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Behind the Skyscrapers: An Assessment of Dubai's Cultural and Creative Scene

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Abstract

Dubai has witnessed an upsurge of creative and cultural initiatives within the years of 2020 and 2021 with strong plans and strategies of becoming the hub of creative economy in the coming years. This research traces the arts, culture, and creativity within the city to produce a comprehensive timeline and an assessment of the repository of its physical manifestations in the city. Focusing on three main districts: Dubai Historical District, Al Serkal Avenue, and Dubai Design District, the narrative of arts and gentrification are explored in relationship to governance, urban development, and social life. The findings reflect on the path of culture and creativity in Dubai's urban fabric and explores the resilience of its network in relation to factors such as community engagement, financial risks, tourist activity, and global changes to assess best practices and envisage a plan of action for the new strategies put forth.

Keywords: Cultural Districts; Creative Districts; Grassroot Community; Gentrification; Observational Mapping.

1. Introduction

Stories and narratives of Dubai have always glorified it as the city that rose from the sand or the fishing town settlement, which turned into a fast growing urban metropolis in a miraculous amount of time. Dubai truly grew from what was a small town into a global metropolis under the visions of its leaders, however to narrow the narrative into such a focused statement disregards the storylines of many other components of Dubai's making as "there are many untold stories about the city that could offer unique and valuable lessons for planning practice and scholarship." (Al Awadi, A return to the old landscape)

Dubai's transformation started shifting rapidly at the end of the fifties and by 1961, Dubai had its first masterplan, which was drafted by John Harris at the time, a British architect residing in Dubai. This master plan introduced the ideas of modernist urban planning theories into the region clearly shown within the division of work, leisure, and industry over the city's expansion outwards. These same planning theories manifested over the course of sixty years to create the city as it is known today.

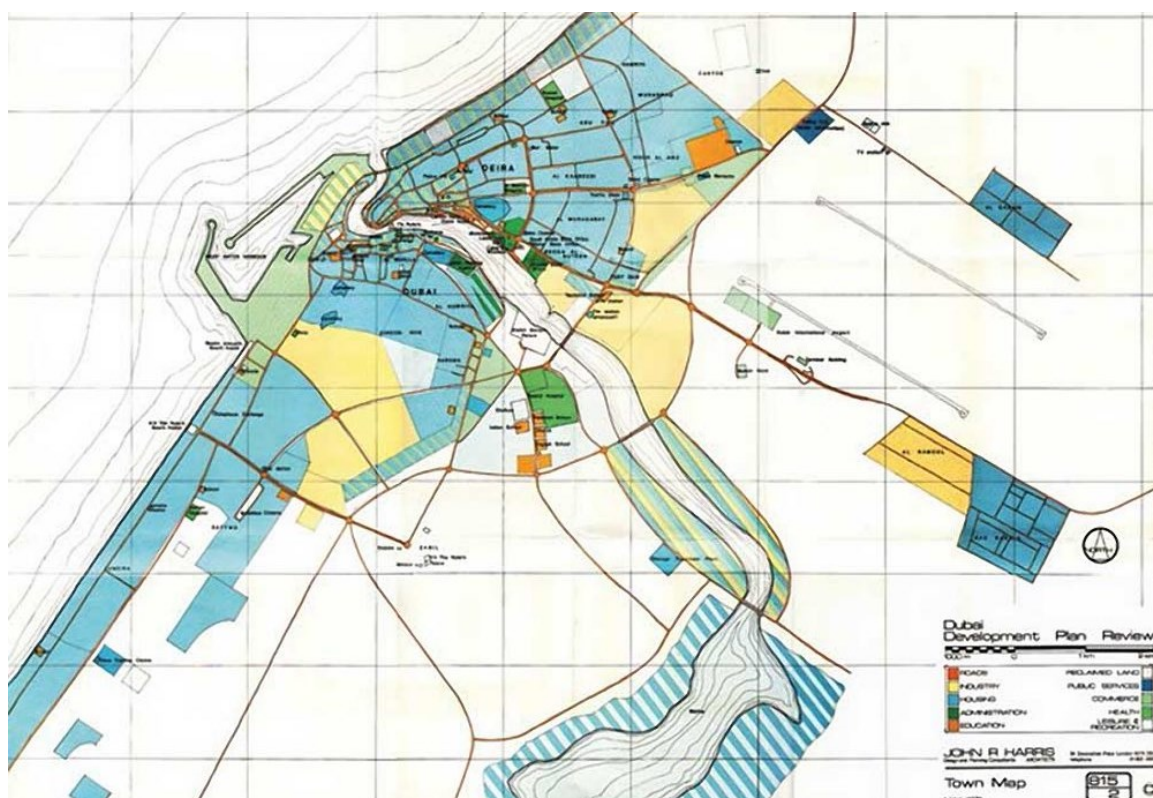


Figure 1. Dubai's second master plan by John Harris 1971 (Source: Dubai Municipality).

To this day, Dubai is a modernist's vision which manifested physically onto the urban fabric with large areas of land dedicated to different functions. This is why Dubai has often been described as a city made up of "urban fragments" (Archis Foundation, 2007) dictated by "traffic engineers and real estate developers" (Alawadi, 2018, p.13). Moreover, the fact that Dubai's lands are owned in a large part by developers or free zones over the government by about 51% (Alawadi et al., 2018) has led to another major phenomenon - the privatized public realms - such as shopping malls, gated housing developments, leisure destinations, theme parks, educational complexes (Archis Foundation, 2007), and most importantly a number of creative and cultural districts.

