

THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON URBAN SPACES IN ARAB CITIES

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ABSTRACT

Over the past few decades, Arab cities have been subject to dramatic external interventions and western influences. The colonization, and associated cultural imperialisms of Arab and European, and more recently the rapid modernization have all transformed and internationalized cultures, conceptualization, and planning ideologies which affected the spatial development and the pattern of urban spaces. The aim of this paper is to look at the spatial pattern of urban fabric in Arab cities and how they change under the impact of globalization. This transformation is examined in relation to the global city of Dubai, the second largest city in the United Arab Emirates. Dubai has been chosen as a case study because it has been a subject of colonialism, and has been significantly shaped by various imported ideologies: Arab, Persian and British; particularly with regard to contemporary planning policies. In addition to that, the fast urban development that followed the 1971 federation completely changed the character of the city.

Keywords: Arab cities, colonization, Dubai, globalization, urban space, urban pattern.

INTRODUCTION

Cities are part of larger society that their spatial form is inter-related with the economic, social, cultural, political, and environmental structure of the society. Urban spaces are further influenced by developments and decisions on higher spatial levels. Architects and planners agree that the transformation of urban patterns in the Arab cities change as a consequence of the interaction of individual decisions with variety of structures and developments on different special levels. The reasons of that change can be traced back to the impact of the colonialism as well as to the urban development that take place, regarding nationally and globally. The later is generally classified under the concept of globalization. It comprises many processes, including the spatial integration of economic activities, movement of capital, migration of people, and development of advanced information and communication technologies.

This paper looks at the spatial pattern of Arab cities and how they change under the impact of globalization. The study focuses on the impact of globalization on the transformation pattern of urban spaces. To achieve the aim of this paper, the study introduces a framework of globalization as urban development process. The role of information and communication technologies as main driver of globalization that

accelerates challenges in changing urban form is highlighted. The impact of western models on urban development in Arab cities and the conflicts between traditional and western forms are considered. Information about the United Arab Emirates is summarized. The transformation pattern of Dubai and its spatial development are discussed as a case study. The impact of globalization on urban spaces in Arab cities is reflected in the last section.

URBAN DEVELOPMENT AS A PROCESS

All processes have one thing in common; they involve a variety of components that generate products. Urban development process is defined as the activities of a group of people (clients, developers, professionals, contractors, suppliers, financiers, etc.) acting with their resources (finance, skills, materials, etc.) to produce a particular building environment and urban spaces. These are influenced by political, economical, social and environmental aspects, which are the main drivers of globalization (see figure 1). The role of the participants may vary according to changes in socio-economic and political circumstances and cultural development of the society. The impact of globalization on the urban pattern in Arab cities varies, according to the circumstances of the above aspects. The fact that modern urban space is distancing itself from traditional/vernacular urban patterns is a warning aspect of globalization. These will be discussed later in this paper.

WHAT IS GLOBALIZATION?

Globalization can be defined as the unfolding resolution of the contradiction between expanding capital and its national political and social formations [Henry and Springborg, 2001]. It refers to the growing interaction in world trade, national and foreign investments, capital markets, and ascribed role of governments in the national economies. Globalization seeks to encompass all countries in one economic unit, possibly without governments or borders [Peter and van Kempen, 2000]. Globalization is an extension of an internationalization of economic activity that has been going on since history began, marked by a radically increased mobility of capital and international integration of production and control, facilitated by advances in communication and transportation technology. Globalization operates without geographic boundaries, as if the entire world were a local marketplace. Globalization is one of the forces determining the spatial of cities, and a force not coming into play for the first time in the recent period. It must be seen as the extension of forces already present over a much longer period of time [Henry and Springborg, 2001]. The process of globalization touches all cities and involvement in that process is not a matter of being either at the top or the bottom of it, but rather of the nature and extent of influence of the process.

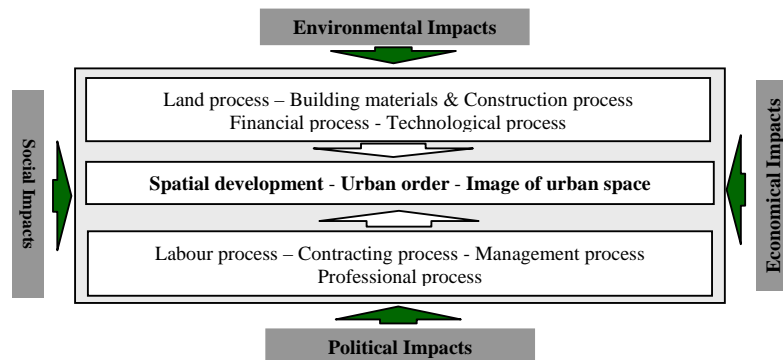


Figure 1: Factors impact urban development process and the main drivers of globalization

