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ID 1340 | TRANSNATIONAL URBAN DESIGN FIRMS AND LOCAL IMPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING

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ABSTRACT: International architects and urban designers are considered to be crucial for creating new urban projects and more generally for growth. Indeed, transnational firms tend, to provide complex packages of services that reassure investors and politicians, often by elaborating positive narratives such as sustainability or the smart city. By following strategies for being highly distinctive (star architects) or highly reliable (corporate-like) in the global market, design firms are now widely used by developers and investors to package and legitimize their projects. This may occur without any specific reference to local planning processes. Design firms have grown into multinationals with hundreds (sometimes thousands) of employees and they work in multiple cities sharing the same (standardized) knowledge, technologies and, most importantly, similar planning solutions that are ostensibly replicable. Public opinion and the media seem more interested in the narrative (or the technologies, or the esthetics, or the persona) than the actual urban project. In this way solutions are more and more often depicted as merely technical matters, depoliticized and privatized by developers or ad hoc local planning agencies. By investigating two critical examples of firms working on multiple continents (i.e. one star-firm Foster+Partners and one less famous, Broadway Malyan), this chapter will show that these transnational firms can operate in the absence of local planning powers (e.g. in emerging Asian countries or the Middle East), eventually be out of touch with the local physical and functional context and instrumentally use the specificities of given urban places. In the end this serves pro-growth local players. It seems important to understand these strategies and their implications for local planning, since the work of transnational design firms is becoming more and more relevant for many global and second tier cities in Asia and the Americas, as well as in Europe.

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, global cities as well as capital cities of Asia have witnessed the effects of a steep increase in the transnational circulation of architects, urban designers and planners. It has become more and more common to expect world-famous "archistars" and "urbanistars" to design not only "iconic" or spectacular pieces of architecture, but also to outline the master plans for infrastructure hubs, corporate headquarters and institutional compounds or university campuses. Similarly, other sorts of large-scale development projects have resorted to branding for building political consensus and media visibility. Despite their pervasiveness, the problematic practice of transnational planning and design - both in terms of local democratic decision-making process and in terms of its urban effects - has been left to a large extent to the architectural debate.

It is recurrent to find assumptions linking the work of architects and planners to the economic performances of given cities in public debates. In particular large-scale projects and innovative solutions are intended as an opportunity for the production (via real estate appreciation) and redistribution of wealth among citizens, in terms of new infrastructures, public facilities, employment, etc. (Logan and Molotch,

1987; Clark, 2004). International planning and architecture experts are considered to be crucial for urban growth. Transnational firms tend to provide complex packages of services that reassure investors and politicians of this pro-growth rationale (sometimes supported by academia: Jencks , 2005; sometimes criticized: Easterling, 2005, Saunders, 2005; Sudjic , 2005).

According to the work of Leslie Sklair, iconic and spectacular architecture has been serving contemporary forms of globalized capitalism to proliferate and fuel the rhetoric of inter-urban economic competition (Sklair, 2010 and 2012). In other terms, one can interpret the spectacularization of contemporary architecture and of the urban environment as a means for global players to work more easily in given urban contexts. At the same time, this condition seems functional to the commoditization and commercialization of architectural design on a global scale. In fact an architectural project is at the same time a product and a media representing a city, a client or even a place, or a real estate product to market.

Several firms have grown into multinationals with hundreds (sometimes thousands) of employees and they work in multiple cities sharing the same technologies and, most importantly, the same libraries of solutions. Design service has reached unprecedented global scales. Geography and urban studies literature have focused on the characteristics, strategies and the role of international architectural studios in urban matters (see, among others, the interesting work of Donald McNeill, 2009; Leslie Sklair, 2005 and 2006). The reasons why star architects are selected for particular projects and how they compete have been studied (Ponzini and Nastasi, 2016). Despite the significant expansion of global demand for architectural design and planning services, the mechanisms of distinction are quite important with reference to the internationally most visible projects. The studios which are capable of entering the architecture star system or the circles of the rich and powerful states' elite are in fact less vulnerable to global competition for certain types of works, such as outstanding public facilities, museums, concert halls, institutional and corporate headquarters, luxury housing and so on (Kloosterman, 2010). Architectural firms may indeed be appointed for these projects through invitation-only calls or even directly by public and private clients. From this point of view, architectural studios benefit in the long term from their established reputation and networks.