This research shapes a comprehensive timeline mapping the cultural and creative movement within Dubai's urban fabric seeking to understand the nature of these creative and cultural districts by exploring the narratives of the untold stories of how Dubai's cultural and creative scene evolved into what it is today and by understanding the different creative and cultural typologies which exist in today's fabric.

2. The Creative Cultural District (CCD) and Neighborhood Change

Before diving into Dubai's historical trajectory of creativity and culture, it is important to define what encompasses culture and creativity and the differences and similarities within them. Creative-Cultural Districts as they exist today may be described as centrally located, and often historic, urban neighbourhoods that serve as nodes of creative-cultural production and consumption (e.g., Recording studios and music venues, art studios and galleries, live theatre, dining and retail, festivals and sporting events)." (Bereitschaft, 2014, p.3) However, Florida's (2019) definition of the creative class encompasses a much larger scope of fields that include technology sectors, academia, engineering, design and culture as the super-creative core, and the service workers in finance, health and legal fields as Creative Professionals; most of today's definitions encompass the super- creative core as the inhabitants of the Creative Cultural Districts (CCD). This leads to an important distinction on the type of creative and cultural districts; 1) cultural clusters that house concert halls, cinemas, theatres, libraries, museums, galleries and music venues 2) Entertainment zones (EZ) 'concentrated nightlife districts occupying the margins of downtowns in former commercial and industrial areas', tend to be less formal than entertainment districts, and cater to a decidedly younger crowd, 3) Historic Districts, 4) Business Improved District (BID)"usually initiated and governed by property or business owners, enabled by state laws, and authorized by local governments to provide public services in designated urban or suburban areas" (Bereitschaft, 2014). The clustering or formation of such spaces is said to occur due to factors such as: economies of scale and scope, importance of proximity for the line of production to consumption, networking reasons, and the need for similar infrastructure (Bereitschaft, 2014; Ponzini, 2009; Scott, 2010; Aziz Amen, 2022, Amen & Nia, 2020). For the sake of this research, culture refers to spaces, incentives, and programs related to knowledge, art, music and cinema, while creativity encompasses a larger definition including entrepreneurship, academia, technology and engineering alongside all definitions included within culture.

Moreover, these CCD's have standard narratives in most literature that are always tied to them which are classicism (Scott, 2010), gentrification and displacement (Grodach et al., 2016). Whether organically occurring or planned, the general observation is that creatives tend to cluster together and as they do, what tends to follow them next are unique spaces of consumption leading to the attraction of the upper middle class into the area. The slow gentrification of the area is fast forwarded as "Developers, property investors and governments spearhead new redevelopment projects marketed to affluent buyers" (Grodach et al., 2016, p.4) and "the expulsion of particular types of residents or even of users" happens (Ponzini, 2009; Nia et al., 2017). Other than gentrification, such spaces always create an important distinction when it comes to public spaces, where most of the spaces that constitute cultural and creative districts induce the phenomenon of privatized public realms due to their lack of integration within the existing context. Bereitschaft (2014) suggests that BID's specifically create this notion through the employment of security, maintenance and marketing strategies, however the general notion is these spaces' success depends largely on attracting a certain audience which is looking for an aura of security and hygiene standards (Bereitschaft, 2014).

However, newer literature suggests that the general narrative of gentrification and displacement of the arts is too generic and different types of cultural and creative organizations, developments, clusters, and districts can have a different effect on the urban fabric and population of an area or a city (Grodach et al., 2016, Aziz Amen & Nia, 2018). Another counter narrative is that most of the cities or even researchers that were "using" Jacob's theories to develop cities, or even mayors who took Florida's (2002) bohemian index planning methods seem to have carried out their own agendas under the false pretenses of diversifying and boosting the economy. The arts do not gentrify, "arts policy and urban policy alike have prominently shifted from supporting 'art for art's sake' and towards arts and cultural production as mainly drivers of economic development or place-based revitalization" (Grodach, 2016). Even Florida (2016) himself admits today that where creativity leads, segregation, inequality, and "winner takes all" urbanism follow and the only solution most scholars can suggest for this issue is that cities need to let go of top-down approaches in terms of creativity and cultural developments in the city (Florida, 2016; Grodach, 2016).

3. Material and Methods

In order to understand effects of creative and cultural developments in Dubai, a multilayered approach and socio-spatial analysis must be carried through. First, a comprehensive timeline of Dubai's cultural and creative path is to be established to understand the trajectory of the city's development. Then, understanding the different types of inclusion and exclusion that can be imposed through public policy and investment down to the architectural and geographical barriers of these sub-societies is carried through the collection of three data sets: (1) cultural and urban policy correlation in Dubai and how they materialize in the city through publications, research on policies, and urban development, (2) geographical and architectural features of the different creative and cultural developments through archival and field research, (3) social life of public spaces in the areas of these developments through observational mapping and interviews. Due to time and resource restraints, three neighborhoods were selected of different typologies to study the variety of the Dubai cultural landscape in relation to the hypothesis. Therefore, this research will focus on Dubai Historic District (Public), Al Serkal Avenue (Private), Dubai design District (Developer/Freezone).

