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ABSTRACT BOOK

Dubai Before Dubai. The Pietiläs and the City Coastline

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In the global imaginary, Dubai is a charming and futuristic international capital projected to the future. Only 50 years ago, nevertheless, the city was just a small fishing village settled around trading and pearl diving. The discovery and commercialization of oil in the 60s was a turning point in the history of the emirate: suddenly, a large number of concrete and curtain-wall hi-rise buildings started to arise from the sand of the desert, till transforming that 2 km² small village (1950) into a 150 km² global city (2005).

The extension of Dubai's boundaries has not only happened in a specific direction but has widespread in any direction. The city has reached the limit with the emirate of Sharjah on the North and with the one of Abu Dhabi on the South, has conquered a large part of the desert on the East and also expanded its domain towards the sky with the tallest building in the world, the Burj Khalifa. The only remaining side to further expand was the coastline on the West side, and the city has also reshaped it. Therefore, manmade islands have become a distinguishing mark of Dubai. The islands of Burj Al Arab, Palm Jumeirah or the World are among the most world well-known hotspots to visit. This expansionist desire has reshaped the coastline of the emirate from its natural 67 km to the more than 1500 km of nowadays.

Actually, land reclamation as a tool for urban expansion is not new for Dubai. One the first accomplishments of Sheikh Rashid, when he became ruler of the emirate, was to renew the old natural harbor (the Creek) and to start the construction of modern ports (Rashid and Jebel Ali). Since that moment, the coastline of the emirate has been continuously reshaped until nowadays. One proposal should be highlighted among all projects designed or built to reshape Dubai's coastline: Pietiläs entry for the competition for the master plan of the Deira Sea Corniche in 1974.

The main idea of the Pietiläs' proposal was to protect the city waterfront with a chain of connected islands, which included housing, commercial, educational, cultural or sportive areas, separated from the original coastline by a longitudinal lagoon. This new offshore-city would have also interpreted the traditional Arab city in density, orientation, scale, etc., with a sustainable approach to design able to deal with the local climate issues.

This paper will attempt to unfold the value of land reclamation as an instrument of urban planning. To achieve this goal, Dubai will be investigated as a case study, disclosing the contents of the Pietiläs' proposal for the Deira Sea Corniche, the first to provide artificial islands in Dubai. Describing the history of the coastline and analyzing Pietiläs' project for its innovative and forerunning ideas, the paper will finally consider the value of land reclamation as an instrument of urban development -with its strengths and weaknesses- in order to avoid land consumption and to allow the preservation of the coastline.