Branding, legitimation and the power of museums: The case of the Louvre Abu Dhabi

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Abstract

Museums and cultural developments are on the rise in the Gulf region. The United Arab Emirates is home to some of the most ambitious and extravagant museum projects in the world. In this article, I consider the example of the Louvre Abu Dhabi, exploring some of its underlying dynamics and context. I focus mainly on the relationship between branding and legitimation while placing my analysis within a wider critical debate, which includes discussions on the link between museums and identity, the legitimizing role of architecture, and the various contentious concerns and controversies surrounding the Louvre Abu Dhabi project. I conclude that the United Arab Emirates and other neighbouring countries have an excellent opportunity for innovation in the cultural field if they are willing to *critically* and *ethically* found their cultural developments on an ethos of inclusivity, openness, experimentation, non-exploitation and curatorial courage.

Key words: Branding, legitimation, Louvre Abu Dhabi, identity, power

Introduction

> Past societies devoted substantial wealth to constructing and decorating temples and cathedrals. Similarly, our society lavishes enormous resources on creating and maintaining museums of art.
>
> Duncan and Wallach, 'The Universal Survey Museum' (1980: 449)

Recent years have witnessed a massive expansion of cultural projects and museums in the Gulf region. Several countries in this area have been placing issues of culture and the arts very high on their agenda. Qatar, for instance, whose capital city Doha was recently dubbed the 'Arab Capital of Culture' (UNESCO 2010), is investing heavily in its cultural projects, including the building of the National Museum of Qatar as well as the acquisition of some of the world's most famous artworks by its royal family (Elkamel 2011; Adam and Burns 2011)[1]. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has also been witnessing an expansion in its museum projects, such as the Louvre Abu Dhabi and Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, as part of the 'Saadiyat Island' master plan (Ouroussoff 2010; Shadid 2012).

One of the primary objectives of such ambitious projects is to enhance these countries' cultural portfolios and transform them into cultural hubs that are able to rival other major art cities such as Paris, London and New York. Reshaping the 'image' of the Arab world is also a driving motive behind the establishment of new cultural centres in the Gulf. Equally important to the rationales of these projects is the desire to create a bridge between Western and Arabic art and a platform for retelling the histories and stories of the region, some of which have remained undocumented so far. This is all whilst finding a balance between modernization and Islam, between an increasing urbanization and a need to preserve the cultural heritage of the region.

Assessing the actual or even potential impacts of such developments in the region and elsewhere is far from being an unproblematic process, especially given that the majority of the Gulf's museums and cultural projects are still a work in progress that will take many years to be fully actualized. That said, they are nevertheless emerging as an 'object of great curiosity

and advance speculation' as McClellan (2012: 272) puts it, given their 'potential to shift the attention of the art world to a new continent and to institutionalize new global perspectives' (McClellan 2012: 272). These developments warrant, as such, some critical reflections and discussions vis-à-vis both their rationale and function, and especially in light of the current political climate and the transcultural context within which these projects are embedded. So far, however, there is a marked lack of academic studies, whether preliminary or substantial, which critically address this expansionary trend of museums and cultural projects in the Gulf. While it is, admittedly, still too soon to conduct detailed analyses and assessments of this trend and its wider impact locally and internationally (Bouchenaki 2013: 102-103), an initial degree of conceptual engagement is needed to stimulate the necessary debates and discussions on this theme. This article aims to make a contribution to this process if only by way of providing some useful signposts for future debates and further engagement.

Here, I look at a specific example, namely the Louvre Abu Dhabi, with a view to understanding some of the underlying dynamics and contexts of this project. I focus primarily, in this instance, on the relationship between branding and legitimation, while placing my analysis within a wider frame of debate, which includes discussions on identity, architecture, and transnationalism, as well as some of the controversies surrounding this project. I begin with a consideration of the Louvre Abu Dhabi in relation to its parent museum, highlighting the ideological dimensions pertaining to the history and function of the latter, as described by Duncan and Wallach (1980). I argue that museums are by no means neutral spaces, but highly value-laden places that are embedded within a web of cultural and national symbolism and significance. The remaining part of the paper is concerned with issues of branding and how they play out in the context of the Louvre and its branch museum in Abu Dhabi. In considering the relationship between these two institutions from the perspective of branding, this part critically examines how established museums, such as the Louvre, represent a 'model for global, supranational museum brands and neoliberal ideals' (Malone 2007: 1) while new museums, such as the Louvre Abu Dhabi, are investing in the construction of their brand identity by building partnerships with high profile museums so as to generate the level of publicity and cultural capital needed for achieving an international reputation. The critical examination of this interplay reveals some of the discourses and dynamics surrounding contemporary museum partnerships and their wider implications. Finally, the paper ends with an emphasis on the need to align emerging museum projects in the Gulf with an ethos of inclusivity, openness, experimentation, and risk-taking in curatorial practice, and to resist the temptation of merely replicating established conventions and models of (Western) art history and traditions, something that is often at issue in the globalization of museums and the proliferation of their mega satellite branches.

Louvre Abu Dhabi: Background

Envisioned to be the first 'universal museum' in the Arab world, Louvre Abu Dhabi was born out of an intergovernmental agreement between The United Arab Emirates and France, initiated in March 2007. It is part of a series of ambitious projects belonging to the developing Saadiyat Island, a 27-square-km zone situated 500m off the coast of Abu Dhabi's urban centre (see saadiyat.ae) and whose total development cost exceeds 27 billion US Dollars (Davidson 2013). The Louvre Abu Dhabi alone has a total budget of over a billion dollars, including a 520 million dollar deal with France to use the Louvre's name for thirty years, and an additional 747 million dollars for art loans, art management advice and special exhibitions (Riding 2007). In addition to Louvre Abu Dhabi, Saadiyat Cultural District will be home to the Zayed National Museum, Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, the Maritime Museum and a Performing Arts Centre[2]. These colossal 'signature' buildings were designed by some of the world's leading architects: Norman Foster, Frank Gehry, Tadao Ando, Zaha Hadid and Jean Nouvel, the architect of Louvre Abu Dhabi. The Tourism Development & Investment Company (TDIC), which is responsible for overseeing the development of the Saadiyat project, describes the island as 'the only place in the world to house architecture designed by five individual Pritzker prize winners […] an irresistible magnet attracting the world to Abu Dhabi, and taking Abu Dhabi to the world' (TDIC n.d.). Geared with space and money, Abu Dhabi is providing these architects with an

Image 1. Louvre Abu Dhabi: aerial view and site plan. Source: Buro Happold

unparalleled opportunity to take their 'imaginations to even greater heights' and pioneer 'the most dramatic currents of early twenty-first-century architecture' (McClellan 2012: 272-277). This new trend of deliberately commissioning prominent names of international repute and strategically attaching famous brand names to new museums and cultural projects in the region has become an important means by which countries in the Gulf are seeking to gain 'instant cultural recognition' and prestige (McClellan 2012: 275) and an expression of a political drive to construct a new identity for the region and modernize its societies (see also Bouchenaki 2013: 95). As McClellan (2012, 277) explains:

> Prominent European architects reinforce cultural ties to countries upon which Abu Dhabi will rely for expertise and object loans. Norman Foster, from Great Britain, will design the Zayed Museum, which is partnered with the British Museum, while the Frenchman Jean Nouvel will design the Louvre. Zaha Hadid, an Iraqi based in Britain, is the best-known Arab architect, and Tadao Ando, from Japan, represents Asia. Frank Gehry is from Canada but has long been based in the United States. All of them have profiles that transcend their place of origin. Taken together, the choice of architects speaks to Abu Dhabi's desire to present itself as open to the world, to global currents of art, design and cultural tourism.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of this observable trend and its underlying dynamics and rationales, one needs to understand first and foremost the meaning and function of the idea of the museum itself and how historically museums have long been inextricably linked to mechanisms of power and processes of identity construction. In considering the example of the Louvre Abu Dhabi, one is inevitably prompted to consider its parent museum.

The ideology of museums: reflections on the Louvre

Since their inception, museums have been acting as a powerful 'treasure house of material and spiritual wealth' (Duncan and Wallach 1980: 448). Their primary function has often been ideological, insofar as they serve as iconic embodiments of authority and status, and a means

of recognizing state power: '[a]bsorbing more manual and imaginative labour than any other type of architecture, the museum affirms the power and social authority of a patron class […] It is meant to impress upon those who use or pass through it society's most revered beliefs and values' (Duncan and Wallach 1980: 449).

This is particularly true in the case of the 'universal survey museum', as Duncan and Wallach (1980) have shown through their work. In considering the example of the Louvre, the authors demonstrate how the architecture, spatiality, collections and iconography of this museum all serve to represent France as the 'true heir' of culture and to dramatize the triumph of French civilization. They therefore argue that there is a strong link between the concept of the museum and that of the State, the nation and citizenship. The history of the Louvre itself is, in fact, a case in point.

Image 2. Louvre Museum. Source: Jacques Brinon/AP Photo

The Louvre was initially built in the twelfth century as a defensive fortress, but was later transformed into a Renaissance-style palace that served as a royal residence for King Francis I, an avid art collector. Over time, the Louvre and its grounds were extended and renovated by almost every subsequent French monarch, and now cover 60,600 square meters (for more details on the expansion of the Louvre, see louvre.fr). The art collection itself also grew steadily through purchases and donations. The reigns of Louis XIII and Louis XIV during the seventeenth century, in particular, had a considerable impact on the Louvre and Tuileries palaces, as major additions and extensions were made during that period. These two kings also considerably expanded the Louvre's art holdings, including the acquisition of the art collection of Charles I of England after his execution during the English Civil War[3]. Later, when Louis XIV relocated his court to Versailles, the Louvre ceased to be the main royal residence and fell into a state of neglect as a result, until around 1756 when it started receiving renewed interest under Louis XV (louvre.fr).

Originally, only royalty and kings were able to view the art collection held at the Louvre. It was not until the eighteenth century, in the context of the Enlightenment, that many people in France, including writers and philosophers, started calling for the public display of the royal art collection. The French Revolution was particularly instrumental in realizing this vision. In 1793, the revolutionary government declared the Louvre to be an art museum and, for the first time,

the private royal collection and artefacts were open to public viewing. The collection rapidly grew following Napoleon's conquests, as the French army seized many art and archaeological objects from conquered territories (Szalay, 2013). Artwork that was hitherto stored away in inaccessible rooms at the Louvre started acquiring a new importance, and no longer was the size or richness of the collection the only aspect that mattered. Rather, many ambient features, such as space, presentation, lighting and the manner of display, became imbued with new meaning and significance, both aesthetic and political. As Duncan and Wallach (1980: 455) argue, the turning of royal collections into a public art museum did not merely involve transforming a royal space into a public one. Instead and to serve 'the new needs of the state', the collection had to be arranged and presented in a new way, according to Enlightenment ideas and with the view to illustrate key moments of art history. Art history itself embodied the claim that 'history was the history of great men' and museums 'institutionalized the bourgeois claim to speak for the interests of all mankind' (Duncan and Wallach 1980: 456; also Weil, 2000).

Importantly, the reconfiguration of the Louvre as a public art museum was born out of the same socio-historical and political context from which the notion of 'nation-state' emerged. So while the royal gallery identified the nation as 'the king's realm', the public art museum identified the nation as 'the state' belonging to the people (Duncan and Wallach 1980: 454). The challenge of the Louvre was then 'to celebrate not aristocratic superiority, but the democratic principles of liberty, equality, and brotherhood' (Skluzacek 2010: 12). Consequently, the state as an abstract entity came to replace the king as a host. And instead of considering the visitor in terms of his or her social relation to the king and the palace, the visitor was now addressed as a 'citizen' and a shareholder in the state. The Louvre as such became a potent symbol of both the nation and the state and an important mechanism through which visitors could access the artistic and 'spiritual wealth' of the state in exchange for their attachment and allegiance to the latter (Duncan and Wallach 1980: 457). This hegemonic function of the Louvre was thus embedded in and part of the development of a national community and the experience of citizenship itself.

So in a sense, the Louvre's transition from being a royal space to a public space marked an important moment that is part and parcel of a larger historical context. On the surface, this transition might seem to have demarcated a sharp line between two distinct identities: between the Louvre as a symbol of 'royalty' and the Louvre as a 'public' art museum. However, as Duncan and Wallach (1980: 452) rightly point out, the Louvre as a public institution inherited some of the basic ceremonial functions of the royal context from which it arose and, as such, continued to convey bourgeois ideology and represent an elite culture. Due to the historical forces of that time, these functions were undoubtedly redefined and refashioned to pave the way for a different identity and new characteristics for the Louvre. Yet, 'lurking behind the façade of the public art museum, there are often memories and sometimes even the reality of royal ceremony' (Duncan and Wallach 1980: 452).

Whether in terms of its architecture, display, iconography, or its ritual-like visiting experience, the Louvre as a public museum was still meant to *impress* its visitors and speak of the glory of the nation the same way, when as a royal palace, it was meant to convey the glory and wealth of the king and impress his guests. It is also worth noting that the notion of 'public' here represented only a small fraction of society, namely the elite bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. And although the museum was mobilised to create an illusion of a classless society in line with the ideology of the nation-state, it also contributed to reinforcing modes of differentiation and their attendant dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, belonging and non-belonging. 'The museum prompts the visitor to identify with an elite culture at the same time it spells out his place in the social hierarchy' (Duncan and Wallach 1980: 457). Or as Fyfe (2004: 47) puts it, following Bourdieu's arguments, the puzzle is that 'although public art museums celebrate citizenship and are open to all citizens only a relatively small and privileged proportion of people pass through their doors'.

