Mega projects in the Arab World: A reading Through Operators of Conception and Engineering

Oula Aoun
Architect Urban Planner
PHD Candidate – Liege University, Belgium - LEMA laboratory

The presentation
Is based on - a preliminary work in the context of a PHD research
- first-hand experience: 3 years designing Megaprojects
Context:

- Emergence of a new trend in Arabic world; megaprojects with unprecedented size and implementation procedures.

- Major role of the real estate market in creating the command, shaping the projects and influencing the planning professionals

- Emergence of the megaprojects tightly related to mega International engineering and consultancy companies
Questions

- What are the context factors instigating such projects?
- To what extents the planning professionals are shaping these megaprojects?
- Are the professionals practices influenced by the market requirements?

Argument: The market is modifying the planning professionals practices who are adopting a procedural framework – tools and practices- characterized by a lack of theoretical references, flexibility and prioritizing the market exigencies.
Context: The Arab World

- Not a homogeneous block; differences in context between cities
- Witnessed a rapid growth
- Searching for a role at the international level
Megaprojects: definition and History

**Large projects**: area – targeted population - cost - high level of technology - complicated procedure - large number of professionals and stakeholders.

**Integrated procedure**: single operator – entire production chain

Megastructures movement in 60s; first megaprojects (ex Tokyo Bay extension by Kenzo Tange)
First megaprojects characterized by rationality and integration to context and local needs.
International Mega engineering and consultancy companies

- Integrated approach from conception, technical details, implementation, management...
- Implanted worldwide through big numbers of offices and professionals especially Middle east and North Africa
- Multitude of disciplines, nationality and background
- Fierce competition in searching for projects command
- Companies marketing: through revenues, ranking, portfolio etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>offices</th>
<th>professionals</th>
<th>turnover (in millions $)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HOK</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dar el Handassa</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6500</td>
<td>1600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AECOM</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>45000</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATKINS</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>17500</td>
<td>8000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Study Case: KEC Knowledge Economic City by Dar el Handasah

Dar:
- Multidisciplinary company
- Projects in Middle East and North Africa
- Planning department with 20 professionals founded in 70s

KEC- Saoudi Arabia
New Town
860 ha
Population 230,000
Mixed Use program
The client and the command:

- Project started with HOK
- Program and main projects elements predefined
- Main decisions taken by the client
- Client consultant: AECOM
The company procedural framework: mobilized references
- lack of models or theoretical references
- adaptation to client vision
- Country norms and standards only limited to public facilities
- LEED as norms requested by the client as an added value.
- limitation of professionals contribution
Tools and Images Circulation

- Anticipation and pragmatic tools: alternatives and benchmarking
- Importance of visual communication: perspectives, videos, models
- A certain level of exaggeration and unrealism
- Tools for ‘urban marketing’?
- Leading to an ‘urban utopias market’?
Conclusion

- In a context of predominance of the market requirements, what role remains to the planning profession? Is it reduced to Client vision validation?

- Is ‘Dubaisation’ become a trade, exported by Dubai-based contractors to surrounding countries, where city utopias are circulated as **products in a real estate market?**
- To what limits, this context is a laboratory of urban and architectural experimentation? Is it the only Place where unordinary ideas can become real?

-in the absence of high technological performance, will these projects still take place? And to what extents sustainability is taken in consideration in a highly non renewable energy-based context?
Thank you