One can say without hesitation that star architects rely on their distinction, technology and aesthetic style. Most innovative and renowned architectural firms are often related to the personality of particular designers or to the extraordinary ability of completing special tasks. In literature, two strategies are recognized as relevant for architectural firms to organize their work and sell their services in the framework of contemporary global competition and international mobility. Coxe (Coxe et al, 1986) synthesized organizational strategies for architectural studios: a strong idea, strong service (and strong delivery, which is not relevant to this paper). The first concentrates on supplying unique competences for innovative and creative projects, where the star or an exceptional expert can prove to be decisive. The second, strong service, targets experience and reliability in complex design, development and implementation processes. The charisma and personality of an individual designer is often at the heart of strong idea studios. Typically they are groups of workers closely collaborating with this star-like figure or using their name as a brand. They typically work in different geographical contexts, since their high level of specialization is requested on few occasions in each city.

The strong-service strategy is highly reputed because it follows efficiency criteria in the organization of the design and implementation work cycle. Time and cost reliability is appreciated by investors and leads to higher profits. These studios are not centered on the figure of a star but they tend to have a corporate image. These organizations are sometimes articulated into branches following the whole life cycle of an architectural product (including engineering, public relations, city and community planning) and they can specialize in given items: office towers, skyscrapers, stadiums and so on.

2 FEATURES AND REASONS FOR THE TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY OF URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURAL PROJECTS

Urban geography and planning scholars have tried to cast light on the mobility of urban policies and urban development schemes. Building on the work by Manuel Castells (1996) and John Urry (2000; 2007b) and others, scholars showed that multiple urban actors tend to make policies, ideas, and approaches to urban planning, design and architecture travel from one place to another. The Journal of Urban and Regional

Research recently dedicated a symposium to these aspects (Harris and Moore, 2013), discussing the mobility of dominant models of intervention in contemporary cities (Helaey and Upton, 2010). McCann (2011) suggested adopting a wide interpretation of mobilities as a complex of agents, practices and performances that adapt ideas while they are circulating. The transnational mobility of ideas and technologies is not a linear process; one can expect different local adaptations, hybridization and assemblages with reference to local planning systems, institutional framework, actors and interests involved (Guggenheim e Söderström, 2009). Faulconbridge and Grubbauer (2015) maintain that in general the mobilities of architectural design firms and the circulation of their knowledge are strictly related to global market forces. Their ideas and knowledge are often packaged and marketed as effective globally, but indeed design ideas must be adapted locally in order to gain traction.

The organization and networking of such design firms have been investigated by geographers (Knox and Taylor, 2005; Faulconbridge, 2010) providing insight into their rationales and localization, though without reconnecting these with any involvement in designing given types of interventions in specific urban contexts, nor providing a sound link with their specific urban implications. Innovative studies showed the relevance of such investigations for understanding current urban transformations (McNeill, 2009).

Tim Bunnell (2015) explained how cities tend to generate policies by using antecedent cases in terms of prototypical examples, hierarchical imaginaries of other (highly-ranked) cities, paradigmatic and successful city models. Real estate investors tend to duplicate projects and packages of investments that have proven to be feasible and to generate adequate returns. This often includes similar building typologies, or diagrams for master plans, at times only the brand of a name architect that is expected to ease the planning process and make the real estate product more visible for global investors and local politicians (Ponzini and Nastasi, 2016).

Policy makers, planners and architects are not the only mobile actors in the game of transnational urban development. Real estate investors and developers seem to be more and more capable of working under quite different geographic conditions, depending on the institutional arrangements for allowing their business to land (Gotham, 2006). Clearly, the international movement of investors' and developers' resources, modes of planning and design are not politically neutral and they carry, as well, a bundle of socio-economic and cultural values that reverberate over globalizing urban environments.

3 THE TRANSNATIONAL CIRCULATION AND TRANSFER OF URBAN PROJECTS

In general terms, the simplest explanation refers to the tendency of multiple actors to reduce uncertainty and risk, whether by using similar designs, real estate investment schemes, policy tools (e.g. public-private partnerships) or other means. This short overview showed the multiple meanings and facets of transnational mobilities, which might or might not be related to design. More specifically, design-related concepts can only be partially derived from literature (which is still inconsistent). I use the terms "circulation" and "transfer" (Ponzini, forthcoming).

