The Routledge Handbook of Planning Research Methods

Elisabete A. Silva, Patsy Healey, Neil Harris, Pieter Van den Broeck

From Wicked Problems to Elusive Planning

Publication details
https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315851884.ch3.10
Mahyar Arefi
Published online on: 17 Nov 2014

Accessed on: 10 Aug 2023
https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315851884.ch3.10

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
3.10
FROM WICKED PROBLEMS TO ELUSIVE PLANNING
Exploring Dubai’s development conundrum

Mahyar Arefi

Introduction
Almost four decades ago Rittel and Webber characterized planning problems as “wicked,” and argued that they are not only inherently complex but also highly intractable and hard to pin down; and, while unique, they can be explained in different ways. Depending on the angles from which they are described, though, solving planning problems would not involve choices as much between true or false or right or wrong as between good or bad. Hence, conducting planning research requires good judgment as much as relevant data. Seasoned researchers can formulate good question(s) and adopt effective methodologies based on their initial understanding of the problem.

This chapter probes Dubai’s rapid development conundrum and its mixed impacts on collective identity: a global city image vs. a city with an Arab Islamic identity. On the one hand, Dubai shares strong cultural roots with the Persian Gulf Arab states, not to mention with the southern parts of Iran. The design of its old core, Al-Bastakiya, was inspired by Iran’s vernacular architecture. Narrow alleys, small openings in an organic urban fabric with elegant wind catchers invokes an introverted, sustainable, and environmentally conscious urban design.

On the other hand, thanks to its Guinness world records position, with the tallest building, the biggest mall, and the newest and longest unmanned transit system, Dubai’s ambitious mega-projects offer alternative development models for many cities, from Amman, Jordan, and Tripoli, Libya, to Khartoum, Sudan. But “the process of Dubaization” (Elsheshtawy, 2004a; Alraouf, 2005), to some, has been a high price to pay when the UAE as a whole is akin to “a country without a soul” (Walters, Kadragic, and Walters, 2006: 86).

Dubai’s rapid growth and modernization, largely due to windfall oil revenues (Melamid, 1989; Bagaeen, 2007; Davidson, 2012), act as a double-edged sword and involve significant trade-offs and sacrifices. The myriad behaviours, activities, and practices associated with Dubai’s fragmented
urban form (Lavergne, 2006) reflect an increasingly weakened local identity (or soul), yet enhanced global city status. These mixed development effects indeed remind us of what Barnett (1986) called “elusiveness” over three decades ago. Elusiveness implies that things are not necessarily what they seem, and its preponderance here lies in the discrepancy between Dubai’s dual development perceptions.

These paradoxical development signals add to the allures of an exotic city whose reputation even precedes that of the country where it is located. Coupled with the pressures of harsh climate and gender and income divides, Dubai’s phenomenal growth redefines and reshapes its private and public realms from attire to architecture, and from religion to recreation.

Probing this dual status question has prompted this study with two complementary research methods: a deductive approach through hypothesis testing, and an inductive method based on fieldwork and observation. The deductive approach theorizes Dubai’s current development quality. Koolhaas’ critique of Dubai’s development known as “junkspace” (2002) and Deleuze’s (1988) “any-space-whatever” theories offer alternative hypotheses of the same phenomenon. “Junkspace” criticizes Dubai’s incessant development over the past three decades. However, “any-space-whatever” challenges this theory, and conceptualizes the possibility of rectifying it by creating spaces of transition amidst the dualities of chaos and order, modernity and tradition, and fragmentation and integration. One wonders, therefore, whether the actualization of an “any-space-whatever” type of development (or spaces of transition) can make Dubai’s rampant growth more congruent with its original Arab Islamic spatial fabric. Even if the majority favours and supports Dubai’s unprecedented growth as a precondition towards globalization, and celebrates convenience, consumption, and cosmopolitanism as its by-products, others resist these temptations and lament the loss of local identity. This group associates much of Dubai’s development quality with “junkspace.” The concept of elusiveness articulates these two extremes in Dubai’s contentious development trends.

An inductive approach, however, neither hypothesizes nor generalizes based on Dubai’s dual development nature, but adopts relevant case studies (Yin, 1993) to arrive at a grounded theory. This method combines data collection with observation and case study analysis. Observing various forces, from globalization (Lavergne, 2006) and urbanization (Ouf, 2007) to modernization and immigration (Ali, 2010), which have collectively influenced Dubai’s rapid development is key to using this method. The social life of small urban spaces (Whyte, 1980), Looking at cities (Jacobs, 1985), and Outside lies magic (Stilgoe, 1998) exemplify the power of observation and analysis in discerning planning issues in inductive research methods.

