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Glittering skylines, high urbanization rates, and massive development projects in the Gulf have increasingly attracted the attention of urban development scholars and practitioners. Within the GCC, an average of 88 percent of the total population lives in cities, while on average only 56 percent of Yemen, Iraq, and Iran’s populations lives in urbanized spaces. The tempo and spatial ethos of urbanization in the Gulf differ markedly from patterns of traditional urbanism in other developing countries. Within a matter of decades, Gulf port cities have rapidly evolved from regional centers of cultural and economic exchange to globalizing cities deeply embedded within the global economy. Explicitly evident features of Gulf cities such as international hotel chains, shopping centers, and entertainment complexes have classified these cities as centers of consumption. Other urban trends, such as exhibition and conference centers, media and knowledge cities, and branch campuses of Western universities have integrated Gulf cities within numerous global networks.

From the advent of oil discovery until the present day, forces of economic globalization and migration, national conceptualizations of citizenship, and various political and economic structures have collectively underpinned the politics of urban planning and development. While oil urbanization and modernization direct much of the scholarship on Gulf cities, understanding the evolution of the urban landscape against a social and cultural backdrop is limited within the academic literature. For instance, within the states of the GCC, the citizen-state-expatriates nexus has largely geared the vision and planning of urban real-estate mega-projects. These projects reflect the increasing role of expatriates as consumers and users of urban space, rather than as mere sources of manpower utilized to build the city. Other state initiatives, such as the construction of cultural heritage mega-projects in various Gulf cities, reveal the state’s attempts to reclaim parts of the city for its local citizens in the midst of a growing expatriate urban population.

Diverse historical, geographical, political, and socioeconomic settings across the region necessitate contextualizing Gulf cities in relation to their respective urban development trajectory. Complex urban networks in such regional cities as Riyadh, Jeddah, Muscat, Sana’a, Bandar Abbas, and Baghdad reveal a sense of historical and cultural continuity that are distinct from the Gulf metropolises of Doha, Kuwait City, and Dubai. Examining the urban landscape of Gulf cities in their specific context and in a comparative perspective provides added insight into the political, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts that have shaped urbanization in the region.

In line with this, the CIRS research initiative on “The Evolution of Gulf Global Cities” examines dynamics of urban configurations in the Gulf region (the GCC, Yemen, Iraq, and Iran) in order to understand the city as a cultural and social space. Over the course of two working group meetings, CIRS invited academics from various disciplinary backgrounds as well as architects, urban planners, and designers to discuss their research findings and to present papers linking macro-level knowledge of urbanization and modernization projects in the Gulf with the micro-level understanding of everyday spaces of living and human interaction. The chapters are combined into an edited volume titled, Gateways to the World: Port Cities in the Persian Gulf.
Gateways to the World: Port Cities in the Gulf
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1. Introduction

Mehran Kamrava

By all accounts, the growth of cities on the southern shores of the Persian Gulf has been phenomenal, all shooting forward from dusty little port towns and villages as late as the 1920s and the 1930s, dependent on pearling and fishing, into gleaming cities with global aspirations. Today, rightly or wrongly, a number of the cities consider themselves as “global cities,” or at least aspire to be. Collectively, not only have the Persian Gulf’s port cities changed the geography and face of the region, but, more importantly, they have altered the region’s role in relation to broader global networks of trade and commerce, service delivery, corporate decision-making, and the production of information.

This book explores the changing urban face of the Persian Gulf, as well as the processes and consequences of transformations that have occurred at an incredibly rapid pace. In a region long viewed by domestic and international actors as critically important to global networks of trade and commerce, in recent decades internal dynamics rooted in endogenous political forces have combined and colluded with external developments to shape the Persian Gulf’s port cities. Some of these cities have capitalized on emerging trends in the global political economy in order to give themselves roles and profiles that would link them to networks far beyond the region. Others have been left behind, or have taken themselves out of the race, having instead developed a different rhythm of urban life internally and connections externally to other cities and transnational networks. The focus of this book revolves around these differential rates of engagement by the port cities of the Persian Gulf with internal and external dynamics and developments, the resulting emergence of different types of port cities, and their roles, changing face, and broader consequences for the region and beyond. The Persian Gulf has long been a gateway to the world. This volume explores the roles and the rise and fall of its port cities in modern times.

In recent years, the study of cities has drawn from social network analysis. As such, cities are seen as interconnected networks in which attention is paid to specific actors (nodes), flows (paths or exchanges), and relationships among them. But this focus on flows and relationships need not be at the expense of attention to the internal dynamics within cities that also define or at least shape their forms, growth patterns, resources, and dominant features. In the Persian Gulf, regional forces and geostrategic dynamics, as well as the policies and priorities of state leaders, have been equally important in shaping the overall profile and form of cities and their position in broader regional and global networks. The exploration of these internal and external dynamics that have shaped the contemporary port cities of the Persian Gulf, and examinations of how these dynamics came about, the ways in which they manifest themselves, and their consequences, forms the focus of this book.

Cities, of course, form one of the most elemental foundations of human society, and recent decades have seen greater levels of state intervention and planning in the making and remaking of the urban built environment. As the contributions in this volume demonstrate, these steadily increasing levels of state involvement in urban planning, whether on a coordinated and larger scale or on an ad hoc basis, and resulting discontinuities and disjunctures in urban form, constitute some of the important and relatively universal hallmarks of the Persian Gulf’s port cities.
Among cities, those located along coastlines and major rivers—port cities—tend to develop particular characteristics within them and specialized relationships with other cities and ports. Ports and port cities have evolved at the intersection of local and global forces. Despite major structural transformations in the economic and functional nature of global trade, shipping, and logistics, ports and cities remain closely interconnected. The role and significance of port cities tend to be particularly sensitive to changes arising from larger contextual political, economic, and technical transformations unfolding around them, as well as endogenously-initiated changes to their own built environment. This is all the more important since, historically, port cities have played crucial roles as relay stations in globalization by constituting important hubs of trade and traffic. Any serious analysis of port cities must therefore necessarily take an integrated approach into the complex interactions between a port city’s built environment, metropolitan spatial form, urban planning actors, and economic and commercial land and sea networks.

