

Urban development and traditions: the case of Dubai-UAE

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The main concern of this paper is the impact of development on society and the built environment, and the conflict between man: his traditions, needs and expectations and his surrounding environment has become typical of today's life. A phenomenon that can be physically witnessed in a common morphology in the urban fabric of most cities especially in the developing world is the dichotomy between two or more generations of the urban fabric. On one hand a dense traditional core with tiny patterns of streets and pathways, small buildings, artisan workshops and. Apparent poverty, and on the other hand the modern fabric with wide roads, geometric layouts, high buildings and apparent wealth. This pattern has been to satisfy the random demands imposed by modern life. In developing countries this has been transplanted by colonialist to create settlements that resembled those of the mother country. That attitude has been persistently pursued by politicians and planners through out the developing world even in the postcolonial era. Dubai, through a relatively small life span has undoubtedly been a representative example of urban colonialism both imperial and ideological, and has been significantly shaped by its various forms. Arab, Persian, British and lastly the global model of contemporary format planning policies. This paper will trace the urban morphology of Dubai and ultimately identify the various factors that have shaped the city in its current state.

تعنى الورقة البحثية بأثر التنمية على المجتمع والبيئة العمرانية والصراع الدائم بين احتياجات الإنسان وأماله و طموحاته من جهة والبيئة المحيطة من جهة أخرى. في معظم بلدان العالم الثالث يمكن ملاحظة هذه الظاهرة حيث الانفصام بين جيلين أو أكثر من النسيج العمراني: فالنسيج المتداخل والطرق المتلاصقة والارتفاعات المحدودة يقابله نسيج متباعده. طرق واسعة وارتفاعات شاهقة. ولقد وجد هذا الأخير ليلى الاحتياجات المتزايدة للحياة الحديثة في الدول النامية حيث بدأ مع المستعمر الذي أراد خلق مجتمعات تشبه تلك التي في الوطن الألد ثم استمر هذا النهج حتى بعد زوال الاستعمار. وتمثل دبي من خلال عمرها القصير مثالاً للتطور الحضري تبعاً للتغيرات الاجتماعية والسياسية والاقتصادية الناتجة من أشكال الاستعمار والإمبريالية المختلفة: اقتصادية - سياسية وأيديولوجية حيث تم تشكيل بيئتها الحضرية بواسطة العرب والفرس والإنجليز وأخيراً بالمؤثرات الدولية للعولمة. سوف تقود بتتبع ومناقشة التطوير العمراني لعينة دبي والعوامل المختلفة التي أثرت في نسيج المدينة وتشكيلها الحضري.

Keywords: Dubai, Urban development, Urban colonialism, Urban traditions.

1. Introduction

The transformation of a traditional community and its impact on the built environment is a major concern of this paper; while it recognises the need for development it raises some fundamental questions: is it inevitable that development is against tradition? Does it necessarily lead to social dislocations and loss of cultural values? How far can external influences affect local values and traditions? Hence, we need to examine the notion of tradition; what is tradition? Is there really a clash between tradition and modernity? A main argument of this paper is the dynamic nature of tradition. It continuously develops through a constant

process of change, not only through indigenous but external influences as well.

The city of Dubai, through the last three decades has experienced immense urbanization. It represents the second largest of the seven members of the United Arab Emirates, is situated between Abu Dhabi and Sharjah. Given its cosmopolitan nature it has developed a diverse morphological map. Thus, raising many questions about its urban identity and tradition.

2. Background

Archeological excavations have established the existence of settlements in Dubai as far back as the third millennium BC. However, and as for the interest of this paper, we are to

consider its modern history where the first recorded history recognizes Dubai as a small fishing village during the 18th century. Probably earlier references exist under different names [1].

In order to grasp the rather notably rapid development of Dubai, we'll scan its' historical background (Fig. 1) and highlight the principle milestones that shaped this growth.

2.1 Early days

Towards the end of the 18th Century, the area South East the Arabian peninsula was governed by two main rivaling tribes: Qawasim (based in Ras El- Kheima) and Beni-Yass (based in Abu Dhabi). The hostilities among these tribes took place in land and sea. As a result and to consolidate their control over the area, and to ensure the security of the route to India, the British required leading Shaikhs along the coast including those of Bani Yas, to enter into a general treaty of peace that was signed in 1820 by nine Shaikhs. This was further developed in a "Perpetual Maritime Truce" of 1853, in which they agreed to a complete cessation of hostilities at sea [1].