The following overview provides a brief background of Dubai’s complex development history and the type of data needed for the research. From its inception as a fishing village to its rise as an emerging global city (Elsheshtawy, 2004b), Dubai (Figure 3.10.1) has come a long way in a short time. Nowadays a familiar brand name thanks to its phenomenal growth over the past three decades, Dubai has transcended obscurity, and has achieved acclaim as an “ever booming city” (Baldauf, 2008: 228). In addition to its Arab roots Dubai has joined the global economic network, and has assumed leadership as a “main trading and export center” (Baldauf, 2008: 225) in the Middle East.
Dubai’s development conundrum

Research design, conceptual framework, and data collection

Paying attention to two radical interpretations of Dubai (junkspace and any-space-whatever) directed data collection towards operationalizing the concept of elusiveness. Elusiveness incorporates both the physical and non-physical attributes of Dubai’s ambivalent development outcomes. To capture these dual attributes, this research focuses on Dubai’s old and new commercial geographies (souqs and shopping malls) where multiple interpretations of “elusiveness” coexist. Malls and souqs occupy a considerable portion of Dubai’s land use where the tension between globalization and tradition (or junkspace vs. any-space-whatever) manifests.

As a ubiquitous symbol of global cities, malls typically drive souqs out of business and sever their local ties. A cursory observation proves otherwise in Dubai. Souqs and malls carve their own niches and operate within their local-global economic networks. A useful conceptual framework should, therefore, represent the typologies and scales of such networks. Whereas the former aims to track the diversity and prevalence of types of elusiveness in malls and souqs, the latter epitomizes its broad scales from the micro (local) to the macro (global).

Figure 3.10.1 The remarkable physical growth of Dubai.
Source: Wisam Allami.
Such a framework should be narrow yet comprehensive enough to capture the “intricate interrelationships” and “unsettling juxtapositions” of Dubai’s development question. Barnett (1986) articulates two key attributes of elusiveness. Were they neither intricate (i.e., the ways in which malls or souqs relate to their local contexts or global networks in the case of malls) nor unsettling (i.e., how new and old developments curiously abut), evaluating Dubai’s development would not have been contentious (read elusive) to begin with. Hence, the elusiveness of Dubai’s malls and souqs transcends merely physical/spatial attributes, and encompasses socio-economic and cultural relationships, behaviours, and activities. Hunches about these intricacies and unsettling relationships need not initially define an overarching coherent logic of elusiveness. They involve “little logics” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), arising from multiple observations of the same phenomenon (i.e., seeing fake architectural elements showcasing nostalgic historical memories, or souqs which cater predominantly to tourists rather than the locals). Such observations contain bits and pieces of the junkspace vs. any-space-whatever debate discussed earlier. From the observation of these little logics broader theoretical constructs emerge, which help sort out new meaning and planning knowledge. The sequence of sorting, clustering, and coding makes up the process of research, which evolved from observing little logics to creating coherent arguments surrounding elusiveness.

The data for this study were collected in 2010 as part of an urban planning course offered in the fourth-year architectural engineering program at Sharjah University. Twenty-four students...
formed eight teams, each of which conducted extensive fieldwork on one souq and one mall (Figure 3.10.2). The “constant comparative analysis” (Glaser, 1978) of malls and souqs offers a potent method whereby multiple manifestations of the same phenomenon (the tension between the dual forces of tradition vs. modernity or local vs. global) determine the type of data to collect and where to go next. Comparing souqs and malls, thus, captures the elusive dualities Dubai seems to experience.

Fieldwork consisted of the sequence of observation, comparison, and measurement (Bosselmann, 2008) on various levels. During the observation stage students paid attention to the following aspects of the malls and souqs they visited:

- What types of activities characterize souqs and malls?
- What are the distinctive patterns in them (i.e., hours of operation, shopkeepers’ and patrons’ behaviours, scales, shopping experience, modes of access)?
- How do forms, functions, and flows (design of buildings, types of services offered, movement of people and information) relate within and beyond these establishments?
- Are malls more vibrant than souqs?