4. Tracing Dubai's Cultural and Creative Path

Dubai's cultural and creative journey can be summarized in a manner of looking at the growth around the year of 2008; pre and post. Starting with the first structure of cultural significance – Al Ras library built in 1963, a structure of the late Modernism that had entered into Dubai's fabric in the 1960's, the library was one of the markers of urban transformation of the town into a city and more importantly a marker of the importance of culture and knowledge from the early stages of Dubai's formation. The period between the sixties and eighties establishes what is known today as Historic Dubai as a place of arts and culture with the formation of spaces such as the Dubai Museum 1971, the Majlis Gallery 1975 in Al Fahidi, and the restoration efforts carried on Sheikh Saeed Bin Maktoum House in Shindagha 1986. The next decade – the nineties - Dubai becomes a repository of different movements in culture, art, and creativity where different galleries settle into the new neighbourhoods of the city, and the foundation of cultural heritage and preservation gradually seeps into the urban narrative of Dubai. This decade defines the growth of the anchor points of culture in the city as movements are seen in the Historic Area with preservation efforts off Al Ahmadiya school and the opening of Juma Al Majid Center for Culture and Heritage and Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding (SMCCU), the downtown area around Satwa and Jumeirah with Hassan Sharif's Atelier and Green Art Gallery respectively, and Al Quoz with the inauguration of Total Arts Gallery, 1x1 Gallery and finally the Courtyard in 1998. The openings in Al Quoz, Al Shindagha, Al Fahidi, and Jumeirah all formalize these spaces in the city as places for culture and creativity to prosper and furthermore, they invite other alike institutions to slowly agglomerate into these spaces as can be seen in the beginning of the 21st century. In 2003, the art scene sees another boom of galleries with the opening of Art Space Gallery by Maliha Al Tabari under the patronage of Princess Haya Bint Al Hussain in Fairmont Hotel Sheikh Zayed Road and XVA Gallery in the Al Fahidi District. The following years between 2005 and 2007, Al Quoz's galleries and art institutions count goes up with the establishment of the Third Line gallery and the Jam Jar in 2005, B21 in 2006 and the Dubai Community Theatre and Arts Centre/DUCTAC, and the existing Etemad gallery and Total Arts alongside Meem Gallery and the Flying House (Nouvel, 2020, p.5). Another important marker in Dubai's establishment of contemporary art is seen in 2006 with the first auction of International Modern & Contemporary Art in the Middle East held in Dubai (Nouvel, 2020, p.5) This sparks one of the most important events of Dubai's art path with the culmination of the Gulf Art Fair in 2007. On the other hand, this decade also introduces the first creative free zone into the fabric of the city, which opposes the organic growth that has been seen up to this point where three different free zones are established; Dubai Media City, Dubai internet City, and Dubai Knowledge Park.

The next year becomes the year that defines Dubai's establishment of a cultural and creative city with the formalization of government agencies and private foundations which open the city into a greater spectrum of narratives and stories of cultural history. The year 2008 becomes a radical year of change in Dubai's cultural narrative; this is highlighted in the various literature written on the subject matter with many timelines starting as early as 1998 and ending in 2008 or others only starting from the early 2000's then highlighting 2008 as a pivotal point with some only focusing on certain districts storyline (Allison et al., 2017; Nouvel, 2020; Harper's Bazaar Arabia, 2021; Signal, 2018). There are many reasons why 2008 becomes the year of change for the Arts in Dubai but the most important one starts with the restructuring of the Dubai Cultural Council into Dubai Culture and Arts Authority in March 8 2008 as part of the Dubai Strategic Plan 2021¹. The same year witnessed a large number of exhibitions,

¹ The Dubai culture and Arts Authority was established under the Law No. 6 of 2008 with 16 clear objectives in the fields of heritage, literary, arts and culture.

[https://dlp.dubai.gov.ae/Legislation%20Reference/2008/Law%20No.%20\(6\)%20of%202008.pdf](https://dlp.dubai.gov.ae/Legislation%20Reference/2008/Law%20No.%20(6)%20of%202008.pdf)

districts, and art destinations forming all around the city. Starting with the further agglomeration of galleries in Al Quoz with the joining of Ayyam Gallery, and the beginning of the formation of Al Serkal Avenue right opposite the courtyard under the patronage of Abdel Monem Al Serkal and his family with many galleries moving into warehouses owned by the family and run at the time by a real estate agency. In downtown, DIFC Gate Avenue had officially become a home for a number of galleries which made it into a destination of galleries and restaurants. East into the desert, a small but magnificent modernist building became the home for Tashkeel, a space offering galleries, workshops and multidisciplinary studios by H.H. Lateefa Bint Maktoum with a branch established in Al Fahidi District later. In the same year, Dubai Culture and Arts Authority announced a large mixed-use project right in the heart of the city called the “Al Khor Cultural District” (Nouvel, 2020, p.6) which took many later years to materialize into reality. The year of the financial crisis actually turned into a positive outcome for the Art scene in Dubai; firstly, a large hit on the rental prices of many spaces making Dubai more affordable, the formalization of an arts community and the patronage of the government for a cohesive cultural program, and the emergence of new investors in the arts sector as the real estate market was down (Nouvel, 2020, p.8-9).

The coming years sees a flourishing of concepts, galleries, and artistic spaces around the city in Al Serkal Avenue, and DIFC especially. Furthermore, an establishment of local and international art fairs program, the formation of critique and more importantly a large governmental support for the arts and creativity sector. In 2014, the Dubai Technology and Media Free Zone Authority (DTMFZA) was renamed the Dubai Creative Clusters Authority (DCCA) with the addition of a purpose built master plan project under its jurisdiction – Dubai Design District – which had the first phase completed in 2015. This era sees a new trend in cultural development that is not seen in the usual trajectory of arts development in cities- the planned districts – where another added master plan known as the Dubai Culture Village is added to the Dubai plan in 2014 under the Dubai Properties Authority. A third development announced in 2015 is the Dubai Historical District project (what was announced as Al Khor Cultural District in 2008) is finally launched under three governmental entities Dubai Culture and Arts Authority (DCAA), Dubai Tourism and Commercial Marketing (DTCM), and Dubai Municipality² with a masterplan including around 20 museums, restaurants, and a boutique hotel. This establishes a benchmark for future developments of the city that started with the free zones of the early 2000’s and differentiates Dubai’s cultural plans and growth than most cities.