Mehran Kamrava is Professor and Director of the Center for International and Regional Studies at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar. He is the author of a number of journal articles and ten books, including, most recently, Qatar: Small State, Big Politics; The Modern Middle East: A Political History since the First World War, 3rd ed.; and Iran’s Intellectual Revolution. His recent edited books include The International Politics of the Persian Gulf; Innovation in Islam: Traditions and Contributions, The Political Economy of the Persian Gulf, Migrant Labor in the Persian Gulf (edited with Zahra Babar), and The Nuclear Question in the Middle East.
2. From Port Cities to Cities with Ports: Towards a Multiscalar History of Persian Gulf Urbanism in the Twentieth Century 
Arang Keshavarzian

It is uncontroversial to say that at the beginning of the twentieth century the port cities of the Persian Gulf had a pluralistic, “hybrid,” “transnational,” or “anational” quality; some would even describe them as “cosmopolitan.” Straddling multiple empires—Ottoman, Qajar, Omani, Saudi, and British—and trafficking in various language groups, religions, genealogies, and more, this was a world for which it seems the term “frontier” was made. What is possibly more striking from the vantage point of the early twenty-first century, however, is that contemporary discussions of some of these very same cities claim that they are similarly “outward looking” and interconnected to places and forces beyond their immediate environs—and in today’s parlance are “global.” In fact, in recent years, this very characteristic has been cited as the factor differentiating these societies from the rest of the Arab world and the Middle East.

Considerable research and scholarship has been generated to make sense of these recent urban forms (i.e. Dubai, Doha, Abu Dhabi) or their less “spectacular,” but equally petroleum-revenue engineered cousins (e.g. Manama or Kuwait City). Some of the literature is unflinchingly triumphalist and composed of hagiographies of rulers represented as captains steering these remarkable projects. Other treatments that foreground the exceptionalism of these transportation hubs, financial nodes, and speculation bubbles are more even-keeled. In these discussions, the darker moments along the path from British tutelage to monarchical absolutism are exposed; yet, these works continue to speak in terms of an exceptional “Dubai model.” Still other scholars have marshaled rich empirical research with against-the-grain reading of sources and critical analytical insights to demonstrate how the workings of power, discourses of development, and confidence in planning both marks contemporary capitalism and binds these societies to international modes and processes.

Concurrently, the last decade has also witnessed a new interest in these histories of the wider Persian Gulf and its hinterlands during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century period in which new rounds of imperial rivalry, center-periphery struggle, and technological innovation disrupted the older order and introduced new alliances and forms of governance. We have studies that have focused on individual cities, surveys of the northern coast and the expansion of the Qajar’s authority to the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman, and examinations of the interactions across and between the two coasts. Taken together they demonstrate that this maritime world was not an isolated “sub-region” and backwater of modern history, nor can the era be reduced to notions of stasis and decline or be merely viewed as a prelude to the pre-oil era. The Persian Gulf, like other bodies of water, was more a bridge and conveyor-belt, than a border or a chasm. What is strikingly absent, however, are analyses that study the entire twentieth century or compare these urban forms across the temporal divide that is marked by major economic and geopolitical transformations, including the emergence of the petroleum political economy, the retreat of the British Empire and ascendance of U.S. hegemony, and the shift from a world of imperial frontiers to nation-state borders. This chapter consciously seeks to disrupt the standard markers of periodization that have narrowed the temporal scope of analysis of the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula. Thus, I offer a broad comparative perspective on the nature of urban forms and relationships at the beginning and end of the long-twentieth century. While ultimately we will need analyses and debates about the processes and causes of this shift, my arguments will be limited to sketching a rubric for distilling this shift, rather than fully describing or explaining it.
A second conceptual move is to focus on these urban centers as “port cities” by considering how this form of urbanism has been reworked by and for new technologies, modes of accumulation, and forms of political control. Port cities offer a vivid example of how local conditions interact along and with multiple scales. These physical ports are thus in a dialectical relationship with urban space as well as trade patterns and state policies.

Finally, this chapter seeks to move beyond discussions of the Persian Gulf in the twentieth century wherein this body of water is treated as a boundary that renders the northern and southern shores as distinct places and incomparable cases. The focus on port cities and the maritime dimension of these sub-national polities forces us to consider the Persian Gulf as a readily traversed “frontier” and interconnected set of relationships mapping a shifting social geography with multiple centers and peripheries. The culturally plural, fluid, and highly networked nature of these societies has been illustrated by a substantial body of literature on the nineteenth and early twentieth century that encourages less nationalistic historiographies or the valorization of “security” and regional “stability.” Thus, I consciously incorporate examples from, and think through differences between, cities and ports, such as Basra, Bushehr, Bandar Abbas, and locales on the southern coast that have tended to receive greater attention in “Gulf Studies” circles. The aim is not to suggest that all ports or cities on the Gulf were or are the same or follow a single historical path, but to explore how these diverse locales experienced similar, yet dramatic changes in their political economies.

