The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington

Building bridges of understanding

Big Space/Small Space: Art and the Gulf City

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The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (AGSIW), launched in 2015, is an independent, nonprofit institution dedicated to increasing the understanding and appreciation of the social, economic, and political diversity of the Gulf Arab states. Through expert research, analysis, exchanges, and public discussion, the institute seeks to encourage thoughtful debate and inform decision makers shaping U.S. policy regarding this critical geostrategic region.

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Elsheshtawy has authored more than 70 publications, including *Dubai: Behind an Urban Spectacle* (ranked number one on Amazon under the "United Arab Emirates History" category in September 2017). He also edited *The Evolving Arab City: Tradition, Modernity, and Development*, which received the 2010 International Planning History Society Best Book Award, and *Planning Middle Eastern Cities: An Urban Kaleidoscope*. He is currently working on a book about the Gulf Arab city provisionally titled *Temporary Cities*.

Elsheshtawy has a PhD in architecture from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, a master's degree in architecture from Pennsylvania State University, and a Bachelor of Architecture from Cairo University.

> "The [cultural] institution of the future reflects the body that gifts it time and attention. It is continuous with the city and its 'impure particles' rather than being a cartoonishly out-sized object cut in to an urban milieu, or 'leading' a regeneration project. It has caught up with the way that the human became reconfigurable and 'impure': new parts grown, attached, altered, decorated. Caught up too with inhabited dwellings and shared urban space, also adaptive, accretive, refurbished, transformed by addition or growth."
>
> – Guy Mannes-Abbott[1]

Executive Summary

Over the last few years many cities have attempted to integrate cultural developments within their overall planning strategy. This involves the utilization of spectacular architecture and conversion of formerly industrial areas into art districts. As a result, many of these newly developed areas have witnessed an influx of upscale retail and housing catering to a wealthy and highly educated clientele. The Gulf Arab states have been at the forefront of such developments within the wider Arab region. Seen as a way to diversify their economic output, these gleaming museums and cultural centers primarily aim to attract tourists. At the same time, through such initiatives the region is setting its sights at claiming the mantle of the Arab world's cultural leaders. Furthermore, the presence of these large-scale institutions, as well as the smaller spaces of art districts, is seen as a way to modernize the Gulf states' local populations and integrate them within a wider cultural context. Yet such approaches have their drawbacks, as they inevitably result in gentrification and a potential marginalization of a larger part of the population who may see themselves excluded from these cultural spaces.

This paper aims to unpack these issues by situating the development of spectacular museums (big spaces) and art districts (small spaces) in the Gulf region within a wider global context. To that end, the paper is structured in three parts. First, a theoretical exploration looks at the changing nature of museums in the 21st century and the proliferation of art districts as a way to attract creatives to the city and in turn spur economic and urban development. The paper highlights a series of related problems such as the "ghettoization of culture" and presents the case of the Bilbao museum as a potential solution for avoiding such issues. Another suggestion pertains to the involvement of local stakeholders and the broader community as a way to minimize exclusionary tendencies, noting the case of Hong Kong's West Kowloon Cultural District. Second, the paper briefly reviews the global proliferation of creative districts highlighting the distinction between planned and organic developments. The third and main part of the paper shifts the discussion to the Gulf Arab states, where the proliferation of museums and art districts is presented in detail, setting their development within a larger critical framework and situating them within a wider global context. The paper concludes by arguing that Gulf cities could be at the forefront of a cultural renaissance.

1 Guy Mannes-Abott, "Utopian Dust Versus Perfumed Amplification," *Ibraaz*, June 26, 2014.

Introduction

Cultural developments aiming at revitalizing cities are proliferating throughout the world. "Starchitects" are commissioned to build spectacular museums and cultural centers to draw both local and international audiences. The Gulf Arab states are not far behind and have over the last few years been active in establishing art institutions, thereby further cementing their positions as the Arab world's new cultural hubs. While the focus has been on spectacular museums, there are numerous efforts underway to activate spaces in marginalized, abandoned, and neglected industrial sites. This echoes developments worldwide where such settings are attracting artists, gallery owners, and curators. They are seen as places that suggest an alternative narrative, a representation of nonmainstream values, which are critical for sustaining an artistic identity, as is the case with Shanghai.[2] Elsewhere, New York City's Meatpacking District or London's Shoreditch neighborhood, all formerly known for their gritty character, are now thriving areas spurring urban development. Similar sites exist in the Gulf such as Dubai's Al Quoz district, Abu Dhabi's Mina Zayed, Manama's Adliya district, and Kuwait's Shuwaykh neighborhood. Yet, as has been the case in the West, their very attractiveness may facilitate an influx of upper-income professionals, the construction of high-end galleries designed by renowned architects, and incursion of upscale retail, making them unaffordable for a large portion of the population, and often driving out artists who would have initially moved there attracted by their affordability.