Placing the debate on museum developments in Abu Dhabi within this brief historical overview of the Louvre can help us critically approach the idea of the Louvre Abu Dhabi itself, bearing in mind, however, the different context and dynamics from which the latter is emerging. Crucially, this contextualization also raises the following pertinent question: If the original Louvre acted to impose a narrow idea of 'civilization' and aligned it with France, to institutionalize

democracy and yet to make culture into a marker of social status, how is this being transplanted into the very different milieu of Abu Dhabi, and what concerns or challenges might this raise?

Louvre Abu Dhabi: Branding and Legitimation

As mentioned above, the Louvre Abu Dhabi represents an ambitious development in the emerging cultural landscape of the emirate and that of the UAE in general, which has been attracting some attention from the art world and Western media, oftentimes in the form of criticism. Kluijver (2012: 63) provides a succinct summary of the kind of remarks and criticisms currently directed at Abu Dhabi's cultural ambitions. Some of these arguments relate to the question of whether Abu Dhabi is merely 'buying' or 'importing' a cultural identity instead of developing its own, and the extent to which the curatorial choices envisioned for the art collections and programming display a rather conservative and non-risky view of art and culture. Added to that the following question concerning audiences and more specifically local audiences: will the Louvre Abu Dhabi and its neighbouring museums attract local visitors, or will they be empty spaces except for occasional tourists and expats? These are obviously genuine concerns that do not only touch new museums such as the Louvre Abu Dhabi, but also established ones worldwide. Nevertheless, these debates can equally be reproached for often being couched in a rather condescending and almost colonial language. In fact, and as Kluijver (2012: 4) articulates:

> A person seriously investigating contemporary art in the Gulf is thus confronted with either bland, PR-like statements by local authorities or with dismissive reports of the 'Disney meets Speer in the desert' variant, often tinged with old-world jealousy about the resources available for art in this 'uncultured' region. There is little in between.

In response to this notable gap, in what follows, I seek to approach some of these questions from a more nuanced and critical (rather than cynical) viewpoint. I begin with the notion of branding, as it is an important aspect to address when approaching the dynamics underpinning the Louvre Abu Dhabi.

Branding

> At the beginning of the 21st century, everything is for sale, everything is a brand, and brands are the culture.

> O'Reilly, 'Cultural Brands/Branding Cultures' (2010: 574)

Practices of branding have become commonplace in today's global economy. From food enterprises to art establishments, the rise of 'brand identity' has become a strategy for gaining instant international recognition through association with already established brand names. Scott (2002: 36) defines branding as 'an engineered perception made up of the name of an organization and the personality that goes with it. The personality is a combination of the organization's products, services and perceived attributes'. As a marketing tool, branding enables organizations to manage their 'image' and how the public views them. It helps define the values of a given business or institution and the ways in which these values can be conveyed to the wider community both locally and internationally. Brands, as such, 'are not purely a source of differentiation, but also of identification, recognition, continuity and collectivity' (Mommaas in Evans 2003: 420). They enable the linking of collective and individual cultures and identities, mediating meanings between producers and consumers, and establishing a sense of association and sociocultural belonging. Brands are indeed an integral part of business processes and often act as a vehicle for managing and developing perceptions of a given product or service, and generating loyalty from customers and employees.

It is no wonder, then, that institutions and businesses are often willing to devote much attention and resources to building a strong and sustainable brand identity. This is more so the case with new organizations. In the context of museums, Wallace (2006: 1-6) argues that,

> A brand new museum needs a brand. It needs an identity that instantly communicates what it is, has, and does […] A brand new museum needs a personality, so people feel they know it, and are predisposed to like it […] A brand new museum […] needs a reputation so that when it starts adding features, they are readily accepted.

For these reasons, new museums, such as the Louvre Abu Dhabi, are investing heavily in the construction of a brand identity that is capable of encouraging familiarity and loyalty, and generating the level of publicity needed for achieving an international reputation. Building partnerships and collaborations with established high profile museums is therefore becoming a crucial strategy for the materialization of such objectives, given that these museums have succeeded in marketing themselves as (arguably) being representative of the 'best practices' and developing strong brand images that are easily recognizable and highly regarded by both visitors and the art world. Skluzacek (2010: 35) explains that 'consumers instantly understand the quality implicit in the '"Louvre moniker […] The presence of a branded (recognizable) experience […] offers a feeling of social inclusion to visitors. [It] allows geographically and culturally disparate peoples to have mutually relatable experiences'. This does not necessarily mean that all visitors are bound to have the same homogenous experience of the museum merely by virtue of its brand association, but branding helps conjure up specific common perceptions and expectations, and creating shared points of reference.

In essence, the construction of a (successful) brand identity relies very much on the 'name' assigned to the brand and the symbolic value embedded in it. The name gives 'a guarantee (in a weak sense) that the products or experience offered would be of certain quality. The value of [the] brand name […] is as much as an asset […] as the physical assets' (Caldwell 2000: 30) insofar as it can contribute to ensuring a higher probability of visitors and a greater degree of prestige.

525 million US dollars, the fee required to attach the Louvre's name to Abu Dhabi's museum, is in itself a strong attestation as to how 'big name' institutions are increasingly mobilizing the power of their cultural brands and reputation for financial gain. At the same time that new museums and developing economies are increasingly seeking to capitalize on already established brand names and harness their power in order to quickly gain prominence, legitimacy and credibility, enhance their own image and 'make up for not having an established collection or standing to build upon' (Wei 2008: 65). This emerging symbiotic relationship is more than simply a matter of cultural exchange or translation, supervision or management advice, but part of a growing economic trend whereby the marketing, trading and circulation of brands and their names have become an important currency and strategy amid global cultural markets.

This is all the more pertinent given the current economic climate in which public funding of museums has become a persistent issue in recent years and one that is firmly placed on the agenda of many governments and institutions. Whether in terms of budget cuts, rising costs or decreasing support, many museums in developed countries are now increasingly facing various challenges and a mounting pressure to legitimize their cultural and economic relevance. In France, for instance, until 1993 the Louvre was entirely state-funded. Now the museum has to self-fund 30 per cent of its yearly operating costs, despite drawing six million visitors annually (The Economist, 19 April 2001; Wei 2008: 12). On the whole, most European museums are under pressure to find alternative ways of supporting their presence and activities and meeting their operating costs. This in turn has prompted the need to develop new marketing and fund-raising strategies and, at times, even unlikely alliances to respond to the challenges of globalization, precarious economies and funding shortages. Expansionism and corporatism are some of these growing trends that are shifting the role of museums, and reconfiguring the power dynamics between developed and developing countries, between established and new museums.