The circulation of urban and architectural projects implies that specific design-related aspects migrate among projects in multiple and geographically distant places. This has been recurring systematically for centuries with reference to common and generic architecture and urban design, but it seems more and more relevant once it is referred to spectacular buildings, complexes, infrastructures and urban environments that are supposed to be iconic and uniquely important for one city or place. The world-wide circulation of building types is quite recurrent. King (1984, 2003 and 2004) showed how circulation involved a specific history, regarding the creation and evolution of one building type, its adaptation in different contexts, and its diffusion and impact in diverse societies and cultures. Since modern times the discussion of the circulation of typologies has fostered a number of discussions targeting architectural features or their implications for local societies and ways of organizing cities.

The import and export of master plans and attention-catching architectural projects, if compared to the past, has assumed a relevant magnitude and geography, as well as an unprecedented pace in the last few decades (Nasr and Volait, 2003). A new frame of reference is available today for researching and discussing the transnational mobility of spectacular architecture, but is not fully deployed, nor systematized. Knox and Pain (2010) argued that the circulation of types and of similar buildings is part of the homogenization push of globalization, i.e. due to increasing the financierization and de-materialization

of the real estate market, to the competing and neoliberalizing attitudes of cities, and hypermobility and indulgence of design professionals. It is important to specifically note that this circulation can be detected with reference to central facilities and urban infrastructures (e.g. stadiums, museums, etc.) or clearer transfers of actual projects. Matti Siemiatycki (2013) offers a long term view of larger “waves” of the circulation of mega-urban projects. In particular he suggested the interest of historically and geographically tracking particular kinds of urban projects (e.g. electric tramways, urban freeways, light rails) and explaining policy trends with a concrete reference to the local interests and policy arrangements, public discourse and politics, and ultimately the physical environment. In particular, Siemiatycki outlines a theory of urban project circulation based on long-term waves and (for certain types of megaprojects) in phases of trendsetting, promotion and local adaptation, spread and decline. These waves can radically vary in their length and outreach depending on cultural but also local conditions, since projects are adapted and pushed forward by local interests and coalitions.

The second design-related way of importing and exporting spectacular projects can be described as a specific transfer when substantial features of one given building or landmark, of one master plan or of the structure of one exiting area is directly translated from an original place to one or more geographically distant destinations. Of course, the transfer concept can imply direct imports and exports having different degrees of accuracy in practice (with reference to building features: height, overall surface, functions, main materials, building structure, relationship to the master plan for the area or to infrastructure and public spaces).

From the point of view of the firm it is clearly more efficient to design one solution and apply it multiple times, eventually adapting the technology, aesthetics and narration to the local environment. Various types of design software in use among strong-service firms (and strong-idea as well) allow firms to buy or develop libraries of solutions that are shared by branches across the world: building information modeling is one example. Narratives like the “Bilbao effect,” the smart city and the like are reinforced when repeated and enacted locally. Real estate developers (and the investors backing their project) are reassured by projects that proved to be successful elsewhere, expecting marginal adjustments to be needed to obtain the same returns. Local politicians use the architect’s name and fame to cast positive light on the projects and themselves in the media. Other auxiliary actors (service providers, academia, intellectuals, etc.) can be in favor of growth in more or less general terms according to the project.

In this picture the connections between the key players in urban development are clear, though the urban implications for planning and effects at the local level have been investigated less. The profile and projects of two different transnational firms can help explore these aspects.

3.1 BROADWAY MALYAN AND THE TRANSNATIONAL CIRCULATION OF WATERFRONT COMPLEXES

The UK-based firm Broadway Malyan was founded in 1958. It covers all the typical expertise of architectural practice, from master planning to interior design. They have a quite mixed portfolio and wide array of clients in over 60 countries. According to the firm (Broadway Malyan 2013) they have a high rate of repeated business. For this paper I could find solid data only with reference to projects from the late 1990s to the present (deriving most information from the official website: www.broadwaymalyan.com). The localization of their satellite offices (sixteen overall with more than 500 employees) was both due to the expansion of the firm and to a set of partnerships with other offices (e.g. Latin America). Outside the UK they are mostly concentrated in Asia, with offices in Singapore, Shanghai, Mumbai and the Middle East. The 65 analyzed projects show that the firm increased its presence in Asia in the late 2000s, due to the economic slowdown in Europe. In particular, the spread from the UK and Europe to the East is quite evident (Fig. 1). This also implied a change in the political environment in which they operate, from fully democratic and free countries to partially free and not free countries (see Fig. 2).