Fig. 1. Historical map of the area.

In 1892, and to prevent others (e.g. French, Russians) to get involved in the area, Britain concluded an "exclusive agreement" with each sheikhdom whereby they agreed not to enter "any agreement or correspondence with any other power other than Britain". By the end of the century all formal external relationships of the Trucial Coast were

handled solely through the government of British India.

Meanwhile, the beginning of Dubai as an independent sheikhdom has started at about 1833 when about 800 members of the Al Bu Falasa subsection of the Bani Yas migrated from Abu Dhabi to Dubai after a dispute with its ruler.

2.2. The first phase of development

At the turn of the century Dubai's relatively cosmopolitan population was about 10,000. There was a growing economic importance of pearling as well as the separate identity developed through the treaty relations with the British. By the turn of the 20th century Dubai was a sufficiently prosperous port to attract settlers from Iran, India and Baluchistan, while the Souk on Deira side was thought to be the largest on the coast, with some 350 shops. The facilities for trade and free enterprise were enough to make Dubai a natural haven for merchants who left the Persian coast. These people were mostly of distant Arab origin and Sunni, unlike most Persians, and naturally looked across to the Arab shore of the Gulf finally making their homes in Dubai. They continued to trade with Persia, and they named their district Bastakiya, after the Bastak region in southern Persia [1].

Through the first half of the 20th century, the development of Dubai was marked with a variety of milestones that have shaped its pattern of urbanization and growth, Gabriel [1,2]

- In 1902, the central government in Tehran established the Imperial Customs in the Persian ports and a series of restrictive measures were imposed on the merchants there. The Indian trade, as a result, began to shift to Dubai. Along with the trade, merchants, craftsmen, pearl and others came with their families to reside in Dubai. This was further reinforced in 1904 by the introduction of a fortnightly steamship service from Bombay.
- The word recession of 1929 and the introduction of the cultured pearl by the Japanese and further more the Second

World War had serious affected the economy of the area.

- In 1932, an airstrip was constructed in Sharjah to provide a link for British communication with India.
- In 1937, the ruler of Dubai signed a concession agreement with the Petroleum Development (Trucial Coast) company Ltd.
- The development of the oil industry after the Second World War revolutionized the economy and the society of Trucial Oman.
- In 1950's, Sheikh Rashid embarked on programs to establish a variety of services not previously available and to modernize the administration. Dramatic progress was made, and by the end of the decade infrastructure development was in progress with the dredging of the Creek.
- In 1953, the British Political agency was moved from Sharjah to Dubai, reflecting the latter's established commercial importance.
- Petroleum was discovered offshore Dubai in 1966, and the export of crude oil began just over three years later.

Meanwhile a flourishing Indian population had also settled in Dubai and was particularly active in the shops and alleys of the Souk. The cosmopolitan atmosphere and air of tolerance began to attract other foreigners as well. By the 1930s, nearly a quarter of the 20,000 population was foreign, including 2,000 Persians, 1,000 Baluchis, many Indians and substantial communities from Bahrain, Kuwait and the Hasa province in eastern South Arabia. Some years later the British also made it their center on the coast, establishing a political agency in 1954 [1].

The international trade that has flowed from Dubai's cosmopolitan contracts was the basis of rapidly increasing prosperity. This, unlike many other towns along the coast, gave the city an early start in development before the beginning of oil production in the late 1960s.

2.3. Dubai and the UAE

In 1967, Britain announced its intention to close its military bases and that it would terminate its treaty relations in the Trucial Coast by the end of 1971. In December of the same year, Britain withdrew and the treaties

were ended. Seven Gulf Shaikhdoms (Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al Qaiwan, Ras al Khaimah and Fujairah), formed the federation of the United Arab Emirates (Fig. 2).

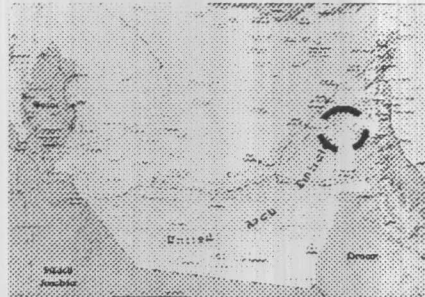


Fig. 2. A political map of the UAE (Dubai is marked).