Based on these three observations, this chapter poses the following questions: how do the Persian Gulf’s two different forms of transnational urbanism separated by a century compare, and what does this tell us about the urban process as well as transnationalism? My argument is that the Persian Gulf has always been transnational or “glocal,” but the processes and mechanisms of transnationalization have changed in a way that has resulted in (a) a morphological separation of ports from cities, (b) a less integrated regional network of ports, and (c) cities where homogeneity and unity, in terms of identity, class, and citizenship-status, are privileged and differences are rendered as threats that must be neutralized and controlled. These transformations operate at multiple geographic scales and are products of both technical changes and state policies under evolving capitalist conditions. Hence, social boundaries and territories have not been strictly articulated on national or urban scales, nor can they adequately be studied as such.

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Over the last two decades or so, a subtle but steady shift has been taking place in the Middle East, with the region's centers of economic, commercial, diplomatic, and political gravity shifting increasingly away from the Levant and North Africa and toward the Persian Gulf region. An integral cause, and consequence, of this shift has been the apparent emergence of a number of “global cities” across the southern shores of the Persian Gulf stretching from Kuwait down to Abu Dhabi and Dubai. A region-wide urban chasm has developed in the process, in which Arab and Middle Eastern cities can be divided into the two general categories of “struggling” and “emerging,” a division drawn mostly on the ways in which large clusters of cities are coping with ongoing processes of globalization.

According to Yasser Elsheshtawy, the Middle East’s “great divide” is being driven primarily by real estate conglomerates, fuelled by global capital and oil wealth. The Arab cities of the Persian Gulf—most notably Doha, Manama, Kuwait, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai, as well as Riyadh—have emerged as models to which the other cities of Middle East and Arab regions are aspiring. “The Gulf model,” itself a product of what Elsheshtawy calls “moments of change,” or rupture, has brought with it the massive migration of laborers in search of employment, and of skilled professionals and semiskilled workers, replicating the astounding imbalances that mark the Middle East’s economy at a smaller scale within each of the emerging cities. Active engagement with and participation in globalization may have propelled the Middle East’s “emerging global cities” into a higher plain of infrastructural development and modern urbanism. But it has also brought them armies of foreign workers and unsettling levels of demographic imbalance.

This chapter examines port cities along the Persian Gulf, going beyond Elshehtawy’s dichotomy of “struggling” and “emerging” cities although agreeing with his basic thesis that some have become the beneficiaries of sustained attention and resources while others suffer from seeming policy neglect and are starved of resources. Building on Arang Keshavarzian’s historical account of Persian Gulf urbanism in this volume, the chapter traces the evolution and current profiles of three types of port cities along the Gulf. They are, in ideal types, company towns, many of which have seen better days; secondary port cities, which, by virtue of being “secondary” receive nowhere near the attention and resources that their “primary” counterparts receive; and what I call “aspiring global cities,” which have ambitions of being global cities but do not seem to be quite there yet.

There is a correlation between being a primary city and aspiring to become a central node in multiple global networks in trade and commerce as well as finance, transportation, and logistics. Besides Dubai, all of the other aspiring global cities of the region are capital cities, and all, including Dubai, are primary cities. As such, they are the chief locations for the country’s concentrated economic and political power, national symbols and heritage sites (such as museums, national libraries, and sports stadiums), trade and commercial activities, cultural life, and religious centers (national mosques). These cities predominate the life of the entire country and overshadow all other urban formations; in fact, Kuwait, Qatar, and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Bahrain are all essentially city states, in many ways, where the primary city is essentially the whole state. Not surprisingly, they are the chief beneficiaries and recipients of both public
and private attention and resources, the primary sites for investments and infrastructural growth, and, invariably, the biggest urban centers in terms of population and geographic size.

This chapter identifies three ideal types of port cities across the Persian Gulf, namely company towns, secondary cities, and aspiring global cities. A combination of policy neglect, inadequate resources, and geostrategic developments have impeded the potential significance of secondary cities and company towns both at home and abroad. Conversely, a number of factors have coalesced to propel the aspiring global cities to the international limelight, and, more importantly, regional influence. There has been a dramatic shift in significance and influence in favor of the southern shores of the Persian Gulf, especially insofar as active engagement with global networks of trade and commerce, finance and banking, transportation, and infrastructural depth are concerned.
4. *An Historical Examination of Territory and Infrastructure in the Trucial States*

Stephen Ramos

During the past two decades, the Persian Gulf region has courted international attention for its architecture and urbanism. Fascination with the mode, pace, and scale of the region’s urbanization grew, and a sub-genre of literature poured out in attempts to understand so-called “Gulf Cities.” Sharp observers quickly realized, however, that the term and scale of “city” did not appropriately describe the urbanization and settlement processes. Terms such as “megalopolis,” “archipelago,” and “urban landscape,” to name a few, were then proposed as scalar lenses through which to interpret what was happening in the Gulf, and how it seemed to both represent and influence urban circumstances in other parts of the world.

There has been a concurrent, renewed interest in territory, coupled with calls to retrieve it as the most appropriate scale at which to discuss contemporary spatial phenomena of architecture and urbanism. Within the field of geography, a common critique since 1973 has been the notable underexamination of the concept of territory. In sum, the critique claims that conceptualization of territory has been reductive either because of focus on its relational nature without the deeper historical background, or the reification of bounded space without an understanding of how the space was configured.