Globalization itself is an image, an idea, and an ideology. The idea that globalization is inevitable and that it is linked to laissez-faire economic policy has been a powerful force in itself (Newman and Thornley, 2002). There are also countervailing interpretations of globalization, which emphasize its critique. These ideological uses of the concept of globalization are themselves rapidly transmitted around the world and became part of the power politics of actors on the international scale. That globalization allows the rapid spread of alternative ideas as has been demonstrated in the rapid growth of opposition to the activities of the World Trade Organization [Thoenley and Rydin, 2002].

GLOBALIZATION AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

Cities are not powerless in the face of globalization, but, through good governance and in effective partnerships, they can play an important part in mediating and directing their consequences for economic and human development in positive way. The challenge is to develop and implement policies that support not only the function of cities as engines of economic growth, but also their role as agents of social change. This challenge is highly accelerated by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Globalization has placed human settlements in a highly competitive framework of inter-city linkage and networks with a geographic context only by planetary boundaries. This new constellation of globally networked cities implies that a city may have more relations with some faraway place than with its hinterland and that such cities act as energy nodes in a global force field. These are processes with considerable potential, and the urban strategies of many governments are now moving towards providing an enabling environment for human settlement to compete on the international stage [Sen, 1999].

ICTs are often presented as 'liberating'; emancipating society from spatial constraints imposed by the limitation of yesterday's technologies. They enable businesses to develop global markets and allow people to form communities of interest that are based on shared values [Wellman, 1999]. However, while ICTs enrichment to some, they leave others insolvent. ICTs are increasing global urbanization in three major ways:

- ICTs allow specialist urban centers to extend their powers, markets and control over ever-more distant regional, national, international and global hinterland. ICTs support the accelerating and increase contacts, transactions; communication flow and interaction that help bind, integrate and add economic energy to the vast, extended and multi-centered urban settlements, spaces, corridors and regions of our age [Bunnell, 2002].

- Within the global economy, the growing speed, and complexity of innovation in all sectors seems to demand a parallel concentration in the cities with the assets to sustain on-going competitiveness.
- Demand for ICTs is highly driven by the growth of metropolitan market. Large global cities are of inconsistent importance in driving ICTs investment and innovation [Graham and Marvin, 1996]. This is mainly because of cities' cultures of modernization, their concentrations of capital, their relatively high disposable income and their concentration of internationally oriented firms and institutions.

The complex interaction of human settlements and ICTs is helping to build new urban space and new landscapes of innovation, economic development, cultural interactions, political dynamics and social inequalities within cities and urban regions.

THE IMPACT OF WESTERN MODELS ON URBAN PATTERNS IN ARAB CITIES

In the west, industrialization reached a first climax in the second half of the 19th century. The transmission of this new civilization to the Arab countries was filtered through Europe's colonial development activities. Western countries and the Arab world have a long history of encounters, exchanges and conflicts, which saw the two opposites in changing roles. During the early Middle Age, Western countries had much to learn from the highly developed Arab culture [Clark, 1998]. During the Renaissance, Western countries started drifting towards different horizon of cultural development and discovered other spheres of interest. The main reason for this change, as pointed out by Bianca, [2000] was that the age of discoveries gave these countries the possibility of bypassing the core regions of the Arab world.

By 1920, large parts of the Arab world were in western hands. Western-type apartment houses and public building started lining the street fronts of new districts. French and Italian squares and open spaces were also established in many Arab cities. Western architects and planners were commissioned to do important architectural and urban projects. This trend also influenced provincial capitals such as Alppo, Damascus or Baghdad, where the Ottoman administration established new western-type municipalities to supervise urban development. Saad Zaghloul street in Alexandria, a shopping constructed before the first World War, is reminiscent of western colonial architecture as shown in figure (2).

The new independent nations were more or less forced to continue their pre-established economic patterns, which had become dependent on international trade structures and were geared to the application of modern western technology. Rapid industrialization may not have been the only alternative at the time, but it was hard to escape its pressures, considering the superior living standards of western nations. The cleavage between "West and East" was thus introduced into the very social body of new Arab nations [Henry, and Springborg, 2001]. The dynamics of the socio-economic changes produced by the industrial age found their physical expression in the radical transformation of existing traditional Arab cities. Whereas during previous centuries, changes in the architectural fabric and urban spaces had always occurred as part of a natural evolutionary process, the new development was of a different nature, mainly because of the record speed and the massive scale of new construction.



