I, Venkata K Matturi, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Community Planning in Community Planning.

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The Elusive Dubai
Lessons in planned development for fast growing cities

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Abstract

Increase in urbanization through globalization and population explosion has resulted in rapidly growing cities in the past few decades. Driven by market forces and moneyed interests, cities are placing larger emphasis on economic development. This increasing trend had resulted in a dramatic change in urban morphology and vernacular urban fabric is being replaced by a ‘global urban form’ that has become a commonplace around the world.

Dubai, a regional financial hub and a global city, rose to prominence in a matter of few decades. Started as a mere fishing village, it has managed to modernize and build itself to global prominence. Its meteoric rise has resulted in a dramatic transformation in its physical form through single minded determination and careful planning. This research explores the impact of rapid growth on Dubai’s urban form and its implications on creating an ‘Elusive Dubai’. This research also investigates the phenomenon of elusiveness in major land uses of Dubai through the analysis of surveyed data collected prior to this research. Furthermore, it attempts to draw lessons for planned rapid urban growth in cities through Dubai’s model of urbanization.
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The Elusive Dubai

Lessons in planned development for fast growing cities

دروس في التنمية المخططة للمدن المتنامية بسرعة
Introduction

Throughout history, cities have played an important role in shaping human civilization. Most notably, urban form has helped shape many aspects of world we live in today and remain the witnesses of evolution, and transformation that took place. Although the evolution and dynamics of cities remained the focus in planning and urban design for as long as the cities existed, the recent emergence of rapidly growing cities and their impact has demanded attention, primarily because of one city: “Dubai” (Figure 1). It is a known fact that Dubai has generated wide spread attention in how surprisingly it rose to significance in a span of just over three decades. No other urban conglomeration in the history has achieved such an unequivocal prominence in such a short period of time, all the while, making heads turn with its ambitious accomplishments. It is now widely seen as a brand in itself and increasingly being tried to replicate in newly developed cities around the world, especially those in the developing nations.

Not everything Dubai has seen is rosy and smooth. A deeper look into the socio-economic, cultural and physical aspects of the city and its growth paints a different picture, albeit its purple patch of exuberance. Critiques have often remarked its growth as a mere profligacy that cannot be sustained. Although there has been much published work on its architecture, and a growing literary collection on social conditions of Dubai metropolis, there is a clear dearth of knowledge on the most crucial tying field: Urban design and planning. Taking this as a basis for a research meant deeper exploration into some of the
basic understandings of the dynamics of a global city; the exponential and unfathomable change in urban form; and most profound of all its “elusiveness”. Elusiveness of cities originates through the constant overlays of evolving urban traditions over a period of long and storied past which is part of what comprises them. But a look at the recent growth in the number of urban areas that has less valued history merits an unclenched definition and evaluation of their elusiveness. Especially a city like Dubai that is being seen more and more as a model of urban growth requires a measured look.

This precise relationship of urban form and the elusiveness of Dubai as a research had been initiated by Dr. Mahyar Arefi of University of Cincinnati during his stay at University of Sharjah with the help of architecture students. A surveyed data had been gathered in and around Dubai’s metropolitan area, which includes the city of Dubai and the city of Sharjah. The findings were both intriguing as well as immense in revealing some of the fascinating facts of previously unknown proportion about Dubai’s urban fabric. The findings as well as a logical elusive framework developed by Dr. Arefi forms the core of this research that looks into above mentioned dynamics of global cities, a review of the city of Singapore that comes closest to Dubai in terms of its organization; and the aforementioned logical framework.

This research is divided into two parts. The first part, that includes first two chapters, will look in detailed the effect of globalization on urban morphological change, rapid growth in cities, analysis of Singapore’s growth, and history & emergence of Dubai through a careful literature review on these wide ranging topics. The second part will look into the concept of elusiveness, research methodology, and analysis of the surveyed data in...
each of research framework elements. Further this epistemological research will conclude with inferences as well as lessons to rapidly growing conurbations that try to emulate Dubai!
1. **Dynamics of Modern Cities**

Cities were, and always have been, the engines for growth. They epitomized the change and evolution of nearly every human aspect (Kostof 1991). Especially they symbolize the values and ambitions of nations throughout the history. However, in modern times some cities have increasingly become global centers that are not only crucial to the country / state they are located in but the whole region and sometimes even the global economy. Capital inflows from far and wide have made them points of interest across the globe (Castells 2003). Market forces have become the primary modifiers of a city’s morphological changes seriously endangering the multitude of aspects that made the cities diverse and unique in instantiating their respective cultural values and traditions. Centuries long notion of being a focal point to socio-cultural aspects of a state had been forgone and comfortably being replaced by centers of economic and financial growth. This current paradigm has increasingly influenced public policies that are being developed primarily driven by commercial interests. This trend is seemingly more apparent in cities striving for more global presence through investments. This inevitably has influence on how the space and land are planned in these cities (Ooi 2004, 2).

This market based phenomenon is not specific to any region or country but seen all around the world, transcending the boundaries; and more interestingly, united by a common ambition of economic growth. “Moneyed interests progressively dominated
landed interests in laying out and building the new quarters of the city” (Mumford 1961, 417). There are other factors too that are associated with such an overhaul in evolution of urban centers. Explosive population growth is the primary reason that is often directly related to urban population growth around the world. The number of people immigrating to the urban areas has gone up at an exponential rate and the urban population is projected to reach 60% of the total world population by 2020 (UNPD 2012). This growth is so interrelated to the growth of urban morphology that it is difficult to treat them as separate entities. Policy decisions are geared towards accommodating more and more population in the urban areas as well as creating jobs in the cities, resulting in an enormous expansion of urban form. Urban population growth again is linked to those better economic conditions and financial climate causing a spiraling cycle to perpetuate further.

Most interestingly, this urban population explosion in the past two centuries is not just because of rural immigration. Better economic conditions have attracted skilled as well as non-skilled labor from foreign countries, and sometimes other continents, creating an amalgam of cultures and traditions. This has been evident first in western hemisphere and now in the eastern hemisphere as well as in South America. Foreign direct investments and human resource availability have made cities in the developing countries viable locations for Multi-National Corporations (MNCs) (Ex. Intel, IBM, Citibank, Microsoft, etc.) to set up global offices, helping them reduce the cost of services they provide. This economic globalization has resulted in booming economies of developing countries, which directly translated to prosperity of some major cities. All along, increased specialization in services provided, and the principle of *comparative advantage*, helped in cultivating the
globalization phenomenon, and in turn resulting in a cross-cultural and cross-social activity (Sassen 1998).

This process of changing priorities and interests are in turn affecting wide ranging areas of urban migration, population growth, and recent shift in financial premises that cities relied upon. The effects of globalization are seen and felt in almost all the facets of urban life. Indeed it is safe to say that in the past few decades globalization is the driving force behind growth and decline of urban areas (Girardet 2008; Marcuse 2008). This is more prominent in major cities and postmodern cities vying for a lion’s share in trade and economy regionally and globally. Dubai is a prime recent example of a city that had successfully reaped the rewards of global economic factors and diversification, but also as a city that had been affected by the side effects of fragmentation and marginalization of immigrant population (Ali 2010). Hence, a deeper look into how global forces and the phenomenon of globalization had influenced the morphological change in cities will help in understanding the current crop of issues faced by major cities around the world, especially the major financial centers.

Globalization and Urban Change

When Levitt (1983), an economist introduced Globalization in his seminal article “The Globalization of Markets”, published in Harvard Business Review, it merely involved the operation of market forces around the globe. These market forces were just starting to capitalize on the advancements in information and communication technology as well as the rapid transfer of goods through faster modes of transportation. These advancements
were not just influential on the economic growth. Regimented states started to open up in the middle of perpetual progress in technology. At the heart of this transformation were cities, more specifically, the major cities located in developing world.

Cities were the centers of transformation. “Societies only exist in time and space. The spatial form of a society is, therefore, closely linked to its structure and urban change is intertwined with historical evolution” (Castells 2003, 23). With globalization and booming free markets the national economies became more dependent on the functioning of cities that transcended the national boundaries with their impact. For this very specific reason Sassen (1998), a sociologist argues that any analysis of economic globalization needs to include cities and further, understand the economic epicenters situated in specific places.

*World City* as popularized by Patrick Geddes in early 20th century included the cities that controlled the majority of world businesses operations. It was purely based on increasing dominance of these cities in world economy. Population migration for better working opportunities created a burst in these cities. But fascinatingly associated with this exponential growth of immigration is the fragmentation of immigrant population in the city. Hence the initially categorized *World Cities*, New York and London being most prominent among them, has seen large scale immigrant settlements impacting the socio-cultural aspects in these cities.

Past 3 - 4 decades have seen an increase in the number of world cities through growing dependence on market forces; technological innovation; and globalization. Sassen categorized these new world cities as *Global Cities* which include some of the former World Cities that sustained the financial growth, as well as the ones that are increasingly
becoming influential by day in world trade, economy and politics. The influence of economic forces and international finance is undeniable on globalization. However, Sassen argues that analyzing globalized cities as places allow us to understand more localized processes where globalization is felt and the multiculturalism is much a common denominator as the market. “Finally, focusing on cities allows us to specify a geography of strategic places at the global scale, places bound to each other by the dynamics of economic globalization” (Sassen, Globalization and Its Discontents 1998, xx).

This however, leads us only to the effect of market on urban processes that define how a city is functioning. Traditionally, cities were shaped out of “man’s social needs and multiply both their modes and methods of expression” (Mumford 1938, 3). Social needs are increasingly drifting towards free trade rather than freedom of expression. In other words, the needs of the society are shaped by economic common ground than heterogeneous societal commonalities that were a norm, thereby, making the city a place for global capital claims and ‘organizational commodity”. This however, only puts certain sectors of urban population at a disadvantage. “The denationalizing of urban spaces and the formation of new claims by transnational actors and involving contestation, raise the question-whose city is it?” (Sassen 1998, xx)

Here in, lies an essential aspect of investigation. As Castells (2003) argues, cities are the products of history; not only in physical settings, but also social attributes. This very collision of social change through immigration and historicity behind their urban meaning is what makes the global cities most intriguing to analyze. Global cities are unified by elements that are unique and are consistent across national boundaries, global capital and
the new immigrant manpower being two of these. There are more common societal and
economic factors in the way how New York and Tokyo work as opposed to how New York
and Mobile, Alabama. This is due to the global economic and social flux operating in an out
these cities. To gather a clear understanding of this social change that has worked towards
making the global cities unique and their very connection to it, “we must determine the
mechanisms through which spatial structures are transformed and urban meaning is
redefined” (Castells 2003, 23).

The very notion of globalization has changed how the cities work in the past half
century. So the analysis of urban contexts and meanings require a thorough investigation of
these globalized processes inside the city that constitute not just the dominant corporate
and capital culture, but also the sea change in social order of the city through immigration
and its consequent ramifications. “And while it may seem that migrations are ever present,
distinct phases and patterns are clearly discernible during the last two centuries” (Sassen
1998, 57). The increased pace of growth in cities in their economies, population and
urbanized areas only add an extra layer of complexity to this. This increased pace has
resulted in unforeseen consequences as the globalization is manifested in almost all forms
of city living. Hence, it is becomes critical to look at the impacts of rapid growth in cities.

**Rapid Growth in Cities**

The effect of globalization is felt across the world in a dramatic explosion of urban
population in the last half a century. The major brunt of this burden is born by world global
cities. For the first time in 2007 the human population in urban areas had crossed 50%
marker (UNPD 2012). This momentous demographic shift has wider implications on transportation, businesses, transportation systems, and in general the environment. But the underlying change in the urban form has also been the cause of concern, more specifically, the uncontrolled growth of urban areas around the existing cities, ever mushrooming new cities and rapid changes in historic urban character. This calls for a change in how the cities are perceived and planned. Castells notes:

    Western planning theories were developed in response to the industrial revolution and technological innovation. These theories have subsequently evolved to accommodate private vehicles, multi-storey buildings and the consumer-oriented way of life. With better awareness of the limitation of global resources, even advanced countries will now have to seriously re-examine how their urban centers should function (Castells 2003, 5).

    Cities located in the developing world had seen an unprecedented explosion of population, especially immigrant population, both from the country side and transnational. Cities like Mumbai, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong and Jakarta are prime examples of this phenomenon of population growth. New cities are being created either alongside existing ones or on green fields to address this growth. City states like Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Singapore had focused on urbanizing to reap the rewards of glowing global economy, which made them magnets for immigrant population in the past 50 years. On the other hand, the earlier global cities continued to attract a large pool of working population from both internally and externally. Although urban migration is one of the main issues of rapid population explosion in cities, the motive behind this research is not to reiterate or discuss the rapid growth through globalization and urbanization. However, the effect of this uncontrolled growth on urban form and patterns of urban space utilization (Bosselmann
2008) could very well provide us the answers to some of the wide ranging problems that are plaguing the urban areas today. Interestingly, the economic motive behind migration and demographic shift is also a major factor behind the growing urban form.

Rapid growth in cities, for the varied reasons noted above, was not consistent. More importantly, the growth periods of western cities differed from the rapid urbanization in Asian cities. The swift urbanization of London in late 19th century and early 20th century followed by New York’s growth (Figure 2) in early to mid-20th century was evidence to the changing economic power. Rapid urbanization of Asian cities like Tokyo (Figure 3) and Hong Kong (Figure 4) started happening towards the later part of 20th century. The last decade of 20th century and the first decade of 21st century saw this pace continue with other major cities like Kuala Lumpur, Taipei, Shanghai and Singapore. This pattern continued westwards from the Asian countries towards the subcontinent and Middle Eastern cities because of various economic factors like Oil boom as well as economic liberalization. Interestingly, but inevitably, the urban morphological change in Asian cities excluding Shanghai, stabilized towards the end of 20th century.

Middle Eastern cities of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, unlike any other city in history, started to grow rapidly in physical form taking advantage of the oil boom (however, both Dubai and Abu Dubai differ in their growth models). This is especially important as these cities were virtually non-existent until mid-1970. What’s more intriguing is the way the urban form was shaped not because to address the population growth but rather to modernize and attract population either by immigration or by economic development. The uniqueness of this development, which is the focus of this research (and is discussed in
detail in the following chapters), can be partly attributed to the city-state nature and the ambitions of the monarchy in taking the strides of rapid modernization.

