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ADAM NADOLNY
ORCID: 0000-0003-3766-7020
Poznan University of Technology, Poland

INTRODUCTION TO THE "COLLAGE CITY": MASIRAH ISLAND, SULTANATE OF OMAN. A CASE STUDY

WPROWADZENIE DO KONCEPCJI „MIASTA KOLAŻU" NA PRZYKŁADZIE WYSPY MASIRAH, SUŁTANAT OMANU

Abstract

Masirah Island in Sultanet of Oman offers a fascinating opportunity to investigate the idea of the collage city, a theoretical framework put out by the architects Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter. The premise that cities are not one homogeneous entity but rather a collection of diverse communities is the foundation of the collage city concept. It is crucial to take into account the theories and notions put out also by the Italian architectural group Superstudio while thinking about the idea of future urbanization. The "Continuous Monument" project by Superstudio, which envisioned a vast, continuous structure that would span the entire world, is one of their most well-known creations. The question is, how can we transform it today?

Keywords: architecture, collage city, Oman, Superstudio

Streszczenie

Wyspa Masirah w Sułtanacie w Omanie oferuje fascynującą okazję do zbadania idei miasta kolażu, teoretycznej ramy opracowanej przez architektów Colina Rowe'a i Freda Koettera. Założenie, że miasta nie są jedną jednorodną całością, ale raczej zbiorem różnorodnych społeczności, jest podstawą koncepcji miasta kolażu. Rozważając ideę przyszłej urbanizacji, należy wziąć pod uwagę teorie i koncepcje wysuwane także przez włoską grupę architektoniczną Superstudio. Projekt „Continuous Monument" autorstwa Superstudio, który przewidywał rozległą, ciągłą strukturę obejmującą cały świat, jest jednym z ich najbardziej znanych dzieł. Pytanie brzmi: jak możemy to dzisiaj przekształcić?

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, collage city, Oman, Superstudio

1. INTRODUCTION

The formation of urbanized spaces in many corners of the modern world takes place on the principle of some kind of adding buildings and objects to the resulting structure, which is the city. The urbanization of the Middle East is primarily associated with places such as Dubai. The generally accepted perception of this part of the world by one city

is, in a sense, quite confusing. Creating a city is creating spaces and quarters, building, that's how we see it from a European perspective. Nevertheless, the reality of creating and changing the modern Arab world[1] is more complex. New urbanization changes space and this is a continuous phenomenon.

The Sultanate of Oman is the region of the Arabian Peninsula that has not yet been thoroughly investigated or assessed in terms of potential future urbanisation. This cultural region has over 1000 years of history of civilization[2]. Oman has experienced a variety of historical outcomes because of its location, from decline to prosperity. It was also influenced by Portuguese and British mines in Europe because it was near the travelled trade routes.

The Sultanate of Oman is not only a permanent continent of the Arabian Peninsula, but also the island of Masirah, which has become the field of research presented in this text. It is an island located on the eastern coast of Oman, in the Arab Sea. Due to its strategic location over the centuries,[3] it was an important part of Oman's defense system, as well as an important military base for the British until 1977. There are many beaches and little trees on the island's landscape. They are accompanied by small spatial structures, created by residents at the intersection of local roads and paths. The formation of space takes place in a rather chaotic way, due to the fact that the main type of economic activity is fishing and poorly developed tourism, despite the beautiful landscapes. This situation can be dictated by the issue of accessibility of the island, which can only be reached by boat or ferry from the mainland.

This dreamy and hot landscape has become the author's field of research on the application of the collage city concept, in the design activities carried out as part of a scientific internship at the German University of Technology in Oman[4].

The opportunity to work with young architects has led to the search for answers to the question of what a city of the past should be, or how to create, create and implement design activities in relation to poorly urbanized areas such as the mentioned island. The change in its nature is also envisaged as part of the strategy for the development of the Sultanate of Oman by 2040, from a poorly urbanized area to a new tourist destination.

Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter's[5] theoretical considerations included the concept of a collage city. The creation of a space that, by drawing on past achievements in urban design, becomes a new added value, an undeniable turning point in the discussion of the relationships between space and buildings in the second half of the twentieth century. Oman's new urbanisation, which transformed the country's image in the late 1980s, became undeniably a source of debate about how modernity should be defined.

The search for the connections of the urban present, and their transposition towards modernity, was also at the heart of the Italian design group Superstudio[6]. Futuristic collages,

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[1] A. Rippin, *The Islamic World*, Routledge, London, New York 2008, p. 98.

[2] P. Risso, *Oman & Muscat an early modern history*, Croom Helm, London 1986, p. 2.

[3] R. Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar. Roots of British domination,* Routledge, London, New York 2002, p. 101.