In April 2019, Dubai Culture and Arts Authority appointed a new ambitious strategic plan “to be a global cultural destination and a centre for talent and innovation”. The strategy announced different initiatives, one being the introduction of a cultural visa to attract artists to coming into Dubai and ease the process³, and another was the transformation of Al Quoz area into a creative district. The year 2020 shows the resilience of culture and how culture and creativity flourish even in the worst of times, this is reflected in how the creative economy has become one of the most powerful sectors in Dubai’s financial investments. This is done through ministerial and local legislations and initiatives which aim to attract, fund, and invest in the talent and creativity of people from around the globe. The impression at this point in time, that the hard infrastructure (buildings, spaces, urban blocks) is already complete and it is time to complement it with soft infrastructure (programs, initiatives, legislations, etc.) to create a whole circle. This however, does not entail that the current infrastructure in place is on standby, as many of the aftermath effects of the established scene start showing within the fabric of the city through urban changes that are not induced directly by the artistic and cultural scene further explored in the next chapters.

5. Macro Scale: Neighborhood Changes

5.1 Al Quoz Creative Zone

By 2019, the attention that had surrounded Al Quoz has truly started to grow with the introduction of Al Serkal Avenue almost a decade ago in the area as many concepts and restaurants have joined the Al Quoz area replacing industrial spaces with retail, café, and gym spaces mostly alongside galleries as a main use. The organic movement of galleries to Al Quoz initiated the Al Serkal Avenue and in turn Al Serkal Avenue’s, alongside the Courtyard’s, increased footfall attracted the governmental efforts of culture and creativity by setting the Al Quoz area as one of the main projects of the new strategy initiated by Dubai Culture and Arts Authority in 2019⁴. Despite no clear decisions, in 2021, it was announced as the “Al Quoz Creative Zone”; the area is said to become a free zone. The project is mainly run under the supervision of Dubai Culture; however, a project team has been formed involving the Dubai municipality, Roads and Transport Authority, and Al Wasl Asset Management Group, Brand Dubai, and

² <https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/green-light-for-dubai-historical-district-project-1.17300>

³ <https://www.mediaoffice.ae/en/news/2021/March/02-03/Dubai-Culture-to-grant>

⁴ <https://dubaiculture.gov.ae/en/Media/Press-Releases/Pages/Mohammed-bin-Rashid-approves-the-new-vision-of-Dubai-Culture.aspx>

Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing⁵. The current announcements have revealed that there will be enhancements carried out in terms of transportation and soft mobility which would be an asset to the area, however a prototype of the new spaces show a predictable developer carbon copy format which emulates a much different future for the area.

5.2 Dubai Historic District

While the government's attention to the larger Al Fahidi area has allowed for the preservation of the historic fabric and heritage of the city, it has also sparked the interests of an opposing development interpretation; the area has now been a site of urban renewal projects and has attracted many developers to the areas. Due to the lack of legislation and control of the Dubai Municipality on many of the surrounding areas and the complex relationship of semi-private developers in the region, there has been an adverse effect creeping into the historic district with the Al Seef project completed in 2017 by Meraas right at the border of the Al Fahidi District⁶. The new project demolishes the efforts of the culture and municipal authorities in preservation and rehabilitation in both aspects. From the neighbouring side of Al Fahidi, Al Seef buildings have an embellished and misinformed interpretation of the old wind tower houses of Dubai made of new materials and aged in a theatrical manner to show distress that is not even seen in the originally preserved houses. Moreover, on the other side of the project, the contemporary buildings are carbon copies of Real Estate Developers', in particular Meraas' projects seen in other parts of the city. The "old" portion of the project blurs the lines between traditional houses and the artificially aged new ones which confuses visitors that might not be aware of Dubai's old architecture. The new buildings, likewise, completely disrespect the context of heritage creating a dystopian futuristic city effect with their industrial and international style as they encroach on historical territory, however completely disregard the architectural style of the space. Moreover, alongside the Shindagha shoreline, a new "Infinity" bridge has been completed with a futuristic steel design and on the other side of the shore, the Deira enrichment project is almost fully completed creating another discontinuation in the historic context with its grandeur modernity. Despite all the above, Al Fahidi Neighbourhood and Al Shindagha are still considered as potential spaces of generating creative economy as the Shindagha Museum is almost completed and set to open soon and Al Fahidi Neighbourhood has been announced recently to undergo a rehabilitation and revitalization project, however not much is revealed on the exact plans.