This paper considers cultural production and consumption through a closer look at big spaces (monumental museums) and small spaces (marginal and industrial sites). It begins with a global perspective, situating the developments taking place in the Gulf, including the emergence of the universal museum, cultural quartering, and the proliferation of cultural districts. This paper argues that because of this global outlook and the embrace of cultural initiatives the region has surpassed the traditional centers of culture in the Arab world. Indeed, the Gulf Arab states have arguably become the region's de facto cultural leaders, admired not just for gleaming and spectacular museums, but also for a thriving and burgeoning art scene.

However, there are certain drawbacks pertaining to the global expansion of museums, and the top-down development of cultural districts. Issues such as gentrification, social exclusion, real estate speculation, and intensification of economic inequality are deeply embedded in the contemporary cultural discourse. The Gulf is not immune from this; similar to what is happening elsewhere in the world, artistic production, in some respects, is being commodified and in turn city spaces are becoming privatized. And while in a Western context this has resulted in a polarization of city life between "affluent cores and low-income margins"[3] the issue in the Gulf is further problematized due to its unique demographic. Comprised of a minority local population, a majority of expatriates (Arab and Western), as well as low-income migrants, such exclusionary tendencies may impact city life in a different way. Arguably, spatial inequality and segregation are deeply embedded in Gulf societies, and as such cultural developments are simply a reflection of this. With that in mind, this paper engages such criticisms and suggests guidelines for avoiding cultural developments that are exclusionary. It is predicated on an

2 Sheng Zhong, "Artists and Shanghai's Culture-Led Urban Regeneration," *Cities* 56 (July 2016): 165-71.

3 Andrew Ross, *Nice Work If You Can Get It: Life and Labor in Precarious Times* (New York: NYU Press, 2010).

assumption that the proliferation of both big and small spaces of cultural production should serve the city in which they are located, contributing to its urban growth and providing an environment that caters to the needs and desires of all of its citizens and residents.

The Emergence of the Universal Museum and Proliferation of Cultural Districts

The proliferation of museums in the Gulf Arab states exists within a universal trend in which these institutions' meaning and significance have been reconstituted as a result of globalizing influences and a shift toward a business-based model. Such trends suggest a redefinition of culture within postcolonial and transnational systems. Indeed, the first inkling of a radical change into the nature of what a museum is and its relation to the larger global economy happened in New York in the 1990s. Later, especially following the 9/11 events and subsequent economic downturn, museums began to find themselves in a dire financial situation. Moving toward a business-based model and promoting the idea of culture as a commodity that can be sold, moved, and exchanged at a profit, began to suggest a way out for these troubled cultural landmarks.

Yet this has not been without its critics. Some described it as an "end of an era"[4] while others suggested that such orientations "tarnished" the reputation of great cultural institutions.[5] Such a change to the very definition of culture, and indeed the nature of the museum itself, was based on the theoretical writings of postmodernist advocates Fredric Jameson and Rosalind Krauss, who described this shift in terms of a "logic of the late capitalist museum."[6] Here the notion of culture as a commodity was highlighted, which impacted how a museum is designed and experienced, foreshadowing changes that were to take place at the beginning of the 21st century.

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Thus, culture has become a form of capital and museums are treated as a business – not distinguishable from a department store, for example. As a result, these venerable institutions are engaged in branding, and have become part of a "global expansionist model" with some scholars describing this as a "McGuggenheim" effect, since the New York-based Guggenheim was at the forefront of these efforts.[7]

Cultural districts were initially meant to counteract these developments, providing a bottom-up approach to urban regeneration. They were also seen as a panacea of sorts for urban ills where large parts of city districts had fallen into disrepair and neglect as a result of economic restructuring during the 1970s and 80s due to the loss of traditional industrial sectors and

4 Michael Kimmelman, "Critic's Notebook; An Era Ends for the Guggenheim," *The New York Times*, December 6, 2002.

5 Susan Ostling, "The Global Museum and the Orbit of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum New York," *International Journal of the Humanities* 5 (2007).