The students measured the vibrancy of malls and souqs within their contexts. Observing vibrant souqs packed with patrons was elusive and counter to the initial expectation of finding them fallen from favour, or out of business by malls. Seeing local Emirates in malls rather than souqs (which symbolize the Arab identity) seems equally elusive. To do this the students examined the activities, services, and goods offered and the ethnicity of shopkeepers and patrons. They also paid attention to patterns of walking and perceptions of safety in or around the case studies. Observing how malls and souqs operate in their immediate contexts and beyond played a key role in conceptualizing elusiveness and better understanding the patrons’ expectations, ambitions, and perceptions.

Analysis

Analysis involves sorting, clustering, and coding the collected data. The students reported their collective experiences and whether their observations pointed to larger patterns of behaviour, functions, or occurrences. To produce visually coherent and accurate comparative drawings of the case studies, the students were instructed to use a 500m x 500m grid. Using a similar grid-iron pattern helped them to compare malls and souqs in terms of scale as well as context (i.e., being part of a disjointed and fragmented or contiguous urban fabric).

The final class presentations covered the students’ reflections and self-discoveries and what struck them as unorthodox, unusual, or unexpected in the malls and souqs they had monitored for several weeks. Discerning patterns went beyond the semester, was too complex to be handled by novice researchers, and requires experience and foresight.

“Types” and “scales” represent the two dimensions of the little logics of elusiveness observed in souqs and malls. “Types” shows the diversity and nuances of elusiveness whereas “scales” highlights its prevalence on multiple levels of scrutiny from spatial to social and experiential (Figure 3.10.3).
Malls promulgate an increasingly pervasive global consumer culture. Souqs, however, operate as local marketplaces with important venues for social and cultural interaction. Dubai houses some of the world’s largest and exotic malls as the poster child of junkspace, and several vernacular souqs. In the spatial structure of the Middle Eastern city souqs, mosques, and residential quarters reinforce each other and generate a tight-knit integrated network, while malls with huge footprints are typically disconnected from their immediate contexts.

1. Behaviour

Exposure to the bulky literature of how design affects social behaviour prepared the students for comparing the malls and souqs on the basis of social behaviour. In the aftermath of the failed American social engineering policies of the urban renewal projects of the 1950s and 1960s planners faced harsh criticisms. Regardless of the degree to which the built environment shapes social behaviour—often referred to as physical determinism (Gans, 1991)—Dubai’s malls and souqs highlight three discernible elusive behaviours.

Conflicting behaviours exhibit the mismatch observed in how people or firms behave in the contexts within which they operate. The students observed some of these discordant behaviours both in malls and souqs. Prior to the emergence of malls as all-day-long destinations and active focal points, souqs served as vibrant marketplaces and public spaces among the local population. With the advent of malls and their strong presence, however, souqs did not entirely fade away and are still fairly active—especially among the Pakistanis, Indians, Iranians, and tourists, albeit not much popular among the local Arabs anymore. The observed discrepancy among the lower-income Asian labourers and tourists, who keep the souqs vibrant despite the hostile climatic conditions and limited accessibility and safety compared to the convenience of malls, and the lure and variety of goods and services they offer are elusive.
Another unexpected observation was the cooperation between the malls and *souqs*. If a *souq* offers a particular commodity (i.e., herbs and spices) or supplies such goods to specific ethnic groups, then malls and *souqs* arguably carve their own niches in a cooperative rather than competing fashion. Malls were expected, however, to force the *souqs* out of business – similar to the dominating “big box retail,” which pushed small, mom-and-pop local stores out of business in the U.S.

While at first blush, the volume of trade in *souqs* seems negligible compared to malls which operate globally, yet some competition between the two still exists. *Souqs* use different practices to attract and appeal to customers. Notable among them is that by creating *souq*-like environments (see Figure 3.10.4, the Gold Souq in Dubai Mall), malls lure those who do not seek brand names. *Souqs*, however, carry non-brand items, which appeal to certain clienteles (i.e., the Indian and Pakistani customers with a limited budget).

2. Activities

Examining the activities carried out in malls and *souqs* was the second attribute in their comparison. For centuries, *souqs* symbolized robust commercial and communal spaces in Middle Eastern cities. As informal gathering spaces where trade took place outdoors, *souqs* evolved into semi-enclosed or enclosed marketplaces. The great *souqs* of Cairo, Isfahan, Baghdad, or Damascus exemplify such economically and culturally vibrant places. Linkages to other communal nodes, including mosques, caravanserais, and alleys, made these markets active and lively. With this rich history, one still expects to see strong linkages between *souqs* and their local contexts in Dubai.