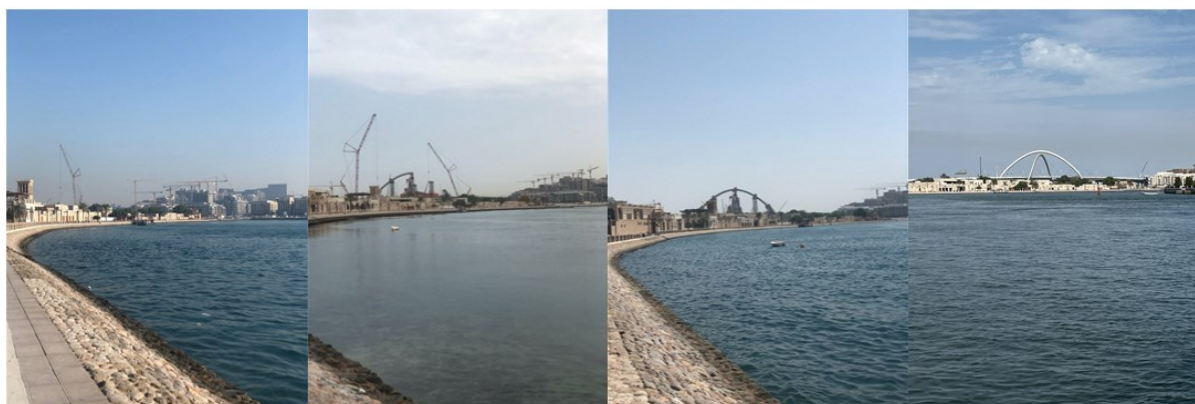


Figure 2. Progress of Deira Enrichment Project and Infinity Bridge from right March 2021- April 2021 -June 2021- Dec 2021(Source: Author)

⁵ <https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/art/al-quoz-creative-zone-dubai-s-newest-creative-hub-kicks-off-first-workshop-1.1208839>

⁶ <https://gulfnews.com/going-out/society/al-seef-where-old-dubai-meets-the-new-1.2111592>



Figure 3. Al Seef Project by Meraas - on the left: the modern part, on the right: the newly built historical replicas
(Source: <https://dubaiofw.com/al-seef-dubai/>)

5.3 Downtown Dubai

The Downtown Area's development differs from the other neighborhoods slightly where in Downtown the grassroots initiatives were in a smaller capacity and the shift to planned districts came in earlier. The DIFC Gate Avenue was the first planned district in the area in the year 2008 which later attracted many galleries into its space. Today, DIFC gate avenue's galleries are in competition with the many fine dining restaurants surrounding them. Not long later, another project was announced as part of the revitalization of the downtown corridor which was the Dubai Design District. The Dubai Design district differs in terms of urban development in that it was created purposefully as a creative district. It was a masterplan that dedicated 1.9 square kilometers (21 million square feet) of Dubai's land under the supervision of TECOM group as a free zone. The project consists of three phases; phase one (consisting of 10% of the land) was completed in 2015, made of eleven buildings consisting of office and retail spaces for the creative community. The design process involved "leading global figures as well as local talent from across the spectrum of the creative industries"⁷. Phase 2 is currently on hold and Phase 3 is known today as "The block" which consists mainly of restaurants. The Downtown actually becomes a clear example of using the agenda of creativity and culture for the actual reason of revitalization and change.

6. Micro Scale: Social Life

This layer of information was collected to understand people's perception of these spaces and how different groups react and interact to these spaces in the city. A combination of methods were taken as a field survey for the different districts which included static observation, dynamic observation, interviews with users and visitors of the space, interviews with business owners, and interviews with artists that interact with these districts. The timelines show the differences in the three districts where in most of them you can see the decline of activity in the nighttime, a bit less in Serkal due to the new activities introduced such as sports and F&B, while in Shindagha the closing of the museums leads to the emergence of an illegal activity: betting kiosks. Moreover, the social life also emphasizes the importance of land use in the sense where D3 truly shows as an office space having the peak of its day within lunch breaks of employees. Dubai Historic District's neighborhoods reveal that tourists are the largest audience group that visit these spaces due to their interaction with the museum spaces and their interest in seeing the "other side of Dubai". The most surprising activity within these spaces falls in Shindagha Historic District where a large group of nearby residents use the public spaces as an exercise area in the morning and a picnic area in the afternoon. On the other hand, the largest similarity in these spaces is seen in event or festival days, where people of all ages, ethnicities and social status gather to enjoy the public activations surrounding the areas and enjoy what these communities have to offer.

⁷ <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/revealed-dubai-design-district-plans-in-detail-565307.html>



Figure 4. Compiled timeline of three studied districts showing the typical daily social life in each space (Source: Author)

7. The Patterns

7.1 The Growth Patterns

Although throughout the decades there has been a constant rise of cultural and creative spaces within the city's fabric, Dubai's art scene has definitely seen a non-linear postmodernist approach (Nouvel, 2020) as evident in figure 5, which creates a unique landscape of arts, creativity, and culture throughout the city. The city's mixture of planned and organic developments also has contributed to the complexity of its nature creating noteworthy enclaves within the urban fabric. Many of the initiatives were spearheaded by individuals passionate for creating something that speaks to them within the city at first, however the scene that exists today is due largely to the governmental and developer approach that is distinctive to Dubai.