Around the turn of the century the population of Dubai was about 10,000. The first systematic census in what is now the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was conducted in 1968. At that time there were about 59,000 inhabitants in Dubai. By 1985, the figure had risen to 419,000. The population thus increased six-fold between 1900 and 1968 and over eight fold between 1968 and today.

This tremendous population explosion of recent decades is the result of two factors: primarily immigration and secondarily natural growth. The foreign residents represent an important demographic phenomenon – not only in Dubai but also in all Gulf states- as they represent about 80% of the total population while local citizens represents only 20%.

For a decade the Ruler had been successfully modernizing the administration, improving facilities and encouraging commercial development. Major infrastructure and industrial projects, including port Rashid, the dry dock, the Aluminum smelter and Jebel Ali Port and industrial area.

Dubai has become a regional center for many multinational companies. The major period of concentrated expansion occurred between 1974 and 1978 (Fig. 3). Dubai resembled a massive construction site and up to 150 ships were anchored offshore awaiting berthing space (Fig. 4).

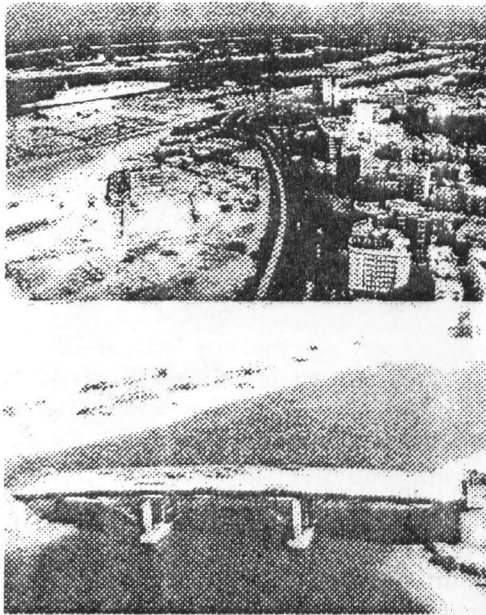


Fig. 3 Massive development and construction work that took place.

3. A city in transition

"It doesn't take much thought to realise that development must be conceived in terms of improving a society as a whole, and enhancing the welfare or quality of life of all. Consequently, development of the political system, of technology, of social arrangements, of ecosystems, and of the whole geography and culture of the society should be on the agenda." [3]

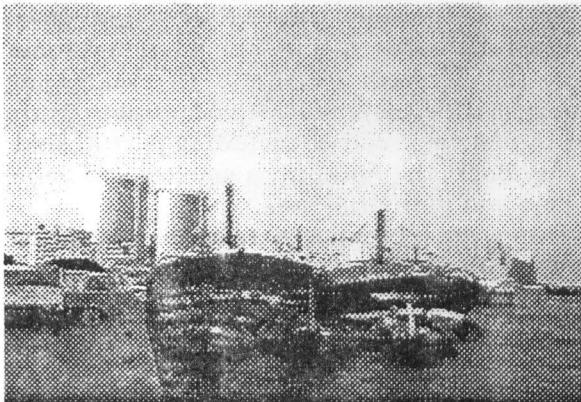


Fig. 4. Traditional boats and modern architecture at the Creek side.

The Dramatic growth in the city and its population has been clearly reflected in the urbanization process. By the 1950s, the city was limited to three major parts: Bur Dubai, Deira and Alshindagha. Through the following three decades the city has then witnessed extended urbanization (Figs. 5-8)

4. Local image vs. global identity

A traditional community is often reluctant to drastic changes. In other words, tradition is the steady, smooth and regular line of human progress through ages; it does not accommodate sharp, sudden and rapid changes. As in a city as dynamic as Dubai, it seems rather difficult to identify what is traditional; is it the old 'Barasti', the Barjeel, or is it becoming now the high-tech glass towers? It is indeed a difficult question to answer; what is meant by tradition(s)? Does it stands for backwardness or pre-industrial antiquated way of life? Is it of a static or absolute value? What was "tradition" last century and what would it be next century? Is it related to architecture, music, costumes,