Figure 1 – Localization of completed projects by Broadway Malyan in the 1998-2016 period

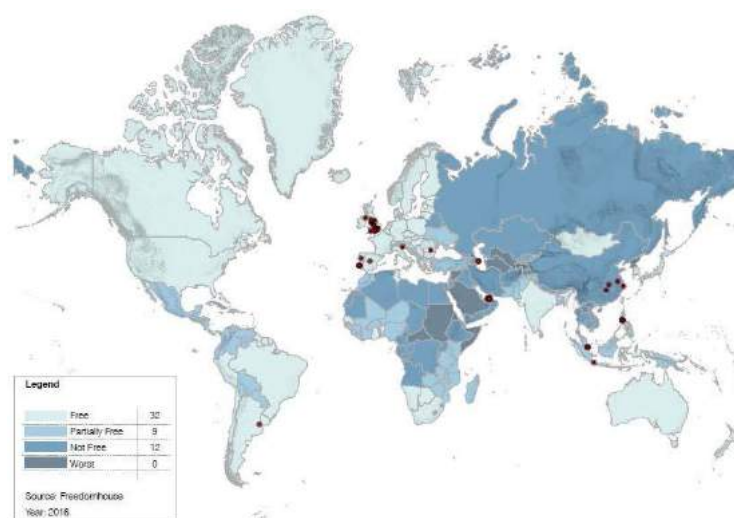


Figure 2 – Localization of completed projects by Broadway Malyan in the 1998-2016 period with reference to the level of freedom in each country, using the classification and data by Freedomhouse.com (Free, Partially Free, Not Free, Worst)

The presence of offices and the orientation toward repeated business clearly brought the firm to strengthen their relationships with local decision makers. In the Persian Gulf region, for example, they established two offices (one in Abu Dhabi and the other in Dubai). In 2009 Broadway Malyan was appointed to deliver and develop prototypes of architectural design for schools and educational centers in Qatar with the Ashgal programme and in Abu Dhabi for the ADEC School Programme (Ashgal is the national agency for public works of Qatar, while Abu Dhabi Education Council manages the educational system of that country). This means that they were in charge of developing one flagship school project and eventually dozens of others (more precisely forty in Qatar and twelve in Abu Dhabi). It is clear how this strategy implies the circulation and transfer of similar design solutions across one country and region, potentially developing common functional and aesthetic features.

An evident circulation of design features can be seen in the case of waterfront complexes in the UK, UAE and Azerbaijan. In the UK the firm experimented a receding floor system to enhance the presence of terraces overlooking the waterfront. This solution is known, but found success in the NV Buildings in Manchester and some obstacles in St. George Wharf in London. The residential complex using the same building type and overall scheme of Battersea Reach in London started in 2003 but took a long time to implement, being completed in 2014. In the same years the firm developed two similar projects, respectively in Abu Dhabi (Al Bandar) and in Baku (Port Baku Residences) (for a systematic comparison of the three projects see: Matevska, 2016).



Figure 3 – From the top, the complexes of Al Bandar in Abu Dhabi (photograph by Michele Nastasi), Battersea Reach in London (photograph by Michele Nastasi), and Port Baku Residences in Baku (image retrieved from: <https://it.pinterest.com/pin/237987161536546943>)

The development in Abu Dhabi involved the redesign of the shoreline and radical transformation of the environment lead by the real estate developer Aldar. The latter is the leader in development in this Emirate and one of the largest operators in the Middle East. It has developed several quadrants of Abu Dhabi and its most iconic buildings, such as the hotel and Formula 1 track on Yas Island. Its Headquarters building stands as a landmark for Abu Dhabi as well. Its portfolio includes entire islands near the main island of Abu Dhabi and a number of commercial and residential projects.

The Al Bandar project was started in 2007 and completed in 2011. If compared with the antecedent of Battersea Reach it has similar height and a slightly larger scale (90,000 sqm as opposed to 70,000 in London). Quite similar design solutions and materials had quite different effects, due to the different contexts: a former industrial site in a predominantly residential area in London; new man-made landfill and coastline removed from the city and marketed for its exclusivity and direct access to the sea.

These and other Broadway Malyan projects inspired the development of Port Baku in the capital of Azerbaijan, Baku. It was initiated in 2011 and was completed in 2014. The same system of receding floors was adopted for a much larger scale (about 400,000 m²) and less direct exposure to the waterfront (which is a few hundred meters away from the complex). The surrounding area is much more mixed in uses and more valuable if compared to the other two.