The French square, Alexandria, Egypt



Saad Zaghloul street, Alexandria, Egypt

Figure 2: Western urban fabric in Arab cities.

The physical development of most traditional Arab cities was predicated on the approach chosen by the colonial powers in setting out their reconditions, the geopolitical importance of the site and the cultural choices of the administrators responsible and their architects. The possible range of urban interventions was defined by two extremes [Bianca, 2000]. One consisted in superimposing the new city on the old historic fabric by cutting out large new roads and sites for major public buildings. The other one consisted in setting up completely new colonial cities on virgin land, without seeking any interface with ore-existing urban structures. This urbanization policy could be found in Cairo, Baghdad, and Damascus.

CONFLICTS BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND WESTERN URBAN FORMS

It has been argued that the two most reliable indicators of good urban form are the degree of integration of individual architectural components and the successful interaction between buildings and open spaces within the overall built environment. With the rise of modern movement, urban form in the traditional sense ceased to be a concern. Many of its urban design schemes resemble mere blow-up of abstract master plan diagrams, and therefore transmit the corresponding limitations to the built environment. This can be seen in Le Corbusier's concept of the "Radiant City" which was to find many followers all over the world. Its characteristics are deceiving in terms of urban form qualities: contextual values and human-scale interrelations between buildings and open spaces are neglected. Massive traffic arteries disrupt potentially connected urban components. Geometrically arranged skyscrapers float as unrelated objects in this loose open space. On the other hand, the urban form of most traditional Arab cities follows rules which are diametrically opposed to those of "Rodiant City". The formation of the urban structure based on an incremental or organic aggregation process, originating in the definition of socially relevant micro-spaces which are connected into larger unites [Bianca, 2000]. Open spaces and pedestrian movement systems are integrated into the various components of the urban structure. Close linkages with other buildings ensured the integration of single units into larger clusters, producing a cohesive urban environment. Available open spaces were allocated to and often integrated with specific architectural units, such as Mosques, Suk, and Khans. The streets became subsidiary to the cellular urban structure and were often transformed into narrow internal corridors. The city was conceived as closed universe, and man was enveloped by multiple architectural shells embodying and reflecting his cultural values. In addition to that, the circulation system

helped implement increasing degrees of privacy, ensuring that every section of the network matched the character of the space and the social needs of its users.

Modern planning interventions, in traditional Arab cities tend to disregard the traditional urban system and to emulate the Western approach, cutting axial road systems into the organically grown city and dividing the formerly coherent fabric into isolated blocks. Modern highway schemes are the first step of a much wider erosion process and trigger off a number of subsequent steps of destruction. Bianco, [2000] emphasized that the redevelopment opportunities arising from increased vehicular accessibility creates speculative pressures develop along the fringes of new roads, and new street-oriented blocks are built according to the foreign typology. The modern buildings often overshadow the ancient structure. As a result, the remaining fragments of historic fabric lose their physical, functional and semiotic context.

According to the interaction of socio-cultural and urban forms of the city, there are two distinct patterns: orthogenetic and heterogenic. Orthogenetic cities develop upon a local base and their role is to carry forward into systematic and reflective dimensions an old culture. They transform the implicit little traditions of the local culture into an explicit and systematic great tradition. The heterogenic cities reflect the influence of other areas and cultures. They represent technical orders and different ideologies of the local culture. In such cities, the priority comes to be given to economic growth. These two opposite patterns are well recognized in most traditional Arab cities, particularly with the growing presence and influence of dominant western cosmopolitan communities. In these cases, western concepts and ideologies have been adopted and implemented, which to some extent contradict the traditional way of life. Local traditions are increasingly covered up in favor of typical western architectural style and occidentalized urban and planning techniques.

In most modern cities of Arab countries, western planning ideologies have been adopted. This adaptation might contradict the traditional way of life. The conflicts arising from this situation have rarely been seriously debated. There is almost complete rupture between the structure of the traditional urban fabric and the imported western style environment. Due to the record speed of development, there was no chance for an evolutionary process to emerge, where new technologies and building methods could be tested and adapted in accordance with the laws of the original cultural system [Bianca, 2000]. Accordingly, modern environmental planning techniques and concepts have taken over, with the effect that they have overthrown the authentic traditional pattern of Arab cities. In most Arab cities, the pretended dominance of the foreign model has been taken for granted. Therefore, large-scale development projects have been imported and implemented without taking into consideration the cultural context and environmental conditions. As a result, many traditional urban fabrics have been left to decay, while modern western style patterns have been built at an amazing pace to replace them. Skyscrapers, curtain wall and glass facades, highways and tunnels now characterize most traditional Arab cities.

THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Prior to the discovery of oil, the economy of the UAE cities depended on fishing, pearl hunting and trades. The economy was capable of supporting small settlements located mainly on the Gulf shores. In 1971, the UAE came into existence as an independent

nation, merging seven sheikdoms (Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al-Qaiwan, Ras Al-Khaimah, and Fujairah). Until that time, most of population was of Arab tribal origin. They had controlled the deserts, cultivated date palms in the oases, fished along the coastline, and collected pearls. Some had settled permanently in the small towns along the coast and engaged in maritime trade. Merchants from southern Iran and Indian arrived in the early 20th century. In 1950s, other immigrants came from the northern Arab states. Nevertheless, the population remained small: 100,000 in 1960, and 180,000 by 1968 [Higgins, 1995]. The fast urban development that followed the 1971 federation completely changed the character of the traditional cities of the UAE. Workers from Asia, Europe and the USA arrived, increasing the population to 2.8 million by 1998 [Ministry of Planning, 1999]. The dynamism of the UAE economy, boosted by vast oil revenues and relieved by the end of conflict in the Gulf, is likely to continue to attract immigrants.

The traditional architecture of the UAE cities was the result of the hot and humid climate. High-density buildings were constructed close together, creating narrow alleys, which were shaded most of the day. The main traditional architectural features are the courtyards and the wind-tower. This pattern is well recognized in Shindaghah and Bastikia settlements in Dubai. Modern urban development in the UAE destroyed much of the local urban character. Such development altered the lifestyle of the people and caused a redistribution of the population among the emirates. Most cities of the UAE turned to international planning ideologies that paid little or no attention to local traditional structure, as shown in the case study of Dubai.

DUBAI AS A GLOBAL CITY

Dubai has been significantly shaped by various imported ideologies: Arab, Persian and British; particularly with regard to contemporary planning policies. The fast urban development that followed the 1971 federation completely changed the character of the city. The rapid transformation of Dubai and its wider urban region during the last few decades demands greater critical analysis than it has so far attracted. Three issues in particular motivate this profile. First, an overarching theme is the Emirate of Dubai as an international trading center "globalizing city". Since 1970s (followed the United Arab Emirates' federation), Dubai has undergone a reorientation from federal city to national "node" in global networks. A second motivation concerns the dramatic nature of the development of the city. Population increase, spatial expansion and economic growth over several decades are part of this motivation. Urban landscape and open spaces have also been a story of the ascendance of "spectacular space". The most spectacular of all is the development of the centre of Dubai (Sheikh Zayed Street), which includes one of the world's fames tallest buildings, Emirates twin towers. The third theme demanding attention in Dubai is its emerging status as an urban region. Much urban development, including Rashid Port, Jabal Ali Industrial Center, the Free Zone, and other projects have, on the one hand, added to increased trade activities in Dubai, and on the other, accelerated open-door policies of urbanization.

Urban development process, in Dubai, can be divided into the traditional process, the conventional process, and the modern process. In the traditional process, the changes are usually slow and minor, participants are limited and often have multiple tasks, and the techniques used are primitive. The modern process is usually concerned with highly

specialized techniques and sophisticated interrelations between its participants. The conventional process, however, is considered as intermediate between traditional and modern processes using intermediate technologies.

The traditional process in Dubai reflects architectural and planning ideologies of the pre-modern era. Up to the 1950s, Dubai was confined to three traditional residential quarters surrounding the creek: Deira, which was made up of Arabs, Persians and Baluchies; Al-Shindaghah, a former residence of the ruling family, made up of Arabs only; and Bur Dubai, which was dominated by Persian and Indian merchants (see figure 3).

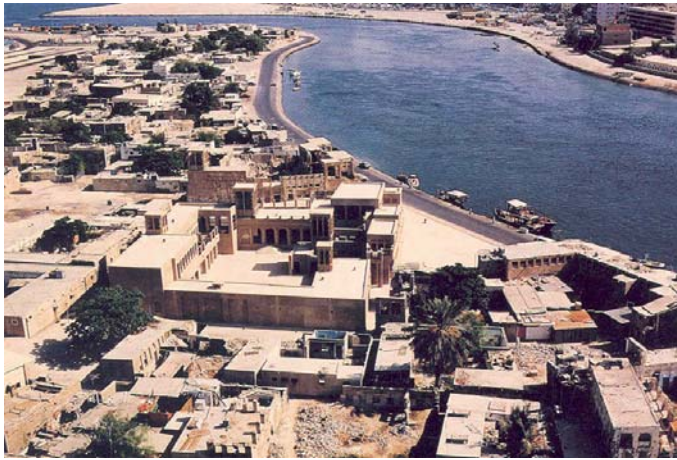


Figure 3: Traditional urban pattern of Al-Shindaghah, Dubai.