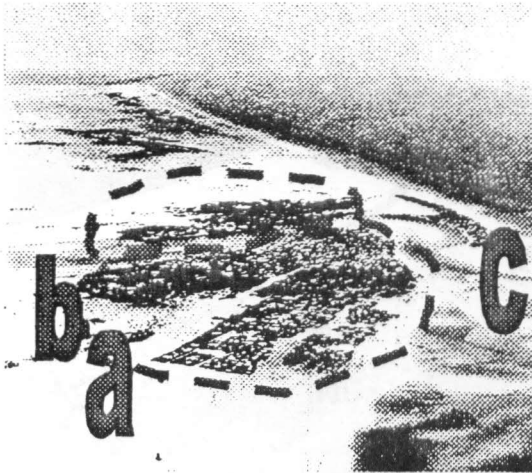
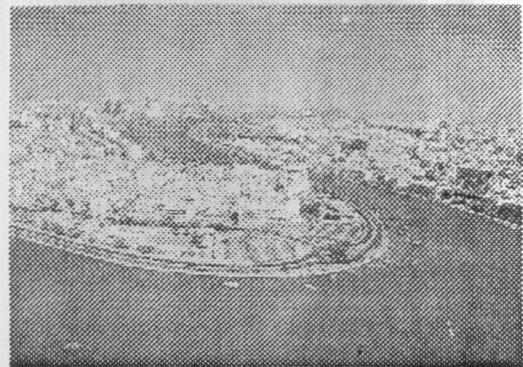


Fig. 5. Aerial photos of the Creek (1940 and 50s); three main areas can be identified: a) Deira, b) bur Dubai and c) shandagha.



(a)



(b)

Fig. 6. a) The modern extension of the city to the west (Sheikh Zayed Rd). b) The Creek as seen from the air.

or? Indeed, defining tradition won't get a straight answer. However, we may formulate our understanding of tradition as the state of life (architecture, art, costumes, food, books, ..etc.) for a certain community at a certain point of time; it is a continuous dynamic and yet, slow process. Whereby the society tries to make sense of the present by exploring similarities or contrasts between the past and the present. Thus, tradition becomes a culturally constructed version of the past rather than the past itself [4].

Foreign influences have always been a major player in the process, as it adds, develop and even alter 'tradition'; or, in other

words it creates and develops a 'new tradition'. Dubai has certainly been the place for extensive 'tradition' development. Touring the city, one will need only eyes to recognize the complex diversity of its cosmopolitan environment. The European influence is notably observed through the overall arrangement of the city; streets, traffic, etc, as illustrated earlier; the Asian (Indo-Pakistan) existence is another very dominant influence; the Persian; the Arab (Middle-Eastern) and lately the "International". Today's architecture in Dubai has become a diverse display of styles representing a multiplicity of cultures,



a) Aerial view 1960 [2].



b) Aerial view 1965 [2].



c) Aerial view 1968 [2].



d) Aerial view 1976 [2].

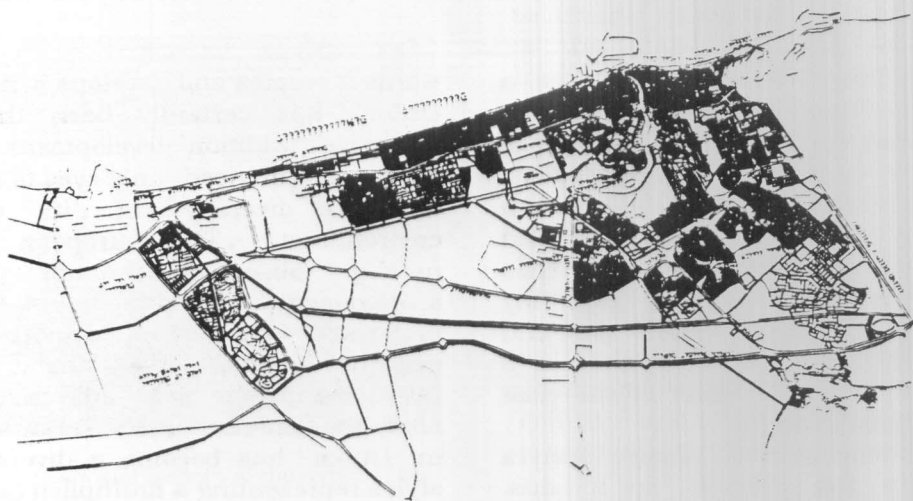


Fig. 7. Immense urban development took place through the last three decades.