Over the century and a half preceding United Arab Emirates (UAE) federation, the historical, sociocultural, and political meanings of territory move from one of a tribal, nomadic, subsistence culture loosely moving among pearling, wells, and grazing lands to a stricter territorial definition for oil speculation, concession leases, and production. Shifting tribal allegiances were dialectically tied to fluid territorial powerscapes when British interests were focused on maritime trade. British strategic territorial concerns moved from open maritime trade routes to then include coastal and hinterland territories for their oil potential once it was discovered in other parts of the region. James Onley’s work on the region’s Pax Britannica of the nineteenth and early twentieth century describes how social, economic, and spatial power relationships changed as the symbiotic period of pearling and animal husbandry moved to oil exploration and production. British oil concession negotiations were conducted through the ruling sheikhs of each Trucial State, which at once gave them a clear power endorsement and ruling advantage over other potential pretenders to the ruling position. The results of British endorsement essentially codified the towns where the rulers resided as the centers of power over surrounding territories, and served as historic precedent for UAE federation in 1971 to be, at once, a modernization and an urbanization project.

Infrastructure, of course, prepares land for urbanization, and the role of infrastructure in this transformative process of territorial meaning acted as a central instrument and medium through which political dreams and desires were expressed throughout the region’s quasi-colonial and post-colonial circumstances. Infrastructure served the British and Emirati leaders, and as an end unto itself, to order the very nature of the state. Infrastructural elements informed the British land surveying campaigns in the region of the late 1950s, along with land boundary negotiations among leaders that followed. These hinterland efforts occurred in parallel to the maritime trade infrastructure projects on the urban coastal settlements. The precedent of infrastructure as essential claim to territorial definition and ownership helps to explain the wave of duplicated infrastructure in the region during the 1970s after British withdrawal. Antoine
Picon, in an article appropriately titled “What Has Happened to Territory?” underscores the importance of the civil engineer and infrastructure in the construction of territory and the larger spatial processes of nation-building. The relationship between territorial signification and infrastructure deployment formed the essence of the UAE discourse on nation-building and development. I have argued elsewhere that the examination of circulatory infrastructure is essential in understanding urbanization in the Gulf, and I would like to build on that argument to further propose that territory is the appropriate scale to understand Gulf urbanization, both historically and today.

The chapter incorporates historical examination of the period when the Trucial States under the larger British Empire moved to independence and the formation of the United Arab Emirates in 1971 to explore the changing significance of territory, and dynamic territorial configuration, in this process. I consider the role of infrastructure, and how it served as a territorial medium that also moved from designating tribal influence to serving as signifiers for territorial fixity and demarcation. Through this empirical/historical analysis, the intention is to contribute to larger theorizing of territory, urbanization, and post-colonial nation formation.

Stephen J. Ramos is an Assistant Professor in the College of Environment and Design at the University of Georgia in the United States. He is author of *Dubai Amplified: The Engineering of a Port Geography* (Ashgate Press, 2010), and co-editor of *Infrastructure Sustainability and Design* (Routledge, 2012). He is a founding editor of the journal *New Geographies*, and editor-in-chief of *New Geographies Volume 1: After Zero* (Harvard GSD and University Press, 2009). Other writing includes contributions to *The Superlative City: Dubai and the Urban Condition in the Early Twenty-First Century*, edited by Ahmed Kanna (Harvard University Press, 2013), *Volume 23 Al Manakh Continued* (Archis, AMO/OMA, Pink Tank, NAI, 2010), and *Harvard Design Magazine*. He received his Doctor of Design degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Design.
5. **Gulf Urbanism: The Semantic Field of a Category Space**  
   Ahmed Kanna

The urbanization of the Gulf region, with its large and flashy development projects, has attracted increasing scholarly and journalistic attention in the past decade. The amount and rate of knowledge, scholarly and journalistic, that is being produced around urban questions in the region, I argue in this chapter, warrants that we step back and ask some metacritical questions about the contours and conditions of this knowledge production, and to reflect on what such questions suggest about the politics of urban knowledge in and on the region.

The current conditions of knowledge production on Gulf urbanism are reminiscent of larger issues in metageography, for example, around the category of space. In his seminal 2004 lecture, “Space as a Key Word,” David Harvey notes with some frustration that the term “space” has eventuated in a theoretical crisis in the social sciences. Harvey notes that the application of the term to empirical research has not produced any clarity or rigor, and the sites where the term is deployed seem infinite. What, theoretically, he asks, do we gain from the category of space? Something like this is going on, if at a more modest scale, and with more modest theoretical and political stakes, in the current discourse of Gulf urbanism. Adapting Harvey, what, theoretically, can we gain from the analytical category of “the urban Gulf”? Or, approaching the question from another angle, what kinds of claims does the category make possible, and what kinds less possible?

The reader should not perceive this as a conventional research chapter. I will rarely offer any conclusive statements on what or how Gulf urban processes are or have been taking shape. Indeed, a critical analysis of the assumptions embedded in such questions are the ones that make up the substance of the chapter. This study seeks to contribute or provoke questions for further research which have seldom been posed in what I am calling here “Gulf urbanism discourse.” I begin by tackling the category of the urban per se, but shift in the concluding section of the chapter to what I believe is a related question: the so-called anthropocene. We now know that urban questions and environmental questions are complexly entwined, yet to my knowledge not a single study has taken as its subject the relationship between the urban and the issue of the human-environmental in the Gulf. This is in spite of the fact that the scholarly literature on Gulf urbanism is becoming vast, the journalistic one even vaster. As I suggest in the conclusion to the chapter, as scholars, it is urgent that we begin to connect the Gulf, a valuable resource extraction zone in the neoliberal economy—indeed, a region whose entry into the neoliberal economy is fundamental to the shape that the neoliberal project would take over the past four decades—to issues under the broad rubric of the anthropocene.