In this sense, and as Maher (2007) puts it, the Louvre seems to have 'simply done what many other museums already have [a famous example is the Guggenheim]: raise needed funds by trading on their famous names and collections.' Referring to the deal between France and Abu Dhabi over the use of the Louvre's name, Henri Loyrette, former president of the

Louvre museum, stated that '[i]t's a fair fee for the concession of the name. This tutelary role deserves reward. It's normal' (in Riding 2007). The normalization of such trading activities is increasingly seen as representative of a paradigmatic shift to a new business logic, whereby 'a museum is considered like a business with assets, [and] the paintings are riches that can be invested to obtain a maximum financial return' (Regnier in Maher 2007).

Unsurprisingly, the rapid penetration of the arts and cultural world by such business and neoliberal trends has been raising a host of concerns, while dividing opinion between supporters and sceptics. For supporters, collaborations such as the Louvre Abu Dhabi project represent an undeniable opportunity for economic, social and cultural cooperation that has the potential to enhance political unity and cultural exchange, and create a bridge between East and West through art and culture. They see such partnerships as remaining very much in tune with the logic and spirit of 'universal museums': 'we must recall that the Louvre was set up during the Revolution and the (Napoleonic) Empire as a universal museum. And all throughout its two-century history, it has always been attached to having partnerships abroad' (Loyrette, 2007). Former French president Jacques Chirac (in Khaleej Times, 7 March 2007) describes the collaboration between the Louvre and Abu Dhabi in the following terms:

> By choosing the Louvre, the emirate of Abu Dhabi not only sealed a partnership with the world's most visited and well-known museum, but selected one which, from its very inception, had a vocation to reach out to the world, to the essence of mankind, through the contemplation of works of art. Created from ancient French royal collections and constantly enriched over more than two centuries, the Louvre has from its inception firmly believed that art conveys universality.

Andrew McClellan suggests that the Louvre's partnership with Abu Dhabi is 'the model of the future'. He argues that 'unless governments are willing to subsidize completely the funding of culture, which would be my preference, then we are only to expect increasingly a form of commercialism entering in to support these institutions' (in Maher 2007). He describes critics of such trends as unrealistic. But more so than just being a matter of economics, McClellan (in Maher 2007), argues that the Louvre–Abu Dhabi partnership raises issues regarding purpose as well as potential for cultural exchange:

> the idea right now that museums can have a global impact, an impact on global relations, is a remarkable one, the rhetoric you hear consistently around the openings of these [new] museums is that they will foster dialogue between east and west. And that's a very important justification for museums I think all over the world. And they're putting that into operation, in effect, by bridging the east and the west through this partnership.

Others, however, do not share such positive views. Many critics have been condemning France's business model vis-à-vis the Louvre partnership, and see it as an assault on the raison d'être and ethos of public art institutions. An online petition against the Louvre deal has been posted on the French website *La Tribune de L'Art* and signed by more than 4000 people - including many art experts, curators, historians, and archaeologists. The petition, which was drawn by the arts writer Didier Rykner, proclaims, 'Our museums are not for sale' (in Astier 2007). Much of this criticism centres on the fact that the partnership will allow Abu Dhabi to lease art works from the Louvre and other French museums for a certain period of time, raising the fear that such deals might alter and fragment France's national art collection. Criticism has also been directed at the use of the Louvre's identity and the risk of turning this institution into a commercial brand by cashing in on its name. Philippe Regnier, the editor of *Journal Des Arts*, declares (in Maher 2007) that

> The only really troubling thing in this project is that Abu Dhabi was determined to acquire a [desirable] name - in this case that of the Louvre, the name of the most prestigious museum in the world - and France sold the name of the Louvre like one might sell the name of a shoe store, or a store for ready-to-wear clothes. In other words, like a brand name […] And with that, you get into a whole new view [of museums] that is no longer simply artistic but is also very much commercial.

What is striking about these reactions and views, be they positive or negative, is that they hardly question the taken for granted authority of established cultural institutions such as the Louvre, while exhibiting a tendency to perpetuate the enduring rhetoric concerning the divide between the West and the East as though these were monolithic blocks with unshakeable and impenetrable identities. As Skluzacek (2010: 33) succinctly puts it, '[a] critical viewer will wonder why administrators from […] a national collection like France's Musée du Louvre are necessarily the experts on all the world's cultures. Why have they been given the authority to identify the best examples of non-Western art to complement a universal dialogue?'

Cultural capital

To be sure, many of these dynamics and exchanges can be seen as partaking of what Bourdieu (1980; 1984; 1986) famously referred to as the field of 'cultural capital', a concept that is widely used in various academic disciplines to articulate the link between economy, social class and culture. Central to this concept is the idea that culture is more than merely the expression of shared values, traditions and identity, but is itself an important asset and a generative source of power that can be converted to other forms of capital, including economic ones. Unlike economic capital, however, cultural capital is not easily obtainable but is acquired through a life-time as a result of exposure to social circumstances and conditions. Bourdieu's work indicates that the acquisition of cultural capital is closely related to social origins. Cultural capital is inculcated initially during childhood through one's family upbringing and social class position. It is then developed further through the educational system, which provides a platform for investment in cultural consumption and acquisition, and a certificate to prove it. But as Blunden (2004) notes 'Bourdieu's research shows that "scholastic" culture can never quite duplicate the ease and depth of the cultural capital acquired by constant exposure at home', and as education is now open to wider sections of the population, the struggle goes on to redefine legitimacy and qualifications.

For Bourdieu, capital ultimately involves power insofar as its accumulation and distribution ends up determining one's social standing and life opportunities. Cultural capital is no exception, to the extent that it represents the capacity to 'play the culture game' and internalize appropriate manners and tastes that can ' identify you to others as a person of a culture […] with a likely trajectory in life (declining or rising), likely to have access to certain circles or not' (Blunden 2004). Cultural capital, as such, enables individuals and groups to create relations of 'distinction' (Bourdieu 1980; 1984; 1986) and thereby establish or sustain social hierarchies and class differentiations:

> It has the potential to flow out of localities and to cross the borders of trade, region and nation in the form, say, of universal academic qualifications […] Cultural capital is not just accumulated by individuals, it is institutionalized and its accumulation presupposes the guarantees of cultural monopolies such as academies, schools, universities and museums (Fyfe 2004: 49).

Indeed, institutions play a crucial role in the acquisition, circulation and endorsement of cultural capital, insofar as they act as entities that set and guarantee the value of a given product, symbol or qualification, decide on what counts and qualifies as knowledge and culture, and demarcate between what is worthy of official recognition and what is not. This is 'the performative magic of the power of instituting, the power to show forth and secure belief or, in a word, to impose recognition' (Bourdieu 1986: 51).

Museums are in fact powerful engines when it comes to the accumulation, institution, distribution and incorporation of cultural capital. Through their locations (often at the heart of city), architecture (often exhibiting grandeur and ambition), collections (often presented as being emblematic of individual genius and cultural triumph) and power to select and classify things, museums act 'on the universe of objects to make public those cultural differences that count as original art and to suppress those that do not' (Fyfe 2004: 49). Their function is that of distinction, inclusion and exclusion, which exerts authority on the domain of cultural production and transmission by conferring or denying institutional recognition.