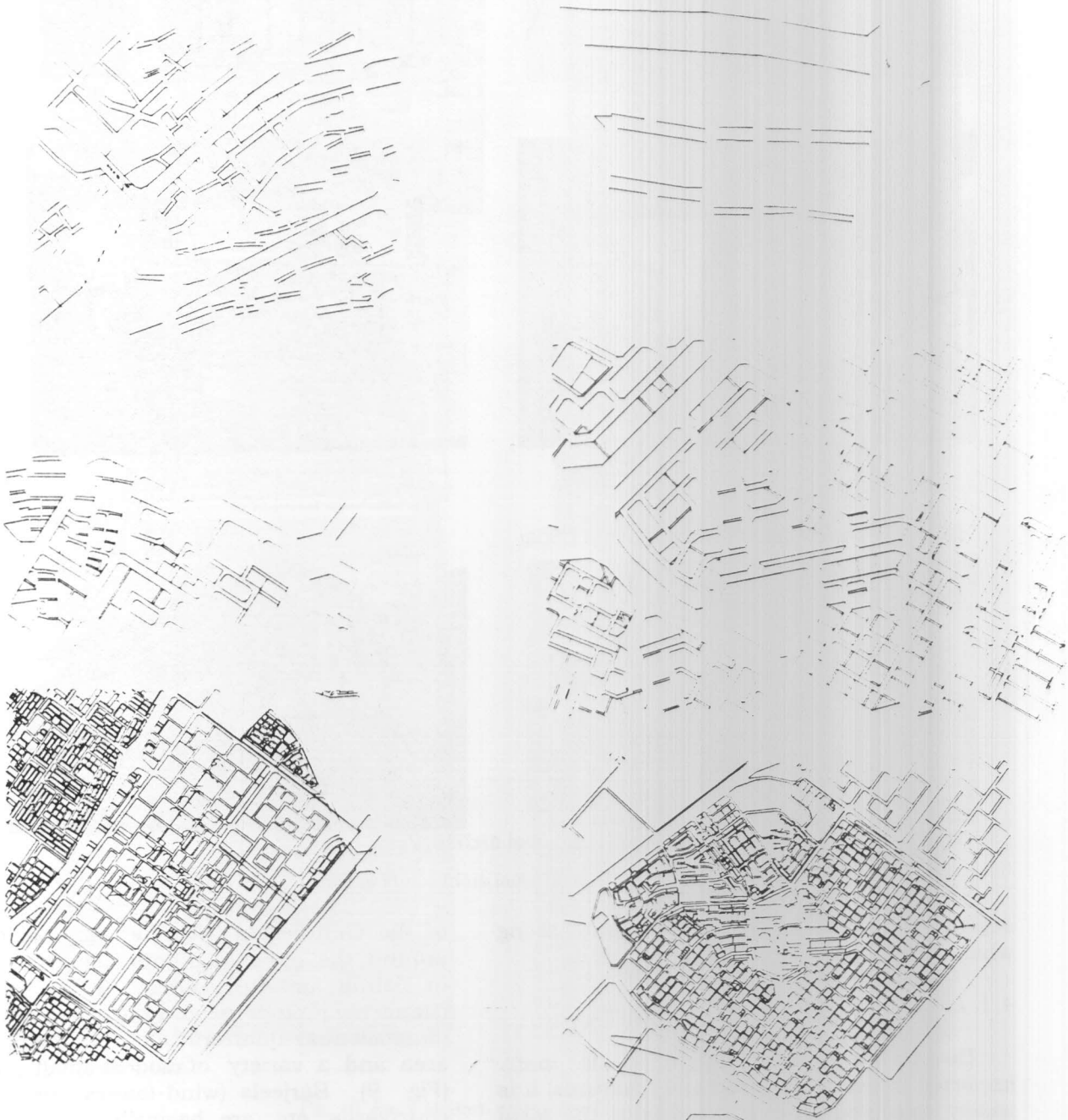
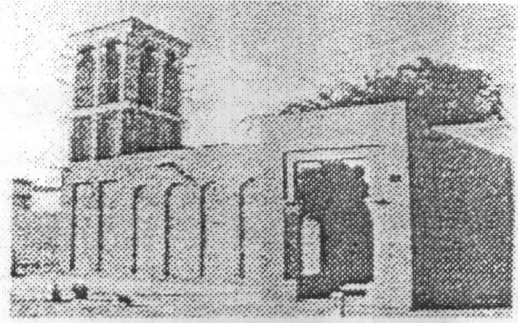
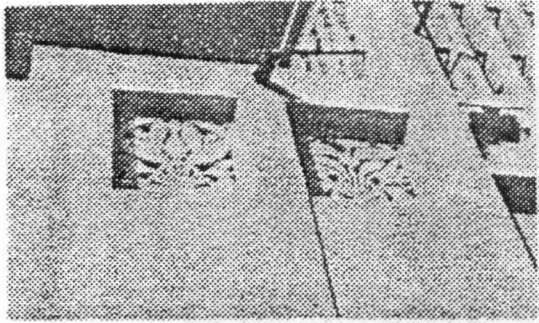
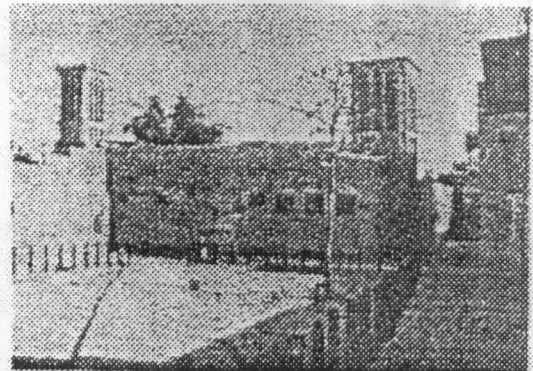