[4] The study included 90 GUTech students as part of classes and workshops on the topic of Urban Planning History II, which were held at the First degree of engineering studies (Msc).

[5] C. Rowe, F. Koetter, *Collage* City, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 1979, p. 45.

[6] L. Ciccarelli, C. Melhuish (eds.), *Post-war Architecture between Italy and the UK. Exchanges and Transcultural Influences*, UCL Press, London 2021, p. 98.

a newly defined reality re-closed in the framework of geometric clusters and shapes,[7] have become the starting point for the creation of Omani students' collages.



Ill. 1. Picture of the southern part of the Masirah Island shows distinctive fishing boats. Photo by A. Nadolny.

The research was aimed at examining how theoretical and historical urban concepts can translate into the design work of future architects. It was significant to look at the present considerations from the present perspective. An interesting point of the design activities was the desire to confront the theory, as well as the attempt to create a new space, shaped by means of volumes and planes. The project activities were divided into four subgroups. The first subgroup is Urbanised Landscape, the second is City and Nature, the third is Sea and Tree, and the fourth is Shelter for Beach Tourism. The students were split into 14 project groups, each with a different number of team members ranging from one to five.

2. COLLAGE NO. 1 – MASIRAH URBANIZED LANDSCAPE

In response to the assumptions of the collage concept related to the urbanized landscape, the students were asked to use its technique to look at the open landscapes of the island from the perspective of the future architect, for whom an important aspect will be the question of combining the climate and colourfulness of the local island with the challenges of the present. This contemporary issue has been diagnosed as a spatial framework that allows, on the one

[7] F. Quesada, *Superstudio 1966–1973: From the World Without Objects to the Universal Grid*, "Footprint" 2011, no. 8, pp. 23–34.

hand, for a creative search for themes, and on the other, is an attempt to create a creative approach to a given design theme. An important factor in these searches was the issue of understanding the concept of the spirit of space and time with some kind of new idea of how the island should look in the future.

If we would like to diagnose the new achievements of future architects in this regard, then these creative activities can be divided into two basic groups. The first concerns the creation of collages in which the urbanized space was defined by strong architectural accents and the significant accumulation of these elements in space. In creating a new landscape as part of the design activities, students used the creation of landscapes based on spaces that for them were the result of success and prestige. Many of the presented projects appealed to the numerous tower buildings and concrete roads that greatly changed the landscape. You could have had the impression that young architects are still fascinated by cities like Dubai or Hong Kong. This type of work accounted for approximately 60% in the study group of 14 project teams. The second direction that appeared in the cited work is an attempt to use the colour of the local island and to create a kind of link between the past and the present. Working in this spirit is definitely less difficult. Such a state of affairs may be somehow dictated by the lack of conviction of the younger generation as to the issues, values and importance of the natural landscape as a significant element of local identity.

Of course, they believe in its worth, but the built environment, or the perception of architecture through the lens of modernity, is very important to them. The urbanised landscape's modernity is undeniably valuable, but there is no doubt in the mind of the educator that students are fascinated by modernity. However, in accordance with the demands of the Superstudio, it is worth considering the significance of modernity for contemporary architects. Creating new structures has become a less creative phenomenon than it once was. Change itself becomes a subject, a kind of spatial game between urbanised areas.

3. COLLAGE NO. 2 – MASIRAH CITY AND NATURE

According to the Superstudio concept, the structure of a modern city was frequently modelled after a game of space, in which the basic spatial components continued to reference the archetype of architecture, which is made up of basic geometric shapes like rectangles, squares, cones, and others. The site of the temporary market was one of the island's locations that sparked conversation. Considerations on how to use the building's shape in the concept of a collage city have been sparked by its cubic architecture, which is from the turn of the 20th century and dates to the 1980s and 1990s. The two projects that were chosen for student's feedback are listed below.

- Masirah is a nice land that lacks trees and facilities hence we added a Telefrik system which takes you to the mountain with a fantastic view. Additionally, it takes you across the city, so it functions as both an activity and a mode of transport. We also provided trees along the road because the sun is unbearable. With the use of trees in conjunction with the wind breeze from the sea, people would be able to walk across the shoreline[8].

[8] The description of the City and Nature collage. Design team: Ms Shamma Al Balushi, Mr Mohammed Al Masruri, Ms Hafsa Al Masroori, Ms Rayyan Al Salti, Ms Dorar Al Saadi.

- With this collage we tried to implement how the environment around the beach could look like when it was near the city, by adding common food trucks, an amusement park and also a live concert on the beach. These things would mostly be found around cities but could also be implemented around nature, such as the beach[9].