Indeed, many factors contributed to the rise of Dubai to a global status in such a short period. The effects of immigration, architecture and oil boom in the growth of Dubai have been well documented (Ali 2010; Alraouf 2005; Davidson 2008; Esheshtawy 2004; Elsheshtawy 2010; Krane 2009). The growth of Dubai had been nothing short of a miracle. This vicissitude of urban morphology from a humble fishing village and a trading town to a global city in less than half a century has been a subject of much discussion and research. The attention though, has been more focused, and continues to be, on the market spectacle (Davidson 2008).

For every transformation of this stature there is always a vision behind it, and the case of Dubai is no different. The resolve and ambition to elevate the city to a household name has got everything to do with the focused urbanization approach taken by the authorities, in this case the rulers themselves. A similar physical progress of such magnitude has no precedents, only some traces to compare Dubai’s success or failure with.

Prior to the rise of Dubai in the middle-east much of the growth outside of United States has been happening from 1960s to 1990s in the cities located in Asian countries, more specifically the economies of Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and South Korea later came to be known as four Asian tigers (Kim 1998). The Asian miracle catapulted them into a developed world through rapid urbanization. The case of Singapore has always been curious for limited resources and land. This similarity along with the early British influence, city-state nature, a huge immigrant population from Southeast Asia and a rapid
urban transformation literally from swamps to a financial and civic success, makes it an ideal city to investigate as a case study and compare it to the lightning fast rise of Dubai.

**The Singapore Experience**

Singapore is a parliamentary republic and a city-state located to the south of Malay Peninsula in south-east Asia (Figure 5). Although Singapore has been inhabited continuously since the second century AD the modern day Singapore was established as a trading post in early 19th century by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, a British statesman. It has always been a major trading city in the region and gained prominence with its booming market economy after its independence in 1965 and subsequent rapid urbanization. With a population of 5.07 million (Census 2010), Singapore is one of the largest city-states in the world. At its peak, it was known as one of the Asian tigers. Singapore has one of the busiest ports as well as the one of the busiest Airports (ACI 2011) in the world signifying its export and import-based, free-market economy.

Singapore has been an important trading city primarily due to its location on major trading route during the colonial times and transformed itself into a major financial hub in the past four decades. The economy is based on extended entrepôt concept (without import and export duties) and ranked 1st in the world in ease of doing business (Doing Business 2012). Lim (1980) claims, that Singapore is an external oriented international urban center. It had proven its commitment towards consistent growth throughout its history. From a small fishing village to a global city, the metamorphosis involved significant changes and sacrifices both physically and culturally for the city. “Singapore has singular
position regionally and globally in relation to these concerns insofar as its history involves extended, strategic engagement with the twin enterprises of post colonialism and globalization, as well as with colonialism” (Bishop, Phillips and Yeo 2004, 2).

Singapore provides a unique case study for investigating the outcomes of rapid urbanization, as well as the wider implications of physical metamorphosis in a short span of time as in the case of Dubai. Its development also gives insight into ambitious planned growth where there exists a large immigrant population with socio-ethnic divides. Singapore also exemplifies a Southeast Asian city with a major divide between the urbanized areas and a marginalized populace that depends nearly on urban areas for living.

History

To understand the Singapore’s case of rapid growth and its subsequent modernization, it is imperative to analyze the historical physical and political premises that made the city what it is today. Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles arrived at the island of Singapore at the southern tip of Malay Peninsula in 1819 through the Strait of Malacca (Dale 1999). He soon recognized the potential of the island to be a major center for the British trade in the south East Asia. Through tactical political negotiations that took advantage of the local factional division Raffles managed to establish a British trading post giving birth to Singapore. Malaya Archipelago was an area of considerable commercial interest for colonial powers as it was important for Spice and Opium trade between India and China, and the area was dominated by the Dutch. The growing trade with China, and associated sea route, were the reasons behind the revival of British interest in the Malay Archipelago (Dale 1999).
Singapore saw a growth in population, as well as economic activity, during the period of 1819 to 1867, signifying its role as an important trading post. Its population grew to 81,000, an eightfold increase from 1824 (Dale 1999). Singapore became a crown colony and remained so till the Japanese occupation of the peninsula in World War II (1942-45). Post-war Singapore came back under British rule till it became self-governed in 1958. It merged with Malaysia in 1963 for a brief period and gained total independence in 1965 (Dale 1999).

However, for the better part of nineteenth century Singapore has grown rapidly both in trade and population in which Chinese occupied the major portion. Infrastructure was subsequently developed to cope with the commercial growth. Free trade policy attracted more and more businesses. This period of rapid growth was followed by a consolidated growth till the earlier part of twentieth century. The rapid industrialization in the western nations and consequent economic explosion of China meant more trade for Singapore. “Singapore’s, as well as Hong Kong’s growth was closely interwoven with Britain’s expansionist policies” (Dale 1999, 10).

Post-First World War, declining British hegemony and expanding American interests, as well Japan’s industrial power, resulted in increasing economic prominence for Singapore. Seventy-five percent of world’s rubber was produced in Peninsular Malaya and former Dutch colonies located in South East Asia. The population of Singapore rose to approximately 560,000 in 1931 (Dale 1999) of which the majority were Chinese immigrants. The Second World War and its aftermath marked a change in Singapore both politically and economically. Japanese occupation and suppression of the population had
profound impact on trade and the attitudes of Singapore’s residents. However, it remained a major center in regional trade and a powerhouse in international economy because of its strategic location especially since its independence.

Although Singapore has experienced steady growth throughout most of its history, the increase in urbanization post-independence and a rapidly expanding economy due to more globalized financial processes has elevated it to a post-modern city. Therein, lies the ambition of growth that transformed the city physically (Figure 6). Singapore recognized early on the need for modernization to sustain its standing based on the free-market economy. “Such moves are a staple of communication from official quarters such as ministerial speeches and government directives, and they are delivered with certain rhetoric that is underpinned by a belief in urgency about the need for agile and incessant transformation” (Bishop, Phillips and Yeo 2004). This has been reflected in the consistent attention towards addressing physical problems of the city. Indeed, the roots of this structured growth can be traced to a land-use master plan (Figure 7), created as early as 1823 by Lieutenant Philip Jackson through an instruction from Raffles himself. Especially, the declining city conditions were to be addressed in a comprehensive way. This is where the urban renewal program Singapore employed became critical in recuperating its urban environment.

Urban Renewal Program

Urban Renewal Program in Singapore is often seen and cited as the turning point of Singapore’s history. Unlike their counterparts in the western countries, urban renewal here was defined and executed in a completely different way as these programs were not meant
to revive neighborhoods but to improve their physical condition. Post-independence the need for urban regeneration in Singapore was becoming evident with outburst of population, rapid decline in living conditions and chaotic urban growth. United Nations (UN) assistance was sought to improve these conditions. However, the constraints in land availability meant “gradual demolition of virtually the whole 1,500 acres of the old city and its replacement by an integrated modern city centre” (Dale 1999, 121). The UN report outlined the urban renewal as a series of “Action Programs” that had to occur without a wholesale demolition avoiding a social upheaval.

Prior to the UN consultation, attempts to build public housing through demolition of the existing crowded areas, resettlements were met with skepticism and resistance. By 1965-6, through political maneuvering and some tactical moves, the government had succeeded in gaining the upper hand in coercing all those who might block resettlement (Dale 1999). The UN team had estimated the population of Singapore to reach 4 million before the turn of the millennium. This population growth needed a strong and radical approach to land use and growth management.

The UN team had recognized the case of Singapore was unique. A major difference in urban renewal programs in developed western countries, notably in the United States, was that the renewal districts in Singapore were thriving, not decaying. Thus, the group recommended an attempt to identify the unique values of some of Singapore’s existing areas and strengthen these values (Abrams, Kobe and Koenigsberger 1980). Part of Singapore’s uniqueness was shophouses, close cousins to mixed-use housing in the west but with narrow covered walking arcades. However, these shophouse areas were seen by the
authorities and administrators as a slum dwellings and *unfit* for the aspirations of the new Singapore. Although most of the recommendations of the UN group had been implemented since then, some unique elements, like conserving shophouses, were neglected; this neglect resulted in the demolition and rebuilding of many areas of the city.

The urban renewal strategies employed by the Urban Renewal Department (URD), previously the Housing and Development Board (HDB), were both holistic and focused (Dale 1999, 126). The original target of modernizing housing was broadened to accommodate the objective to provide space for economic activities of the growing city. Reparcelled land was cleared and tendered to developers with government’s overall guidelines. Developers were offered special concessions that included interest free payments, property tax concessions, and easy repayments. The infrastructure was provided by the government to streamline the planning and design approval process. These strategies proved to be an instant success in attracting the developers and buyers alike.

The public housing impacted the growth of the city and was especially useful in decongesting the Central Areas (CA). There was massive population redistribution and increase in the areas where public housing was constructed (Dale 1999). Initiatives taken by the Singapore government heralded the city into a new era of growth through foreign direct investments and rapidly growing service sector.

**Modernization, Rapid Urban Growth and Impacts**

The rise of Singapore was becoming evident through the population and economic growth during the 1990s. "Today, it is difficult for any visitor to Singapore to conceive that
up to the late 1960s, high-rise buildings hardly existed” (Dale 1999, 231). This success can be attributed to the urban renewal programs that the government of Singapore initiated throughout the early years of its independence that massively helped the spur in development. The government's commitment in keeping Singapore a major economic power, despite limited resources, was evident throughout the late 20th century. To address rapid population growth and declining conditions, “the physical environment was to be rebuilt, not only to eradicate old slum areas but also to give Singapore a modern face, reflecting its aspirations” (Dale 1999, 232).

This transformation had wider implications on many aspects of Singapore. The city transformed from a prominent regional city to a global city. Modernization of infrastructure and housing created a much more viable environment for major multi-national businesses. Tourism and financial industries began to grow rapidly, which contributed to the diversification of Singapore’s previous entrepôt economy. It is an undeniable fact that this rapid transformation in creating the Singapore experience began with the initiatives from the governmental body. “The main lesson to be learnt from the Singapore experience is the aspirations that can be achieved through a government committed to certain ideals and determined to attain these” (Dale 1999, 243).

Not all outcomes of this urban metamorphosis have been positive. Rapid urbanization and large scale modernization of Singapore had profound ramifications on socio-cultural aspects of the city. The metamorphosis had simultaneous implications of losing its cultural heritage, in a period of planned social and economic exchange (Dale 1999, 241). Due to the urban renewal program that changed the face of Singapore, unique
elements of the city’s urban fabric were demolished and replaced by the postmodern high-rise buildings, a reflection of economic boom. “But the nature of this ubiquitous postmodernity is fundamentally that of the alternative: a response that can change as quickly as the conditions it responds to a fleet contingency grounded not on fixed values but on principles of trans-valuation” (Lim 2004, 137).

The loss of many historic structures, like the aforementioned shophouses, was irrevocable, especially, in the earlier urban renewal process. Singapore’s modernization plans only saw these structures as places for squalor and chaos. But, the government was slow to see the underlying social temporality that thrived in these places. Lim (2004) notes that what looked like chaos was indeed complexity with a multi-layered order and systems superimposed on each other or existing next to each other. This neglect had cost the city dear throughout the process of modernization.

The global market forces that elevated Singapore to a post-modern city also resulted in the loss of its uniqueness and identity. These indeed may have resulted in oppressing or even driving the local cultures to a risk of extinction. This process of urban change (Figure 8) was merely focused on creating a global image. “Rather than being inspired by the traditional city, from the outset, the process adhered to the universal trend of aggrandizing the modern while denying the contribution offered by history and tradition” (Dale 1999, 241).

Hence, Singapore’s historical experiences provide some valuable lessons in understanding rapid growth and urban processes, especially as they relate to ambitious construction projects and the modernization of physical form. “Demands for increased
speed and foreshortened building lifespans have profound ramifications for the interactions between architectural practices and theory and urbanization processes” (Bishop, Phillips and Yeo 2004, 6). A focus on the creation of structures that are ubiquitous and easily replicated only leaves a city to eventual stagnation. “Buildings and spaces, however, are only tangible crystallizations of intangible qualities: the customs, rituals, and timeless patterns derive from the way people live, eat, greet each other, and socially interact” (Dale 1999, 237). Nonetheless, Singapore has managed to accomplish their original goals of urbanization and in latter stages managed to successfully carve out conservation policies for its historical image. It has achieved global city status in little over three decades, proving that the sustenance of national policies have allowed for successful growth strategies. To this day, it remains a model for growth determined by strong governmental action and later for conserving efforts.
2. Emergence of Dubai

Dubai has become a household name for global tourists and businessmen alike, in recent years, both for its profligate rise as a holiday destination, financial center, and a trading center, in other words a true global city. Increasingly, it has also been gaining a dubious distinction for poor working and living conditions, specifically, for laborers and immigrants, as well as safe haven for trafficking and slavery (Krane 2009). But these are more byproducts and side effects of an embraced change that the emirate of Dubai took upon itself four decades ago.

The journey that Dubai had embarked on was not an easy one. For three decades it was “slow” before things started to really take off for what Dubai had aimed for. The first decade of the new millennium Dubai had witnessed the most dramatic of changes, in its physical and social environment, that the world had ever seen in history (Elsheshtawy 2004). This is a remarkable transformation considering the city was a mere fishing village till 1930s and a small trading town in 1960s. This merits a deeper discourse of Dubai’s roots and precedents for understanding its transformation.

Sands of Time*

For all its glitz what Dubai is now or for the past decade, its beginnings were extremely humble. Although there had been archeological evidence of settlements as early

*Sands of Time is the title of a chapter in The City of Gold by Jim Krane (2009)
as 7000 BC, around where modern Dubai is located, the earliest mention of Dubai can be found in the “Book of Geography” in 1095. A thriving pearling industry was noted by Venetian merchants in 16th century (King 2001). Dubai’s modern history dates to the beginning of 19th century. Since then there has been a continuous settlement in the Dubai’s Strait area as a port town. By 1830s, Dubai and Abu Dubai were occupied by tribes that built forts, bastions, and towers in mud to protect the pearl industry and water supplies.

“The transition of Dubai from a small village to a port town started with the occupation of the Al Bu Falasah tribe in 1833 (Figure 9) after a quarrel with the Banu Yas of Abu Dhabi” (Fuccaro 2009, 52). “The most important family of the Al Bu Falasah section was the Al Maktoum, from which all the rulers of Dubai have come” (Ali 2010, 14).