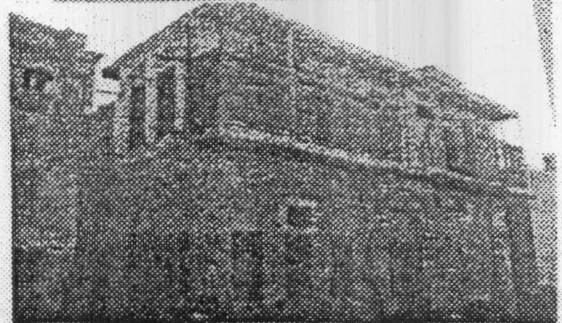
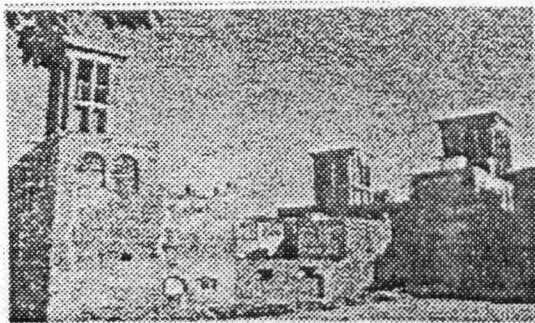
Fig. 8. The variety and diversity of urban orders.



A) Traditional features and elements



B) Urban public spaces and suq in old Dubai



C) Environmental considerations in traditional architecture

Fig. 9. Traditional architecture in Dubai.

designs, designers and materials. Among which the following orders can be noted:

4.1. Local

Despite the fact that it holds many imported Persian architectural features, it is widely accepted that it represents the local (traditional) character of the city and perhaps

of the Gulf region. To be found along and around the old suq on both sides of the creek in Deirah and Bur Dubai. It is made up of commercial properties, some small remnants of residential quarters such as the Bastakia area and a variety of modest small mosques (Fig. 9). Barjeels (wind-towers), ornaments, courtyards, etc. are basically the features of this architecture.