Figure 4: The modern urban centre of Dubai (Sheikh Zayed Street).

The modern process was established in Dubai during the second half of the 19th century, with fast urban development following the discovery of oil. Therefore, the demand for occidental buildings and western planning ideologies increased. In 1954, a British firm was commissioned to improve port facilities and deepen the creek entrance. Few years later, a new municipal council was established and dominated mainly by foreigners. One of the most important roles of the municipality was the active participation of establishing the Dubai Town Planning Scheme, which was carried out in 1971. This plan had an impact on the growth of the city and especially the provision of an efficient network linking both sides of the creek through constructing Al-Maktoum and Garhoud bridges as

well as Al-Shindaghah tunnel. It also covered the necessity of upgrading the building and planning regulations. In 1972, an enormous project "Rashid Port" was constructed. A few years later, an enormous international industrial center, "Jabal Ali Centre" was established. These projects have, on the one hand, added to increased trade activities in Dubai, and on the other, accelerated open-door policies for globalization. These policies attracted a huge number of immigrants to come to the city. During this period of rapid development, the building industry and urban fabric had been strongly affected by two factors. First: the import of building materials as well as the establishment of foreign factories in Dubai. Second: planning organization was based mainly on occidental codes and dominated by foreign professionals. Therefore, mostly western architects controlled the architectural profession in Dubai. Meanwhile, the traditional contracting system was replaced by a modern system with the participation of western professionals in order to cope with the new standards and technologies provided by foreign consultants.

The spatial development pattern of Dubai shows that, during the last 40 years, most of the participants of the urban development process, such as developers, professionals, contractors, and suppliers were foreigners. Meanwhile, both foreigners and local professionals, mainly graduates from western universities and institutions, controlled the resources of the development process. This system, in addition to the use of ICTs, had a great influence on the development process. These influences can strongly be recognized in the occidental architectural style and urban spaces, particularly in the central area of Dubai (see figure 4). A number of enormous mega-projects are now under constructions, including Dubai Marina project (a master planned community for 40,000 people located in the centre of Jumeirah), the Palm project (city within a city, with estimated cost of 0.6 billion US\$), Burj Dubai (the World's Tallest tower with one of the largest retail spaces in the world), and Mall of the Emirates (with estimated cost of one billion US\$).

In conclusion, the impressive skyline of Dubai is built on the foundations of advanced infrastructure and thriving economy. More and more multinationals have based their headquarters in Dubai, attracted by the investor-friendly atmosphere, cosmopolitan lifestyle and one of the highest per-capita incomes in the world. This trend has a significant positive impact on the global orientation of the city.

CONCLUSION

There is a rapidly changes in the urban form in most of the Arab cities, according to their economic, political and cultural circumstances. Globalization has affected the fabric of the urban spaces, in positive as well as negative ways. The major urban impacts of globalization on urban spaces, as products of spatial development, are summarized in the following.

- The use of advanced communication and transportation technology enables the concentration of wealth in the hand of a few. The increasing mobility of capital has resulted in an increasing concentration of wealth at the top and increasing gap between the holders of that wealth and the poor. Such aspect has strong impacts on the shape of the cities. An especially striking urban related of globalization is the expression of inequality in pattern of segregation of people and land use. Inequality has been

extensively documented as worldwide phenomena known as polarization (Musterd et al, 1999).

- Globalization has significantly increased both our technical and our social knowledge. This knowledge is being shared, allowing learning about, if not transfer of, successful policies and programs. We have the scientific knowledge to avoid and to control environmental degradation; we have the planning competence to improve urban design, to plan cities well, to equalize educational opportunity and to open the doors to a better quality of life for all of the residents of cities. Habitat has provided the lead in the documentation of best practices. Best practices often illustrate only the best that can be done under existing national policies and decision-making process; what is further needed is a set of "best policy" and "best decision-making processes" for wider distribution.
- Citizen participation in planning and local government has been on the increase almost everywhere in the world. It has rightly been a major thrust of Habitat's efforts over the years. How far participation will develop to change decision-making depends on the existing relationship of power, which globalization has served to reinforce. Decentralization of powers from national governments to cities is ambiguous in this regard, particularly in the Arab cities; since the resource base of national economies is not effectively controlled at local level.

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