The area of Dubai, Abu Dhabi and the Strait of Hormuz in general has always been an important and attractive one to trade because of its location between Europe, Africa, and Asia. Despite this, it is important to note that the scarcity of water and adverse desert conditions had significant ramifications on the development or rather a lack of a permanent town till the 19th century unlike the thriving civilizations across the Strait of Hormuz and Persian Gulf. However, by the early part of 20th century Dubai started to establish as a major regional trading port with its pearl industry. Dubai was able to attract merchants and traders from as far as India. As a result of booming pearl industry migration intensified to Dubai and influx of laborers and merchants intensified from Bahrain, Iran, and East Africa. Dubai blossomed as an entrepôt trading center and its population quickly rose to 10,000 inhabitants in 1905 from a mere 800 in 1833 (Fuccaro 2009).
The growing British Empire in the latter half of 19th century, especially in Africa and Asia, made the port towns in Persian Gulf very favorable for trading. After the earlier conflicts with the local tribes at sea, the British had established a firm control of the naval routes in the gulf (Krane 2009). A lack of a structured state in Dubai and surrounding towns made the British to construct treaties with the Sheikhs - tribal leaders (Elsheshtawy 2004). British navy provided the protection for the pearl industry as well as the entrepôt trade between Europe and its Asian colonies. Ottoman Empire, a powerful expansionistic neighbor was also one of the reasons for the trading towns in the peninsula to enter into diplomatic treaties with the British.

The seeds of capitalism were sown very early in Dubai. Initial years of the 20th century also saw Dubai grow as an important international port for trading. The financial travails of the neighboring Iran made the Sheikh Maktoum bin Hasher see a clear opportunity. Subsequently, customs duty was abolished and trading fee was slashed to lure merchants from Iran. This strategy worked magnificently. By the turn of the century a sizeable population of Iranian traders relocated to Dubai. They were offered free land to the south bank of Dubai’s Creek, “and the Iranians built the Bastakiya neighborhood, named for the ancestral town of Bastak in south-central Iran” (Krane 2009, 22). This also brought Iranian traditions to Dubai, becoming a strong influence on its ‘vernacular’ urban form as well as the socio-cultural aspects. Most important of these imports were the Barjeels - wind catching towers, a vernacular building ventilation technology in Iran that was both innovative and modern for Dubai.
Since the early 1920s, the high tax rates and import duties in Iran helped ports across the gulf immensely in attracting large population of Persian immigrants that started gain foothold in Dubai economy and later would become vital cogs in its growth. The Islamic revolution in 1980s also increased the flow of educated and skilled immigrants across the gulf. To this day the trade with Iran accounts heavily in Dubai’s market economy and indeed, Dubai is Iran’s largest trading partner across the gulf (Krane 2009). The prominence of Dubai’s port and free market saw a consistent rise, especially with the help of British East India Company. “In a notable development, in 1904 the British Steam Navigation Company, that hitherto had been operating the route between Basra and Bombay, began using Dubai as a calling point” (Davidson 2008, 68). This increase in trading, as well as the thriving pearl industry, brought increased revenue to “souqs”, the indigenous market places in Dubai (Figure 10). Souqs started to take on a more prominent role in Dubai’s urban fabric - creating places of community gatherings along with market operations. To this day souqs occupy a special place in Dubai for both its local residents and the tourists.

British treaties with the ruling class helped its influence on the Dubai’s trade. The British continued their interests by maintaining a naval and diplomatic presence to protect the pearl industry from foreign investments. The gentle and shallow nature of the gulf allowed for a collection of pearls without any sophisticated equipment or protective gear. This luxury item was in high demand with the wealthy - both in India and the western nations. The thriving pearl industry facilitated an increasing wealth for the merchants and some sheiks. Some of the wealthy residences comprised of multiple wind towers and carved out wooden verandahs (Krane 2009, 36). The British were entitled to protect
Dubai’s divers’ monopoly on the pearl industry in the gulf. In return, the deal was to market the pearls only through British India and a firm control of Dubai’s foreign affairs.

Dependence on unstable pearl industry came back to hit hard on Dubai’s economy when the First World War broke out. The decreased demand and the increased competition from cultured pearls had a drastic effect on Dubai’s economy. Demise of pearl industry on Dubai will be felt for the following decades.

Oil and Economy

Both great wars had deep impact on Dubai’s economy and living conditions. A great depression followed the flourishing pearl economy. The truce that brought peace to the gulf by the British was merely for stagnation. There was no significant development either in infrastructure or technologies (Krane 2009; Elsheshtawy 2010). A politically weak sheik only contributed to the declining standard of living. There was an attempted coup against the sheikh by the majlis (advisory group to the sheikh comprised of merchants), who were pearl merchants (Elsheshtawy 2010, 65). “The pearl crash triggered a famine, with malnourishment widespread in Dubai in the 1930s and 1940s” (Krane 2009, 28).

Albeit the crash in pearl industry had culminated in Dubai’s perilous situation its crucial location between Europe, Arabia, and India meant it never lost its sheen in the eyes of Great Britain. The British struck a deal with the sheikhs to pay a ‘rent’ for its aircrafts to halt before they could proceed on their journey to India. This rentier income from landing rights went directly to the sheikhs that in turn would help making friends internally. This
led to building of the first airport in Dubai in 1939. Also important, but more lucrative at that time was the concession to the British for oil exploration in the area (Krane 2009, 36; Elsheshtawy 2010, 66). But this revenue was not enough to propel Dubai out of poverty. “The outbreak of the Second World War disrupted commercial links with India, however, and the resultant economic difficulties were offset only marginally by income from aviation and petroleum exploration concessions” (Pacione 2005, 256).

Post Second World War, Dubai saw a much slower growth both physically and economically. Although oil exploration was in full swing and oil was to be found in the neighboring Bahrain, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, Dubai’s oil exploration saw no success until much later. Dubai’s development was virtually stagnant in 1950s. Souqs were the only places of trading activity. In fact, they acted as the centers for any activity.

Much of Dubai’s center was a clamorous Arabian Souk. Alleys shaded by straw roofs let tiny beams of sunlight poke through the murk. The lanes were too narrow for cars, but donkey carts, camels, and even stray herds of goats could get inside, and it was by all accounts cacophonous (Krane 2009, 41).

The transformation the world was going through in 50s and the technological advancements in communications, building, and life style were alien to Dubai. There were no structures built by concrete blocks until much later. The ‘traditional’ barjeels (Figure 11) were still widely used, even with the advent of air-conditioning. Refrigerator was still a luxury that was owned by a very small group of people, because of the lack of electricity. The first hospital facility of western medicine was only built in 1950; 130 years after the British arrived (Krane 2009).
The oil exploration resumed in Dubai after Abu Dhabi’s first successful oil drilling barge in 1958. It was initially met with no success. But finally, in 1966 the oil drilling success came proving Dubai’s persistence with oil exploration right. Although the amount of oil deposits in Dubai area was a letdown compared to Abu Dhabi, it proved to be pivotal in turning its fortunes around. As the oil earnings grew, so did the dependence of Dubai’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on it. By 1975, oil earnings accounted for two-thirds of Dubai’s GDP. But Dubai’s rulers made sure it never relied entirely on the oil. Krane (2009) points out that this could be because of the not so old memories of the collapse of pearling industry. However, Davidson (2008) notes, the rulers had acknowledged the importance of heavy industries and overseas investments as an important component of Dubai’s economic plan, and that oil-backed strategies would never be enough to sustain Dubai’s standing as the lower gulf’s economic capital. He also points out that the recognition of Dubai’s limitations due to the oil rich neighbor in Abu Dhabi, just a few hours’ drive away.

The proceeds of the oil industry were invested heavily in building Dubai’s basic infrastructure (Pacione 2005, 256). “Oil income allowed Dubai to create the state-run business base that grew into the foundation of its economy” (Krane 2009, 51). In the mid-1980s, the Al-Maktoum family decided to commit to the internal growth by supporting and enhancing its existing re-export, entrepôt sector, while also allowing diversification in other sectors. “Over the following two decades investment in such physical infrastructure continued unabated with at times as estimated 25 percent of GDP being spent on building and improving” (Davidson 2008, 107) Dubai’s Infrastructure. This diversification helped Dubai immensely in times of fluctuating oil prices. It managed to weather these better than its neighboring oil-based states.
A City of Ambition

Post World War II to the discovery of oil, Dubai remained a mercantile town with limited resources, infrastructure, and flexibility. However, it was always part of a British protectorate, which enabled them to be the only partners in almost all the development that happened during this period. When oil boom created wealth in neighboring Emirati states and their subsequent growth in the world market, Dubai's rulers increasingly grew uneasy at the underdevelopment in Dubai as well as its isolation to the advancements around. The ruling family desired to change this, and create a Dubai that will be a household name far across the world. Sheikh Rashid, after his father’s death in 1958, took the development of Dubai’s modernization seriously. Dubai soon would have a modern port and within few more years basic infrastructure of electricity, running water, and telephones. In five subsequent years, a bridge was constructed connected both sides of the creek. Dubai has its own airport terminal by 1972 and by 1979 Middle East’s tallest building (Krane 2009, 67).

The grit and business acumen showed by the ruling family was remarkable in this pursuit. Series of development projects were undertaken by the Sheikh, that included “electrification of Dubai in 1961, a year which also saw the dredging of the creek for which funds were borrowed from Kuwait to pay for the British firm of Halcrow & Partners” (Elsheshtawy 2004, 175). What is remarkable is the persistence of the rulers in developing the state. Its long history of being a town dominated by merchants from foreign countries helped this cause by using the international connections in investments.
Although the British played a nominal role in developments around the Gulf as opposed to a formal colonial rule, there was an increasing demand against the British protectorate. This has led to, among other factors, the formation of United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 1971 with seven Emirati states of Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah, and Umm Al-Quwain; and Abu Dhabi as its formal capital. This was a significant development in strengthening a unified and emerging Emirati identity.

Sheikh Rashid dreamt of Dubai to be a truly global city. He continued to invest in Dubai internally to compete with the big names that are booming in the surrounding Arabian Peninsula. Outpacing its neighbors is one of the strategies that Dubai employed to stand out on its own and grow continuously. Some of the lucky breaks, like port of Sharjah's closure in early 1960s, the revolution across the gulf, and the gulf war, indeed helped Dubai either directly or indirectly. Sheikh Rashid commissioned Dubai’s World Trade Centre in 1979, which was the tallest building in the Middle East at the time (Krane 2009, 78). Multi-national corporations like IBM, Union Carbide and British petroleum relocated to Dubai from neighboring emirates like Sharjah. The same year, he also commissioned a new port, Jebel Ali. This eventually would become one of the busiest in the region, especially contributing to a strong entrepôt economy.

By 1985, Krane (2009) notes that just about everyone lived in an air-conditioned home, a stark contrast to 1960s. Heavy investments in the infrastructure, both public and commercial, continued at a frantic pace in the 1990s. The whole face of Dubai continued to change relentlessly and evolve every single year. Dubai had come a long way; with a thriving trading port, multi-national commercial operations and the oil-extraction, albeit in
smaller quantity. The next phase of Dubai’s development would fall into the hands of Sheikh Mohammed, son of Sheikh Rashid.

Mohammed envisioned Dubai also as a tourist destination, to further diversify it. Two things that a tourist industry needed the most: Airline and Hotels were lacking in Dubai in 1980s. Gulf Air, owned by other states, was the chief carrier that operated in Dubai. A fall out with the carrier led to the creation of Dubai’s flagship carrier ‘Emirates’ Airline in 1985 (Davidson 2008, 112). The city was well placed to become a tourist spot. The creation of airline facilitated smoother travel from far across the globe. “Capitalizing on winter sun, long stretches of sandy beaches, and shallow seas, Dubai soon emerged as a credible alternative to the Mediterranean and Florida, and more recently has also become a major regional destination for healthcare and education tourism” (Davidson 2008, 120).

Dubai entered the high-end tourist market in early 1990s with the creation of Jumeirah International group and the first iconic hotel, Jumeirah Beach Hotel to the west of Dubai with 600 rooms. This will be overshadowed by even more ambitious project that can be credited as a prelude to the building frenzy that followed and paved way for landmark structures that sprung Dubai on to the global stage. Burj Dubai (Figure 12), a sail-shaped tallest luxury hotel in the world when it was completed on a small manmade island, became an instant landmark and a recognizable structure all around the world. It remained Dubai’s most famous structure until it was overshadowed by a mile long building, which is a tribute to the contemporary construction technology and human ambition.
Transient Population and Growth

Dubai has seen a steady growth of its population albeit its economic travails in 1930s to 1950s. It grew from 10,000 inhabitants in 1900 to 59,000 in 1968 (Pacione 2005, 257). The discovery of oil and its subsequent effect on the oil related businesses as well as the diversification of investment in varied sectors like infrastructure, retail, and hospitality quickly resulted in attracting a new wave of immigration. The need for skilled as well as non-skilled workers kept growing to meet the demands of the inundated physical expansion.

By 1985, the number of residents had risen to 370,788, representing a five-fold increase over two decades. The population has continued to grow at a (relatively) reduced rate, increasing to 689,420 in 1995, (an increase of 86% over the decade), to 862,387 by 2000, and to 961,000 by 2002 (Pacione 2005, 257). The current population of Dubai is 2 million inhabitants, an increase of over 100% (Dubai Census).

Dubai possesses all the attributes of a true global city: globalized economy, large immigrant population, and vast urban area. Dubai’s urbanized area has increased from a mere 2 sq. km in 1950 to 140 sq. km in 2005 (Elsheshtawy 2004, 178; 2010, 121; Pacione 2005, 259). The planned growth area (Figure 13) indicates this could increase to more than 1000 sq. km by 2015, comparable to other major global cities in the world. However, Elsheshtawy points out unlike cities like London, New York, and Tokyo, where urban population ranges from 4 million to over, Dubai’s population is characterized by mostly transient and expatriate population (Elsheshtawy 2010, 121). The local Emirati population only accounts for less than 15% of the total.
Dubai has developed into a city of global prominence within a span of few decades. The pattern of growth (Figure 14), albeit seemingly typical of the major cities in the past half a century, Ali notes, that Dubai presents a unique case. "In short, Dubai is fascinating case study in light-speed urban development, hyper-consumerism, massive immigration and vertiginous inequality, where first-world wealth for citizens and professional expatriate workers is created through third-world wages of Asian laborers in a forest of construction cranes reclaiming the desert and the sea" (Ali 2010, 3).