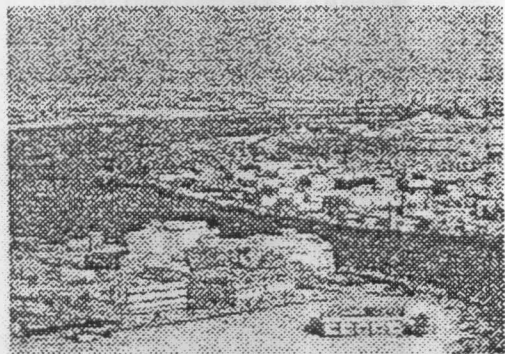
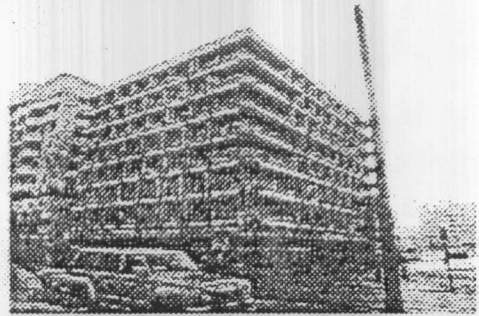
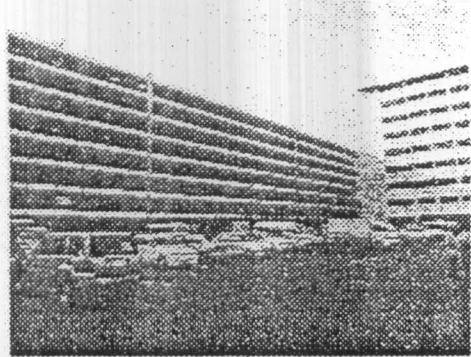
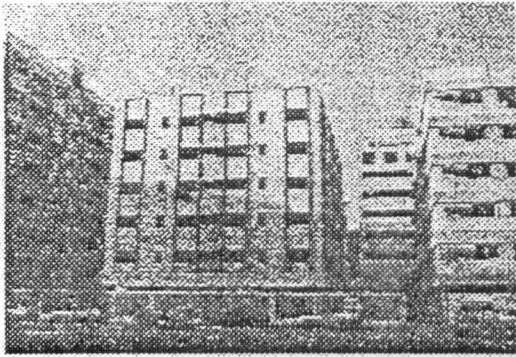


Fig. 10. Early Modern architecture in Dubai.