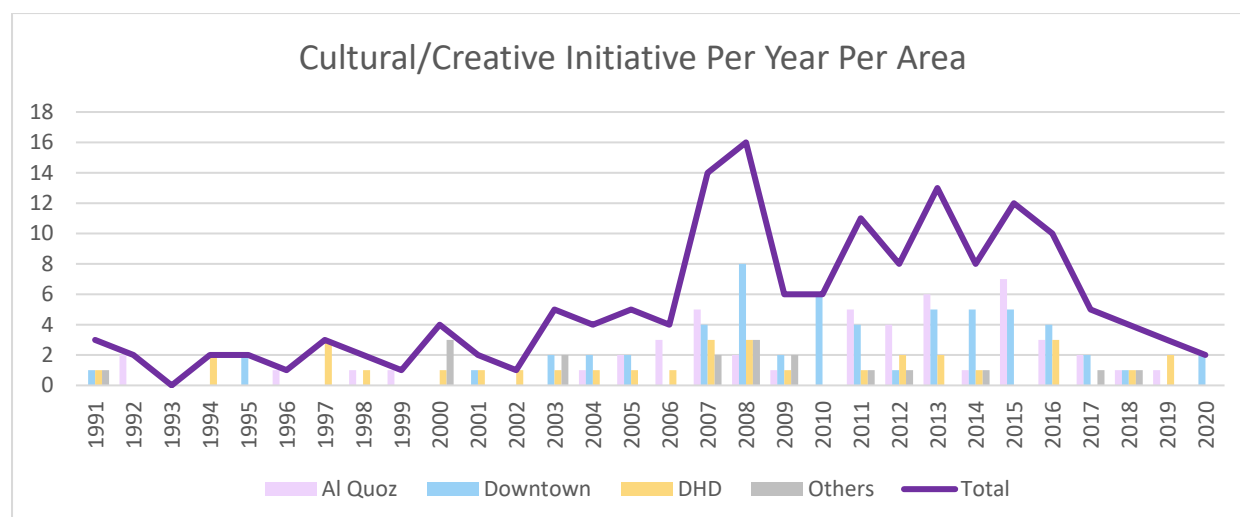


Figure 5. Cultural/ Creative Initiatives Per Year Per Area (Source: Author)

All the districts in Dubai that exist whether as planned or organic agglomerations fit the typical narrative that artists and creative tend to cluster for reasons such as the need for similar infrastructure or proximity to production spaces or the most common reason found in Dubai, rent, and then this leads to the creation of districts. Al Quoz was being utilized by different galleries, such as Total Arts (1992), The Third line (2005), and B21 Gallery (2006), as it offered the perfect space and blank canvas for many galleries, and then as more galleries came in due to rental prices between 2009 and 2011 (Carbon 12, Ayyam Gallery, Green Art Gallery, Gulf Photo Plus), the entrepreneurial decision was made to create a district dedicated to the arts and creativity. This in turn led to the government's decision of taking the opportunity of turning the larger Al Quoz area to a creative zone. The same goes with the downtown area where the "favorable winds" (Nouvel, 2020) and the growing appetite of the city for arts alongside galleries such as Tabari Art Space (2003) and Green Art Gallery (1995) predicted the creation of a dedicated district in DIFC, Downtown and later sparked the idea of creating another purposefully planned area, Dubai Design District in 2015. While in Dubai Historic District, the narrative follows the typical urban revitalization timeline seen in Jacobs (1961) and Florida's (2002) works and the wake of the importance of historic preservation within the GCC region (Boussaa, 2014) alongside the existence of spaces such as the Dubai Museum (1971). Majlis Gallery (1979), Sheikh Saeed Museum (1987), Heritage Village (1987) allowed for the realization of the importance of these spaces by the government turning them into a touristic destination and the concept of creating a historic downtown.

This approach led to a gated and clustered map of the creative and cultural spaces which can be largely pinned to the downtown areas of the polycentric Dubai emulating the Modernist planning principles enforced within Dubai's larger map. In other words, creative and cultural spaces were moving in a nonlinear and organic fashion through the city, however the formal responses within the urban fabric and the governing agencies overtook the informal growth language and dedicated centers for these spaces. The same formalized growth patterns are now being echoed within the new planned districts of Al Shindagha and Al Quoz Creative Zone creating "deliberate segregation and decontamination of numerous cultural institutions from the ordinary city" (Jacobs, 1961) with no regards to the failed global counterparts which fulfilled Jacob's vision that predicted cultural and civic centers and the centralization of cultural resources would be "tragic in their effects on their cities" (Jacobs, 1961). The effects are already being seen in spaces studied above where there is a disconnect of the districts from the city with either formal barriers such as gates or informal barriers of governance and rules which accompany the "decontamination" of these spaces, therefore adding more spaces of the same module will only amplify the effect within the city. Especially in terms of free zones, where the spaces seem to be not connecting either to the users such as galleries and entrepreneurs or the majority of residents due to the fact that they are not connected to the city's main planning entity.

Another major pattern is seen in the introduction of new projects and opportunistic investments due to the movement of these cultural and creative spaces into their respective areas. The patterns are seen in short-term displacements and microaggressions or long-term gentrification processes both reinforcing the theory that the arts, creativity, and culture are not direct perpetrators of gentrification necessarily. In reality, the case of Dubai reinforces the account of "treating the arts as amenities that catalyze land development and lure upscale consumption" (Grodach, 2016) as seen in the new developments of the Dubai Historic District or what possibly will become of Al Quoz Creative Zone plans.

"The cultural glamour surrounding such areas fades once capital is injected and more generic commercial land use dominates and displaces artistic originality and creativity" (Elshehtawy, 2020, p.254) and this is exactly what Dubai's

current patterns and futuristic plans emulate. It is noteworthy to point that such approaches have deemed to be unsustainable in the long run, however just as Modernism was adopted in Dubai in the sixties when Jacobs and advocates were already condemning the consequences, it seems that the same approach of adopting western ideologies of bohemian enclaves and the "SoHo Effect" seems to be the current trend in planning creative cities. It is already evident in many cities such as London, Bilbao, New York, Shanghai, etc. that the module of formal and government-led initiatives is not sustainable. Scholars such as Grodach (2016) and Florida (2016), argue that the planning for arts should solely be for the arts for it to be successful and well-integrated into the city, and this was evident in the semi-organic development of Al Serkal Avenue, and its neighbor the courtyard within the Al Quoz Area as opposed to the aggressive development of the Dubai Design District area or the touristic wonderland of Dubai Historic District.