6 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); Rosalind Krauss, "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum," *October* 54 (1990): 3-17.

7 Saloni Mathus, "Museums and Globalization," *Anthropological Quarterly* 78, no. 3 (2005): 697-708.

the collapse of the industrial base in many cities.[8] Accordingly, cultural policy was used in the context of place marketing largely influenced by Richard Florida's book "The Rise of the Creative Class."[9] Cities thus embraced creative place strategies but rather than providing alternatives to consumption and market policy developments, they were mostly centered around gestures related to infrastructure such as building bike paths, renovating warehouses, or introducing hip entertainment and consumption zones. Yet, the gentrification of creative neighborhoods drives out those most likely to innovate and "Potemkin cultural zones," i.e. places that on the surface imply a dedication to artists without any substantive change in cultural policies, are nothing but stages for consumption.[10] Moreover, a large portion of the population not designated as creative is excluded prompting observers to describe it as a ruse,[11] while Florida distanced himself from this in his more recent writings.[12]

The Ghettoization of Culture

The notion of a museum or a cultural center reviving districts and neighborhoods is not a new one. Lincoln Center in New York City was a project that began in the 1950s under the umbrella of urban renewal at the time. Major architects such as Philip Johnson were contracted to build concert halls and performance centers. The area transformed into a cultural hub following its opening in the late 1960s. Similarly, the Pompidou Center in Paris, which opened in 1977, is in the city's historical heart, the Marais district, housing exhibition spaces and a public library. Designed by renowned architects Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano, it became a landmark in its own right and a major public gathering place transforming the area into one of the most visited places in Paris.

These projects were predicated on an assumption that their very presence and association with well-known architects would help in stimulating urban development. Acting as a catalyst, they increased demand for other uses – such as restaurants, upscale retail, and art galleries.[13] Yet this would only have been feasible if the placement of flagship cultural developments had occurred in a context that was receptive to such activities in the first place. The Frank Gehry-designed Guggenheim museum in Bilbao, Spain (opened in 1997) is cited as a model example since it revitalized a previously neglected and marginalized area. There is even a term for this: Bilbao effect. Yet scholars have dubbed this effect a "myth" suggesting it is nothing more than a facade hiding real estate speculation and urban marketing leading to unwanted outcomes such as gentrification and urban segregation.[14] Moreover Bilbao's "success" story is not just because of its museum but also other factors including the construction of a metro system,

8 Lily Kong, "Transnational Mobilities and the Making of Creative Cities," *Theory, Culture & Society* 31, no. 7-8 (September 2014): 273-89.

9 Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

10 Andrew Ross, *Nice Work If You Can Get It: Life and Labor in Precarious Times* (New York: NYU Press, 2010).

11 Alec Macgillis, "The Ruse of the Creative Class," *The American Prospect*, December 18, 2009.

12 Richard Florida, *The New Urban Crisis* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

13 Carl Grodach, "Museums as Urban Catalysts: The Role of Urban Design in Flagship Cultural Development," *Journal of Urban Design* 13, no. 2 (2008): 195-212.

14 Beatriz Plaza, Manuel Tironi, and Silke N. Haarich, "Bilbao's Art Scene and the 'Guggenheim effect' Revisited," *European Planning Studies* 17, no. 11 (2009): 1,711-29.

new airport, and bridge, all designed by well-known architects.[15] Urban scholars highlight that spectacular architecture in and of itself is not sufficient to enable urban regeneration and that museums should be positioned to build on an existing art scene and linked to an existing cultural environment;[16] otherwise they risk becoming isolated and exclusive spaces, a "cathedral in the desert."[17] However, the presence of such institutions can have a positive effect as well – indeed the Bilbao museum has resulted in a proliferation of art centers throughout the city and the emergence of a vibrant art cluster. This happened because of a comprehensive urban regeneration strategy with the goal to improve local urban structures, social integration, and quality of life.[18] In a similar manner the Zaha Hadid-designed Dongdeum Design Plaza in Seoul, South Korea (opened in 2011) facilitated the revitalization of an old neighborhood transforming it into a "culturally vibrant space."[19]

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Involvement of Local Stakeholders