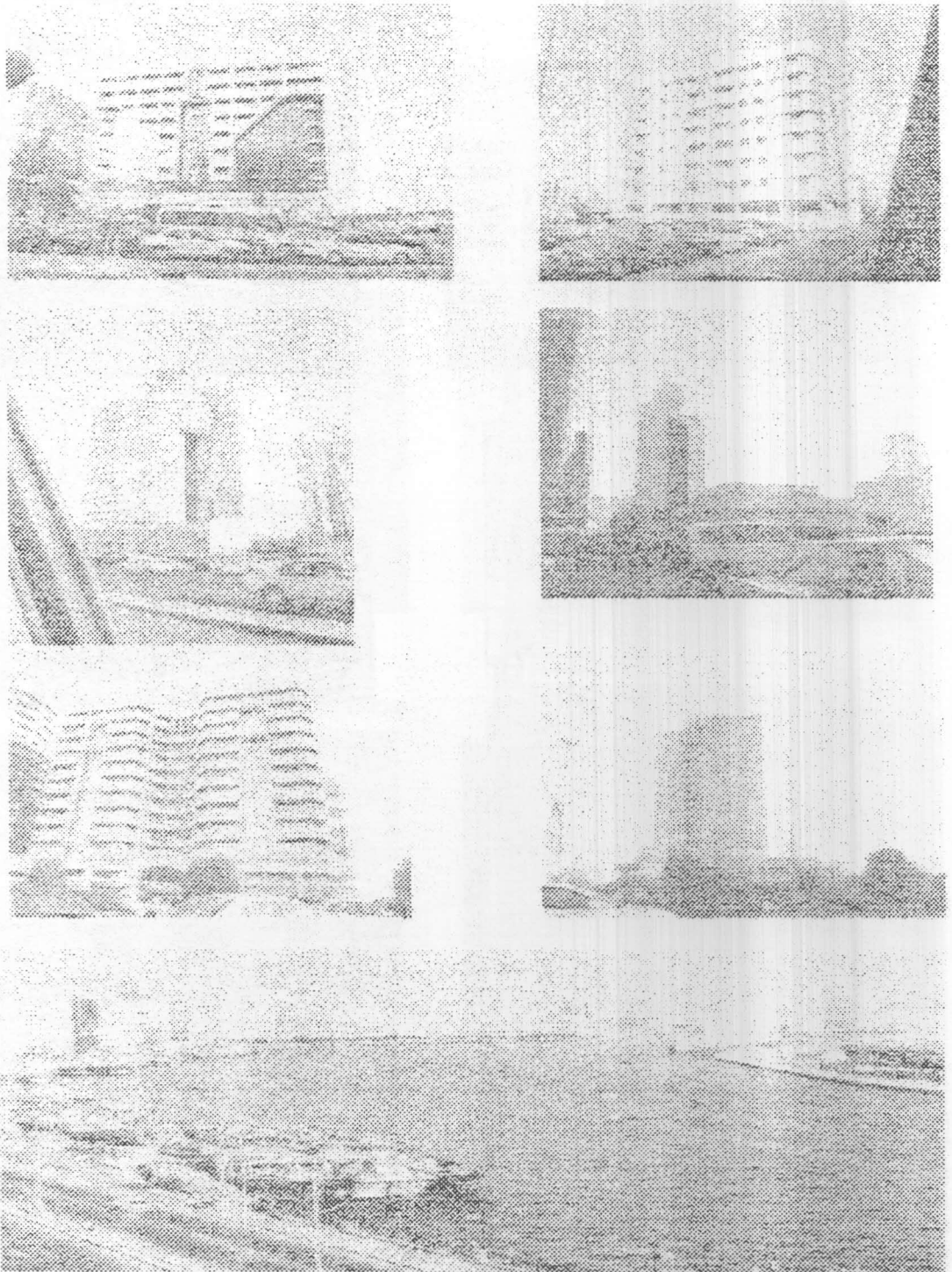


Fig. 11. Late modern architecture in Dubai.



Fig. 12. Various high-tech prestigious buildings, expressing the flourishing economic development of the city.

4.2. Colonial/Global

Truly Dubai has not been a direct colony, but it is also true that, being a cosmopolitan city, Dubai has developed through generations of a notable mechanism of imperialism and globalization. This can be illustrated in the following pattern:

4.2.1. Early Modern

Starting with the first concrete building in 1956 till the 70s, these were largely built by architects from other Arab countries (e.g. Egyptians, Syrians,) and therefore influenced with styles, details and building techniques that they have imported. (Fig.10).

4.2.2. Late Modern

This represents start of the oil boom in late 1970s till now where modern high-tech

designs and systems are employed; these have a natural result of the massive influx of international architectural and construction firms (Fig. 11).

4.2.3. High-tech

A number of prestigious buildings is being built, also by international –mainly western-firms; they present powerful political statements and employ very large investments (Fig. 12).

5. Conclusions

As we are starting a new millennium the world is witnessing a remarkable shift in the political and cultural composition of the world. The traditional systems of colonialism and imperialism are being replaced by the strong forces of globalization, international orders or

what we may identify as ideological colonialism. Consequently, communities of the former regimes are struggling to regain identity; finding new masters; and all the while are torn apart by shifting alliances long religious and ethnic lines. Thus, we may claim that globalization in the 1990's is neither a historically unique process nor a contemporary phenomenon. Rather, its' notion has been evident in previous historical periods, and is perhaps most powerfully visible in 19th and early 20th centuries imperialism [3].

This shifting pattern in political and cultural maps has definitely its implications on the physical built environment. This is a phenomenon that can be witnessed in a common morphology in the urban fabric of most cities especially in the developing world.

In this instance we are focusing basically on development in an urban context; the impact of development on society and the built environment and the adaptation of urban resources to urban needs. The conflict between man and his surrounding environment has become typical of today's life. And it is becoming more difficult to find harmony between man, nature and the built environment. And thus, more vital to establish this relationship.

And yet, as these settlements proceed in life they become subject to various pressures: obsolescence, adaptation, replacement, etc. [5]. With ever changing influences, the understanding of this cycle has, however, been changing throughout the human history. Without losing their identity urban areas have been subject to a continuous process of change and adaptation as a part of a continuing process of city living. With the industrial and later the technological revolutions of the twentieth century, this life cycle has, however, been severely disrupted by the accelerating pace of modern life: the increasing rate of urbanisation and the different demands for space (office, shopping,...etc.), for mobility and transport (wider roads, parking areas, etc.), massive population pressures (rural exodus, uncontrolled urbanisation) and a remarkable change in social structures and aims. As a

response, the perception of urbanisation and urban quality is now more often questioned.

As cultural creation, architecture, on the other hand, reflects the possibility of multiple identities for designer, builders and users. This has been further manifested by the fact that modern practice increasingly takes architects and urban designers out of their own cultures and has them working in and with another culture. Yet, such trans-cultural practice has great opportunities, but also presents many complex ethical, cultural, technical, historical and formal problems.

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