7.2 The Social Patterns

Zooming into the districts themselves, the subcultural enclaves evidently have created pockets within the urban fabric emulating new urbanism theories of the vitality of mixed uses. A certain similarity was seen in a few aspects of the different case study neighborhoods and generally to city and neighborhood design; diversity of operating times through diversity of land use and the effect of activation of space in the public realm.

First, most of the neighborhoods (with the exception of Al Serkal in 2020 and 2021) seemed to be quite deserted at nights and become dead spaces which is a testament to the validity of Jane Jacobs' theory that healthy and lively cities must have spaces which have diverse land use, used by a diverse population through day and night (Jacobs, 1961) however the current status used "to build 'creative cities', support the 'creative economy' and attract 'creative-class' workers are not helping cities to fulfill Jacobs' vision of what makes a city live." (Rosenstein, 2009, p.1). In Al Serkal Avenue and Dubai Design district, with the addition of gyms and food and beverage businesses, some signs of nightlife have been seen around the avenue. The emptiness in the day versus the small crowd in the night show how there is a crowd that is looking to spend their time there at night especially that during the day most people are at work and don't have the time to pass around. Moreover, in Al Shindagha and Al Fahidi this pattern is the opposite as the mornings and afternoons are more lively with the museums operating and the government entities working and the flock of usual tourists taking their tours. At night, the crowds are quiet, however an illegal activity of betting⁸ takes place and this again is evident in Jacobs' (1961) theories where she states different examples of how nighttime activations allow for lower criminal activity. Additionally, the importance of activation of space is evident in all event days as the volumes of crowds of different nationalities flood into the districts, encouraging different and new experiences to the public and engaging the city with the creative developments. Al Serkal Avenue and Dubai Design District are witnessing a larger flow as they are accompanied with a full-rounded programming calendar within the year as opposed to Al Fahidi Neighborhood which only hosts Sikka for three days within the year and Shindagha days for another three days in Al Shindagha Historic District. Hence, it is imperative that these neighborhoods, just like the rest of the city must be diverse and alive during different times of the day and more importantly activated with comprehensive programming to ensure healthy, lively, and safe environments.

Surveying the current arts and creativity scene reveals the notion of what is yet to be established in terms of culture and creativity in Dubai's landscape. Seemingly, the current hard infrastructure still does not serve as the ideal space for creatives and cultural seekers- many business owners and artists seem to not connect to the current spaces proposed or have chosen to settle in the best option offered (see figure 7), others view these existing areas as high rent spaces (as evident in the figure 6 showing empty spaces within each district). However, government efforts are catering to certain artistic individuals for the upcoming plans of the Al Quoz area showing that there is a small change towards a community participatory planning approach. Nonetheless, little else is to be revealed in terms of the Al Quoz area or even the larger cultural plan meaning there is still a lack of transparency in terms of the future developments, therefore they cannot be fully analyzed or evaluated.

⁸ Gambling is completely forbidden in UAW law. As per Article 414 of the UAE Penal Code, 'whoever gambles shall be punished by detention for a maximum period of two years or by a fine not exceeding Dh20,000.

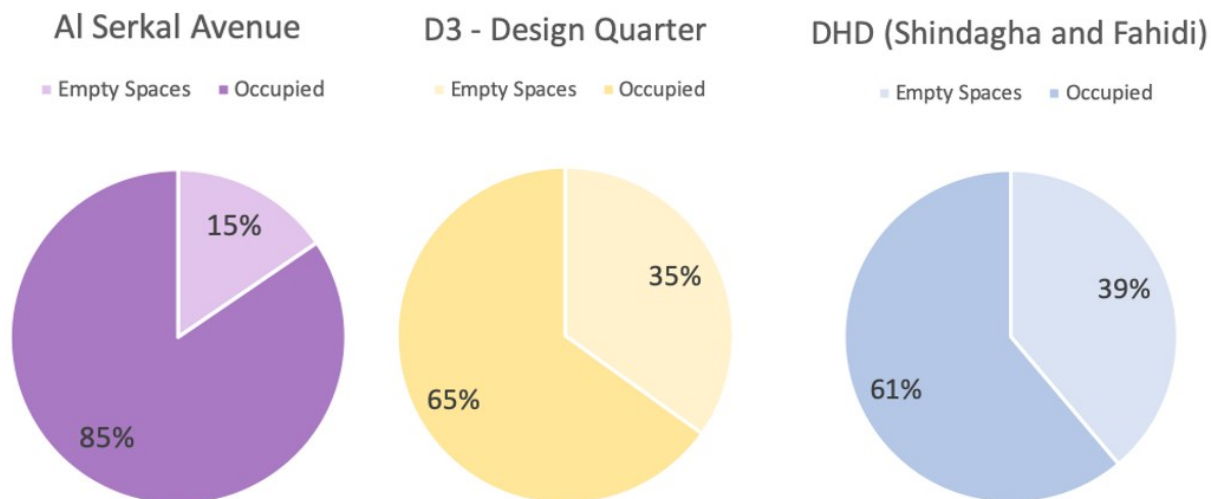


Figure 6. Empty vs Occupied Spaces per district (Ground floor occupancy only) - (Source: Author)

Q7 If you had to choose a place to set up your business/gallery/venture, which would it be?