However, while malls and *souqs* carve their own niches, *souqs* have succumbed to malls in the range of activities they offer. Dubai malls reflect the dual signs of junkspace and robust indoor and outdoor public spaces simultaneously. As junkspaces malls are little more than theme parks and provide entertainment, trade, and casual social encounters. For example, in addition to hundreds of familiar brand names, Dubai Mall is known for numerous non-commercial activities, and is home to exclusive programmes for children and women (i.e., fashion), a unique indoor ski resort, and the tallest outdoor dancing fountain in the world. It is therefore hard for *souqs* to compete with these unique spectacles. Nevertheless, *souqs* remain fairly active, even during hours when malls may be less busy.
Mahyar Arefi

Ethnicity illustrates another elusive point in the mall vs. souq comparison. Whereas the malls’ shoppers range from the locals to tourists and expats, the souqs’ shoppers are limited mainly to Pakistanis, Indians, or Iranians. Locals, by and large, do not shop at souqs as much as they visit malls for entertainment and cultural and leisurely activities.

The time of day illustrates the third aspect of elusive activities carried out in Dubai’s commercial geographies. While due to harsh climate and with their open structures one expects to see the souqs inactive during the day, Bur Dubai Souq proves otherwise. Figure 3.10.5 shows this souq to be filled with people on a Friday afternoon, whereas at around the same time, the air-conditioned, covered Dubai Mall was quite empty.

3. Form

Comparing the architectural design and the visual aspects of malls and souqs seemed particularly meaningful for architecture students. They were familiar with the elements of vernacular architecture, such as wind catchers. Dubai’s upscale shopping malls and theme parks, however, manifest displaced, deterritorialized, and detached enclaves dissociated from their immediate surroundings (Baldauf, 2008), and remind users of exotic non-places of imaginary settings rather than showing compatibility with the local cultural/commercial practices.

The students paid particular attention to authentic, fake, and global urban and architectural forms dotting Dubai’s urban landscape. Souqs with pre-modern designs exemplify complex, organic architectural elements, which served specific functional, visual, and physical purposes. Not only do they maintain strong linkages to mosques, residential quarters, and public spaces around them, but also their designs help control high temperatures through direct ventilation and shade (Kheirabadi, 2000).

Some souqs (Figure 3.10.6) in Dubai do not use wind catchers (barjeels in Arabic) for natural ventilation and are air-conditioned. With exposed structural elements, these souqs serve as replicas for cultural consumption and aesthetics rather than functional reasons. The interior spaces of these souqs mimic the old traditional bazaar stalls for tourists, who enjoy visiting exotic places. They also lack linkages to their contexts, with only parking spaces surrounding them.

As linear commercial passages, which created strong senses of place and enclosure, souqs historically expanded parallel with the rest of the city and represented innovative design thinking in the Middle Eastern city. Dubai’s spatial structure, however, lacks such integrity through...
Dubai’s development conundrum

continuity and connectivity to its context, and instead epitomizes fragmentation and reinforces junkspace.

Junkspace provides convenience, flexibility, and fluidity in design by sealing the buildings’ interior from the outside world, and gives more freedom to explore new architectural and global urban forms and building technologies. Fragmentation downgrades integration and tends to intensify junkspace by sharpening rather than blurring the spatial boundaries among the different parts of the city. This goes counter to what any-space-whatever as its alternative promises.

Designed by global architectural firms, most shopping malls showcase visual and physical uniqueness and prominence in size, scale, and composition of their components, and attention to construction details and quality. In most cases, the impressive and impeccable architectural outcomes by far overpower their traditional counterparts, which exemplify modest but nevertheless long-lasting solutions to hostile environmental conditions through pre-modern and at times primitive construction techniques.

The global forms of malls vs. the vernacular forms of souqs raise two elusive notions: first, the incoherent fragmented spatial relationships among the constituent elements of the former (à la junkspace) contrast the unpretentious and cohesive structural and physical form of the latter. Second, numerous distractions, including details, number of people per square mile or crowdedness, colour, scale, etc., lead to two different experiences of place: walking the same linear distance in the souq takes longer compared to the mall. This is an important observation tested and verified by several students. The lacklustre, no-frills, and modest presentation of goods and merchandise offered in souqs makes the shopping experience more exciting and perhaps more

Figure 3.10.6 Covered Souq Al Arsa, Sharjah and derived architectural elements of Dubai Mall.
Source: Class report.
Mahyar Arefi

adventurous at malls. Comparing the real vs. imagined time is a good indicator of assessing the shopping experience in the malls vs. the *souqs*.