Although global cities are unique in their own right, they exhibit more commonalities than differences. Dubai, on the contrary, possesses attributes that make it exclusively a new phenomenon. Elsheshtawy identifies two of these attributes: building itself into prominence and land development policy that willingly distinguishes housing for the locals and the non-locals (expatriates) (Elsheshtawy 2010, 121-122). This planned development and land policy had not only resulted in unforeseen ramifications of how the urban spaces are being used, but also, in the kind of urbanization that structurally is different from the traditional ways of urban growth. Hence, Dubai, a city of global stature, presents a case that current crop of cities are trying to emulate.
3. The Elusive Dubai

Dubai, in recent years has acquired many names to itself: ‘Manhattan-on-speed’ ‘A skyline on crack’ ‘Capitalist dream on steroids’ ‘Part Disney, part Scheherazade’ ‘A hallucinatory pastiche of the big, the bad and the ugly’ (Ali 2010, 1). This only signifies the uniqueness of Dubai, its unprecedented and ambitious growth. Arguably, it has become a household name as envisioned by its rulers. It has certainly morphed from being a Middle Eastern/Indian Ocean regional city into a global conglomeration, a melting pot for corporations and people alike on the ‘New Silk Road’ (Ali 2010).

Parlaying a mere ambition into an advertent growth of this stature has to start somewhere. Inevitably, it did with the very first master plan of Dubai in 1959 (Figure 15) by John Harris, a British architect. This was prior to the discovery of oil and laid out the plan for basic infrastructure, zoning, and a town center. The need grew for a more comprehensive plan because of urban expansion and the availability of development capital which resulted in a new and more ambitious master plan in 1971 (Pacione 2005). This plan made provision for connecting the two sides of the creek, most notably Bur Dubai and Deira. Deira historically has been the center of the city and is home to traditional souqs and neighborhoods that defined Dubai for a long time. Developed organically based on the Islamic architecture, as a response to the adverse climatic conditions, Deira symbolized traditional Dubai. The explosive growth in the early 1990s meant there was need for an updated growth plan. The government commissioned the Dubai Urban Area Strategic Plan
1993–2012 (Figure 13) to guide the economic and physical development of the city into the twenty-first century (Pacione 2005, 260). Inadvertently, the face of Deira has changed from the structured and focused growth vision. Baniyas Square, a popular public space in Diera, was demolished for ‘improving’ the infrastructure (Elsheshtawy 2010). Deira is not the only neighborhood that has seen this transformation.

While everything that was conceived had been turning into real and tangible transformative elements of Dubai and in turn, translated in to its meteoric rise, the intangible, and hence the temporal elements of urban form that define the urban meaning had given away to monetary forces. The creation of urban space had become merely empirical. The conundrum of the un-built is where designers falter because of the lack of an obvious empiricism and understanding. It can only be understood, through observation and through involvement. The unintentional urban spaces then occupy more prominent role in creating the urban drama and the obvious spaces become more elusive.

The Concept of Elusiveness

The perpetual quest to design and achieve a perfect city has been going on for centuries (Kostof 1991). Innumerable models for the ideal city had been put forward taking into account the diverse forces that made up cities: market, military, art, cultural, garden etc. Invariably none of these had been able to address the key aspect of a city: time. As cities grow with time the design of cities became complex and unintentional, building on the framework of their initial designs and often times diverging too. Hence, Jonathan Barnett in his seminal work, The Elusive city, argues that: “an understanding of city design
requires both a chronological account and a detailed exploration of the major design ideas that have entered the history of cities sequentially but continued simultaneously, producing both *intricate interrelationships and unsettling juxtapositions*” (Barnett 1986, 1).

Barnett’s notion of *Elusiveness* stems from the evolution of cities that spanned over considerable period. The transformation that cities go through, responding to the changing patterns of social, cultural, technological, and economic forces, making them digress from the initial design, creates elusiveness. This is true to most cities that had a long history of development. However, the pace of growth has been increasing rapidly and the time it takes for cities to develop, is considerably less than what it used to be because of the advancement in construction and communication technologies. Dubai stands as a perfect epitome of this phenomenon. Pacione (2005) analyses that, as opposed to major western cities where the transition from pre-industrial to industrial to post-industrial status occurred over a period of two centuries, Dubai has undergone a similar transformation in only fifty years.

At its basic, elusiveness can be implied as “that things are not necessarily what they seem” (Arefi 2012). Dubai for all its glitzy freedom in developing a rapid physical presence in adverse climatic and geographic conditions, has long foregone its lineage of Islamic traditional architecture; or so it may seem. As noted in the previous chapters, Dubai’s historical development had a stronger relationship with its physical surroundings, especially with the Islamic traditions in the way of life. But for the past few decades this tradition has been replaced with the emphasis on creating a global center. “Dubai’s almost myopic emphasis on economic development has been at the expense of the cultural realm,
specifically of art and education, which were largely ignored by the government in the rush to develop Dubai over the past few decades” (Ali 2010, 33). This especially seems to be true from an outsider’s perspective.

As with the case of Singapore, Dubai’s unquenchable thirst for modernization and urbanization has resulted in neglect, and in most cases, destruction of its historic physical form. This leads us to wonder whether Dubai has built to lose its identity. Dale (1999) notes that analysis of urban form and a sense of city must emerge from a dialectical understanding of historical permanence and morphological change.

It is an undeniable fact that the urbanization of Dubai has helped a small fishing town to grow into a global megalopolis, especially, with its vast developed swaths of urban areas that are more reminiscent to a sprawling western city. However, because of its complexity unlike most cities, especially with the demographics, culture, and adverse conditions, structured planning and moderated growth has consequences that are unimagined, thereby creating ‘The Elusive Dubai’.

**Research Methodology**

Primarily, the mode of investigation here focuses on how forced growth and lightning fast development of the Dubai’s physical fabric has resulted in what it was planned for, or otherwise. Barring the limited research by Elsheshtawy (2010) on Dubai’s physical fabric, there is a clear gulf in understanding how the city is performing physically. As mentioned earlier, much has been written and published on other major issues related
to its pattern of globalization, modern architecture, and immigration (Ali 2010; Alraouf 2006; Davidson 2008; Krane 2009). Upon deeper look into the urban fabric, the following questions become apparent:

i. Has Dubai’s quench for rapid urbanization resulted in a mismatch between its historically close knit neighborhood structure (both physically and socially) and the contemporary urban environment?

ii. Has Dubai given away its socio-cultural aspects for the luxury of global importance? Or, is there a hybrid aspect between the two that is taking shape?

iii. How has the urban fabric responded to the rapid change in its physical presence?

iv. How is the modern urban fabric impacted on the vernacular’s use?

The complex overlay of these intricate layers (physical, social, cultural, and political), as a result of modernization, paves way for researching how the city has morphed. Barnett’s (1986) argument that cities become elusive as the time passes with added layers of complexities can be put to test with the deeper exploration into above questions of Dubai’s physical environment.

Research Precedents

Taking in to account Barnett’s seminal work and applying to a city like Dubai would not entirely suffice, simply because of the ever changing dynamics of cities in the post-modern world. As Arefi (2012) notes, the concept of elusiveness in an expanded view has both abstract and practical dimensions; and deals with the Koolhaas’s (2012) “junkspace” and Deleuze’s (1988) dualities of chaos vs. order.
In 2009 Arefi and his students at University of Sharjah initiated a survey based research on Dubai’s current urban fabric. The studio collected an elaborate data regarding the functioning and usage of Dubai’s traditional, as well as the modern urban environments. Evidently, it revealed some of the most interesting aspects of how city of Dubai is performing, and most importantly, how the city has transformed into a global city, with many added layers of intricately woven socio-cultural aspects. This data will act as the primary source of evidence for investigating the question of elusiveness, through finding out the contrasting nature of uses and activities in primary land uses.

Framework for Elusiveness

To evaluate a city of Dubai’s stature it was imperative to analyze the city through multiple fronts. In sociological terms, it simply implies reaching out to different socio-economic and socio-cultural groups. But analyzing something that spans across multiple platforms of social, cultural, and physical aspects, the research needed a much elaborate and collated strategy; a framework that could accommodate the extensive data and be able to provide answers to the complex nature of elusiveness. It also meant that the resultant framework accommodates the geographies - major land uses in the city - to come up with conclusions that could be generalized, and would be used to other cities as a model for rapid growth.

The initial survey was done to evaluate the vitality and livability (Bosselmann 2008) conditions of Dubai’s various neighborhoods, post its imperturbable development in a comprehensive manner. The findings were remarkable, and ably led to more pertinent
urban issue of usability of these spaces as opposed to what they were designed for. This has inevitably evoked Barnett’s (1986) theory of elusiveness but in contemporary context of rapid growth.

Apart from exhibiting the typical characteristics of global cities trying to find a balance between modernity and historicity, added complexities of large expatriate population and rapid growth in physical form have resulted in diverse range of elusive behaviors within its urban fabric. Thus a framework (Figure 16) has been evolved to accommodate all the variables that constitute and define elusive Dubai.

This framework is divided into three primary categories to define elusiveness in an explicit way. Geographies of Elusiveness constitute the commercial, residential, and public spaces, which typically are the highest land-uses in any urban area. To reveal the complete essence of elusiveness exhibited in these land-uses, a comparative analysis between the old and the new has been employed and detailed in the following chapters.

**Malls vs Souqs**

A unique feature in a middle-eastern city is the vernacular market, famously known as *Souq*. Souqs for centuries played a prominent role in city’s economy and development. Dubai’s souqs were center of the trade activity since its fishing town days. Because of their ingrained physical association with the residential neighborhoods, they were often morphed into community gatherings and social spaces, providing refugee to visitors and locals alike.

Malls on the other hand are contemporary super shopping centers that tend to act as the “be all and end all” of shopping, luring wide variety of customers, and works
completely on the logic of profitability. Dubai is home to some of the largest malls in the world that are popular destinations of not just shopping but entertainment and leisure as well.

Malls in most developed nations have made life harder for smaller, less sophisticated ‘local’ shopping places to survive. A common perception in the case of Dubai is that souqs could be endangered and run out of business by the extent of malls. However, the shopping behavior, coupled with intricate attributes of Dubai, transcends a mere obvious perception and makes it rather elusive and certainly more complicated. The comparison hence provides a better understanding of how each of Dubai’s commercial establishment is performing in relation to the other.

*New residential vs old residential*

Dubai’s residential neighborhoods are facing a complex conundrum of balancing between modernization and historic character. The unique architecture that evolved as a response to the adverse conditions is in dire need of restoration and conservation. The historic residential fabric of the city is a dense amalgam of housing, community gathering, and commercial activity. This has come under intense pressure from increasing modernization.

The new residential neighborhoods bear a typical resemblance to probably any other suburban development around the globe. The growing urban area and improved infrastructure has facilitated the ubiquitous built fabric. The most interesting facet of this is how the local culture has morphed to accommodate this new development.
The changing socio-cultural character due to large expatriate population, notably the non-skilled labor from Southeast Asia, and the skilled professionals from the west, creates an intricate mosaic of neighborhoods. Comparing these could answer how elusiveness is exemplified, challenging the much perceived notion of historic neighborhoods being at the center of Arab culture and the new residential areas’ lack of sense of community.

New public spaces vs old public spaces

Public spaces are probably the best indicators of how an urban environment is performing and contributing to the city’s social growth (Kostof 1992). Dubai, virtue of being home to people of diverse cultures in recent times, is also home to some diverse public spaces that play various roles. More specifically, the layers of complexity that have been added so fast in recent times have created elusive behaviors in most public spaces of Dubai.

Historic public spaces like souqs, squares, and mosques are synonymous to Emirati culture and traditions, and one would expect to get a taste of ‘authenticity’ in Dubai’s public spaces. New public spaces in recent years however, have increasingly become popular in Dubai’s neighborhoods because of the improved facilities and amenities provided. This popularity may not necessarily be translating in contributing to the city’s culture and identity due to the complexity in the usage of these spaces. Old and new public spaces, with the recent exponential changes in Dubai’s demographics, exhibit varied degrees of elusive behavior, partly because of the strong socio-economic divide and the multi-layered urban
form. A comparison of the old and new would provide insights into how Dubai as a city is performing in terms of its cultural places.

**Types and Scales of elusiveness**

It was expected from the beginning that the phenomenon of elusiveness in Dubai is not exhibited in the same degree. The enormity of data meant that it had to be carefully sorted and characterized to evaluate using the comparative analysis of different geographies. The observations thus were categorized into *Types* and *Scales* to ably measure the extent of elusiveness. Types comprise of existence of elusiveness, in various tangible and intangible forms, and are further divided into measurable comparative elements. Categorizing the surveyed into various types that include the behavioral, social, and physical aspects also allows us to identify the manifestation of elusiveness in areas that are often hidden and underlying elements in urban environments. Scales, on the other hand, comprise of categories that provide various degrees of elusiveness in aforementioned aspects of behavioral, social, and physical aspects. Both the typologies and scales of elusiveness are analyzed in the following chapters. Together, the geographies, typologies, and scales helps us understand the complexity in manifestation of elusiveness in diverse tangible and intangible forms through layering, merging, and perpetually evolving nature of the urban aspects.
4. **Typologies of Elusiveness**

Urban environments exhibit contradictions that lead to elusiveness. Their intricate layers of complexities come in a variety of tangible and intangible forms. It is imperative that any measure of elusiveness be generalized enough to take into account these forms, both tangible and intangible. Intangible elements, like behavioral aspects of user groups, are difficult to measure and need to be further characterized to make any useful comparisons between the intended and the unintended consequences.

Dubai’s exuberance has promulgated into nearly all of its urban aspects, from urban form and to culture. It is home to some of the most fascinating man made creations on earth. However, its venerable historic urban form is reminiscent of many other cities, influenced by Islamic culture in the Persian Gulf; the presence of souqs, mosques, and intricately woven residential quarters, all add an intrinsic urban structure to Dubai. The conflict between user behavior, activities, and the very nature of the urban form make up the various typologies of elusiveness in the structural framework. This chapter will look into the comparison of these activities relating to both the old and the new urban structure, i.e. the planned and the unplanned.
Behavior

Human environmental behavior has been the subject of research for quite some time. More specifically, how built environment influence human behavior and vice versa, has been a multidisciplinary field of interest, notably by sociologists, planners, urban designers, and architects. Designers and researchers have even extended this to generating urban structures through evidence based approach in recent years (Hamilton 2006). The range of behavioral complexities in built environments can be a primary contributor to the elusiveness. Hence, behavior is further categorized into conflict, cooperation, and competition among the old and the new city structure.

Conflict

Conflicting behavior is not an unusual phenomenon in urban spaces with diverse populations. This is especially true in global cities that have dense urban spaces, which encourage higher degrees of interaction among diverse socio-economic groups. Conflict in behavior arises when spaces exhibit discrepancies in usage within the contextual framework of how they were supposed to operate (Arefi 2012). Dubai’s network of old and the new physical settings, when delved deeper, exhibit similar discrepancies.