The case of the West Kowloon Cultural District in Hong Kong, one of Asia's largest culture-led urban development projects, highlights the confluence of global and local politics and how they can shape a city's cultural policy. The project, introduced in 1998 with the master plan developed by British architect Norman Foster, was conceived as an attempt for Hong Kong to become a world-class city and further enhance its status as a major global financial center. Private corporations were invited to build a series of renowned museums, among them the Guggenheim. Interestingly, a similar strategy of "spectacular" architecture (for example, the world's largest outdoor roof/canopy) was adopted to enhance the project's appeal. However, a public outcry led to it being temporarily shelved in 2006.[20]

A main objection concerned whether the megaproject catered to the local population or was only meant for visitors from abroad. Moreover, critics questioned whether it enabled "cultural thickness" by facilitating the creation of an urban setting that attracts artists, performers, writers, and others – in other words, actively contributing to the promotion of a local art scene.[21] Officials in charge of the development avoided all these questions, focusing instead

15 Martin Heidenreich and Beatriz Blaza, "Renewal through Culture? The Role of Museums in the Renewal of Industrial Regions in Europe," *European Planning Studies* 23, no. 23 (2013): 1,441-55.

16 Carl Grodach, "Museums as Urban Catalysts: The Role of Urban Design in Flagship Cultural Development," *Journal of Urban Design* 13, no. 2 (2008): 195-212.

17 Andy C. Pratt, "Creative Cities: The Cultural Industries and the Creative Class," *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 90, no. 2 (2016): 107-17.

18 Beatriz Plaza, Manuel Tironi, and Silke N. Haarich, "Bilbao's Art Scene and the 'Guggenheim effect' Revisited," *European Planning Studies* 17, no. 11 (2009): 1,711-29.

19 Ji Youn Kim, "Cultural Entrepreneurs and Urban Regeneration in Itaewon, Seoul," *Cities* 56 (July 2016): 132-40.

20 Tai-lok Lui, "City-Branding Without Content: Hong Kong's Aborted West Kowloon Mega-Project, 1998-2006," *International Development Planning Review* 30, no. 3 (2008): 215-26.

21 Ibid.

on infrastructure. However, observers saw this as only a cover-up for allocating a large piece of land in a prime location toward real estate property development. The project was put on hold with a recommendation to abandon some major design aspects in any future development such as the canopy. Recent reports indicate that it is back on track with a stronger focus on local residents and venues dedicated to various aspects of Chinese culture.[22]

In this manner the West Kowloon Cultural District managed to bypass some of the main drawbacks that accompany the development of spectacular museums and cultural districts. In the process, it provides some useful lessons for similar endeavors elsewhere, including the Gulf Arab states, where monumental urban developments predicated on a flagship architecture are embraced wholeheartedly. The effective contribution of civil society is a poignant reminder about its significance, acting as a counterpoint to top-down measures, thereby enabling a more balanced approach.

Creative Districts Worldwide

With the proliferation of cultural districts internationally, the Global Cultural Districts Network was formed to address issues relevant to such districts (both planned and naturally occurring) bringing together actors and stakeholders across the world.[23] Among its members are only three Arab cities, all from the Gulf: Dubai, Sharjah, and Kuwait City. Among the issues of interest to the network is the extent of integration with the cities and providing an outlet for artistic production that is inclusive. The involvement of the state or private sector in planning these districts is another topic frequently discussed among its members.

Se Hoon Park argued that, in a South Korean context, art districts that develop organically are more sustainable and of greater benefit to local communities than formal and government-led initiatives.[24] In support of this, a series of case studies of cultural districts examined the various degrees of involvement of the South Korean government in their development, questioning whose culture was being addressed. The study found that cultural districts can be sustainable and invigorated only with the active participation of private actors, such as artists, art associations, and cultural agencies. Significantly, however, the role of the state was not dismissed; the author recommended that the state support and enable civil society actors and communicate with artists. Similar observations have also been made in other contexts. Considering Hong Kong, scholars have noted that the proliferation of art districts and cultural initiatives are all state led such as the Fontanian Art Community in the New Territories, the Fo Tan industrial district, or the Blue House, a tenement building in central Hong Kong.[25] Yet, in this instance, they are mostly seen as cosmetic measures perpetuating the hegemony of the regime.

22 Enid Tsui and Kevin Kwong, "Is the West Kowloon Cultural District Finally Taking Shape?," *Post Magazine*, February 17, 2017.

23 "About Us," The Global Cultural Districts Network, accessed April 19, 2018.