The developer and investment bank Pasha is extremely influential in the Azerbaijani national system, being closely related to the Aliyev family (in power in this oil-rich country since 1993, after the Soviet Union's collapse). The Port Baku project is part of a new residential and commercial development of the area and connected to a large mall. The complex does not have direct access to the water but faces a buffer zone of public spaces towards the waterfront. While the London project had to face a slowdown in the real estate market, in the cases of Abu Dhabi and Baku the project was completed at a dramatically high pace. In part this is due to the different planning systems and regulations, but one must notice that the market plays a less relevant role where "government-led urban elites ... define the political economy of the city and future development" (Valiyev, 2014, 45).

Besides the Port Baku Residences, Broadway Malyan designed another flagship project in Baku, completed in 2015. The National Gymnastic Arena originally was a key project for Baku's candidacy for the 2024 Olympic Games bid. The power structure is quite centralized and personalized (see: Guliyev, 2012) and the connection with it is of central importance in this country. Multiple commissions in this country may imply coming to terms with this monocratic and clan-like elite, and with its view of the city and urban growth.

3.2 FOSTER+PARTNERS AND THE TRANSFER OF A COMPLEX FROM ABU DHABI TO ASTANA

Today Foster+Partners is a multinational firm with several branches. Their initial work during the 1960s-1980s was mainly completed in the UK, but rapidly reached international recognition. The major breakthrough was the completion of the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank Headquarters in Hong Kong in the mid-1980s. Procurements came from Europe (e.g. Germany and France) and subsequently from other continents. Since the mid-2000s the firm started to work more systematically with emerging countries. The firm has been in the spotlight for several decades now and for multiple reasons, spanning from technological innovation, ecological care, architectural aesthetics, to the ability of designing and implementing iconic new buildings, of retrofitting existing heritage buildings and of managing complex development processes. It has attracted substantial attention among architecture, urban geography and planning scholars (among others: Mc Neill, 2005 and 2009; Poli, 2010).



Figure 4 – Localization of completed projects by Foster+Partners

One of the explanations for the transnational strategies of the firm can be derived from a documentary movie dedicated to it: “Foster has become placeless to quite an extraordinary extent. Bashes with bankruptcy have overshadowed many architects’ careers. So once Foster had the chance to work outside Britain, he saw that building a global practice was the key to survival. Downturns on one continent can be compensated for by booms on another. The experience of working on a world-wide scale has transformed Foster and his work. You can see now that there is a certain level of impatience with the way old Europe does things. He wants to bring home what he has learned.” (Carcas and López Amado 2010)

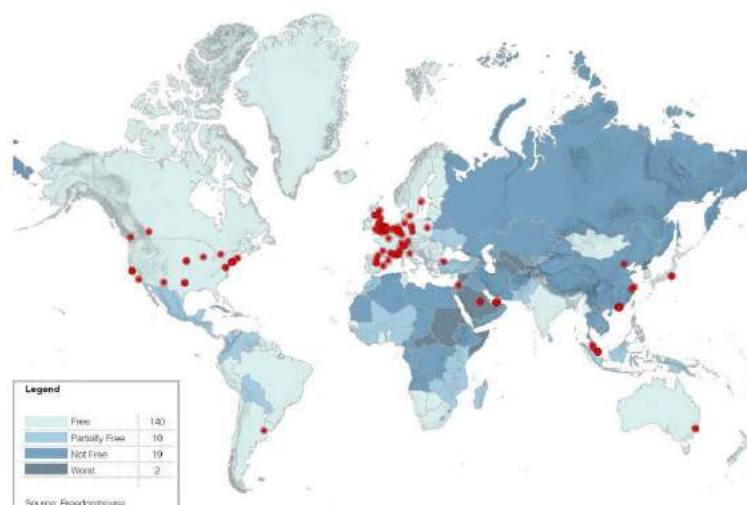


Figure 5 – Localization of completed projects by Foster+Partners with reference to the level of freedom in each country, using the classification and data by Freedomhouse.com (Free, Partially Free, Not Free, Worst)

The firm has worked in a number of countries and different institutional arrangements, including autocratic countries. Among the emerging countries where Foster works, the UAE and Kazakhstan seem very important in explaining the relationship with the elite and its transnational features. The firm was involved in a number of key projects in both countries, which were very important for their practical and symbolic relevance. In particular Foster designed the UAE pavilions for the 2010 Expo in Shanghai as well as the 2015 one in Milan, the Index in Dubai and the Masdar Institute master plan. The latter was intended to be the first zero-carbon eco-city, but was only partially completed (Gunel, 2016; Cugurullo, 2013).