Observations of Dubai’s commercial geographies reveal even starker conflict in consumer behavior and how both malls and souqs operate with respect to one another, as well as within their own entities. Souqs were the primary commercial spaces, and doubled up as communal activity areas that were distinctively Arabian. They played an important role in the development of unique Arabian socio economic cultures (Elsheshtawy 2010, 67-68). The uniqueness of souqs can be traced to their physical connection to the residential
quarters of old Dubai. Indeed, every souq is associated with a distinct residential neighborhood. Prior to the infiltration of malls into Dubai’s commercial landscape, souqs enjoyed an undeniable success as primary focal points.

Malls were expected to dominate the commercial landscape as they did in other countries, consuming smaller commercial entities, as they became more popular. However, analysis of observations in Dubai’s souqs reveals an interesting picture of user behavior. Souqs exhibited vibrancy and association, but not as places for local Emirati population as one would expect. The expatriate population, notably Indian, Pakistani and Iranian, are the primary contributors to cultural vibrancy in souqs despite the adverse climatic conditions (Figure 17). On the other hand, local Emirati consumers are inclined towards shopping at malls because of the variety of factors (global brands, wealth, and new found attraction towards malls), creating a conflicting shopping behavior. This conflicting behavior is also reflected in the variety of goods sold in the souqs. Catering to the expatriate population, souqs have transformed and evolved into niche places from offering specialty items to becoming specialized places to offer ethnic and authentic goods like jewelry, spices, herbs, and textiles.

Old residential neighborhoods, along with souqs, as discussed above, played an important role in shaping early Dubai. Often these neighborhoods were extremely dense, which was necessary to counter frequent sand storms and extreme desert climate (Elsheshtawy 2010). These close living arrangements resulted in frequent interaction among all residents; it also emphasized the importance of privacy. The physical environment and the resulting human interaction are intertwined with the local social
culture. This was expected in historic neighborhoods of Dubai. However, a deeper investigation revealed a startling elusiveness of conflicting behavior in Dubai’s residential structure, as the historic houses were increasingly occupied by low income expatriates from Southeast Asia. This change is surprising due the very structural difference in social aspects of native cultures trying to accommodate spaces that were primarily designed for Emiratis, who unsurprisingly, had shifted to the newer more modern neighborhoods of ever expanding Dubai.

Public spaces have traditionally held a special place in Emirati and Arabian culture. Because of harsher climatic conditions, they were seldom occupied or used throughout the day. Public places like mosques had even greater importance in community gatherings. The usage behavior, as one would expect, is supposed to reflect on this knowledge. However, the rate of development and the accompanying impulse to create a ‘Global Dubai’ has led to a massive influx of diverse cultures, which subsequently permeated through the urban fabric. Henceforth, unexpected heterotopias, that are distinct from Arabian culture, can be found in public spaces. Rolla Square (Figure 18) located in the Dubai’s metropolitan region manifests these subcultures beautifully. The expectation to find local culture in the square was replaced by a space primarily used by Indian and Pakistani immigrants, bringing a distinctive ‘Mumbai Maidan’ feel than an Arabian square.

**Cooperation**

Unexpected transformation of urban form and its subsequent use is a common occurrence in many large cities with rich historical evolutions. Dubai, despite its rapidity in growth, has been exhibiting discordant behaviors. Rapidity in transformation usually
translates into mismatched and competing natures of urban space that might seem to lose essence when modernization takes place. However, a deeper look into the three geographies reveals the existence of an underlying cooperative behavior.

A general understanding, as noted, is that malls with outreach to wider markets would essentially wipe out the venerability and vibrancy of older souqs, and thus its consumer base. Contrary to this expectation, there exists a cooperating behavior between souqs and malls. Souqs derived niche marketability with the offering of specialized goods (i.e. clothing, jewelry, and spices) (Figure 19) that cater to the needs of the expatriate population, as well as appealing to tourists of Dubai. Malls, with their grandiose nature, tend towards a holistic consumer experience, thereby executing a hidden cooperation that is often intangible, contributing to a unique Dubai experience.

Behavioral cooperation among modern and historic neighborhoods is seldom rare when there is a stark economic divide. But in Dubai’s case, albeit to a lesser degree, cooperation is manifested because of the urban layout. Modern residential quarters were expected to have all the necessary facilities and amenities. However, residential neighborhoods like Dubai Marina lacked public facilities like mosques and schools. On the other hand, the historic urban structure had always allowed for a closely knit social fabric among residences; souqs and mosques also provided a variety of uses in a smaller area. Religious places, with historic importance, often cannot be replaced and this contributes to the behavioral cooperation among the modern residential neighborhoods inhibited primarily by local Emirati population and the historic old residential neighborhoods.
Comparing old and new public spaces shows an underlying elusiveness that is intangible and hard to comprehend based on cursory observation. Old public spaces were typically associated with residential neighborhoods, thus allowing for an abundance of activity. The modern residential neighborhoods, however, because of their expansive nature in design, easy access to public spaces has become much harder. For this reason, there is a dearth of widely used public spaces like mosques in these neighborhoods. This made the usage of older public spaces even more important and widely used, albeit sparingly for specialty uses like religious activities. This has been observed in various older neighborhoods where there is an abundance of religious activity located within the walkable vicinity but, newer neighborhoods had sparsely located mosques. More importantly some of the religious places located in the older neighborhoods are well known and occupy a special place in daily lives of Emirati population albeit their relocation to much modern localities. This underlying cooperation among old and the new public spaces was an unexpected outcome of the expansive and planned new developments.

**Competition**

Within any material context of a similar nature, competition is a regular phenomenon that exists. But when the scale or context changes, it is less likely that a chance of a clear competition will occur. In most cases, it is expected that the larger entity will wipe out the smaller entity. In the case of Dubai, the phenomenon of behavioral competition manifests in a peculiar manner, which in turn, merits a discussion of Dubai’s urban form.
In general, malls are superior in scale and resources compared to souqs. The financial capacity and volume of trade renders the concept of competition among these two commercial entities almost negligible upon first glance. However, a deeper investigation reveals the congruity towards the existence of an unintended competition because of the evolution of souqs in to niche places. It was expected that souqs would cater local customers and malls would cater to a wider consumer base. Interestingly, malls are now trying to recreate an image of authenticity to lure the souqs’ consumers thereby competing directly. A case in point is the Dubai Mall’s gold souq, located inside the mall as a replication of the traditional gold souq (Figure 20) that operates exclusively on authentic jewelry and gold items. ‘Gold souq’ inside the mall was specifically designed to attract the customers seeking authentic jewelry for which traditional gold souq, located in the Diera neighborhood, is known for.

Historic residential neighborhoods are facing extreme neglect in most cities where there are no stringent conservation and preservation laws. The inevitable outcome of this is the dilapidation of these neighborhoods. Dubai’s case is not different in this regard; as the city modernizes rapidly both in housing stock and infrastructure, the older residential neighborhoods are facing a dire situation. However, what makes this elusive is that even when neighborhoods are facing an Emirati flight, they seem to hold on their own providing a stiff competition (Figure 21) with higher population density and by attracting tourists.

Public spaces are operating with an underlying cooperative element as briefed earlier. However, a more direct element of competition exists as both the old and the new strive to thrive behind the ever changing landscape of public spaces. Old public spaces that
were inherently more active because of the interconnected urban structure have been facing a tremendous challenge from the new public spaces. The reason for this is because of the variety of activities that are being offered in modern public spaces like The Walk Jumeirah (Figure 22) and Marina Walk; these spaces offer a waterfront experience that had not been seen before. Older public spaces have been confined to accommodating specialized activities like play areas and limited times of the day.

**Activities**

Closely associated with the behavior of users is the type of activities that play a crucial role in defining urban spaces. Often when spaces are designed, there is a program associated with it, to curate what type of activities will occur in the space, as well as the kind of users that the spaces serve and nature of use. However, often there exists a discrepancy when it comes to the program and the actual usage. As the design field is moving more and more towards evidence based design, especially in architectural design, the divide between the design and the usage has grown smaller.

However, the design of public spaces has yet to catch up with evidence based practice (design associated with activity and usage statistics as precedents). This reality can be attributed to the fact that it is a difficult task to control the usage of a space due to existing richness and diverse variables like socio-economic and cultural aspects. To better understand the planned and unplanned nature of activities, this category is subdivided in to range of activities, demographics, and times of the day.
**Types of activities**

Souqs, as aforementioned, symbolized the social and commercial activities in Middle Eastern cities. They served dual functions of commercial activity and as communal gathering spaces that allowed for a diverse array of activities. By virtue of their location, intertwined with residential neighborhoods, and their characteristic narrower alley ways, the great souqs of Cairo, Isfahan, Baghdad or Damascus exemplify such economically vibrant and culturally rich places (Arefi 2012). Despite their traditionally important place in Emirati culture, the reality points to a grimmer picture. They are no longer the central places of economic and social activity as one would expect. Widespread mall culture has resulted in relegating these social places in to mere markets of specialized goods.

Malls have become what Foucault (1986) calls the other places, creating a unique blend of consumer experience, as well as accommodating range of activities that would essentially make souqs impertinent for social activity. Non-commercial activities in Dubai Mall (Figure 23) and Mall of Emirates have successfully managed to attract users purely for their entertainment value. Nevertheless, souqs have managed to remain somewhat active by retaining an active expatriate consumer base.

Old residential neighborhoods in Dubai have a unique sense of place because of how people were associated to them. Part of the reason for this was the availability of a wide variety of activity spaces, like souqs, that also served as communal gathering spaces and mosques in their vicinity. There was a lot for a person to do. Because of the urban structure, public spaces thrived in these residential neighborhoods (Figure 24). Rapid growth in urban areas meant that they became more niche places that offered less diversity.
in activity compared to the more modern residential neighborhoods like Mirdiff and Palm Jumeirah.

Older neighborhoods like Al Shindagha and Al Rolla have been increasingly affected by the newer modern public spaces, like The Walk and Marina Walk, as they are continually trying to stay relevant. Until the rapid growth along the southern shores of Dubai, these older neighborhoods were centers of public activity, providing space for a variety of entertainment, as well as communal gatherings. Sheikh Saeed Al Maktoum once lived in Al Shindagha, signifying the importance of the area. However, in more recent times, the offering of diverse activities in the modern public spaces has led to an unexpected change in the way the older public spaces operate. These are now gathering places for southeast Asians and Iranians, predominantly male population. The squares are being used more as social places where young expatriates generally play a popular game of cricket (Figure 25) or take a walk along ethnic commercial activities surrounding the squares.

**Demographics**

One of most fascinating aspects of global cities is the demographic diversity that makes them unique. Demographic data provides the character of a city's social composition, thereby giving a valuable insight into underlying components that make the society. Dubai has become a converging place for a diverse population in recent years due to its rapid growth and subsequent economic opportunities. However, the demographic data provides a much starker picture from what is generally expected. Dubai’s transient urbanism (Elsheshtawy 2010) meant the usual census computation would not be enough to
provide a clearer picture. Hence, demographics here focus on the social composition of individual geographies.

A comparison between a mall and a souq illustrates elusiveness in the social composition and usage of these spaces respectively. Often local shopping places act as the cultural centers where vernacular flairs and cultures are in display. However, Dubai’s historic souqs have virtually transformed into places for the expatriate population where the commerce is primarily serving South-east Asians, Iranians as well as western tourists. In some of the souqs, there is even a grimmer picture, one with no customers when the desert temperatures rise as they become more and more specialized places. The scarcity of Emirati shoppers in souqs illustrates an elusiveness of shopping demographic. Quite interestingly, malls have shown the tenacity to successfully lure the Emirati population by various means of shopping, entertainment, cultural, and leisurely activate (Figure 17). As a result the malls are primarily featured with locals and to some extent foreign tourists.

A similar pattern arises in the residential neighborhoods that are traditionally interwoven with souqs. Although the new residential districts are not related or associated with any specific commercial entities, as more and more high-rise and suburban type housing become more prevalent the easy access to the malls have ensured the souqs have fallen out of favor to the Emiratis. Indeed, with the modernization of Dubai some of the old neighborhoods have transformed themselves into modern districts. However, they are failing to garner the attention that has been lost to newer and more flamboyant residential entities along the coast. The historic neighborhood of Bur Dubai is hardly occupied by locals and is primarily an expatriate dominated one.
Public spaces like piazzas, squares, and pueblos exhibit population characteristics of transient nature. The more the space grows in prominence, the more transient it becomes by drawing a high volume of tourists. Not surprisingly, historic places like Trafalgar Square in London are among the most visited tourist attractions (Picincu 2009). The notion of public space in Dubai takes a different meaning, as historically some spaces, like souqs and mosques, served dual functions as gathering places for socializing and communal activities, along with their primary modes of operation: commerce and religion respectively. Public spaces that are considered for demographics are purely squares and plazas that are intended for public gathering as the notion of elusiveness is apparent in souqs.

Dubai’s public spaces exhibit a contrasting yet elusive nature of demographic distribution, as indicated by Al Satwa. A high concentration of expatriates and their related activities have prospered around the square. The usage of the square, however, is predominantly by the male population which is in stronger contrast to the modern public spaces like The Walk located in Jumeirah Beach (Figure 26). This is a result of overlapping cultural associations of the users originating primarily from the sub-continent and from Iran. Similar pattern has been observed in Rolla Square i.e. a contradicting demographic presence to what was expected to find contributing to a general elusiveness of usage of public spaces around Dubai.

**Time of day**

Usage aspect of spaces also consists of the ‘times of day’ that they are primarily being used. Many factors contribute to a specific type of space’s usage. Dubai, by being the only true postmodern city located in a desert climate, exhibits different patterns to what
other global cities have known to exhibit: a consistent use of almost all the spaces throughout the day. However, the modern constructions have allowed for more flexibility of usage of spaces because of advance building technologies. Herein, lies the aspect of elusiveness, indicating how historic places have responded to the planned and more structured organization of the modern design.

Although souqs have traditionally been the most vibrant places in Dubai, the usage of these spaces tended to vary, based on the time of day. As desert temperatures rose throughout the day, the uncovered souqs had little or no activity. One would expect a similar pattern of usage in alleyways sandwiched between residential buildings. However, souqs like Bur Dubai and Souq Al-Arsa have been successful in attracting visitors throughout the day despite hot temperatures. On the contrary, Dubai Mall exhibited sparse visitors despite its air-conditioned environment (Figure 27). This can be attributed partly to the demographic makeup of the area, as the majority of the souqs’ visitors are now expatriates and tourists while the malls’ visitors are mostly Emiratis.