The goal of this ambitious projects was to create Masirah Island which will serve as a showcase for sustainable development, livability, and environmental awareness. It is a testament to the students' commitment to achieving a delicate balance between urban development and the preservation of nature's beauty because it is located amidst breathtaking natural landscapes. The meticulous consideration given to green areas and ecological systems within the city is one of the project's defining features. For the city to continue to have a strong connection to nature, the students carefully planned parks, gardens, and greenways throughout the area. In addition to providing residents with a break from the hectic city life, these green spaces also act as crucial habitats for various plants and animals, fostering biodiversity and ecological sustainability. In addition to its environmental considerations, Masirah Island also prioritizes the well-being and quality of life for its residents. The students have designed a pedestrian-friendly city with walkways, bicycle lanes, and efficient public transportation systems that promote active and sustainable modes of commuting. The city boasts modern amenities such as healthcare facilities, educational institutions, and recreational centers, ensuring that the needs of its residents are well catered to within a compact and cohesive urban environment.



Ill. 2. Temporary market building of the southern part of the Masirah Island. Photo by A. Nadolny.

[9] The description of the City and Nature collage. Design team: Ms. Shaima Al Balushi, Ms. Taima Al Maamari, Ms. Malak Al Balushi, Ms. Basma Al Naamani.

The students have worked closely with local "imaginary communities", conducting workshops and awareness campaigns to educate residents about sustainable living practices and the importance of preserving nature. By actively involving the community in the project, the students have fostered a sense of ownership and pride, empowering individuals to take an active role in shaping the local identity.



Ill. 3. Graphical representation of the idea of the Collage no. 2, City and Nature. Authors: Ms. Shaima Al Balushi, Ms. Taima Al Maamari, Ms. Malak Al Balushi, Ms. Basma Al Naamani.

4. COLLAGE NO. 3 – MASIRAH SEA AND TREE

The students collage project titled Masirah Sea and Tree captures the mesmerizing beauty of nature's two contrasting yet interconnected realms – the vast expanse of the sea and the towering presence of trees. This imaginative and visually stunning project showcases the creative talent and artistic vision of a group of students who seek to celebrate the harmonious relationship between these two elements. Through their artistry, the students have skillfully combined various materials, textures, and colors to depict the captivating essence of the sea and trees. The vibrant hues of blue and green dominate the collage, representing the ever-changing shades of the sea and the lush foliage of trees. The collages capture the dynamic nature of the sea, evoking a feeling of tranquility and awe when gazing into its vastness.

The Masirah Sea and Tree project goes beyond the aesthetic appeal of the collage and aims to evoke a deeper understanding and appreciation for the relationship between these two natural elements. The students have meticulously incorporated symbolic elements into their

artwork, such as birds soaring above the treetops or schools of fish swimming beneath the surface of the sea. These representations serve as reminders of the delicate balance between land and water, the interdependence of ecosystems, and the significance of preserving these natural wonders. By highlighting the beauty and interconnectedness of the sea and trees, the Masirah Sea and Tree project inspires viewers to contemplate their own role in protecting and preserving these precious resources.

Additionally, this collage project acts as a conversation starter and a way to increase awareness of environmental issues. By actively engaging with their audience, the students encourage them to ponder the intricate details and symbolic meanings incorporated into each composition made by their imagination base on theoretical projects from the Superstudio. The Masirah Sea and Tree project invites visitors to immerse themselves in a sensory experience that fosters a connection with nature and inspires a sense of responsibility towards its protection through exhibitions and interactive displays.

In conclusion, the Masirah Sea and Tree student collage project is a testament to the artistic talent, creativity, and environmental awareness of the students involved. Through their imaginative depiction of the sea and trees, they invite viewers to embark on a visual journey that celebrates the profound connection between these elements and emphasizes the need for their preservation. This captivating artwork serves as a poignant reminder of the delicate balance that exists within nature and the responsibility we all share in safeguarding its wonders for future generations.

5. COLLAGE NO. 4 – MASIRAH SHELTER FOR BEACH TOURISM

In the realm of student collages projects, the Masirah Shelter for Beach Tourism project emerges as an innovative and visionary endeavor that showcases the creative talents and entrepreneurial spirit of a group of enthusiastic students. This project envisions a sustainable and immersive beach tourism experience, combining the beauty of nature, artistic expression, and community engagement. The creation of a distinctive beach destination that not only enthralls visitors with its natural splendour but also offers them an immersive and eco-friendly experience is at the core of the Masirah Shelter for Beach Tourism project. The collages created by the students show idyllic coastal vistas, complete with vivid sunsets, immaculate sandy beaches, and crystal-clear waters. These collages portray the imagined beach tourism destination artistically and evoke feelings of adventure, serenity, and tranquility.

