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Citation

How the City Grows

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Andrew M. Gardner

In the short historical trajectory of sustainable development, attention to the idea of urban sustainability has been a particularly late addition. Cities, as industrial nodes and as spaces of dense human habitation, have long been portrayed as antithetical to sustainability. This longstanding rural bias has a sensible legacy, for among their many qualities, cities are locations where the detritus of our human existence congeals and, perhaps more to the point, where the scale of that detritus becomes most visible. And although sustainable development is a relatively new paradigmatic force, the notion that cities are somehow inappropriate or problematic venues for human habitation has a much longer and storied history in both European and Middle Eastern traditions. In the latter tradition, Ibn Khaldun portrayed the city as a culturally refined but morally corruptive space.[1] Centuries later, these same conceptions of the city percolated through European and American thought, and eventually came to serve as the backdrop to substantial portions of classic Western social theory, perhaps most clearly distilled in the Jeffersonian fetishization of the agricultural livelihood (and a corresponding mistrust of the city and its denizens). These conceptions of the city persevere, and today it is more common than ever to find the romanticized portrait of pre-civilized and decidedly non-urban human functioning as a conceptual antidote to the excesses of our contemporary, capitalist and highly urban world. In North America, these perceptions cling to the Native Americans and First Nations of that continent; in Arabia, the same notions adhere to the Bedouin pastoral nomads who traditionally populated the interior of the Peninsula.

   The new focus on urban sustainability rejects this history. Certainly the notion that pre-capitalist and non-urban humans lived lives 'in bal-

ance' with nature has been challenged by a constellation of scholars who together purvey a more supportable contention that in the history of humankind, *some* people seem to have found *some* sort of balance with their natural environment in *some* places for *some* period of time (e.g. Lansing 1991; Diamond 2005; Smith and Wishnie 2000; Hames 2007). Presently, however, other factors are also driving the increased attention to urban sustainability. First, there is the stark reality of the previous decade – one in which we passed from a primarily rural species to a primarily urban one. More than half of the human population now dwells in cities, and we face a future that looks ever more urban. The task of collectively creating a more sustainable future must necessarily contend with the primary location of our species' habitation. Second, a coterie of scholars have pointed to the inherent efficiencies of urban life (Owen 2009; Light 2001, 2003; see also Keil 2005). In cities, human habitation is dense. People live in close quarters, often stacked upon one another in apartment buildings and other densely efficient dwellings. They live close to commercial centres and to the services they require, and can often access those centres and services by mass transit or on foot. Urban populations in developed nations generally require less per capita infrastructure, and specifically less of the expensive infrastructure that must (ideally) bring water, electricity, gas and asphalt to the domicile, as well as the infrastructure that must (again, ideally) carry away waste. As these scholars argue, proximity and density make the city inherently efficient, and their calculations suggest that the urbanite's ecological footprint is typically smaller by several degrees of magnitude than her suburban or rural counterpart. In other words, within the domain of developed countries, persuasive arguments have been made that cities are, by design, inherently *more* sustainable than many other forms of human habitation.

Sustainable Development and the City

Another facet of urban sustainability, and one perhaps less clearly articulated in the literature, is that cities are increasingly prominent actors in the vanguard of the sustainability movement. When it comes to developing, declaring, and deploying sustainable goals, cities themselves serve as important units of collective action. Perth, Australia; Portland, Oregon; Vancouver, British Columbia, and countless other cities today function as key stakeholders in the collective enacting of sustainable goals (Newman and Jennings 2008). One can envision a variety of different reasons at work here. Even the largest cities are able to develop cohesive identities capable of articulating sustainability initiatives. Cities also provide an integrated

political unit in which citizen groups – that is, neighbourhood groups and other voluntary organizations that operate on a local level – can feasibly assert their interests, in contrast to federal systems in which the voices of these groups are lost in the scale and scope of national-level politics. Cities are a principal apex for those energies that gather strength at the grass-roots level, and they comprise a much more manageable target for change than national or global systems. Perhaps cities also replicate the context described by Raymond Firth in his ethnographic work with the Tikopians. By his analysis, the small island presented a cohesive and limited resource domain to the island's denizens. Every adult was aware of the limitations presented by his or her environment, and with no accessible frontier past which more resources might be discovered or, perhaps more to the point, past which more resources might be imagined, the Tikopians eventually established a notably sustainable pattern of human/environmental inter-action. Contemporary cities, of course, are quite different from isolated Pacific islands; indeed, cities are central nodes in the global production, circulation and consumption of commodities and the resources those commodities draw upon. But cities do provide their inhabitants with a bounded unit with which to think – a demarcated social and geographi-cal space to which collective and potentially sustainable aspirations can be affixed. Cities' successes in articulating and implementing sustainable goals have further distanced urban space from its traditional position as the antithesis of sustainability movements.