**B) Scales of elusiveness**

In addition to the typologies of malls and *souqs*, scale characterizes Dubai’s other elusive dimension. Elusiveness of scale involves the grain of the fabric, density, and diversity, along with the spatial, socio-economic, and political relationships, and the uses of space.

1. The built environment

The students were asked to compare malls and *souqs* within their surrounding contexts. *Souqs* historically operated as part of an integrated urban form with symbiotic relationships to many local institutions, and governmental or non-governmental agencies (i.e., mosques, caravanserais, gardens, plazas, public baths, schools, and so forth). Centrality, walkability, permeability, and multiple access points between the *souqs* and their immediate contexts kept their scales large enough to be well connected to the other neighbourhood elements, yet small enough to be walkable. These principles endowed the pre-modern Middle Eastern city with a peculiar organic figure-ground relationship quite dissimilar to the spatial properties of the modern city based on automobile access and single-use zoning.

These two types of fabrics (Figure 3.10.7) show somewhat elusive growth patterns in Dubai. Some *souqs* have gradually lost connection to their contexts and resemble malls with large open spaces around them. More recent *souqs*, however, resemble the hybrids of *souqs* and malls. Linear slender forms akin to *souqs*, the use of vernacular local construction materials, and decorative elements such as *barjeels* exemplify these features. Detached from their contexts these *souqs* are beset by parking lots. Somewhat elusive is that although, unlike malls, *souqs* depend on and operate on smaller local scales, and perhaps lend themselves more to walkability, they are still fairly active among the Pakistanis and Indians, who neither walk nor drive to them, but use public transportation such as buses or *abras* (Arabic for traditional boats made of wood).

---

Figure 3.10.7 Figure-ground relationship of Gold Souq and Mall of Emirates.
Source: Class report.
Density constitutes the second aspect of the built form. *Souqs* historically thrive in areas with dense organic spatial patterns. This spatial arrangement gives malls, which are typically located in urban fabrics with coarser grains and public open spaces, and wider roads, a regional rather than merely a local competitive advantage. With the *souqs’* increasingly weakened and severed local ties, however, they still remain vibrant and attract specific clientele from places other than their immediate neighbourhoods.

The third observation concerns the diversity of forms, functions, goods, and services offered in malls and *souqs*. Even though *souqs* are generally smaller in scale and popular for their linear forms to facilitate their future expansions, Dubai’s *souqs* prove to be fairly diverse in their forms, types of contextual connections (or lack thereof), and the range of goods and merchandise they offer. The Gold *Souq* is known for specializing in gold while Dubai’s Spice *Souq* is known for exotic spices. Comparatively, malls have more variegated building forms with much larger scales, and provide more goods and services to a much larger clientele.

2. Relationships

The students compared the scales to which malls and *souqs* belonged. These comparisons revealed certain relationships, which warrant attention. First, physically and spatially, *souqs* have gradually adopted some attributes typically associated with malls. For example, unlike most traditional *souqs*, *Souq Al-Arsa* (Figure 3.10.8) is weakly connected to the organic spatial pattern surrounding it, air-conditioned, and largely accessible through *abras*.

Second, *souqs* historically thrived in small, densely populated residential neighbourhoods. Ironically, however, the growing influence of malls and the shift towards the planned, sparsely populated neighbourhoods have eroded the distinct physical and social nexus that made them special. On the other hand, while the diminishing social role of *souqs* in Dubai is somewhat predictable, in some cases, women unescorted by men actively shop the Gold *Souq*.

![Figure 3.10.8](image-url)  
*Figure 3.10.8* Figure-ground relationship of *Souq Al Arsa*, Sharjah and *Mall of Emirates*.  
*Source*: Class report.
This observation contrasts with the perception of *souqs* as generally unsafe (compared to malls with private security and surveillance cameras), particularly for women. Third, *souqs* and malls represent two separate financial and politico-economic institutions. While the organically designed *souqs* depend on local financial ties, the generically designed malls symbolize global financial practices.

3. Use

Third, the students were asked to compare the ways in which malls and *souqs* were used. Although as global shopping centres malls share fairly common characteristics distinguishable from *souqs* (i.e., size, a wider array of goods and services offered, and branding), perhaps special circumstances have made Dubai’s malls unique and somewhat elusive. Malls in Dubai have become popular destinations and certainly serve purposes besides shopping.