Seen through this Bourdieusian lens, it is possible to understand the rationalities

underpinning the Louvre-Abu Dhabi deal as being embedded in the perception and attribution of the Louvre *as* cultural capital. For Abu Dhabi, it is a matter of gaining legitimacy and symbolic power by proxy in the form of identification, brand association and acquisition of that which has already been labelled and established as world-famous high art. For France, it is a matter of converting the cultural capital embodied in the figure of the Louvre, and which has been accumulated throughout the centuries, into a substantial economic capital which in turn also recursively serves to reaffirm the weight, value and power ascribed to this institution, and to recycle the message that France is 'the principal heir to civilization's highest achievements' (Duncan and Wallach 1980: 463). This is a case of how culture becomes a site of struggle for distinction and the accumulation of both symbolic and material capital.

Architecture

> Besides the display of the actual art objects in the design of museums, the architecture has to deal with a set of fascinating relationships: the civic grandeur, the public experience, the relationship of the individual viewer to the individual object, as well as the relationship of the art and the space to the general surroundings.
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> Richard Meier in Evans, 'Hard-Branding the Cultural City: From Prado to Prada' (2003: 429)

Architecture, in addition to name and brand association, is also deployed as a crucial strategy for augmenting Abu Dhabi's cultural capital and world reputation, and for building its brand identity (after all, visitors are often attracted by museum buildings as much as the art residing within them). This is not only the case with the Louvre Abu Dhabi, designed by Jean Nouvel, but the entire Saadiyat project, dubbed a 'highbrow cultural theme park' (Burleigh 2013). As Wei (2008: 65) elucidates, '[the] component of architecture *is* the personality and image of the Abu Dhabi project because they are starting from square one. Celebrity architects such as Frank Gehry, Jean Nouvel, and Zaha Hadid are being used to sensationalize the district'.

Importantly, whereas the name 'Louvre' is used for brand 'association', the architecture of the Louvre Abu Dhabi, on the other hand, can be seen as a strategy of 'differentiation'. For this museum will bear no visual resemblance to its parent institution. Instead, the design of the building is very much inspired by Arabian architecture and Islamic design, and comprises a man-made archipelago that 'draws on traditional methods of passive cooling, echoing the woven palm-frond roofs that are typical of the region' (Architizer 2013). It features a distinctive 180-meter-wide perforated dome, which allows the diffusion of natural light into the complex, evoking 'the atmosphere of a shady oasis within the desert landscape' (Architizer 2013). The 'skin' of the dome is inspired by the '*Mushrabiya*'[4] (TDIC 2013) and offers greater interaction between the museum's interior spaces and outside environment in a way that is reminiscent of the *souk*[5] experience. Nouvel (in UAE Interact n.d.) poetically describes the vision and context of the Louvre Abu Dhabi in the following terms:

> The island offers a harsh landscape, tempered by its meeting with the channel, a striking image of the aridity of the earth versus the fluidity of the waters. These fired the imagination towards unknown cities buried deep into the sands or sunk under water. These dreamy thoughts have merged into a simple plan of an archaeological field revived as a small city, a cluster of nearly one-row buildings along a leisurely promenade. This micro-city requires a micro-climate that would give the visitor a feeling of entering a different world. The building is covered with a large dome, a form common to all civilisations. This one is made of a web of different patterns interlaced into a translucent ceiling which lets a diffuse, magical light come through in the best tradition of great Arabian architecture. Water is given a crucial role, both in reflecting every part of the building and acting as a psyche, and in creating, with a little help from the wind, a comfortable micro-climate.
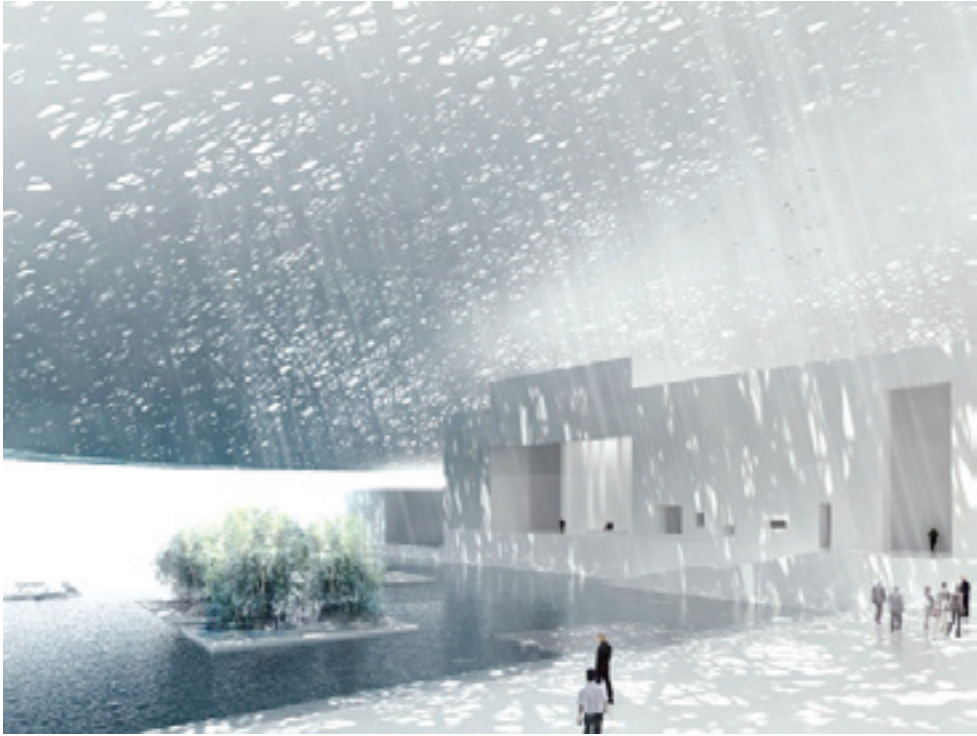
Image 3. Louvre Abu Dhabi, floating dome. Source: Ateliers Jean Nouvel

Through its distinct design and landmark architecture, the Louvre Abu Dhabi is seeking to create a strong sense of difference and architectural authenticity that sets it apart from its parent institution and other universal museums. Conceptually, Nouvel's design aims to be in tune with the historical and geographical milieu of the museum and its natural surroundings while attempting to avoid 'being either a dull translation of this reality or a pleonasm meaning boredom and convention' (Ateliers Jean Nouvel in Furuto 2012). The building, whose design and construction cost amounts to 108 million US Dollars, will certainly be an important aspect vis-à-vis the degree of the branding success of Abu Dhabi's cultural projects and its ability to build a museum identity of its own and draw tourism into the region.