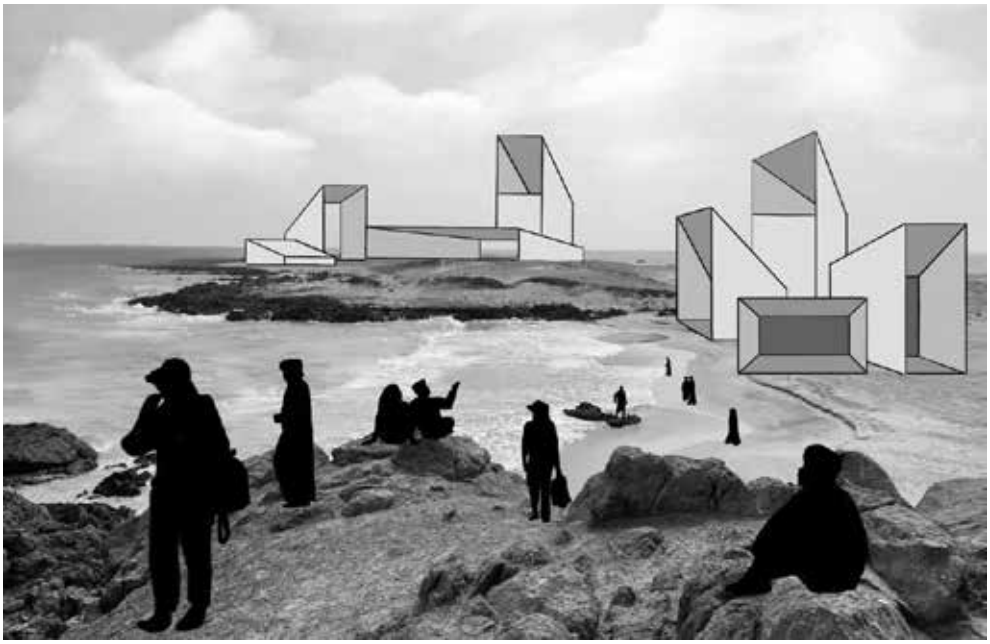
The Masirah Shelter for Beach Tourism project goes beyond mere visual representation through collages. It encompasses a holistic approach to the beach tourism experience, incorporating educational and experiential elements. The students design interactive exhibits, workshops, and guided tours, allowing visitors to learn about the local marine ecosystem, participate in conservation efforts, and engage in sustainable practices. These activities not only enrich the visitor experience but also raise awareness about the importance of preserving and protecting the natural environment.

In conclusion, the Masirah Shelter for Beach Tourism project stands as an exemplary student collage project that reimagines beach tourism as a transformative and sustainable experience. Through their collages, the students paint a vivid picture of an eco-friendly and community-centered beach destination, emphasizing the preservation of natural resources, community

empowerment, and educational engagement. This project serves as an inspiration for future entrepreneurs and tourism enthusiasts, demonstrating the power of creativity, collaboration, and environmental stewardship in shaping a more responsible and enjoyable tourism industry.



Ill. 4. View of an undeveloped beach on the island. Photo by A. Nadolny.



Ill. 5. View of a beach on the island and student Mr. Wadhah Al Rashdi's new collage interpretation of a new development.

6. SUMMARY

Collage drawing serves as a powerful tool for fostering and building up Omani students' imagination. This artistic practice encourages students to think beyond conventional boundaries, explore new possibilities, and expand their creative thinking skills. By combining various materials, textures, and images, collage drawing enables students to create unique compositions that express their imaginative visions and ideas.

The freedom from the limitations of conventional drawing methods that collage drawing offers is one of its main advantages. By experimenting with various "electronic mediums", including magazines, newspapers, fabric scraps, and found objects, students can include a variety of textures, hues, and patterns in their artwork. Students are encouraged to use their imagination and connect seemingly unrelated ideas thanks to this freedom of choice, which inspires creativity and pushes the limits of artistic expression.

Collage drawing also promotes interdisciplinary thinking and encourages students to make connections between different subject areas. By integrating elements from various sources, students can explore the intersections between art, literature, science, and history, among others. This interdisciplinary approach fosters a holistic understanding of the world and enhances Oman students' capacity to think critically and creatively across multiple disciplines.

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Author's Note

Assoc. Prof. Adam Nadolny, PhD, DSc, Arch.

Regarding his professional activity, Adam Nadolny has been associated with the Faculty of Architecture at Poznan University of Technology since 2006. He is currently employed by the Division of History, Theory and Heritage Protection as an associate professor. He also holds the position of visiting professor at the German University of Technology in Oman. The history of Polish architecture from the second half of the 20th century, the history of urban planning, and the connections between heritage and climate change are only a few of the topics he has written about in over 90 scientific articles and 4 books. He has served as a visiting lecturer and critic at many European universities, including: the Polytechnic University of Milan, the University of Cagliari, and the BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg.

adam.nadolny@put.poznan.pl