One evident example of transfer of a Foster+Partners design can be considered. The site of Abu Dhabi’s central market was once the place of a lively souq of mixed-income shop owners and users. The new project designed by Foster+Partners - also known as the World Trade Center Abu Dhabi - is a mixed-use facility including exclusive offices, luxury residences, a mall and shopping area and a hotel. Its design

involved specific architecture and aesthetics and technological devices for thermic comfort which, according to the designers, are a contemporary reinterpretation of traditional bazaars in the region. In the firm's words: "Central Market will be a reinterpretation of the traditional market place and a new civic heart for Abu Dhabi." (cited in Elsheshtawy 2008b, and retrieved from <http://www.fosterandpartners.com/news/archive/2006/11/abu-dhabi-central-market-to-be-transformed>). The height of the main tower (Mohammed bin Rashid Tower) is also considerable not just because it is the tallest building in Abu Dhabi, but also compared with ones in the neighborhood, which have medium-rise average. Besides the expulsion of the lower strata of shop owners and users, the place lost its souq atmosphere in favor of a spectacular impact on Abu Dhabi's skyline. The project has a direct link to a distant place. The president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev has been in office since independence from the USSR in 1990. He has planned a new capital city – Astana - leveraging the country's booming gas economy to generate tremendous expansion (from a small village to over 800,000 people now) and international visibility (Anacker, 2004; Koch, 201; 2013a and 2013b). Two of the most iconic buildings of the new capital were commissioned to Foster: the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation and the Khan Shatyr Entertainment Centre.

One of Astana's most notable complexes of luxury hotels, retail, office and housing space - the Abu Dhabi Plaza – followed quite literally Abu Dhabi's Central Market development format. Norman Foster+Partners designed the master plan for this development, which was in fact promoted by Aldar and backed by President Nazarbayev. The official press release of the design firm reports that "the scheme is inspired by its sister project in Abu Dhabi - the Central Market Redevelopment" for "creating a new landmark on Astana's skyline" (<http://www.fosterandpartners.com/news/archive/2007/11/designs-unveiled-for-a-new-mixed-use-development-in-astana-kazakhstan/>). Despite their opposite climates, Abu Dhabi and Astana (with peaks respectively of +40C and of -40C), shared a similar rationale in design terms since some parts of the mall were expected to draw on the traditional Kazakhstani bazaars (in the firm's words "reinvention of a traditional marketplace" <http://www.fosterandpartners.com/news/archive/2007/11/designs-unveiled-for-a-new-mixed-use-development-in-astana-kazakhstan/>) and to implement the newest technologies for maximizing the gain from solar light during winter. The project is located nearby the monumental axis that includes most representative and institutional buildings of the city and the nation. The Abu Dhabi Plaza project in Astana derived from a special agreement between Kazakhstan and Abu Dhabi, involving the creation of a Special Economic Zone, waiving taxes for both construction and management of the compound and expecting further direct foreign investments. It is clear how the local and national government supported Aldar, despite the fact that local critics and Members of Parliament contested the fact that the municipal budget will not benefit from this operation, which is located in a prime site in the city. In particular, the political relationships between the Abu Dhabi and Astana transfer are quite personalized and generated ad hoc conditions for specific projects (Anceschi, 2014). The sub-culture of the elite counts and can have paradoxical effects for planning and more general state policy (Jones 2015). These were conditions that did not grant any particular planning restrictions for the project.

After a grand public and international announcement, the final design was handed to HKR Architects, which describes itself as "an architectural consultancy for the new global economy [...] Our network of offices in the UK, Turkey, Russia, Kazakhstan and the UAE enables us to offer a full scope of services to our clients, delivering international experience and local knowledge to each project, regardless of location" (Retrieved from <http://www.hkrarchitects.com/about-us/> in April 2015, italics added by the author). Construction started in 2009; the main tower (over 350m) will be the tallest building in Central Asia. In the process several adaptations were made, losing the innovative signature design and aesthetics of Foster. The fact that this building (the tallest in the city and the country) will be adjacent to the monumental axis of the capital ironically show that the only actor fulfilling its goals is the real estate developer Aldar. The client has a more costly and less iconic complex, the state cannot levy taxes on the new development, the design firm lost the job along the way and eventually citizens will have a less interesting urban realm than expected with the approval of the project.