Identity

The substantial investment in these components of architecture, art collection and brand name is therefore part and parcel of the overall legitimation strategy adopted by the Louvre Abu Dhabi in order to achieve greater exposure and status, and instant recognition within the international art and museums scene. At stake also is the desire to build a positive image for the Arab world and (re)construct an identity for the region. For museums, after all, are 'identity machines' (McClellan 2012: 278) that often play a significant role in cementing the notion of nationhood, creating a sense of communal identity and origin, and staking a claim of civilization and progress. According to Duncan (1991: 89), 'having a bigger and better art museum is a sign of political virtue and national identity – of being recognizably a member of the civilized community of modern, liberal nations'. As discussed earlier in relation to the history of the Louvre, the evolution of this museum into a public art museum was very much linked to the process of nation-building and the celebration of the symbolic values of democracy, citizenship and national identity.

In the case of Abu Dhabi, the entire Saadiyat Island is indeed also as much an identity project as it is an urban or a touristic one. Its museum developments are presented with the

same double challenge that is currently facing new museums in the rest of the Arab world: that is, 'asserting a new global status while countering incidents that feed negative impressions in the West of a regressive Islamic ideology in the region' (McClellan 2012: 279). So, embedded within Abu Dhabi's museum projects, such as the Louvre, is a recurring rhetoric of cross-cultural understanding, co-existence and bridge-building through which Abu Dhabi is seeking to promote itself as a civilized, safe and progressive city to visit and to live in, and as a place that truly embodies a brand of 'Good Islam' (McClellan 2012: 281). In its *Plan Abu Dhabi 2030*, Abu Dhabi's Urban Planning Council (n.d.: 7, 11, 76) makes the explicit link between 'identity' and 'opportunity' by asserting that

> Abu Dhabi has the rare opportunity to offer a special combination of features in its urban identity: an authentic and safe but also progressive and open Arab city; a personality garnered from the desert and the sea; a traditional way of life but with the latest 21st century options; and a place of business but also of government and culture […] The city will need monumental spaces and processional routes for National commemoration. As the city focuses urban growth into districts, several key areas should emerge as iconic precincts, such as the Cultural District on Saadiyat Island, the Palace Row, and the Embassy District […] What emerges with the consolidation of this Capital City Framework is a distinct Royal City, a National place triangulating the key aspects of Abu Dhabi and UAE identity: state, culture, and religion.

The Louvre Abu Dhabi is but one example of this wider urban vision and identity-defining strategy. In such a context, the museum is anticipated to act as a symbol of successful cultural diplomacy (with the UAE-France relationship being exemplary). It is often discursively constructed in terms of what Jacques Chirac described, when referring to the Louvre agreement, as 'a certain idea of the world in which people can be not only proud of their roots and identity, but also open to the Other and conscious of the equal dignity of all cultures' (in McClellan 2012: 281). The question remains, however, as to how such a vision can be realized especially in a country where censorship exists[6] and the class structure is heavily demarcated and racialized.

Abu Dhabi has already been criticized repeatedly for the working conditions of migrant labourers building its cultural institutions. In March 2011, for instance, a petition was launched by Gulf Labor, which more than 1000 artists signed, calling for the boycott of Guggenheim over the treatment of migrant workers on Saadiyat Island (see gulflabor.org). Among the noted concerns are the overcrowded housing conditions of workers, most of whom are from the Indian subcontinent, indebtedness due to the required recruitment fees prior to employment, confiscation of passports, low wages, lack of health insurance provision and adequate annual leave allowance, threat of deportation and so on[7]. This is not the first instance of protest against work conditions in the UAE. Back in 2007, the Human Rights Watch asked the French government to publicly and actively commit to ensuring respect for international labour rights for those involved in the construction and maintenance of the Louvre's branch in Abu Dhabi[8]. And in 2009, the organization requested that the French Museum Agency 'should urgently obtain enforceable contractual guarantees that construction companies will protect workers' fundamental rights on their projects' (Human Rights Watch 2009). Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch, Leah Whitson, argued that such

> institutions need to show that they will not tolerate or benefit from the gross exploitation of these migrant workers […] The vague assurances they've received from their development partners are hollow substitutes for firm contractual agreements that their projects will be different from business as usual in Abu Dhabi (Human Rights Watch 2009).

More recently, a collation of international artists has started a '52 weeks' campaign to protest against the labour conditions on Saadiyat Island. Over the year 2014, artists and members of Gulf Labor exhibited, on a weekly basis, artwork that highlights the living and working conditions of workers building cultural institutions in Abu Dhabi[9].

Apart from censorship and these human rights-based concerns, questions are also arising in terms of whether cultural and museum developments, such as the Louvre Abu

Dhabi, are happening at the expense of a grassroots arts scene and with a bias towards fine art and Western-endorsed approaches and categories over other forms of artistic expression central to the Islamic tradition – such as calligraphy, ceramics, textiles and oral culture (see Batty 2012; Cocks 2009). Hans Ulrich Obrist, co-director of the Serpentine Gallery in London, captured some of these concerns when he argued that there is a danger being posed by the 'homogenising force' of globalization. 'The danger is things start to look the same. Local voices disappear if [culture is] just an import. But if there's a hybridisation it could be fascinating.' (in Batty 2012). Or again, 'the Emirates have poured millions of dollars into initiatives that seek to replicate the market-driven, politically influenced arts scenes found in New York and London' (Farhat in McClellan 2012: 287).

While these concerns are warranted given the observed dynamics between major Western institutions and the Gulf region (of which the Louvre Abu Dhabi is an important example) together with their resulting influences, it should also be borne in mind that the cultural landscape and art scenes in the UAE and neighbouring countries are by no means homogenous. Trips I conducted recently throughout the UAE and Qatar made me realize and witness at first-hand the hybridity of these places and their nuanced cultural scenes that cannot be subsumed under one description or vision. In the case of the UAE, in particular, it seems that each of its major emirates is cultivating a distinct cultural identity for itself with Dubai's focus being primarily on commercial art and some grassroots activities (see, for instance, the activities in Al Quoz district[10], Dubai International Financial Centre[11] and Traffic[12]), Abu Dhabi's focus on grand-scale museums (as discussed earlier) and Sharjah's focus on heritage and the preservation of the region's history and culture (epitomized in the series of specialized museums in this city) as well as the advancement of contemporary performances and international programmes managed by the Sharjah Art Foundation and the Barjeel Foundation. Perhaps after all, franchise museum models and grassroots experimental spaces are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as hybridity can allow for the actualization of both.