Answered: 31 Skipped: 0

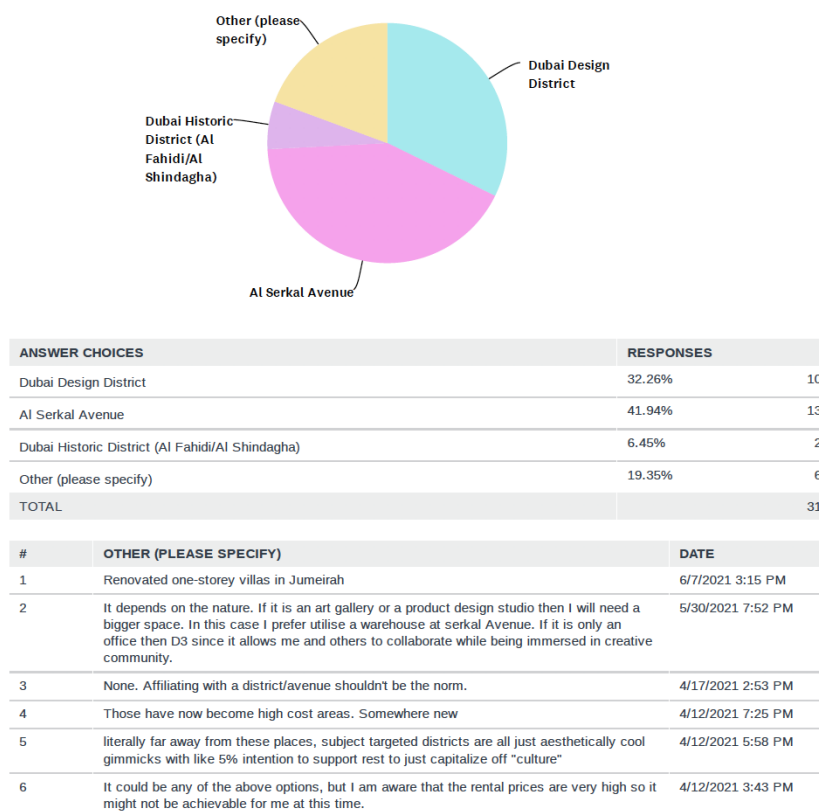


Figure 7. Survey Responses regarding which district would be chosen as ideal space to set up a business showing Al Serkal Avenue as first choice (Source: Author)

The interviews with artists, creatives, gallery owners, and entrepreneurs revealed that the most sought-after improvements are actually within the soft infrastructure, moreover, it is important to note that spaces are only alive with the right programming and placemaking features (Jacobs, 1961; Gehl, 2010). Consequently, Dubai's efforts in creating a future of culture and creativity must first realize the reality that there is a large gap in the audience awareness, the urban planning, and economic procedures, and space development process currently omnipresent in the city. These underlying issues must be addressed to create a sustainable creative and cultural module before

moving ahead with further plans since the "build and they will come" will not be feasible in this scenario as evident with the Dubai Design District model.

8. Conclusions

Opposed to the formal growth of Dubai's Modernist vision, the arts scene witnessed a non-linear growth with an array of peaks and low years generating an urban pattern that is true to Dubai's informal spaces. The organic growth of the cultural and creative spaces in Dubai contrasted with the rigid modern grid, yet slowly and forcibly adopted into it. This created little mixed-use enclaves within the city which harnessed cultural and creative activities for the citizens and allowed for a thought-provoking narrative born within Dubai's common storyline. The year 2008 became a turning point in Dubai's cultural timeline due to significant governmental actions and entrepreneurial ventures which allowed for the creation of a starting point for the emergence of a cultural network of districts, events, and institutions. This allowed for a semi-formalization of the organic evolution of some of the pre-existing spaces and for the planned approach of creative and cultural districts to emerge as a module in the city. Al Serkal Avenue started as an organic clustering of galleries due to rent then shifted into a district, and Al Fahidi was planned as a restoration project, however, the tenants grew organically into the district; on the other hand, the introduction of planned districts became the norm from the year of 2008, starting with DIFC, then Dubai Design District and Shindagha Historic District, and today Al Quoz Creative Zone. This created clusters isolated from the "ordinary city" fabric through physical gates or boundaries and nonphysical barriers such as governance.

The current landscape of culture and creativity in Dubai requires central governance and a decentralized physical manifestation. All current modules have led to the gentrification patterns on a larger scale of development and smaller scales of removing the current creative and cultural spaces rather than supporting them. Therefore, an action plan needs to be taken which supports the plethora of cultural and creative spaces already existing in the city rather than replicating more carbon copies of existing districts. There is large support and advocacy for creativity, culture, and art within Dubai's timeline which allowed for the creation of an initial network, however, the current direction shifted to focusing on the creative economy.

"It is time to let go of the creative city planning agenda and concentrate more on how the arts might play a role in starving off some of the more inequitable outcomes of contemporary urban development."- Carl Grodach

Future developments must focus on community boosting and effective neighborhood planning with the incorporation of the public, transparent codes and permit processes, public programming and space activation around the year alongside cultural and creative educational groundwork, and integrating the cultural agenda with major decision making roles and entities of the city such as urban planning and infrastructure development to cultivate a mature soft infrastructure supporting the sustainability of the existing cultural and creative spaces and cementing a cultural network within the fabric of the city. There are steps taken in 2021 that exhibit the aforementioned recommendations, however, the focus on creative economy might lead to the same effects seen in global counterparts such as North America, where today, urbanists like Florida have already realized that such methods create a "new urban crisis".

The above was revealed through the studies and surveys carried through; however, it is also noteworthy to mention that there has to be further studies exploring larger samples of creatives to understand truly what the city's needs are, and further studies into each district mentioned in this research to allow for a comprehensive body of knowledge within the creative and culture sector as it is moving forward.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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