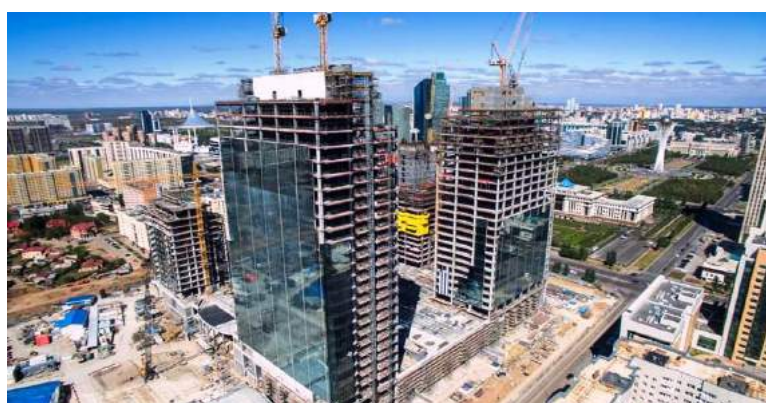


Figure 6 – From the top, the complexes of the Central Market in Abu Dhabi (photograph by Michele Nastasi) and the Abu Dhabi Plaza in Astana (image retrieved from: : <http://www.aldar.com/en/Commercial-Properties/Pages/DevelopmentDetails.aspx?DevID=Abu-Dhabi-Plaza>)

4 CONCLUSIONS: TRANSNATIONAL DESIGN FIRMS AND LOCAL URBAN PLANNING

The analysis of the architectural firms' international strategies and trajectories highlights their quite simple rationale of following the opportunities for working, establishing new branches and relationships where urbanization occurs with a higher intensity of investment, in the Western world and in certain booming cities in Asia. Very little has been done in Latin America, nothing in Africa. Of course, this paper has a very limited scope: two firms only, from the same country and, all in all, having similar profiles, despite the fact that Foster+Partners and Broadway Malyan have different approaches and specialties. However, one can see that the trajectories are clearly related to the international circuits and elites of the countries welcoming the work of international design firms. Repeated works depend on the designer's quality and reliability, but also on strong relationships of the firm .

Star architects' clients seem interested in the functional outcome of architectural design as well as in the returns in terms of reputation that the figure of a renowned architect can induce. As the two cases showed, famous architects are not hired for the expected positive urban impact only, but also for other symbolic and political reasons both at the macro (promotion of the national or urban image) and micro level (same operators). Representing architectural aesthetics, technological innovation or general narratives as determinant factors does not respond to the actual procurement processes. Nonetheless, the firm's distinctiveness has been the means for disseminating certain types of behavior among decision makers and has provided architects, pro-growth politicians, real estate developers and other actors with favorable conditions for their business (Sklair, 2006 and 2010). Despite the fact that architectural and urban design become a means to reassure local actors about the feasibility and innovation of projects to be more or less literally transplanted (which is efficient for the design firm), the final outcome depends on a series of

adjustments. The latter may mean the simplification (and eventual banalization and cost-cutting) of the original project that was delivered under different conditions.

A broader picture may derive from this analysis. The economic crisis, or the Arab spring did not change much in the development of large-scale projects in the Middle East (Barthel and Vignal 2014). The recent slowdown of the Chinese economy did not stop the rapid urbanization process. In such countries, design firms can experiment new solutions (among others: the abovementioned eco-city of Masdar in the UAE) and eventually implement them at the highest speed. The availability of money, concentration of power, the absence of democracy, urban tabula rasa and other conditions may sometimes be extreme. But designers understand what this means for their business. Owen (2009, 10) gives a clear example: “Foster’s Terminal 3 in Beijing was designed and completed in four years, the length of the public enquiry into Richard Rogers’ Terminal 5 at Heathrow – a project that reportedly took a total of 20 years to complete.” The firms’ mobility does have an impact in the way they operate (e.g. a more economically efficient design process implies standardized solutions to be replicated, with incremental customization according to the occasion) and the knowledge they carry around as they travel. At the moment the long-term implications related to the trajectories of important transnational actors who operate in different geographic contexts in search of favorable conditions has not yet been observed. What they eventually “bring back home” after their mobilities in countries with radically different political and institutional settings and rather simplified planning systems and processes may imply some problems.