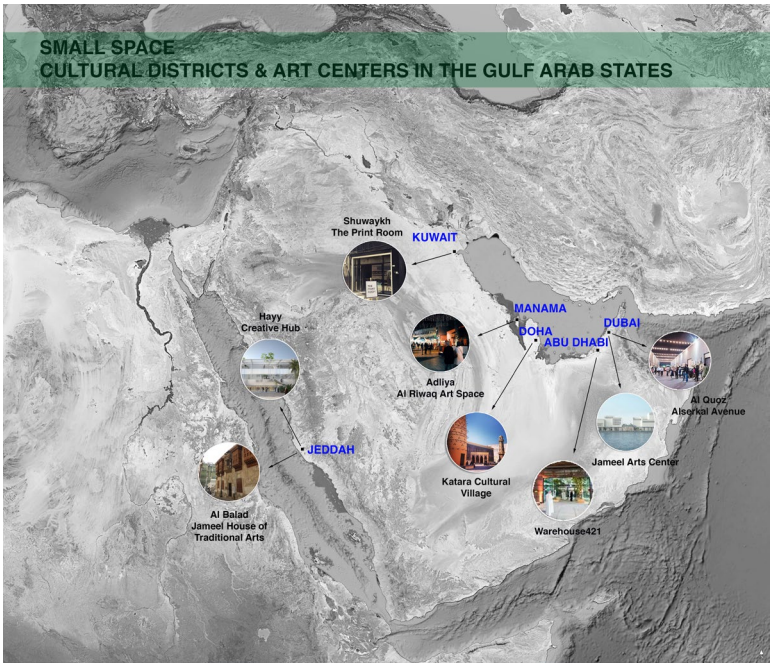
24 Se Hoon Park, "Can We Implant an Artist Community? A Reflection on Government-Led Cultural Districts in Korea," *Cities* 56 (July 2016): 172-79.

25 Wing-Shing Tang, "Creative Industries, Public Engagement and Urban Redevelopment in Hong Kong: Cultural Regeneration as Another Dose of Isotopia?," *Cities* 56 (July 2016): 156-64.

Elsewhere, there have been spontaneous developments such as in Shanghai, which has been active in the conversion of grain warehouses, revitalization of the art district M50, and development of Tianzifang, which welcomed its first wave of artists around the turn of the millennium. Another example is the 798 Art Zone in Beijing. However, this spontaneity is short lived.[26] The cultural glamour surrounding such areas "fades" once capital is injected and more generic commercial land use dominates and displaces artistic originality and creativity. In this manner creative districts are taken over by real estate developers, in some instances with the active collaboration of cultural entrepreneurs. Similar developments take place all over the world, with Soho in New York City perhaps the most recognizable. Its conversion from artist enclave to outdoor shopping mall has actually been dubbed the "Soho Effect," which is considered an undesirable outcome to be avoided.[27]

The Cultural Scene in the Gulf Arab States

Monumental Museums



Looking at the museums and centers that have emerged in the Middle East over the last few years reveals a dizzying array of structures designed by the world's most recognizable architects. And remarkably all are located in the Gulf region.[28] While some are designed to be isolated entities to be admired from afar (Louvre Abu Dhabi or the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia) others are more integrated within their urban context (Dubai Opera, Muscat Opera, Qatar National Museum in Doha, as well as the Kuwait National Cultural District, encompassing an opera house, a cultural center, and a public park). Others are yet to come on board such as Saudi Arabia's massive Misk Art Institute, which promises to be one of the world's leading cultural institutions. Relying on the well-tested formula of combining spectacular architecture

26 Sheng Zhong, "Artists and Shanghai's Culture-Led Urban Regeneration," *Cities* 56 (July 2016): 165-71.

27 Meghan Ashlin Rich and William Tsitsos, "Avoiding the 'SoHo Effect' in Baltimore: Neighborhood Revitalization and Arts and Entertainment Districts," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 40, no. 4 (2016): 736-54.

28 There are some exceptions: The Palestine Museum designed by Heneghan Peng Architects in Birzeit; the yet to be constructed Beirut Museum of Modern Art (Bema) designed by Hala Wardé; and the soon to be opened Grand Egyptian Museum in Cairo, also designed by Heneghan Peng Architects (initially conceived in 2000, it has faced numerous delays but is planned to partially open in 2018).

and monumentality, some of these museums and centers have become landmarks in their own right such as Abu Dhabi's Louvre and Qatar's National Museum, both designed by Jean Nouvel, as well as Doha's Museum of Islamic Art designed by I. M. Pei.