Even when I first began my research in the region in 2002, it was obvious how much change, at least morphologically, cities such as Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Doha were undergoing. In Dubai, every area from shipping to trade to the built environment and real estate projects seemed to be rapidly expanding. Superlatives seem to fall effortlessly from commentators’ lips as they struggle to grapple with a seemingly novel phenomenon. It is no surprise that the urban condition in the region has become a focus of so much attention in this contemporary period. Even casual observers will leap to the conclusion that the cottage industry of urban writing on the Gulf in the first decade and a half of the twenty-first century is obviously a consequence of the kinds of economic and urban development undertaken by the various countries of the region according to the so-called visions of the dominant actors in cities such as Abu Dhabi, Doha, and Dubai.
This construction of the Gulf city as a forward-looking crossroads of culture was typical of how people talked about Dubai during my fieldwork between 2002 and 2007 and what I have witnessed in media coverage since then. More plausibly, such a discursive construction of the city, I believe, is deployed in situations when the seemingly non-political appears as in fact political, and starts causing some anxiety among the ethnocratic elites of the region. To adapt a phrase from anthropologist James Ferguson, in contexts of real life contestation over the urban in the Gulf, the discourse of the city becomes an anti-politics. I do not think that it is an accident that we witness a member of the Gulf intelligentsia being dispatched in the wake of the Arab uprisings to produce for the outside world such vivid and unambiguous renderings of the Gulf as a prosperous, modern, and stable island in a larger, more volatile and impoverished region.

In this chapter, I do two things. First I invert the common sense notion that the proliferation of urban knowledge production on the Gulf over the past fifteen years is a consequence of the urban projects that have been undertaken during the contemporary period. This assumption betrays a naïve realism that goes from the referent to the sign, a theory of signification that linguistic anthropology has long ago advanced beyond. Rather, I will try to show that the situation is more complicated and may in fact be the reverse: that, to extend the linguistic analogy, the sign “city” and the semantic field in which it is situated help to constitute the arena in which certain forms are built and certain kinds of urban spaces take shape. The second part of my agenda here has to do with knowledge more specifically. Categories such as “the urban” and “urban space” are vague and do not lend themselves to precise analytical interventions. In spite of this, the proliferation of urban studies on the Gulf has tended to assume that such categories are self-evident. But in fact, we need first to ask what such categories specifically mean in different contexts, what kinds of analytical and political work they do in a given context. We cannot take such categories at face value as they can be made to signify different things. Rather than assuming we know to what “urban” or “city” refers, or asking “what is a city?” (only ostensibly an improvement), a better way of thinking about urban questions, I argue, is to ask: what does a category such as “the city” do? And how does it operate in contexts of cultural politics and historiography?

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6. The Emerging Urban Landscape in the Southern Persian Gulf
Ashraf M. Salama

This chapter examines the state of contemporary urban environments in the Gulf, and aims to explore the phenomenon of global flows and their impact on regional urbanism and architecture. The key characteristics of contemporary urbanism are identified through a critical analysis of three main aspects. These include the development of “bespoke” infrastructure to accommodate “global flows;” the decentralizing of urban governance and decision-making to entice investment in the urban environment; and the resulting chaotic but emotionally-detached urban scene characterized by exclusive development projects, high-rise agglomerations, and social segregation. As architectural innovation is an integral component of the urban landscape of emerging cities in the Gulf, I classify contemporary endeavors into two categories: the overt and subliminal agenda to construct an iconic and cultural architectural identity coupled with the resultant evolution of “multiple modernities” as reflected in a strikingly vibrant plurality of trends. Case examples demonstrate the rush to brand art and culture into a comprehensive and admired identity supported by a rigid agenda to encourage and sustain educational and environmental awareness. After exploring these issues, the chapter concludes with key challenges relevant to the competitive nature of various emerging cities in the Persian Gulf.

Since the early 1990s, urban theorists, historians, and geographers have been taking note of the trailblazing phenomenon of globalization and its impact on consequential “global flows.” These flows, which represent movements of people, capital, information, and knowledge, emerged in the last two decades and have profoundly influenced interconnectivity in singular new ways. Currently, not only are they occurring at unprecedented rates and contributing to an increased connectivity between places, cultural integration, and economic interdependence but they are also triggering the vibrant restructuring of urban forms and cities. The revolution in communication technologies and transportation prompted by the commercialization and availability of information and communication technologies has radically changed not only how users experience time, but, most significantly, has decelerated the limitations of distance. This spearheading characteristic of the globalization era is referred to as “time-space compression,” which has expedited the integration of social, cultural, economic, and political processes and systems around the world, resulting in a vibrant cross-migration of what is termed “global flows.”

The notion of “space of flows” was introduced by Manuel Castells who maintains that contemporary societies are structured around flows of capital, information, technology, images, sounds, and symbols. While the existence and impact of such flows can be examined and validated, his additional claim that the global city is not necessarily a place but a process has not proven true. His premise is clearly refuted in the rise of emerging globalizing cities, such as Abu Dhabi, Doha, and Dubai in the Gulf region, which are witnessing continuous urban development and rapid growth processes. In effect, the revolutionary changes in the ways people communicate and interact have dramatically impacted and influenced trends in urban developments. While it is true that some of these changes can impact negatively on local cultures and identities, they also offer unlimited opportunities for rapid modernization and change to these developing cities through easy access to global capital and knowledge. These vibrant new and emerging
urban landscapes have primarily been instigated by the constant and unceasing exposure to global flows. Cities like Abu Dhabi, Doha, Dubai, and Manama are generally referred to as “global” cities since they are exposed to more flows than cities like Jeddah, Kuwait, Muscat, or Riyadh. I refer in this context to Arjun Appadurai who has labelled global cities “scapes of flows,” made up of five types of flows: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, financescapes, technoscapes, and ideascapes.

