national wealth by its absolute monarchy governance. Yet while arts and culture are celebrated, the city must still accommodate places that encourage participation in a less formal and controlled manner.

Dubai government programmes are introducing initiatives to start this process, and in this statement, we acknowledge the institutions required to encourage thinking amongst its citizens and the infancy of those institutions in Dubai, such as architecture and art schools and museums, where conversations can flourish into tangible vehicles of change in the creation of the public realms in Dubai.

As an architect, I feel that Dubai would benefit from a city plan to avoid ad-hoc and less integrated design schemes, and create more connected places for people. Creating architectural landscapes on a more intimate human scale will enrich neighbourhoods and ultimately the city. This is evident in Meraas's City Walk on Al Mustaqbal Street, where the ratio between buildings and streets encourage greater interaction, and are visually more engaging too. But this needs to be the norm rather than the exception.

The type and nature of public realm and the art within it should bridge the negotiation of central control over localised decision making; to create an organic relationship of local participation and not purely reception. Allowing for phasing in developments to encourage public decision making to determine design evolution should be experimented with, as this will allow for adaptive spaces to meet changing dynamics within the vibrant urban city community.

The summation of this study of how artistic and cultural participation affect individual and collective experience in the public realm, and how the city should allow, in part a distinctive cultural identity borne out of artistic and cultural participation through individual and collective experiences in the public realm. One that is not totally divorced from the rich heritage of the region, but successfully builds upon it and evolves it as part of the fabric of Dubai's modern dynamic.

Footnotes

[1] *United Nations, World Urbanization Prospects 2014 and 2017 Update*

[2] *Small to medium sized enterprises*

[3] *UAE Government and Political System, www.emirates.org*

[4] *Nine Reasons Dubai Could Be the Most Important City of the 21st Century, Elizabeth MacBride*

[5] *Michelle Saywood, Senior Vice President of Design at Meraas Development, Interview August 2017*

[6] *Lens Chapman, www.dubaiasitusedtobe.com*

[7] *Vikramāditya Prakāsh, Failure of the Master Plan*

[8] *Wikipedia, Demographics of Dubai & United Nations, World Urbanization Prospects 2014 and 2017 Update*

[9] *Quant, The Public Realm by Richard Sennett*

[10] *RIBA, Royal Institute of Architects (UK) and Department of International Development Trade Mission/Tour 2016*

[11] *Social Media in the Era of ISIS, Sultan Al Qassemi*

[12] *Capturing the Ephemeral: An Interview with Sultan Al Qassemi on Art and Technology, by Marisa Mazria Katz New York, NY, USA and Kareem Estefan New York, NY, USA, March 2nd, 2015*

[13] *Wikipedia Definition: Majlis is an Arabic term meaning "a place of sitting", used in the context of "council", to describe various types of special gatherings among common interest groups be it administrative, social or religious in countries with linguistic or cultural connections to Islamic countries*

[14] *Michelle Saywood, Meraas' Chief of Design speaking about manmade island, Bluewater, to Gulf News, April 12th, 2017*

[15] *Mawaheb from Beautiful People is an art studio for the determined (adults with special needs)' Twitter #Mawaheb*

[16] *The Burj Khalifa, known as the Burj Dubai before its inauguration, is a megatall skyscraper in Dubai, United Arab Emirates*

Diba Salam

Claire Doherty (Editor)

Diba Salam is the founding Principal and Creative Director of Studio DS, a dynamic London based architectural studio with bureaus in Dubai and Bangkok. She founded the practice in 2012 after leading national and international projects, such as Imperial College, White City, London and Aldar's Yas Island Hotels in the United Arab Emirates.

Diba has made research a key part of her entrepreneurial business by analysing place-making, smart designs and neuroscience in architecture. The studio's core values are to create efficient, adaptive, and effective communities through design by establishing stakeholder needs. Each solution is uniquely tailored to maximise the social economic and environmental potential of each individual site, celebrating exceptional detail craftmanship through modern methods of construction.

Claire Doherty is the Director of Arnolfini, Bristol.

Previously, Claire Doherty was the founding Director of Situations. Over the past decade, Situations emerged as one of the UK's most innovative and pioneering public art producers, commissioning and producing temporary and long-term public arts projects, creating public art strategies and visions for city-wide initiatives and leading publishing and research initiatives to improve the conditions for, and skills to produce, new forms of public art worldwide. Claire has developed an international reputation as a leading thinker in new approaches to public art policy and planning, and is dedicated to engaging those for whom the arts might have seemed irrelevant or inaccessible through transformative art and cultural experiences; advocating for the social value of the arts, and finding ways to catalyse positive change in specific places.

Claire was awarded a Paul Hamlyn Foundation Breakthrough Award for outstanding cultural entrepreneurs, 2009, and appointed MBE for Services to the Arts in New Years Honours List 2016.

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