Hybridity, however, is often ignored in the media reports covering the nascent art scene of the Gulf, as debates tend to be polarized between attitudes of cynicism on the one hand and celebration on the other, and in ways that reduce the region into a homogenous entity bypassing the reality of its cultural scenes. What also tends to be overlooked is how the UAE and Qatar too are not merely reliant on Western institutions to develop their cultural industries, but are increasingly turning towards Asia to reinforce the evolution of their cultural scenes and museumscape. This can be witnessed, for instance, through the growing presence of Asian galleries in Art Dubai fairs, and the hosting of Asian artists' shows in Doha's museums, etc. These developing ties, as Batty (2012) argues, are 'as much about shrugging off the Orientalist relationship with Western culture as a reflection of the new economic world order.'

Doubtless, issues of censorship, human rights, orientalism and globalization will remain something that emerging cultural industries, such as those of the UAE, will have to grapple with as they try to carve a space within the global cultural market and project themselves onto the international stage. Underlying these concerns and developments is also the question of audiences and access. For whom are these cultural initiatives envisioned? This is a highly important issue given the interesting population makeup of the region. In the UAE, for instance, where 80 per cent of the population are transient migrant workers, questions immediately arise with regard to the effect of transnationalism on what is or can be curated, transmitted and exhibited, what 'local' means in such a highly heterogeneous, differentiated and hierarchical demographic context, and whether the concept of nation is losing or gaining importance when citizenship is more fluid and migration is in a constant state of flux. In the case of the new museum projects, one should ask: how relevant to the cultural worldview of the Indian construction worker, for instance, is a branch of the Louvre managed by a well-paid French agency? To what extent do museums' architectural spaces, designed to make an impact and gain prestige, actually feel condescending, alienating and excluding for large groups of the population?[13] How important is the 'native' population, however small, to the raison d'être of these museums and to the success of their operations? How can museums achieve a broader spectrum of voices and reach out to wider audiences when the different segments of society, be they citizen members of the ruling families, wealthy diasporic elite or Bangladeshi workers, do not necessarily share same cultural points of reference?

These questions bring us back to Pierre Bourdieu for whom the cultural field, as discussed earlier, is by no means a flat, neutral or equal space but one that is inextricably linked to hierarchies, distinctions and power struggles. For Bourdieu, audience engagement with and appreciation of art and culture is a 'trained' capacity, access to which is not always equally distributed among social strata. He speculates (1968[1984]: 2) that '[a]ny deciphering operation [of art and culture] requires a more or less complex code which has been more or less completely mastered'. In fact, 'the work of art considered as a symbolic good only exists as such for a person who has the means to appropriate it, or in other words, to decipher it' (Bourdieu 1968 [1984]: 7). Therefore, individuals must learn to read and understand a work of art just as they must learn how to read the printed word. Those 'lacking either appropriate family background or educational experiences, remain deprived of the means for appropriating the high arts throughout their lives' (DiMaggio and Useem 1978: 149). So, in following Bourdieu's line of argument, one can postulate that (successful) processes of cultural developments are/ should not only be a matter of building grand cultural projects and new institutions, but also a matter of grooming and inclusively supporting the nation to embrace these developments and boost its cultural capital. But the question remains as to who 'belongs' to the 'nation' in the first place and who gets access to the benefits of this cultural grooming. Also, if cultural capital is inherently implicated in social inequalities, as Bourdieu makes us believe, how can we then rethink culture itself in ways that are not amenable to the enduring modes of social exclusion and hierarchy? In other words, is it possible to think of culture and art beyond distinctions? So perhaps the question here is not so much a matter of getting all the individuals full of the correct cultural capital to appreciate the contents of the museum, but a matter of changing the perception of cultural capital itself and its link to prestige so that the culture that these individuals are comfortable with might appear in museums. This is a question that concerns not only the individual level of cultural capital but also the state level whereby culture, as we have seen through the example of the Louvre and its branch in Abu Dhabi, is often construed and mobilized as an instrument of legitimation and distinction rather than a vehicle to genuinely engage with or reflect the diverse audiences and their everyday cultures.

In a way, many of the challenges and dynamics surrounding cultural developments in the Gulf and elsewhere need not be seen as a *fait accompli* or in a pessimistic fashion (as is often the case with Bourdieu's analysis and arguments), but also as an *opportunity* to rethink anew the meaning and function of museums and culture in society, and their wider ethical and geopolitical implications. As McClellan (2012: 288) puts it, '[w]ith the new museums will come critical museology, holding those institutions accountable for the utopian rhetoric of their charters.' This, in turn, has undoubtedly the potential to open up a space for critical debates and strengthen engagement with the ethics of new and existing museums from a transnational standpoint and in light of the exigencies of a globalized, postcolonial world. Countries such as the UAE and Qatar have a great, even enviable, opportunity to create something completely new and become pioneers in the re-mapping and reconfiguration of cultural industries globally, if they are willing, not only rhetorically but also in deed, to found their developments on the ethos of inclusivity, openness, experimentation, risk-taking, non-exploitation and curatorial courage. This can be in terms of developing new critical and reflective practices and methodologies of curation and exhibition that are mindful of the challenges and contexts outlined in this paper, going beyond the rigid definitions of high culture and the anthropocentric paradigms of museology, embracing diversity not only vis-à-vis audience access and engagement, but also in terms of providing a space for themes and artworks that are representative of the human experience in all its shades and varieties and in ways that resist the impulse of censorship, and improving the working conditions of those involved in the building of new cultural institutions and the maintenance of their operations. As Edson (1997: 190) argues 'ethical correctness must extend to every aspect of an institution's activities'.

The unique circumstance of countries like the UAE and Qatar is that they are unencumbered by hundreds of years of (Western) art history and conventional curatorial tradition, or with financial strains. Having the confidence needed to create their own art models, rather than merely importing or replicating internationally established ones, will certainly be a defining factor with regard to whether these countries will be able to achieve their ambitious aspirations in the field of art and culture.

But whether the Gulf will seize this moment of opportunity and possibility or let it pass by is something that remains to be seen.

Conclusion

Museums and cultural developments are on the rise in the Gulf region. Over the past few years, the United Arab Emirates has emerged as one of the most important cultural centres of the Arab world. With the development of the Saadiyat Island, the capital Abu Dhabi is becoming home to some of the most ambitious cultural and museum projects in the Gulf. In this article we considered the example of the Louvre Abu Dhabi, looking closely at the context and dynamics of this high-profile project. Our discussion has mainly revolved around the link between branding and legitimation in relation to the partnership model between the Louvre and its Abu Dhabi branch, a model that epitomizes the current shift towards the globalization of museum brands and the rise of the 'entrepreneurial museum' (Vivant 2011). Branding, as we argue in this paper, has become a common feature of museum processes and urban development strategies. It enables established museums, such as the Louvre, to capitalize on their reputation and prestige for financial gain, while allowing new institutions and developing cities to harness the power of already established brand names to quickly gain publicity and legitimacy on the world stage of art and culture. So much so that some cities, as Vivant (2011: 112) argues, find it 'easier to pay for a brand than to create a new museum and build-up its legitimacy and reputation from the ground up'.