When mapping these scapes of flows onto the current general profile of Gulf global cities, the key features of globalization and global flows become evident. The notion of flows as delineated by Castells and Appadurai has resulted in a new international discourse about the global knowledge economy. This type of economy is characterized by three components: international services and banking institutions, high-tech industries, and knowledge-creating institutions such as universities and research establishments. Such an economy has been identified as one of the key drivers for spatial development processes. It is frequently argued that the rapidly evolving global knowledge economy is continuously both reshaping spatial development and directly impacting on the urban environment in a wide variety of ways. In the context of the global knowledge economy, some of these newly emerging cities around the world have been actively challenging established networks; indeed, influential cities in the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf coast have gained a new geostrategic importance.

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7. Real Estate Liberalization as Catalyst of Urban Transformation in the Persian Gulf

Florian Wiedmann

Recent globalization dynamics have led to increased competition between emerging cities in the Global South to successfully enter consolidated networks of capital flows. Local decision-makers thus initiate new development visions and plans in order to position cities as main hubs for global services. In this regard, as well as public investment in infrastructure to increase the connectivity of cities, the other key strategy commonly implemented is the liberalization of local markets, which is inevitably needed in order to attract more involvement of the private sector. One key market, which usually undergoes rapid growth during the first years of liberalization, is real estate. The subsequent construction boom is in itself the major driver of economic growth in most emerging cities due to extensive employment within construction related sectors. The resulting immigration of the workforce has in turn led to an increasing demand on goods and services. Thus, the newly emerging marketplace is usually dependent on the continuous growth of the real estate sector.

In the Gulf region, the Emirate of Dubai and the Kingdom of Bahrain were the first pioneers to follow the vision of establishing service hubs in the Persian Gulf by opening local markets. The main cause for the initiation of a new development direction was shrinking oil and gas revenues since the beginning of the 1970s. In addition to establishing the first free trade zones in Manama and Jebel Ali during the 1980s, the rulers recognized the large potential of initiating a construction boom by permitting foreigners to invest in local real estate. Due to various obstacles, freehold property markets for foreign investment were first introduced at the end of the twentieth century, which led to developments of unprecedented scale and speed. The two biggest factors in the exponential real estate investment in Dubai and Manama at the beginning of the new millennium are often said to be the flight of Saudi capital from the United States after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and a widespread general recognition of the development potential of Gulf cities as major future hubs due to their geopolitical location between major global markets.

It can be therefore argued that in many cases of recent urbanization in emerging Gulf cities, real estate plays a key role in redefining development patterns. Rising land prices, new forms of urban governance, and an extensive demographic change have led to completely new urban morphologies reflecting the immediate consequences of rapid urban growth. Harvey Molotch argues that cities worldwide became growth machines mainly driven by the link between the established global financial system and liberal land ownership rights. Real estate has thus become one of the top commodities facing few restrictions regarding speculative tendencies. The rise and bust of real estate markets became a widespread pattern affecting local developments worldwide as displayed in the case of the international financial crisis in 2008. Thus, it can be argued that the extensive global trade with real estate and the merge of international capital have created a new basis for city networks, in which each city’s objective is to become a major control center of international advanced producer service sectors playing key roles in initiating urban growth in strategic locations.

One parallel of contemporary urbanism in the case of most Gulf cities is the distinctive role real estate sectors have played in promoting both economic growth and a reinvention of the cities’ identities. The initiation of freehold property markets in combination with ambitious economic development visions
as future global trading, finance, and tourism hubs have fuelled one of the biggest construction booms in human history. Speed and scale of developments can only be compared to emerging cities in China, which is a remarkable fact considering the comparatively small number of native populations, the missing hinterland, and the desert environment. While in 1950 around 400,000 inhabitants lived in small settlements along the Gulf coast, today more than 17 million inhabitants, 60 percent of whom are foreigners, live in eleven cities. The still remaining wealth on fossil fuels in combination with a fortunate geopolitical location and a worldwide unique governance structure within city states led to urban agglomerations reaching more than 4 million inhabitants. Since the majority of new immigrants have been directly or indirectly engaged within the construction sector, the population growth has become highly affected by turbulences on real estate markets. While the general economic growth in countries and emirates with a remaining wealth of fossil fuels, such as the Emirates of Qatar and Abu Dhabi, was less impacted by the 2008 crisis, the development dynamics in Dubai and Bahrain were severely affected due to the discontinuation of a large percentage of real estate projects.

In order to understand the impact of real estate in redefining local urbanism, there needs to be a discussion of the historic evolution of land ownership followed by a closer look at the two case studies of Dubai and Bahrain in order to carry out a comparative assessment regarding the various forms of local real estate markets as well as their impact on urban structures.

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8. Neoliberal Urbanization and Smart Cities in the Gulf Region: The Case of Abu Dhabi’s Masdar City
Remah Gharib, M. Evren Tok, and Mohammad Zebian

This chapter provides a critical examination of the phases, spatialities, and temporalities of neoliberalism by looking at cities. Masdar City, a “smart cities initiative” in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), constitutes the case study in this chapter. Neoliberalism, which can be considered a global transformative force that shapes urban governance in both public and private realms, has been extensively employed to explain urbanization patterns. Masdar City is indicative of a trend in cities of the Persian Gulf, which do not totally fit common neoliberal urbanization trajectories. The extent to which Masdar City represents the neoliberal experience can be understood by a comparison with common patterns of neoliberal urbanization as well as an assessment of contested and divergent forms and what such forms mean for urbanization experiences in cities of the Gulf region.

The chapter begins by situating the concept of smart cities within a theoretical discussion that delineates the relationship between neoliberalization and urban spaces and identifies major fault lines. The next section focuses on Gulf cities in general and then moves on to the criteria necessary for a city in the Gulf to be considered “smart.” The third section concentrates on the case study of Masdar City as an example of a smart city in the making. As such, the project’s evolving and ongoing nature make its evaluation and critical analysis difficult. But the fact that Masdar represents an ambitious effort to construct a smart city, premised on new assumptions that are nothing short of paradigm shifts, cannot be denied.