The denser urban fabric of older residential neighborhoods has allowed the spaces to flourish even within a harsh climate. These spaces were constantly used throughout the day. Demographic shift in recent times due to the expansion of urban areas and modernization has resulted in the inevitable change of these spaces, especially when they were used. Bur Dubai, one of the oldest residential neighborhoods in Dubai, has seen a consistent remodel in recent times to conform to the new image of Dubai. This has not translated in Emiratis moving back to Bur Dubai. Previously, Fridays saw less activity in the neighborhood, as it is the day for religious activity among Muslim population. The
neighborhood now sees more activity during Fridays because of the traditional weekly break from work for predominant non-Muslim Asian population.

Historically, public spaces in Dubai were utilized more in the mornings and the evenings when the desert temperature cooled down to comfortable levels; this left the middle of the day prone to scarcity of activity. The introduction of modern public spaces to Dubai was a game changer, as they accommodated features that were geared towards making user experience comfortable with water fountains, greenery, and air-conditioned spaces. The expected consequence of this was the scarcity of use of the older public spaces. However, a providence of elusiveness arises when one tries to explore through the older neighborhoods during different times of day. Al Shindagha, a public space located in a historic neighborhood, experiences a surge in activity in the later evening hours as well as throughout the weekends, which contradicts the notion of limited usage based on desert temperatures. Part of the reason for this could be a change in the type of users, as the spaces are being occupied more by immigrant populations and tourists whose habit of space usage may not entirely follow the traditional ways of Emiratis.

Form

Analysis of urban form provides a tangible element of how the city has transformed, especially, the influence of modernization on the traditional architectural character. A deeper influence of this modernization has been permeating through Dubai’s historic neighborhoods of Al Shindagha, Al Bastakiya, Bur Dubai, and Deira, where there is less and
less Emiratis to be found. However, these old neighborhoods still stand as the rich remnants of a not-so-distant past.

The modern urban form replicates a structure that has become pronounced worldwide with sprawling complexes spanning a large area, usually disassociated with the immediate context and tending towards a fragmented bit of development. Dubai’s building phenomena has revolved around creating imaginary places; ‘Neverlands’ that are more exotic than integrative, more exuberant than humble, and more transient than stable to go with the general theme of Brand Dubai (Elsheshtawy 2010). For this very reason there exists an element of intricate overlapping, that is still trying to find its natural behavior, causing the resultant elusiveness of physical form. Form aspect of elusiveness is divided essentially into three parts of authentic, fake, and global urban elements that would help compare the architectural forms of old and the new in all the three geographies.

**Authentic**

Souqs were traditionally located in narrow alleys between residential neighborhoods. The alleys were often less than two-meters wide. This has indeed allowed some respite against the harsh desert climate and frequent sand storms. Some of the older souqs had just a tarp cloth covering the alleys. These were replaced by wooden structures that allowed for sturdier construction and provided much needed shade. Over time, the souqs’ alleyways started to emerge and widen, allowing more space for the walkers as well as commercial activity. Today, Bur Dubai and Gold Souq still provide a glimpse of historic form and authenticity. However, modern commercial entities of malls attempt to replicate the authenticity of souqs’ structure by building either replicating elements in the interior
spaces or outdoor commercial spaces in case of Souq Al Bahar (Figure 28). But, as in the case of competition, there is an elusiveness of finding the authenticity of vernacular Dubai in the modern shopping environment. The traditional environment of proximity to mosques, squares, and residential areas simply could not be replicated in the malls, rendering them out of place.

Barjeel (wind-catching tower) discussed in earlier chapters, an import from neighboring Iran, was instrumental in creating a vernacular vocabulary to historic residential neighborhoods. These can still be seen in the historic neighborhoods of Al Bastakiya and Al Shindagha. Specifically, Al Bastakiya has more prominent vernacular elements, as the first immigrants from Iran in 19th century had settled in this neighborhood. The influence of the modern building couldn't be starker in this case. Some houses have kept the original barjeels (Figure 29) for ornamentation purposes; the interiors have become increasingly equipped with air-conditioning, which renders the barjeels obsolete.

Dubai’s traditional public spaces have been unique as they include squares, parks, beaches and mosques. Most of the squares and parks included a monument or a mosque to define the space and give character to it. Replicating the case of residential neighborhoods, the modern public space establishments, like Marina Walk and Mirdiff Park, have tried to create a uniqueness that is often associated with the older neighborhoods through architectural details. This however, has not resulted in creating authentic places that traditional public spaces have been known for. The observations in these spaces have only
showed users’ lack of association with these public spaces, creating elusiveness in authenticity of the newer public spaces.

**Fake**

Traditional architectural elements in desert climates often had represented a particular style that tended to serve as functional elements. Barjeels were used to create cool natural ventilation and filtering the sand out directly into the structures. Islamic architecture in its very traditional form of domes and intricate details has never been present in Dubai. However, these elements were either recreated or used to give an authentic feel to the structures in all three geographies causing a juxtaposition of authentic and fake elements.

Advent and spread of malls in the desert meant there is always pressure for the traditional architecture to adopt some of the newer technologies for more comfortable user experience. This has reflected in some souqs like Souq Al-Arsa and Blue Souq employing air-conditioned spaces. However, to keep the identity intact, souqs have high wooden ceilings and barjeels that are unique to traditional covered souqs, now serve as mere artifacts of aesthetics and culture, rather than serving any functional reason. Only upon closer inspection these elements are revealed as fake elements ([Figure 30](#)), again an unexpected outcome of modernization.

A similar pattern arises in the residential neighborhoods. Bur Dubai that includes Al Bastakiya quarter, one of the oldest neighborhoods, located in the heart of old Dubai has housing style that primarily follows the barjeel pattern. However, the effect of modernization can be seen in the altered architecture elements of upgraded buildings
around the neighborhood that do not serve the same purpose of natural ventilation but more as ornamentation.

Modern public space designs, on deeper look, seem to be more like afterthoughts, as the developers try to increase the profitability of spaces through maximum leasable area. However, these spaces take on a new role of nurturing and enhancing the social activity, as the associated residential or commercial development flourishes. However, it is quite evident from observation that these spaces have taken cues from vernacular architectural elements to utilize them more as ornamentation than functionality creating an elusive experience to find what they were meant for.

*Global*

The wider impact of globalization on the architecture has been a point of contention throughout the last decade. Extravagance and grandeur has been the mantra of Dubai’s incessant architectural development. It has been the place for global firms to explore architectural ideas that have never been tried (Elsheshtawy 2010). The significance of this on Dubai’s physical and visual form has been enormous in size, scale, and composition. The earlier forms of smaller denser neighborhoods had given away to sprawled and magnanimous structures that not necessarily related to Dubai’s culture, tradition or signature architecture. These newer structure continue to overpower the traditional counterparts which were more of a reflection and result of creating solutions to dire desert conditions.

Malls have represented a global phenomenon all around the world. The retail design has grown towards becoming a standard that can just be employed anywhere in the world.
Dubai’s malls have been even more holistic and innovative over the years in trying to attract the consumers from far and wide. However, there is a tangible difference in how both the commercial entities operate. Malls’ experience in closed spaces with wide variety of entertainment have garnered attention for outwardly amenities like ski slope, however, the core shopping experience of walking around the mall has not been a pleasant one for costumers, as noted by the surveyed observations. This is reflected in the shopping behavior of tourists’ preference for shopping in unpretentious souqs that tend to offer much more authentic local experience compared to malls. Observations from the students have revealed that the amount of distance travelled during shopping felt more in the souqs because of the nature of urban space compared to the malls which are expansive and spacious. These contrasting behaviors support the notion of elusiveness in the global nature of spatial structure in modern development.

Modern residential neighborhoods of Dubai have featured in the architectural journals and have been acclaimed by world over for their architectural innovation and achievement. Technological innovation and ambition of larger, taller buildings have resulted in most awe-inspiring buildings of our time. This again raises the same question of authenticity and sense of belonging in these residential developments that could be built anywhere in the world. A sense of place and sense of belonging is becoming elusive for the residents, especially Emiratis that have moved out of the traditional residential neighborhoods (Figure 31) that were built to accommodate the culture in a closely knit urban structure that included variety of communal activities.
Public spaces have steadily incorporated global features into Dubai’s landscape. Fountains, Architectural lighting, and wide array of landscaped features have made way into Dubai’s modern public space realm. The older public spaces assumed a different meaning with compact urban form, because of the climatic conditions. Although there were squares, the landscape was mostly barren due to the scarcity of water. However, the growth in wealth and the influence of the newer and modern public spaces have been causing a ripple effect in older public spaces. The older public spaces are now being equipped with global features like fountains, albeit to a lesser degree to make them more prosperous and marketable to general population as they are predominantly utilized by expatriate population.
5. Scales of Elusiveness

Elusiveness, as illustrated in the previous chapter, has manifested in different geographies in different forms. As a clear measure however, the scales of elusiveness in this chapter will provide a better understanding of physical elements of comparison between the old and the new. A look into different scales of the built environment will give a valuable insight into how the spatial, socio-economic, and political relationships are being affected by the complex layering process of rapid modernization.

Built Environment

Built environment is one of the first impacted areas of rapid modernization. The growth of cities from their historic cores to much broader cities has wider consequences on many aspects of the urban structure (Bosselmann 2008). Much has been written on how Dubai has been transforming itself into a true megalopolis with the extent of its urban area from a very humble beginning just a few decades ago. A rapid change in built environment through a planned development affects how the historic city structure functions. Dubai’s urban form is very unique in that the city lacks a true urban core unlike every other global city. The shifting city center of Dubai (Figure 32) is indeed an intriguing phenomenon and adds to the intricacy of how Dubai has been grown into an elusive urban mega structure. It can also be claimed that Dubai as a city that lacks a city center all together. As the city continues to expand both vertically and horizontally in an unforeseen scale, the ever
changing urban structure becomes more and more elusive. Here, the built environment is
categorized into grain of the fabric, density, and diversity to delve deeper into Dubai’s
physical structure.

**Grain of the fabric**

In earlier stages of Dubai’s growth, the pearl industry was the main stay. The entire
physical structure of the city was intertwined with the limited commerce through the pearl
industry. Souqs played a central role, and everything else (residential, mosques, gardens,
plazas, schools and so forth) was built around them or concentrated around them. Some
times souqs even acted as the entry points to the city or the neighborhood where wooden
dhows were directly towed, and merchants accessed the souq. Urbanization and change in
the way Dubai’s economy operates essentially had a deeper impact not only on the new
planned growth areas but also the older and traditional built fabric. A comparison between
the old and new in all three geographies (**Figure 33**) shows the extent of elusiveness in
Dubai’s physical form.

Souqs, as noted, were the center of all activity. The city’s grain of fabric reflected in
how souqs operated. The extremely compact urban fabric and the linearity of most of the
souqs created visual and physical connections to the surrounding context. Souqs have
always operated as home to local commercial, social, and religious institutions that are an
integral part of Emirati culture. In doing so, souqs’ urban fabric had created an unbridled
connection to the immediate built form allowing walkability and permeability at richer
levels. These relationships have endowed souqs and the historic neighborhoods a unique
figure-ground relationship that is seldom seen in modern planned growth solely dependent on quicker mode of access through automobiles.

Malls’ spatial configuration advertently differed from the traditional souqs in their scale and relationship to the surroundings. However, careful analysis of the current physical structure of Dubai shows an unexpected influence on souq’s configuration. Apart from the changing socio-economic connections because of the expatriate population inhabiting the historic neighborhoods, souqs seem to have lost the connection to their surroundings, and becoming hybrids of historicity and modernity.

Historic residential structure has had an intertwined relationship with souqs and the public spaces. This connection is reflected in the figure-ground drawings (Figure 34) of souqs. Because of the diversity of nature of uses in residential neighborhoods the urban fabric has organically grown into a complex and compact network. This unplanned growth was nevertheless effective in creating physical and social connections. The advent of modern urban structure and planned growth in Dubai gradually moved away from these connections to create more and more expansive developments that are not always unique and seem not to resemble any other major city’s physical form around the world. In recent times however, the inimitable zeal for growth had deeper impacts on how the old residential neighborhoods are being ‘resuscitated’. Lack of a holistic conservation approach caused the older neighborhoods to suffer as the older physical structure was being replaced by a planned urban form.

Historic public spaces, along with souqs, are associated physically to a specific residential neighborhood and usually took rectangular spatial form, whereas the newer
public spaces transform according to the neighborhood’s character and the design intent (Figure 35). The newer public spaces differ in spatial fabric and seemed to be afterthought-spaces, unlike the historic public spaces that were central to all activities (prayers, communal gatherings and commercial activity).

**Density**

As the urban structure changes from historic to modern, there is always an inevitable change in density of the physical character. In the case of Dubai, it is even more pronounced, as the urban structure essentially jumped from being a compact neighborhood to larger, sprawling developments across the desert, and along the coast. All along this transition, which was almost abrupt compared to any other city, the overlays on the built form have created elusiveness in how the density is perceived.

Souqs located in compact and dense neighborhoods historically thrived because of the physical relationships and organic patterns. This spatial arrangement was more pronounced when the economy was dependent on one particular industry. Modern shopping center design is based on creating a retail experience that is independent of the surrounding city structure (Maitland 1990), which is reflected in Dubai’s malls. Mall designs have been evolving into complex structures to create a holistic experience within the confines of a single complex and hence the indifference towards the context. The size and scale of these modern structures meant there was a higher need for parking and access that, essentially, separates them as standalone. The impact of modern malls on the density of traditional Arabic commercial space has been imminent as they are made into places for
specialized commercial activity. However, their denser urban form has allowed them to stay relevant and vibrant by attracting consumers through a distinct shopping experience.

Traditional residential neighborhoods faced a similar prospect of facing indifference with the modern residential developments, conjuring up spaces that Dubai had not seen before because of the advancement in building technologies. Modern residential neighborhoods are offering more and more open spaces that were a luxury in the denser historic neighborhoods. Improved infrastructure and contemporary built form has allowed the newer residential developments to lure wealthy Emirati population from the historic neighborhoods. However, due to the ‘colonization’ of old residential neighborhoods by expatriates, the perceived density remained somewhat the same, albeit the change in socio-cultural structure.