But unlike similar developments in other parts of the world the aim in the Gulf states is not to regenerate a previously marginalized and neglected part of the city. Instead these mostly state-led initiatives have set their sights on a global audience, seeking to attract tourists while at the same time imbuing their respective cities with world-class status in addition to energizing their local artist communities. In the case of Louvre Abu Dhabi, the museum is intentionally designed to be an island on an island, requiring its visitors to embark on a journey leading them to the architectural delights that await them once they arrive (and then experience the exhibits, which will include Leonardo da Vinci's "Salvator Mundi," the most expensive painting ever sold at auction). Others have a closer relationship with their cities – such as in Qatar and Kuwait – providing a better potential for influencing their immediate context and enabling an art-inspired urbanity.

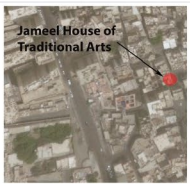
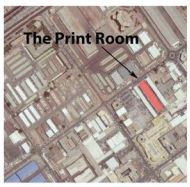
Given the lack of a substantive urban context in terms of history, absence of any effective community organizations, and lack of a viable participatory planning process, debates such as those that occur in the West are largely missing. Mostly conceived as top-down initiatives, these projects fit into a wider narrative of nation building and economic visions prevalent in the Gulf where such developments are seen as a matter of national priority. For example, Abu Dhabi's Economic Vision 2030 stipulates that it is "already investing strongly in expanding and upgrading its tourism and cultural offering with significant projects such as the Saadiyat Island Cultural District with its cluster of world renowned museums, cultural and educational institutions."[29] Thus, at the height of the 2008 financial crisis with many projects put on hold or cancelled, the construction of Louvre Abu Dhabi continued unabated since it was viewed as "cultural infrastructure." The only impact in this case was a rescheduling so that buildings are constructed sequentially with the Louvre the only one completed so far.

Yet, this top-down approach has been criticized for neglecting the local art scene and catering to a primarily global audience or, in the case of the Gulf, expatriate residents as well as a constantly revolving audience of tourists. This has been highlighted in a number of reports, including the 2012 New York Times article "Qatar's Royal Patronage of the Arts: Glittering but Empty," claiming that Qatar's art scene is disconnected from its local audience, which does not find any connection between their cultural traditions and high-end art exhibits displayed in local museums.[30] This also is an issue elsewhere in the Gulf, where exhibitions primarily cater to a highly educated expatriate cultural intelligentsia. Though the seeming absence of local residents, with the exception of those actively engaged in the art scene, may be a result of their small number vis-à-vis the rest of the population.

29 "The Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030," Government of Abu Dhabi, accessed April 19, 2018.

30 Rooksana Hossenally, "Qatar's Royal Patronage of the Arts: Glittering but Empty," *The New York Times*, February 29, 2012.

Cultural Districts

MAPPING URBAN CULTURAL DISTRICTS	LOCATION			DESCRIPTION
Alserkal Avenue Al Quoz Dubai UAE				Alserkal Avenue, founded in 2007 under the patronage of the Alserkal family from three lanes of warehouses in Dubai's Al Quoz industrial district, has transformed into Dubai's arts and culture hub. The enclave's galleries showcase artist from across the region, Muslim world, and globe.
Jameel Arts Center Jaddaf Dubai UAE				An arm of Art Jameel, a regional arts organization, Jameel Arts Center is set to open in winter 2018. When opened, it will house a gallery space, a book store, restaurants, outdoor sculpture areas, a rooftop terrace, and a research library on Arab arts and culture movements.
Warehouse421 Al Mina Abu Dhabi UAE				Founded under the patronage of the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation, Warehouse421 is a collection of warehouses in Abu Dhabi's industrial port area refurbished as a platform for creative discovery aimed at nurturing the UAE's artistic community.
Katara Cultural Village Katara Beach Doha Qatar				Katara Cultural Village is home to art and photography studios, restaurants, galleries, and an opera house. The enclave did not develop organically, but rather through the work of the Qatar Tourism Authority, which aims to put Doha on the map as an artistic hub.
Hayy: Creative Hub AlMohammadiyah Jeddah Saudi Arabia				Set to open in 2019, Hayy: Creative Hub is an effort by Saudi arts organization, Art Jameel and Dubai-based ibda Design to gather Jeddah's creative community in a central location. The hub is set to be located in northern Jeddah near the airport. Upon completion, the complex will host galleries, studios, and other creative spaces.
Jameel House of Traditional Arts Al Balad Jeddah Saudi Arabia				Jameel House of Traditional Arts, an extension of Art Jameel's regional network of creative spaces, houses an arts education program aimed at preserving traditional Islamic art practices and providing inspiration through Al Balad's traditional architecture.
Al Riwaq Art Space Adliya Manama Bahrain				Al Riwaq Art Space serves the dual purpose of an arts education facility and exhibition venue. It holds an annual festival, Nest, to stimulate creativity in Adliya, Manama's primary artistic community.
The Print Room Shuwaykh Industrial Kuwait City Kuwait				The Print Room is a private creative facility housed in a refurbished warehouse aimed at incubating a community of designers and artists. Alongside of the Print Room, a number of upscale restaurants, retail spaces, and a gallery have arisen in Shuwaikh Industrial.