Given the history and political economy of the region, state-market relations in the Persian Gulf region have developed in particular ways. A leading factor in their development is the aspiration to diversify economies away from oil. Decision-makers of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states need to deliver solutions for shaping new cities—cities that can safeguard the environment while being economically diverse and competitive. One option is initiating the development of smart cities that rely on inputs and outputs other than non-renewable resources—a smart economy, smart mobility, a smart environment, smart people, smart living, and smart governance. In this sense, the interstices of neoliberalism, urbanization, and evolution of Gulf cities provide information about dynamics that necessitate strong states, or governments, as opposed to “minimized” neoliberal states. The evolution of Gulf cities illustrates that the dynamics of neoliberalism assign a vital role for states. The cases of Masdar City and other smart cities of the Gulf resemble common local forms of neoliberal experiences that rely heavily on state capacities to establish institutional and organizational mechanisms for markets to operate and integrate local economies with global neoliberal structures, but at the same time there are perceptions that these mechanisms help build more cohesive and sustainable local/urban/national institutional contexts.

By understanding the increasing hegemony of neoliberalism in redesigning, restructuring, and reproducing urban spaces, it becomes possible to conceptualize this phenomenon as a state strategy for creating new conditions of capital accumulation. It would be misleading to assume that neoliberalism unfolds in a linear fashion. Neoliberal policies internalize two contradictory tendencies, which are explicit when the intersection between urbanization and neoliberalism as well as spatial implications are considered. The two tendencies are toward state capacity and market centricism, though there are some ambiguities. For instance, does neoliberalism mean that the state’s functions are minimized or is there still a large role for...
states to shape outcomes for their publics? Moreover, what kind of role is ascribed to the state when it comes to generating wealth? Approached from the perspective of these contradictory tendencies, the emergence of smart cities in the Gulf is indicative of a delicate balance between the two tendencies. State capacity appears to remain strong, albeit with varying scales and temporalities. The establishment of Masdar City in particular, and the rise of smart cities in general, can be better understood according to two axes that imply crucial trade-offs and sensitivities: 1) state capacity versus market centricism and 2) oil/gas dependency versus diversification and sustainability.

The establishment of smart cities and other direct forms of government-led intervention that promote innovation have been widely documented, particularly in Asian countries that have rapidly industrialized, such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, where advanced, diverse economic development is now a reality. Innovation drives in targeted industries were made possible by dramatic increases in government spending, as well as policies to promote research and development and participation in global alliances, which drove capacity/competency building and knowledge transfer. New technologies—in the cases of the Asian countries, electronic and automobile components as well as information and communications technologies—played a major role in export-oriented economic development.

Broad initiatives promoting economic development, the emergence of technology and innovation clusters, and investments in institutional capacity building, education, and infrastructure are becoming increasingly prevalent in several GCC states. The UAE—Abu Dhabi in particular—is making significant efforts in this regard, which this chapter examines further by looking at the company Masdar, a state-owned subsidiary of the Mubadala Development Company. Regarding the UAE, various economic and social indicators based on data from the World Bank have tracked steady progress in terms of development since the 1990s. The UAE has invested heavily in education as well as research and development, reflecting an ambition to build a more diversified knowledge-based economy. This drive for knowledge and innovation is exemplified by Masdar, whose mission is to invest in, incubate, and commercialize new renewable energy and clean technologies both within Abu Dhabi and around the world. The extent of the UAE’s commitment to economic development, institutional capacity building, and the openness that underpins these processes becomes clear by examining Masdar and the degree to which the company represents the neoliberalism emerging in the GCC.

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Bandar Abbas, the capital of Hormozgan Province, is Iran’s largest port with a long history of trade and fishing activities. It is located at the entrance of the Persian Gulf on the northern side of the Strait of Hormuz, and plays commercial and military roles of strategic significance for the country. Bandar Abbas’s natives mostly speak a dialect of Persian, and adhere to either Sunni or Shi’a Islam. There are Arab, Baluchi, and African, as well as earlier South Asian and perhaps European, influences on the population of the city. Named after the Safavid monarch Shah Abbas the Great, Bandar Abbas was in the past also known as Gumbarun, or by a similar variation. Despite its importance as a trading port, it had a population of no more than 10,000 before the modern era, owing to its relatively inhospitable climate and the scarcity of water in the area. While modern municipal activities and town improvements were initiated in Bandar Abbas in the 1920s, the city’s development was delayed as the Trans-Iranian Railways, inaugurated in the 1930s, bypassed it. Yet, its rapid expansion in terms of population and area was facilitated in the late 1960s by the construction of new deep-water port facilities, and it has been enhanced ever since by further economic investment and migration.

To a large extent, Bandar Abbas’s rapid growth in the last four decades reflects general urbanization trends in Iran. Based on figures from the Statistical Center of Iran, the total population of the country grew at an average annual rate of 2.32 percent, from 33.7 million to 75.1 million persons, between 1976/7 and 2011/12. Iran’s urban population grew at an average rate of 3.54 percent from 15.85 million to 53.65 million (71.4 percent of total) in this thirty-five-year period. Population densities—averaging about 45 persons per square kilometer—and urbanization—size and number of urban settlements—are much lower in the south and east as compared to the north and west of Iran due to differences in precipitation rates between the two halves of the country. Bandar Abbas has nonetheless grown rapidly in the past few decades to rank among the top 20 of around 80 Iranian cities that have more than 100,000 inhabitants.