The notion of public space, as noted earlier in historic Dubai, can be interchangeably used to describe the compact structure that comprises of souqs, mosques, and squares. Some squares like Rolla Square have park-like settings that are still strongly related to the neighboring residential entity. The newer public spaces are much more varied in their locations and urban fabric. They are associated with the residential and mixed use developments acting more as buffers to the high-rise structures around. But the most interesting aspect of Dubai’s public space geographies has been the adoptability of the historic ones. Rolla Square, for example, has transformed into much busier public space due to hike in expatriate recreational activity. The ripple effect can be seen in the densified surrounding neighborhood.
Diversity

The third observable category of the urban form is the diversity of the physical structure in its form, function, and goods of services offered. The existence of variety of historic neighborhoods, as well as the mushrooming of planned developments, has made Dubai home to diverse urban structures within its physical metropolitan extents. This diversity illustrates a point of elusiveness in which similar geographies thrive with a variance in how it has been developed. A comparison to the new geographies will provide a holistic picture of the diversity in urban form aspect of elusiveness.

Souqs’ linear form has facilitated them to be easily navigable. Traditionally, souqs have been places of diversity both physically and in variety of services they offered. As noted earlier, modern commercial spaces have influenced them to become more of niche places. However, even with this, souqs have managed to create diversity through linear linkages that allows for easier expansion and the connections they form with their immediate contexts. The physical structure of souqs has indeed diversified from the residential neighborhood business alleys to independent places that still allow linearity inside. Blue Souq and Souq Al-Arsa are primary examples of this phenomenon. On the other hand the diversity in the services offered can be seen in various souqs adopting to offer specialized goods as in the case of Gold Souq, known for its authentic jewelry offerings, Textile Souq, for its authentic textile offering, and Spice Souq, known for its exotic spices.

The impact of planned growth could not be more pronounced in creating an elusive behavior in Dubai’s residential areas. Previously, the Dubai’s small town was separated by
small neighborhoods that essentially comprised on Emiratis and Bastakis (early Iranian settlers). These neighborhoods were distinct and characterized early Dubai. As the city grew larger the physical structure of the residential neighborhoods had changed drastically and now resembles nothing like how it once was. The high rise structures, sprawling villa districts and the unique offshore residential islands are a complete departure from the yester year of human scale, walkable and interconnected traditional residential units. The impact of these new moderated development has unintended consequences of creating an ethnic diversity in the older neighborhoods, thereby a new socio-culture was juxtaposed on to the older physical fabric. The physical diversity can also be perceived when seen in a holistic area as the traditional areas are transforming to accommodate modern infrastructure.

Public spaces can be seen as a reflection of neighborhoods they are essentially associated with. This is especially true with the traditional neighborhoods. The ethnic diversity noted above is perceived in these public spaces, and the diverse and rich activities that these spaces are accommodating, despite not being designed for. Here, one of the fascinating points of observation is the usage of public spaces by women and children. In the older neighborhoods, despite the increase in utility, there is still a cultural premise that prohibits women to use these spaces extensively. This is also reflected in diversity of physical spaces that are available; for example, the commercial activity surrounding the public areas. The newer spaces on the other hand managed to transcend this and the surveys evidently point towards more open and diverse environment in accommodation.
Relationships

Manifestation of elusiveness comes in variegated forms as have been illustrated in various categories. Physical, social, and cultural aspects have been dealt separately until this point and proven elusive, albeit in varied degrees. Relationships category delves deeper into the connections between each of these and constitute the second attribute of scales of elusiveness. These relationships are further elaborated into Physical – Spatial, Social – Individual and the Economic – Political connections to understand the extent of elusiveness and the unexpected consequences in the three geographies.

Physical / Spatial

Physical and spatial attributes pertain to the linkages of the geographies to surrounding areas. Most certainly these linkages have been very modest in the case of the planned development, as the focus has been on creating a city without any premise, unlike the urbanism principles that are being revived in other global cities. It has been the place of experimentation. Its newer physical form has reflected that in many ways.

Malls, as seen in the grain of the fabric, exhibit little no linkages to its surrounding areas. The landscape of infrastructure is the only spatial paradigm that explains Dubai’s malls. Souqs on the other hand, thrived precisely because of these linkages. A cohesive environment that created a spatial pattern unique to Middle Eastern cities has made Dubai’s souqs appeal to a larger and wider consumer base than for what they were previously intended. However, the pressure of the modern mall is invariably felt on some of the souqs. Souq Al-Arsa (Figure 36) which can only be accessed through Abras (traditional
dhow) has shifted towards an isolated physical structure that resembles more like a mall with air-conditioned interior and fake architectural elements than a traditional souq.

Residential neighborhoods have varied and diverse geographies in every city. This is especially true when cities grow and evolve into complex urban systems both physically and spatially. For Dubai, however, the time of ‘evolution’ was so short that it almost never existed and hence created complex connections. This invariably meant the physical and spatial connections among the residential neighborhoods are not always what they seem. The growing need for increased physical change due to modernization of infrastructure that includes improving the physical condition has surely impacted the older residential neighborhoods. Although the spatial structure remains somewhat similar to how the city had been evolving, the impact of modernization is much more evident on the physical structure of the traditional neighborhoods. This again is primarily a reflection of weak conservation laws. This is where there are ominous similarities between Singapore and Dubai.

Spatial configuration of public space in Dubai differs markedly between the new and the old. Historically, older public spaces occupied more central location in the residential neighborhood (Elsheshtawy 2010). The newer public spaces are designed to extend the experience of amenities provided by the exuberant residential and commercial developments. With the new public spaces stressing on higher degree of comfort and luxury, the relationship of physical and spatial structures of older public spaces become more pronounced and elusive. Albeit modest in spatial form, old public spaces more than
make up for it with a diverse demographic of users and flexibility for diverse range of activities.

**Social / Individual**

Social and Individual relationship pertains to the actual user behavior of various spaces in Dubai. As the rapid growth affects the traditional structure of the city continuously, the overlapping social and individual behavior of the user contributes to the city’s socio-cultural structure. The ever changing mechanics of the Dubai’s recent physical structure has contributed to making the city an amalgam of different ethnic structures. This particularly merits attention, as like other middle-eastern cities, Dubai’s culture was built on a strong religious structure which was the premise for the physical environment. As the city moved towards capitalism, the social structure of city has inevitably taken a marked shift from the original basis.

Souqs, as have been mentioned, were the center of the physical and social structure in Dubai (Elsheshtawy 2010). They thrived in compact and dense neighborhoods that related closely to the social and individual structure of privacy following Islamic traditions. As the influence of malls started to grow, and the demographic changes started to affect the operations of souqs, one would expect a social change in how the souqs operate. But ‘social openness’ is still elusive to find in souqs as there is still a stronger gender bias. Unescorted women are seldom seen in souqs, as noted by several students, albeit some souqs are specialized towards jewelry, spices and textile.

Comparison of old and the new residential spaces show a stark contrast how the spaces operate socially and individually. The traditional compact residential spaces had
once served as primary abodes for Emirati population till the economic and construction boom that had made them wealthy. The Emirati flight essentially caused a spatial shift in social-economic structure to modernized sections and resulted in creating the older neighborhoods as places for ethnic expatriate population. The spatial structure that was designed to accommodate Emiratis still responds to the new residents. However, the social and individual interaction, and relationship had been a mixed one; somewhere between the conservative Emirati culture and a more liberal one. The older residential neighborhoods still stress on the privacy of the families but the concept of privacy for individuals has changed. They resemble more like south Asian neighborhoods than Dubai.

Old public spaces and squares were part of an intricate urban fabric that allowed for closed interaction among individuals, especially male population, as the Islamic culture limited personal access. The overlay of different ethnicities from South-east Asia and Iran has certainly made the social intricacy more complex. The newer public spaces on the other hand allowed for more social interaction and the concept of individual privacy assumes a different meaning with more diverse populace utilizing the spaces. However, old public spaces have been much busier in utility and social activity, but, as in the case of souqs, have not been able to open up to all-age, all-gender groups. These public spaces, Rolla Square being a prime example, are dominantly utilized by young men. Women and children are always accompanied by men.

**Economic / Political**

Economic and political relationship is an important one in Dubai’s case to compare as there is an ongoing debate (Ali 2010) of how open the economy really is relative to the
city state nature, which is a political issue. These relationships usually define how the physical structure of the city operated as well as the socio-economic structure is overlaid on it. All three geographies indeed are affected by this relationship and cause a complex experience that culminates in manifestation of elusive behavior.

Souqs and malls represent two ends of this relationship. Malls are global entities that are more influenced by global economic and shopping trends. The consumer base of malls also is a much more varied one, albeit the observations of higher percentage of Emirati population shopping at Malls. Souqs on the other hand, are local institutions with financial practices geared towards the immediate population residing in the neighborhoods associated with respective souqs. However, there is manifestation of elusiveness in how souqs’ business actually operates, as a micro economy that chimes in a fair bit of foreign currency because of the popularity among tourists.

Traditional residential neighborhoods were entwined with souqs and were expected to reflect the same socio-economic pattern exhibited by the souqs. The newer residential neighborhoods were also expected to follow the new commercial geographies, albeit a lack of a visible physical or social connection. These initial expectations proved to be elusive in both the cases when the traditional neighborhoods had actually exhibiting patterns of evolved growth. Despite the physical structure being ‘older’ and the predominant expatriate working population in inhabiting the traditional residential neighborhoods, the observation showed (expensive automobile presence) that the income levels of the people residing, in reality, tends toward a modern residential neighborhoods. The newer residential areas have more or less followed the same economic structure.
Public space conjures up an unbridled truth about the economic factors of usage associated with it. Old public spaces’ intricate spatial connection with the compact residential quarter meant they are connected both economically and politically to the firm footing of historic structure that includes souqs. The predominant presence of South East Asian and Iranian population reflects heavily in the economic activity of the spaces surrounding the public area. Once very important communal gathering spaces that occupied such an unheralded position in spatial structure for political process, old public spaces have become elusive to find and are a mere shadows of the past due to the influence of stronger, much flamboyantly designed public spaces elsewhere, farther from the historic city. Squares like Tahrir Square, Cairo are nowhere to be in modern Dubai.

Use

The final category of the analysis looked into how the geographies are actually being used. Usage of spaces is impacted by many factors ranging from social to economic. Hence, it is subdivided into Space & Facilities, Experience & Amenities, and Access & Connectivity to illustrate the effects and consequences of rapid planned growth on Dubai and its traditional structure. An unprecedented city, Dubai’s lightning fast growth has inadvertently created aura of elusiveness and sea change in how the spaces are being used, services are being offered, and connections are made.

Space / Facilities

Rapid expansion of urbanized area meant drastic change in density of the neighborhoods. An analysis of facilities provided in the amount of space used by different
geographies could very well illustrate both efficiency and the effectiveness of the old and the new developments in Dubai. The impact of improved facilities in newer developments would therefore, inadvertently, be on the unplanned and organically development neighborhoods, resulting in elusive behaviors.

Universally, malls strive to offer a complete shopping experience. This fact remained unchanged in Dubai’s mall experience. However, the strong presence of souqs has actually worked, for once, the other way in influencing how the malls have transformed. Dubai malls’ designs are the epitome of facilities that was never seen before, offering a wide spectrum of entertainment and family experience. These indeed, have carved out a niche in retail design and managed to stand out becoming popular tourist destinations offering more than just retail. Dubai’s malls are more elusive as they differed from a standard universal mall with branded retail stores. Dubai Mall, for example, is the largest mall in the world comprising of unique facilities like a ski slope and an aquarium as well as some of the fanciest entertainment features like dancing fountains, recreational facilities and exotic boutiques.

Modern residential developments like Mirdiff and Palm Jumeirah have invariably dominated the residential landscape in offering rich array of amenities that essentially caused an Emirati flight to these areas. The impact of this on the older residential quarters is noticeable and unexpected. Indeed, the older residential quarters (like Bur Dubai) started to offer more facilities by gradually improving the infrastructure elements but also keeping the traditional flair of spatial compactness and connectivity to historic souqs.
Newer public spaces that support the massive residential and commercial developments have created spaces that are both unique in offering facilities that attract tourists. As with the expansion and modernization, one would expect improvement in the facilities that were being offered. Traditional public spaces however, successfully conjure up the shortcomings of modern facilities with spatial activities that are communal and create a livable place amidst dense neighborhoods. The availability of a metro rail and the public transportation helps enhancing the vitality of these spaces.

**Experience / Amenities**

There is no city in the world that perhaps prides itself on the experience it provides through the diverse range of activities. Dubai had molded itself into a tourist hotspot, through the kind of experience and amenities that no other city had been able to provide, with the creation of offshore urbanism and flamboyant structures. The inevitability in influencing the historic experience is marked and proven through in the observations by the students. A comparison between the old and the new would reveal a better picture of this unexpected influence.

Mall culture had certainly brought the global brands to Dubai. And the extravagance in architecture created a tourist hotspot, or so it seemed. Malls had succeeded in creating an environment that was never seen before in a desert climate. It wasn’t an expectation to find the extremeness of a ski slope in the middle of a desert, which certainly is elusive. However, the most notable intricate overlap of the old and new is the specialized souqs proved popular among the tourists. Exotic spices, textile, and jewelry have proved to attract tourists from far and wide.
Modern residential neighborhoods have followed suit, the same way how the malls in Dubai have created an aura around them. Palm Jumeirah, an offshore residential development (Figure 37) is a prime example in creation of awe inspiring engineering feat the world had ever seen. Since the inception of large scale offshore developments, Dubai had taken the residential experience to a whole new level with the kind of amenities that had not been offered before. This offshore experience includes access to some of the most exotic hotels, restaurants, retail, and other facilities. This in itself is elusive, not seen previously to this scale by any other global city. The ripple effects of these developments offshore on traditional in-land residential fabric cannot be ignored. Historic neighborhoods have had facelifts. However, somewhat elusive is the equally impressive experience of the traditional neighborhoods. The close proximity to historic souqs, historic mosques, squares, and some vernacular architecture have made traditional neighborhoods no less attractive than the new developments.

The ability of new public spaces to offer an experience that is more reminiscent of Dubai’s malls can be attributed to the grandeur and inclusion of amenities that was seldom seen before. Large water fountains, landscaped areas, and exotic outdoor shopping have all culminated in providing a unique experience. However, the users of the newer public spaces tend to be tourists rather than the residing population, which includes about 85 percent of expatriate population that are confined to the traditional public spaces and some new public areas. Traditional public spaces were always limited in providing variety of amenities offered by the newer ones. But the elusiveness lies in the kind of experience they offer even without the sophisticated constructions by serving the diverse ethnic population in a much more flexible way. These traditional squares are used for numerous activities of
walking, gathering, playing cricket, and ethnic shopping that is hard to find in modern public spaces.