Small scale cultural spaces have the potential to mitigate exclusionary tendencies, but they are in many cases planned either by the state or the private sector, which in turn both limits their audience and the degree of their integration within the districts and neighborhoods they are supposed to revitalize. However, a closer look at these art districts reveals a more

nuanced picture, suggesting that such developments have the potential for becoming urban catalysts. Indeed, within the Gulf a number of cultural districts have emerged over the last few years.

These projects vary in scale and involvement of state actors. In the United Arab Emirates, Alserkal Avenue is a private initiative located in Dubai's gritty Al Quoz industrial district. More than any other similar development in the region, Al Quoz is closest to its global counterparts in terms of an organic evolution of artistic activities. The Flying House, a nonprofit institution for the promotion of Emirati art, is located in the midst of the district.[31] Also known for being the studio and home of the late Hassan Sharif, the UAE's notable modern artist, it became a center of sorts for a burgeoning art scene that included Mohammed Kazem and Mohammed Ahmed Ibrahim, well-known Emirati artists in their own right. Described as a laboratory and a site of experimentation,[32] it captures the spontaneous character of a creative environment. The space was set up in 2007 as a small art community was beginning to take shape. Alserkal Avenue capitalized on this transformation of what was a family warehousing business on the site of a former marble factory. Initially attracting a small number of venues, it now hosts 16 galleries and over 40 creative businesses. Its most recent addition – Concrete – is a glamorous Rem Koolhaas-designed space. Described as a creative hub,[33] the venue represents a gradual move away from a market-oriented dynamic toward an organic art scene catering to the UAE's nonprofits and artists. That said, Alserkal Avenue has yet to fully integrate into the district: It is accessible through a gate and once inside patrons are more or less separated from the surrounding context. Admittedly, there isn't much of interest outside Alserkal Avenue; the district is largely comprised of industrial facilities, warehouses, and, further inside, labor accommodations. However, an active engagement with its surroundings could potentially transform the area into a vibrant cultural district.

Small scale cultural spaces have the potential to mitigate exclusionary tendencies, but they are in many cases planned either by the state or the private sector, which in turn both limits their audience and the degree of their integration within the districts and neighborhoods they are supposed to revitalize.

Elsewhere in the UAE such efforts are being replicated. For instance, Abu Dhabi Warehouse421, a yet to be a fully developed art district, is an initiative from the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation. Located in the city's Mina Zayed (Port Zayed) area, a series of warehouses were converted to house exhibition spaces and also as a setting for an annual art festival. One of these structures has been redesigned by world-renowned architect Bjarke Ingels and his firm BIG.[34] Also of note is the Al Hosn

31 Pat Binder and Gerhard Haupt, "The Flying House," *Nafas Art Magazine*, April 2008.

32 Rosemary Behan, "Where Local Art Takes Flight," *The National*, August 10, 2008.

33 Coline Milliard, "The Man Helping Dubai Pivot from Oil to Art," *Artsy*, January 1, 2018.

34 Aidan Imanova, "Resurrecting Abu Dhabi's Past: Bjarke Ingels on Art Space in Warehouse421," *DesignMENA*, February 25, 2016.

Cultural Quarter currently under construction in central Abu Dhabi;[35] located next to its old fort and the modernist Cultural Foundation, the entire project is envisioned as a hub for culture bringing people together in a central location. If realized as envisioned it has real potential to transform the city.