The global financial crisis of the late 2000s was in part originated by the functioning of the real estate market and its financial arrangements and it had significant repercussion on urban policy and planning (Ponzini 2016). When both public and private resources become scarce, urban policymakers and planners may tend to lower the standards and quality of the planned interventions, in order to keep the available investments flowing and maintain political consensus among relevant stakeholders. This is quite visible in several cities of the Western world, especially in Southern Europe. A quote from Norman Foster may summarize the designers’ point of view: “We now have a tremendous amount to learn from the best of those emerging economies and the way in which they are thinking big, thinking strategically, taking bold initiatives. Hum... examples in a way almost so obvious. Thus I wonder why it takes so long for the penny to drop” (Carcas and López Amado, 2010). It is difficult to tell if this is a blunt call for technocracy or a more nuanced inclination toward the import of eventual models for large-scale and fast-track projects that derived from Foster’s experiences in the UAE, Kazakhstan, China and elsewhere. For sure, one can see how the same technologies, aesthetics and narratives circulate internationally making the life of the rent-seeking and local elite easier (Sklair 2017), but not necessarily delivering better plans and projects.

In the case of Foster’s transfer from Abu Dhabi to Astana, the developer Aldar is presumably the only winning actor at the end of the game. The design firm lost the job on the way. President Nazarbayev wanted an icon on the monumental axis and had in return a quite generic complex, designed by a lesser-known and eventually place-indifferent firm. I am not sure if these are the kinds of planning processes and outcomes that cities in the West may be able or want to experience in the near future.

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ID 1343 | CHINESE RETURN TO THE PUBLIC BENEFIT AFTER THE WAVE OF MASSIVE URBANIZATION - A CASE STUDY OF THE SHENZHEN BAY RECREATIVE SEAFRONT BELT

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ABSTRACT: Shenzhen is located on the South of China; east of the Pearl River Delta; while bordering Hong Kong on its south. It is one of the fastest growing cities in China with a strong economic vitality. Started from a small fishing village in the 1970s, Shenzhen has become a mega city with a population of twenty million in 35 years. As a developing coastal city, Shenzhen had most definitely neglected its residents need of leisure. Especially recreational use of waterfront space. Shenzhen's municipal government activated the relevant works of Shenzhen Bay leisure seafront in 2003. The project started west of the Nanhai Hotel, all the way east to the Mangrove Nature Reserve Area. It spans throughout the east coastline of Shenzhen Bay, with a total length of 15 km. The project objectives are specific in the followings: comprehend the importance of coastal natural resources of Shenzhen Bay, make full use of the shoreline. Construct a complete form of ecological system while improving the current ecological function basing on the Mangrove Nature Reserve Area; opens the closed seafront; returns the natural waterfront space to the public; uses international consultation as the standards to reshape the coastal characteristics; encourage public participation in the process of planning and design. Holding these objectives, 9 kilometers of coastline on the east side were completed in 2011. Upon its opening, the Shenzhen Bay leisure seafront belt had won the public praised and regional recognition the Shenzhen and Pearl Harbor Delta area almost immediately. It had then become the symbol of Shenzhen, as a modern coastal city. Summary: This leisure project demonstrated that urban space is not only a carrier economic development and construction. For a better life tomorrow, adhering to the people-oriented, nature-oriented, and positive concepts are needed. They are there to guide urban planning and construction activities in the city tomorrow.

KEYWORDS: Public space, Public interest, Coastal Characteristics, Shenzhen, China

1 PREFACE

The Shenzhen Bay is an estuarine bay shares between the city of Shenzhen and the city of Hong Kong. The west end of Shenzhen bay, bounds to the Pearl River Estuary, while the east bounds to the Shenzhen River; the bay holds roughly 80 square kilometers of area. The water depth gradually shallows from the east to west. The shallowest depth of the water holds at 1 meter. The Shenzhen Bay referred in this article is within the administrative boundaries of Shenzhen.

The new Shenzhen coastal waterfront emerged when the reclamation of the new Shenzhen Bay Checkpoint and Shenzhen Bay Bridge were completed at the end of 2003. Under this circumstances, the municipal government of Shenzhen began to reflect the urban development of past 20 years, including the significances of the Shenzhen Bay regarding to natures, urbans and the publics.

The Shenzhen Bay Coastal waterfront space has superior geographical location and unique landscape resources. It would be an unreasonable wasted, if Shenzhen Bay was not able to convert into public use due to the lack of reasonable use objective. Meanwhile, the shoreline has become increasingly prominent as the inner marine of Shenzhen and the gateway to the city image. Unfortunately, it has no coastal features.

For all the illustrated reasons, Shenzhen municipal government started the relevant works of Shenzhen Bay recreative seafront. Which spans 15 kilometers west from the Nanhai Hotel, along the Shenzhen Bay shoreline till east to the Mangrove Nature Reserve Area.