As in many other developing countries, a byproduct of rapid urbanization in Iran has been the proliferation of unplanned, underserviced, and poverty-stricken neighborhoods often referred to as slums. There is evidence for informal shelter in Bandar Abbas going back several decades. An informative study conducted in the early 1970s on the housing situation on the city’s fringes recorded tents and date-palm huts as well as other traditional makeshift dwellings still existing in Bandar Abbas. Yet, the proliferation of informal, decaying, underserviced, and/or poverty-stricken neighborhoods in Bandar Abbas is related to the city’s rapid growth in the last four decades.

Although similar macro circumstances and urban regulatory regimes affect Iranian cities, their spatial and socioeconomic outcomes have certain distinct characters in each case. This is arguably more so for Bandar Abbas, taking into account its unique location, its economic potentials, and the regional and exogenous forces by which it is influenced. In this chapter, we probe the dynamics of urban growth, informality, and decay in Bandar Abbas as well as public sector initiatives addressing the latter two issues. We discuss some of the general factors that influence informality and decay in Iranian cities; in particular, inflation and unemployment, income stagnation and inequality, and speculative land markets and restrictive
land-use regulations. We then suggest that whereas Bandar Abbas has become Iran’s main cargo transit port, further receiving some manufacturing investment as well as migrants from outside the province, its economy is polarized into traditional and modern parts, neither of which produces adequate employment and income for the city’s poor households more or less native to the region.

After portraying the spatial dimensions of this polarization in Bandar Abbas, we turn to describing the socioeconomic and physical characteristics of the city’s low-income and underserviced neighborhoods categorized as informal settlements in the government’s recent initiatives. In the last section before our conclusion, we examine the outcome of earlier informal settlement pilot upgrading projects in Bandar Abbas as well as recommendations of more recent initiatives aimed at providing a citywide plan for the city’s low-income neighborhoods. We further speculate on the future of the low-income and underserviced settlements in Bandar Abbas and express optimism about current initiatives that are supposed to take a holistic and regional approach to addressing urban polarization in Bandar Abbas and the plight of unplanned, poverty-stricken, and underserviced settlements. Much of our analysis in this chapter is based on published and unpublished reports prepared for the Iranian government. We also make extensive use of data from the Statistical Center of Iran and other official sources, complemented by findings from recent field inquiries and communication with public sector authorities.

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Gulf cities have been characterized by ongoing and unlimited sprawl and growth during recent decades. Today, the Gulf region is among the most rapidly urbanizing regions in the world, where the sudden wealth and construction boom resulting from the exploitation of oil resources have affected the rate and nature of urbanization. The Arab region is now more urbanized than developing countries as a whole (approximately 50 percent compared to 45 percent), and its urban population is projected to more than double by 2050. The two main factors—in both the present and recent past—that have contributed to rapid urbanization in the Gulf region, at least from a population perspective, include a high natural increase of the population and the massive in-migration of foreign labor to support the region’s booming economies. Both trends have predominantly affected urban areas that absorb the majority of natural increase and migration influx. Indeed, it has been predicted that virtually all population growth in the next thirty years in the region will be concentrated in cities.

Urbanization rates in the Sultanate of Oman have increased from 11 percent in 1970 to 84 percent in 2009. Oman’s urbanization follows a pattern that is common for Gulf states and is largely the result of welfare policies that provide free access to a number of services and assets, including land. Experts in the field claim that the granting of land to citizens has been a major factor in shaping Gulf cities. In Oman, this has resulted in vast urban areas of “land grant neighborhoods,” that are of relatively low-density and that are often located on the urban fringe, where Omani families construct a home on a granted plot of land that meets today’s comfort standards.

Within these urban dynamics, the meaning of traditional and “old” neighborhoods and inner-city residential districts has shifted considerably. In an era of globalization and modernization, where private vehicles dominate and the significance of distance diminishes, the historical residential urban areas in Gulf cities seem to have lost their residential appeal to many of their traditional urban dwellers, who now prefer a higher level of comfort, larger houses, more space and privacy, and less congestion.

This chapter is based on a neighborhood study and addresses the meaning of Mutrah, one of Muscat’s oldest neighborhoods, as a place of residence to its inhabitants. It examines the identification residents experience with their neighborhood and community, and the level of appreciation of the neighborhood. Drawing from the literature on place identity, sense of community, and residential satisfaction, as well as how these are all interlinked, this study demonstrates that appreciation of the neighborhood in Mutrah is largely a function of the inhabitants’ sense of identification with their neighborhood and the social groups to which they belong. I argue that in Mutrah, the residential experience appears to be far more positive than the actual physical housing and neighborhood conditions would predict, which can be explained by a strong place attachment and sense of community among Mutrah residents.

The research for this study is comprised of both quantitative and qualitative methods. A survey among 260 Mutrah residents was conducted to assess demographic and socioeconomic and housing characteristics, as well as opinions about dwellings and neighborhood facilities. Interviews with random Mutrah residents were then conducted to examine the quality of the relationship they have with their neighborhood, and how the self is situated in the socio-spatial environment.
The chapter starts with an overview of urbanization patterns in the Gulf and Oman, primarily from a population and housing perspective, and the changing meaning of traditional neighborhoods in these urban dynamics. Drawing from geography and environmental psychology discourses, a number of concepts are discussed relating to neighborhoods and place identity, followed by a description of the methodology. The findings are then presented from the empirical study in the Mutrah neighborhood, with an introduction of the study area, and an exploration of three place identity components: place attachment, sense of community, and place dependence. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the findings in the context of Gulf cities. Policy options are explored to identify how place identity as a precursor to residential appreciation can inform urban planning decision-making and future redevelopment of traditional residential neighborhoods in Gulf cities.

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