Elsewhere in the region, Doha's Katara Cultural Village, initiated by the Qatar Tourism Authority, is notable although it is planned as a self-contained entity and not directly associated with any particular neighborhood. Art Jameel, a private initiative, is planning two centers – one in Dubai and the other in Jeddah, although in both instances they are not yet integrated within a wider context: In Dubai it is located in Jaddaf close to a new development (Dubai Creek Harbor), while in Jeddah it is in a residential neighborhood. In Bahrain, more emphasis is placed on locating art centers within distinct districts. Thus, the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities is placing temporary installations in the historic area of Muharraq. In Manama, Al Riwaq Art Space is a private art gallery expanding into the neighborhood in which it is located, Adliya. Its annual outdoor art festival NEST is a significant nonstate-sponsored art event. In Kuwait, the private sector is revitalizing industrial areas. These include The Print Room in the Shuwaykh industrial district[36] and the Sultan Gallery, which moved from downtown Kuwait City to Sabhan,[37] closer to the city's airport.

[These activities and initiatives] also demonstrate that in some parts of the Gulf Arab states there is a strong grassroots movement that seeks to promote culture independent of state-led initiatives.

At the level of activities numerous individuals have been involved in organizing farmers markets in various parts of Kuwait, such as the Qout artisanal food market, involving the display of crafts.[38] Similarly, the nonprofit design initiative Nuqat organizes symposia on creative practices and processes.[39] They take place in venues that typically do not experience heavy foot traffic. All of these activities and initiatives, while not rising to the level of enabling a creative district scene, do show the high potential for it. They also demonstrate that in some parts of the Gulf Arab states there is a strong grassroots movement that seeks to promote culture independent of state-led initiatives. They also have the capacity to act as a counterpoint to the spectacular, global, and cosmopolitan sites of monumental museums and could thus lead to an art scene that could truly cement the region's position as the main center of culture in the Arab world.

Moving Forward: Toward a Cultural Renaissance?

By situating cultural developments in the region within a wider context – both in terms of theory and actual cases – a number of observations can be made. First, there is a consensus that reliance on infrastructure is not sufficient for an urban renewal. Gulf Arab cities, in their

35 Marak Mannan and Melanie Swan, "Qasr Al Hosn to Become 'Cultural Heart' of Abu Dhabi," *The National*, March 7, 2017.

36 "About," The Print Room, accessed April 19, 2018.

37 Kaelen Wilson-Goldie and Fatima Al Qadiri, "Culture in the Wake of the Kuwaiti Oil Boom," *Bidoun* (2010).

38 Dana Al Khalifa, "Green Bar at Qout Market Kuwait," *The Overdressed*, December 9, 2013.

39 "About," Nuqat, accessed April 19, 2018.

focus on spectacular and monumental architectural strategies for their museums and cultural centers, are plugging themselves into a global art network. However, this has drawbacks as it fails to prioritize the contribution these institutions can make to the proliferation of a thriving local art scene. This effectively creates a barrier that prevents them from fully integrating into their respective cities. Admittedly, this is a strategy pursued at an international level by many institutions and is not exclusively a Gulf phenomenon. Second, "small spaces" of culture play a critical role in the development of art and cultural districts. There is agreement that more efforts should be made to allow for bottom-up approaches that facilitate organic development, thereby serving the interests of artists and other creatives as well as providing for a more inclusive and accessible space.

Additional measures for creative districts include provision of space for artists to pursue integrating the city itself into their work (e.g. public art installations, development of cultural trails, spaces for graffiti or mural-based art, and encouraging performance art). This would move many cities away from the kind of highly sanitized and structured spaces of culture that are present throughout the region such as the Sikka Art Fair in Dubai, for example. Education can play a role too: designing projects and curricula that capitalize on the city's spaces and their potential for art displays; facilitating school trips to art districts; raising awareness about local artists; and establishing more university programs that cater to art and design. Finally, a clearer path for local involvement is needed, which can be accomplished by providing space for civil society, engagement of local consultants and architects, and creating a framework for public participation. Perhaps more than any other measure, the latter would ensure that cultural initiatives are not seen as a foreign import divorced from local realities but emanating from authentic community needs. In providing for both "big" and "small" cultural spaces, the Gulf could perhaps be at the forefront of a renaissance in the region.