Manufacturing legitimacy through branding in the domain of culture is very much about the circulation of symbolic value and the acquisition of the needed cultural capital, a process in which institutions play a primary role. The Louvre-Abu Dhabi partnership deal is an example of how culture itself becomes a platform for the accumulation of both symbolic and material capital in the Bourdieusian sense. For France, the deal involves the conversion of the cultural capital, embodied in the figure of the Louvre, into an economic one. For Abu Dhabi, the deal represents an opportunity to gain legitimacy and reputation by proxy through the use of a world-renowned brand.

The legitimizing role of branding is also performed through architecture. In the case of the Louvre Abu Dhabi, this is manifested in terms of both the grand scale nature of the museum building itself and the choice of a celebrity architect, Jean Nouvel, to design the museum. Both are meant to 'spectacularize' the urban environment of Abu Dhabi and add to the symbolic value of the Emirate, while also providing a link with the local history and architecture of the place. Importantly, rather than representing an iterative architectural version of the original Louvre, the design of the Abu Dhabi branch of the Louvre is inspired by Arabian architecture and Islamic Design, bearing no resemblance to its parent museum. In this instance, architecture acts at once as a branding mechanism of legitimation through the use of 'starchitect' signature and a strategy of identity and differentiation through the deployment of a geographically and historically inspired design.

Speaking of the Cultural District in the Saadiyat Island, Ponzini (2011: 258) asserts that the symbolic value of the District 'is linked to the image of the nation and strengthened by the artistic aura of international iconic architecture'. Indeed, this argument is not only true of the case of the Cultural District or the Louvre Abu Dhabi but also relevant to the original Louvre itself. As shown in this article and elsewhere (Duncan and Wallach 1980), the transition of the Louvre from being a royal space to a public museum is strongly linked to the building of a national identity for France and presenting the museum as a symbol of civilization and democracy. Likewise, the initiative of the Cultural District of the Saadyiat Island and its museums is also envisioned as an identity-defining project as much as a cultural or urban one. Its purpose is to represent Abu Dhabi as a progressive, open and civilized place to visit, work and live. After all, 'museums are one of the requisite status symbols of a developed country' (Lorch 2015). Looking at satellite museums in relation to their parent museums is therefore important for understanding their contextual similarities and differences, and uncovering what values and ideologies are being carried over into these new museum projects.

Museum developments in the Gulf, such as the Louvre Abu Dhabi, have been causing controversy from the start, and before they even open. From issues of censorship to the working conditions of construction workers on the Saadiyat Island, from concerns with the risk of cultural homogenization related to the globalization of museums to the risk concerning the occlusion of grassroots activities, many socio-political and ethical questions are arising with regard to the raison d'être of such museum projects and the limits of franchised culture. In this article, we articulated some of these concerns and debates, providing a reflection on the need to attend to the hybridity of the UAE and the Gulf cultural landscape whereby franchise museum models and grassroots experimental spaces need not be regarded as mutually exclusive or in opposition. This discussion has led us to consider the question of audience in light of the highly migrant-rich, diverse and hierarchical nature of the UAE population.

Finally, whilst the future of museum developments in the UAE and the Gulf in general is still a relatively open-ended question, it is nonetheless evident that such eye-catching projects present us with a valid case study for considering the dynamics of cultural diplomacy and cross-national partnerships, the changing ethos of museums and the increasing neoliberalization of cultural institutions. As McClellan (2012: 289) puts it, 'Abu Dhabi and neighbouring Gulf States have committed to creating what promises to be a dynamic and perhaps paradigm-altering new museumscape in one of the most rapidly evolving parts of the world'. Paying close attention to such developments is surely a necessary task if we are to understand the ramifications of this emerging museumscape together with its opportunities and challenges.

Notes

[1]   In 2011, Qatar was ranked as the world's biggest art buyer after an extensive buying spree by its royal family (Elkamel 2011).

[2]   See TDIC (Tourism and Development Investment Company): http://www.tdic.ae/en/section/projects/cultural-1

[3]   See, http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/louvre-museum-opens

[4]   Mushrabiyas emerged as 'an artistic and decorative element as early as the 14th century. Their original function was to shade alcoves where water was stored to cool. As the screens became more decorative their use was expanded to cover windows in private quarters to allow for airflow and cooling of residents. Simultaneously they act as a window, curtain, air conditioner and refrigerator. Traditionally, these screens are made out of wood and intricately carved with lines from the Quran or motifs of water ewers and hanging lamps' (Skluzacek 2010: 44).

[5]   A local market found across the Arab world.

[6]   See, for example, the controversy concerning the sudden dismissal of Jack Persekian, Artistic Director of Sharjah International Art Biennial in April 2011, following a public outcry over the perceived offensive content of Mustafa Benfodil's artwork exhibited during the biennial (see, http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/bien/sharjah_biennale/2011/jack_persekian_dismissed). Also, in March 2015, New York University professor Andrew Ross

has been barred from traveling to the United Arab Emirates following his criticism of the labor conditions there. It is worth remembering, though, that censorship is not unique to the Arab world. As McClellan (2012: 287) rightly argues, 'all societies have their pressure points and that politics and museums do not mix well anywhere. How likely is it to see an exhibition of Pro-Palestinian art in a mainstream American museum?'

7   For more details see Human Rights Watch report *The Island of Happiness*: http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/uae0509web_4.pdf

8   See, http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2007/07/18/france-abu-dhabi-louvre-must-respect-labor-rights

9   See, https://www.facebook.com/gulflaborgroup

10   Where old warehouses were turned into galleries and studios.

11   Where many high-end commercial galleries are located together with the international art fair, Art Dubai and the government body, Dubai Culture and Arts Authority.

12   A gallery in Dubai that functions as a forum for research and development, social studies and exhibition.

13   In the museums I visited during my trip in the UAE and Qatar, the number of security guards seemed to outdo the number of visitors. This indicates the lack of 'local' interest and audiences (as most visitors seemed to be either tourists or expats). One relevant question is whether architectural development is part of what is alienating audiences, especially when considered in light of the experience of older museums such as the former Qatar National Museum, which opened in 1975 and is currently closed. This museum was very popular and successful with the local audience, but its building and design would now seem rather provincial and old fashioned compared with the aspiration and scale of development taking place throughout the Gulf cities. How to strike a balance between modesty and aspirational building in a way that will resonate with audiences is a key question for future developments.

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Image 1: Louvre Abu Dhabi, aerial view and site plan. Source: Buro Happold, http://www.burohappold.com/projects/project/louvre-abu-dhabi-77/

Image 2: Louvre Museum. Source: Jacques Brinon/AP Photo, http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/artblog/2007/aug/23/virtualartrealmoney

Image 3: Louvre Abu Dhabi, floating dome. Source: Ateliers Jean Nouvel, http://thesuperslice.com/2012/12/12/the-louvre-abu-dhabi-museum-ateliers-jean-nouvel/

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