Being more than merely shopping centres, “theming” distinguishes the Dubai malls from typical American or European malls. Named after the famous fourteenth-century Arabian world traveller, and with more than fifty restaurants and twenty-one cinemas, Ibn Battuta Mall, for example, is the largest “themed” shopping mall in the world. Its six courts with their distinctive architectural designs represent the six major destinations (Tunisia, Egypt, Andalusia, Persia, India, China) Ibn Battuta travelled to in his lifetime.

The largest mall in the world, Dubai Mall, is another example, which houses a unique ski resort and a famous aquarium, not to mention other exclusive facilities, including restaurants serving international cuisines, exotic boutiques, and outdoor and indoor recreational spaces (i.e., the tallest dancing fountain in the world). Maintaining such amenities in extreme climatic conditions requires superb management. The unique experiential quality of these services in Dubai malls creates perceived or imagined, deterritorialized landscapes on a par with or superior to those found in Paris, New York, Tokyo, or London.

In what ways, then, does shopping at malls and *souqs* evoke different experiences in Dubai? The ubiquitous presence of tourists and the local shoppers in Dubai malls, and shopping brand names (i.e., Armani, Gucci, the Ferrari World, and the like) does not seem surprising at all. However, the presence of foreign shoppers and tourists, rather than the local shoppers, and specialized exotic goods, such as spices and gold, in Dubai *souqs* seems elusive.

The last case of elusiveness pertains to accessibility and connectivity of *souqs* and malls to Dubai’s spatial structure. Infrastructure distinguishes Dubai as a post-global rather than a non-global city. Accessibility and connectivity play major roles in the current location of Dubai’s shopping malls. Malls are located in close proximity of the major transportation nodes (highways and metro). However, *souqs* represent the remnants of their initial organic spatial patterns of walkability and high density, and like their global counterparts, seem well connected to arterial roads, water, and public transportation. Therefore, the perception that *souqs* are isolated and not connected to the transportation network is not accurate, and remains somewhat elusive.

Conclusion

A city rooted in its Arab Islamic heritage, yet known as “the hippest city in the world” (Hippest City, 2005), merits examination as a case of elusive planning. The logic of an inductive case study research complements the hypothesis-testing logic of deductive methods. This type of research requires foresight and experience. The senior students from the Sharjah University architecture program operationalized two prominent attributes of elusiveness – namely, its unsettling
Dubai’s development conundrum

juxtapositions and intricate interrelationships. For example, they observed that the locals flocked into malls rather than the *souqs*, or that fake *barjeels* decorated the rooftops of Jumeirah’s modern commercial architecture. Ultimately, they wondered whether such make-believe landscapes of consumption and imaginary “elsewheres” (Baldauf, 2008: 224) benefit tourists and temporary visitors more so than the locals, who take pride in their national identity and celebrate vernacular Islamic architecture. These questions exemplified Dubai’s unsettling juxtapositions, while *souqs* with their local ties and malls with their global linkages epitomize intricate interrelationships on both physical and socio-economic scales. Although the students may not have found answers to all the aspects of “wicked” or “elusive” planning in Dubai, they learned a great deal from breaking complex research questions into manageable components with conceptual clarity. Speaking more broadly, elusiveness unfolds the intricacies of rapid planning and what planners should know to discern its outcomes: how things are vs. how they seem to be. Elusiveness elucidates how malls and *souqs* were perceived to be different when in some respects they were similar, or were thought to be different when in some respects they were similar, or were thought to be similar when they were rather different.

To what extent were these similarities and differences planned or fortuitous? Though not quite directly, such studies provide some answers for planners, whose job it is to observe, analyse, and predict. In hindsight, if Dubai’s vision for rapid development has been doing away with its past and the icons associated with it (i.e., *souqs*), then the reality has turned out differently. *Souqs* not only have not vanished but also have carved out their own niches and synergistic environments to thrive. With some local ties (albeit not as close as before), *souqs* signify the “any-space-whatever” landscapes, which contrast the malls, known as “junkspace.” As this research shows, Dubai’s collective identity still partially draws from *souqs* as well as malls. But to what extent from each requires further research on the degree to which *souqs* and malls contribute to Dubai’s economy through their “forward” and “backward linkages” (Hirschman, 1958), and to its everyday urbanism.

References