**Access / Connectivity**

Accessibility and Connectivity illustrates the final point of the framework. In creating a global city Dubai had taken enormous zeal in upgrading the city’s infrastructure. Connectivity to the city’s nooks and corners has become much easier with the creation of express ways and highways. This is especially important considering the expansion of Dubai’s urban area at an unprecedented rate. However, this had far reaching consequences on the traditional city structure where often the connectivity to spaces is either by walking, because of the narrow alleys, or on water by dhows.

Dubai’s physical strength is supported expertly by the growth in modernization / expansion of efficient infrastructure and providing accessibility to every corner of the city. This has facilitated Malls to be accessible through automobile and public transportation. However, observations had revealed that souqs, which were built in the historic neighborhoods that are compact and quite inaccessible because of narrow alleyways, have indeed better connectivity to major public transportation network (more specifically the fully automated metro rail) thereby quelling the notion of disconnection and isolation. This becomes equally valid when looked at the observations made in the historic residential neighborhoods and the public spaces that are closely knit with the compact urban spatial structure.
6. Lessons of Dubai

“An understanding of city design requires both a chronological account and a detailed exploration of the major design ideas that have entered the history of cities sequentially but continued simultaneously, producing both intricate interrelationships and unsettling juxtapositions.” – Jonathan Barnett (1986)

Dubai has been outgrowing itself; not in population terms; not in financial terms; not even in physical terms. Dubai has outgrown itself in its ambition of creating a city that has not existed and in doing so, created almost a utopian city of unimagined proportions. It has been a place for experimentation of human pursuit. Ever changing physical boundaries only support this contention. Urbanization is not unique to Dubai. Rapid growth in the past two decades is reflected in building and rapid urbanization all around the world, especially Asian cities. What makes Dubai standout is how it is made and what it is being made of.

For many authors exploring Dubai, the intrigue was not in its physical growth but rather the awe in how it was even made possible (Ali 2010; Davidson 2008; Krane 2009) in such a quick time. Others who have explored the physical structure (Alraouf 2006; Elsheshtawy 2010; Pacione 2005; Petti 2008) have found evidence in the anomalies that essentially make Dubai different, a brand to reckon, and one that could be replicated. However, the effect of former investigations to the later had never been explored. This research has essentially tried to find the linkages of present to the past and hence the
influence in such a short time. This has led to the exploration of what Barnett (1986) calls *intricate interrelationships and unsettling juxtapositions*. These interrelationships and juxtapositions were the result of earlier comparisons, or the overlay of new on the old. Due to a complex socio-cultural system in Dubai, in which close to 90 percent population are essentially strangers (Ali 2010) in their own land, and the rest are wealthy - exploration of these interrelationships has highlighted underlying “Elusiveness” in almost every aspect of Dubai’s way of functioning.

Often, hard pressed lessons to be learnt are the ones that do not create additional complexity. This is particularly not an easy premise to begin with. Planning is known to be full of these riddles that are wicked in nature (Rittel and Webber 1973). Solutions that worked for an issue may not quite work elsewhere without a measure and careful look. What Dubai had done was ‘create’ a global city out of pure sand within a span of a few decades, skipping the whole evolutionary change of industrial to post-industrial to post-modern, as with the case of every other global city. Hence, there is an underlying lack of culture and identity that is often associated with cities like New York and London, and supported by the lack of even a single art museum or gallery (Elsheshtawy 2010). The result is a conurbation that is so global in nature and yet so primitive that it’s every aspect evokes elusiveness. So did Dubai go wrong? If it did, where did it go wrong? Did the ambition cost the city a future? Or did it succeed as true global city? If it did, can it be replicated elsewhere?
Tradeoffs for a Global City

The notion of becoming a global city means true involvement of globalized processes that rely on control, command, communications, and information (Bishop, Phillips and Yeo 2004, 61; Girardet 2008, 93) and global population (Sassen 1998) as well as regionalized process (Marcuse 2008). Dubai has indeed enabled these processes through ambitious physical development that allowed for a global capital flux through it. The diversification of the economic sectors early in the years of the oil boom had helped Dubai to depend less on oil money and manage its portfolio through entrepôt trade. It has become a regional financial center with global presence in every sector.

However, the process hasn’t been entirely smooth. Its cultural and physical development was influenced by its proximity to Iran, as the early settlers were from across the gulf. They helped bring some of the early innovations in building technologies, which are the only vernacular treasures of Dubai now. The spatial development has been rather slow and had its share of pit falls throughout, especially the period between the wars when it was heavily dependent on pearl extraction and trade. The single minded ambition and execution of the Sheikh during Dubai’s oil boom infancy had helped as a strategic pill for the birth of a global city.

Dubai, however, had to face some serious physical challenges. As a culture based on Islam, there were skeptics who called for no gambling activity on the land of Islam. The harsher desert climate has acted as a hindrance for the city to grow; and the lack of the most basic infrastructure that support city’s growth until 1960s had to be overcome. The plan was to upgrade the city as a whole. The solution for the religious traditions was to
expand offshore (Elsheshtawy 2004). When building and construction of the first manmade island offshore to build a luxury hotel began, it marked a momentous occasion for Dubai. Although the future seemed to be well structured and laid out, it masked a greater challenge: sustaining the city.

Throughout history, cities have evolved, adopting, reassessing, and revamping. Some even faced decay and faded away. The resilient ones that have endured and became true world cities have always had an underlying uniqueness in culture that evolved and sustained itself over a long period. Dubai’s incessant lust for growth had precisely masked this prospect of saving the Emirati culture that it was founded upon. Some may say there is no such thing as authentic Dubai. It is indeed referred to as a city without identity (Elsheshtawy 2010; Krane 2009). This is primarily because Dubai’s growth plans had no place for its earlier history. In fact, Dubai’s master plans have even failed to illustrate a holistic strategy to provide adequate housing for middle and low income population. The city officials see no merit in enhancing or even caring about this inevitable outcome and important socio-economic group that in deed built the city from its roots, quite literally. The majority of the expatriate population, which accounts for nearly 90 percent of the total population, from South East Asian and Iran, are skilled and non-skilled labor. Being a magnet for working populations is one of the core strengths of a global city, which Dubai had excelled at. However, policies that ignore these socio-economic and socio-cultural groups have created a serious marginalization problem.

This tension, between the determination for planned growth and the existing historic fabric that has ingrained socio-cultural values, has resulted and manifested in
elusive behavior. The observations made by students in small groups in each of Dubai’s physical geographies had been categorized into the *Elusiveness* framework. On one side of the spectrum is physical extravagance through the presence of world famous structures and on the other side, the historic fabric that begs for attention and preservation. This paradox has only added allure to what Krane (2009) calls a “City of Gold” and what Ali (2008) calls a “Guilded Cage”.

A fair conclusion can be made from the data analysis, that Dubai exhibits elusive behavior in almost all of its physical geographies, albeit in different degrees. This translates to answering the initial research questions on the influence and effect of fast tracking to modernity. The juxtaposition and the intricate overlay of the modern over the historic urban fabric has not consumed, rather created interrelationships, transforming the older neighborhoods to adopt, and defy expectations. However, there is evidence of forcing historic fabric out of Dubai’s physical structure, rendering the socio-cultural vestiges obsolete; as the city modernizes it’s every nook and corner. The lessons of Singapore therefore become pertinent, in identifying the city’s cultural fabric and in creation of the identity that Dubai ever so lacked.

**Dubaization**

Earlier in 2004 during the International Association for the Study of ‘Traditional Environments conference in Sharjah’, Elsheshtawy (2010) coined the term *Dubaization*. The influence of specific mega projects in Dubai on neighboring Cairo was the reasoning behind the terminology. However, the proliferation of mega projects across the world, not
just in the gulf, had indeed made the term valid, as more and more cities are trying to build themselves into global cities following the model of Dubai. Truly, Dubai had built itself into a global city in essentially the last decade when it was rumored 85% of the world’s construction cranes were inside the city (Ali 2010).

Dubaiization or the morphed terminology, ‘Dubai Model’, as Elsheshtawy questions, if it had actually worked in other cities? In the case of Dubai itself, the city has built itself on ambition and globalized by MNC’s relocating to get the global processes running, and essentially elevating Dubai to a global city stature. As for the model to be replicated, there are major economic and financial forces that hinder its success. Dubai, as in the case of Singapore, is more of a mediator, as opposed to other true financial centers like New York, London, and Tokyo, where global operations happen on a day to day basis according to Elsheshtawy (2010). However, Dubai’s ambition of becoming a new financial center has yet to be materialized in such a short period. He argues that new centers emerge all the time and Dubai will truly become a regional financial center as large corporations begin to operate out of Dubai.

However, authors like Asad Yawar (2006) question if there is a real Dubai or if the Dubai model is even reliable and functional. He further details the uniqueness of Dubai for why the model cannot be widely replicated. The location of its port; geographic location in an oil rich region, and its proximity to the developing Asian economies are some of the variables unique to Dubai. He goes further, elaborating how the rapid development of the city has not translated in transfer of the skills and education from the expatriates to the
locals; and neglect towards the lower economic classes that is unfeasible to replicate in a wider context.

Whether the model could be replicated or not brand Dubai had caused a major ripple effect in designing and modernizing cities around the world. The replication of success is strictly contingent upon many variables. However, careful observations and learning from the case of Dubai and to a lesser extent, Singapore provide valuable lessons in planning and design for rapid growth in urban areas.

**Planning for Rapid Growth**

Because of growing moneyed interests, planning for large developments has become a challenge to professionals and lawmakers (Castells 2003). Dubai provides a unique case of how the initiative of growth has come from the rulers and the ambition, to go beyond what other cities had not done before, has shown obvious merits. There were notions of Dubai being another Singapore in the region (Elsheshtawy 2010, 253). However, Singapore’s economy has advanced further to establish itself as a producer which is essential for a city to become a true financial center. But, Dubai has been more unique than the Singapore in many ways.

Dubai’s management of rapid growth has applauded for its efficiency and single mindedness where the rulers themselves are determined to improve its conditions (Ali 2010). The most interesting aspect to be noted here is the complexity Dubai had endured to maneuver through the cultural, social and political obstacles. The cultural obstacles figure
more prominently as Dubai tried to create a city that may not necessarily have complied with those principles. Dubai has moved towards becoming more of a capitalistic city (Davidson 2008) and in doing so has created an image that is open to everyone. However, Dubai’s political premise is still a concern as in owning the properties in mainland. The city tried to address this by offering the off-shore developments for which the mainland’s laws do not apply (Elsheshtawy 2004).

Analysis of the intricate relationships and ultimately the manifestation of elusiveness prove the wicked nature of planned growth, especially when it is one as rapid as Dubai’s. To make planned growth work in rapid growth situations, Dubai and Singapore provide some valuable lessons. Evaluating cultural resources very early in the process of change is one of the important steps that both Dubai and Singapore had ignored. Singapore faced the same problems that Dubai is facing now with its identity. It managed to identify its famous shophouses and restore them. It was a crucial step Singapore took in later years of its rapid growth (Dale 1999).

Dubai, on the other hand, still has to identify its cultural resources that merit attention and build efforts to preserve them to give the unique Dubai experience. Not until recently Al Bastakiya neighborhood enamored by barjeels, an Iranian import, that made home in Dubai, had been identified and declared a cultural heritage district. However, there still isn’t a comprehensive approach. The intricate juxtapositions and unexpected consequences of planned growth occur because of a lack of this approach towards curation of rapid growth.
Understanding the concept of elusiveness in how it is manifested acts as a resource in complex physical, social, cultural, economic, and political structures, where often it’s not what it seems or imagined or planned. Hence, a comparative look into elusive elements in cities is often a good indicator of consequences of planning and how planners need to be aware of the effectiveness of curated rapid growth and aftermath: the elusiveness.

Cities are built on social premises and grow using cultural, economic and financial resources as jumping boards (Castells 2003; Kostof 1991). One of the major issues with Dubai’s rapid planned growth effort was the neglect of an important resource i.e. the social aspects of immigrant population which occupies a majority of the city in denser areas. Especially, the overlay of expatriates on the Dubai’s older residential structure that was primarily meant for Emirati population was one of the elusive points illustrated in earlier chapters. This raises an important issue of Sassen (1999): “whose city is it?” These ethnic groups are especially being marginalized and fragmented to accommodate more and more ambitious structures (Elsheshtawy 2004).

There are no straight answers to how cities behave and become elusive. However, as illustrated in this research, there is merit in identifying and considering the consequences carefully when planning for a structured and ambitious growth. Dubai’s growth model of doing away with its immediate past and focusing solely on creation of new structures has not yet resulted in wiping them out. It has in turn resulted in the manifestation of elusive behavior. The traditional city not only exits but is thriving due to the overlays of complex social and cultural processes, and has become a palimpsest urban environment. However, one cannot expect them to keep morphing and evolving, as the city continues to ignore
them. Dubai, thence, provides an important lesson regarding the consequences of blind eye towards cultural and physical history of a city while focusing on nurturing and realizing an ambition; It teaches how not to lose an identity.
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Appendix of Images

**Figure 1.** The remarkable physical growth of Dubai (Source: Mahyar Arefi)
Figure 2. New York City's Physical Expansion (Source: Bosselmann)

Figure 3. City of Tokyo's physical growth (Source: Bosselmann)
Figure 4. City of Tokyo’s physical growth (Source: Bosselmann)

Figure 5. Singapore geographic location (Source: Author)
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Figure 7. Raffles plan for Singapore (Source: Dale, 1999)
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Figure 10. Traditional souq in before Dubai’s transformation (Source: Nowell and Nowell, 2000)
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Figure 13. Dubai strategic plan 1993 - 2012 (Source: Elsheshtawy, 2010)

Figure 14. Dubai's explosive urban growth 1930 - 2015 (Source: Author, Based on Aerial Maps)
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Figure 17. Bur Dubai Souq with foreign & expatriate customers while Malls of Emirates' primary users are Emiratis (Source: Mahyar Arefi)
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Figure 21. Traditional neighborhoods like Bur Dubai are dense and provide direct competition to the newer developments (Source: Mahyar Arefi)

Figure 22. The Walk Jumeirah (Source: Mahyar Arefi)
Figure 23. Dubai Mall's ski slope (Source: www.skidubai.com)

Figure 24. Activity in residential neighborhood of Al Khalidiya vs. Sparseness in Mirdiff (Source: Mahyar Arefi)

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