The increasing prominence of the city in the sustainable development discourse, however, does not correlate with the distillation or progres-sive coherence in that concept's meaning. To the contrary, the concept of sustainable development is broadly used in the contemporary world, and over the course of its expanding currency it has come to mean many different things to many different people. A review of sustainable devel-opment's many meanings and the tectonic frictions underlying its ongo-ing florescence is beyond the scope of this chapter, and has been well described by others (e.g. Adams 2001; Baker 2006).[2] This chapter, however, asserts a classic and critical definition of sustainable development that, in the contemporary era, might also be posited as a radical perspective: sustainability and sustainable development are far-reaching concepts that require fundamental changes in our relationship to the environment, in the structure of our social relations, and in the ideas and values we hold dear. I suggest this definition of sustainable development as radical be-cause of the scope of change it requires. Like other scholars, I see many of the capitalist imperatives of the contemporary world forging societies that aspire to constant and competitive growth, a feature that is by defi-nition antithetical to sustainability (e.g. Broswimmer 2002). At the same

time, I contend that this take on sustainable development is also a classic one, in the sense that our ability to ensure future generations can meet their needs – a feature fundamental to many enduring definitions of the concept – remains a fine metric by which we can measure our progress (if any) towards this goal (see Baker 2006 for a similar argument). This also suggests that the appropriate goal for our collective aspirations should be sustainability, rather than sustainable development, particularly for those wealthy countries and populations that already fit the description of 'developed'.

This brief sketch of a radical (yet classical!) take on sustainable development merits more attention and analytic support, but as noted, those arguments have been made elsewhere at great length (e.g. Adams 2001; Baker 2006). With the above definition of sustainability and its relation to the urban form in place, this chapter considers the potential challenges of implementing a meaningful and substantive version of sustainability in the wealthy and highly urban state of Qatar and, by proxy, the neighbouring GCC states. Qatar has explicitly expressed a commitment to sustainable development, and has integrated sustainability-oriented frameworks into both its national vision and the urban master plan for Doha, the single urban agglomeration on the small peninsula.[3] While this public and state-driven adoption of sustainable development can be read as a sign of sustainable development's growing significance, many would agree that Doha and the other astonishing cities of the Arabian Peninsula would probably look no different today if the goal of sustainable development had been rejected or altogether ignored rather than adopted.[4]

The purpose of this chapter, then, will be to consider the potential challenges of implementing a meaningful, substantive and radically transformative version of sustainability in Doha and, by association, in the other wealthy and highly urban states of the Arabian Peninsula. After a brief overview of city and society in Qatar, I will frame the remainder of the article around three dilemmas I see as central obstacles to the successful deployment of a meaningful sustainability in this city.

Khaleeji Society and the Cities of the Arabian Peninsula

With some justification, the six Gulf states of the Arabian Peninsula are often treated as a single socio-political and cultural unit. This affiliation is perhaps best represented by the term *al khaleej*, an Arabic term used to refer to the six Gulf states (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman) in their entirety, with connotations of the social and cultural homogeneity resulting from the strong commonali-

ties in the history of these states' development. The roots of this affiliation stretch deep into history. In environmental terms, all of the Arabian Peninsula is an arid desert with extraordinarily sparse resources. Two principal and symbiotically intertwined livelihoods historically predominated in the region. A town-based society comprised of settled and largely urban peoples (in Arabic, *hadhari*) was built upon the foundation of trade. This trade included both maritime commerce and caravan-based trade to the peninsula's interior. In some parts of Arabia, limited agricultural production also occurred (particularly in Oman, parts of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain). Along the coastal regions of the Persian Gulf, these town-based peoples also took to the sea, and prospered from pearl production, fishing, piracy and trade, thereby forging a significant merchant class.[5] The livelihoods of the urban peoples enmeshed in these activities were historically intertwined with the second predominant livelihood, practiced by Bedouin pastoral nomads (in Arabic, *badawi*) who made use of the vast spaces between these villages and towns. While the division between *badawi* and *hadhari* was wrought long ago, and while these categories have historically demonstrated more flexibility than this superficial description would suggest, the bifurcation between settled peoples and nomadic pastoral peoples has been held in place for centuries by the genealogical logic of tribalism. This tribalism has been reaffirmed through the political organization of the contemporary Gulf state (and particularly so in Qatar).

To some degree, all six of the Gulf states historically shared a position on the margins of the British Empire. British relations with the region were administered via British India, although Arabia played an insubstantial role in the Empire for much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Perhaps the most important commonality in these six states' histories is the discovery of oil. All six of the Gulf states possess (or once possessed) significant petroleum resources; states and economies were constructed around the wealth generated by this resource. Today, Qatar and its neighbours are often described as rentier states. In practice, significant portions of oil profits are diverted to a vast social welfare apparatus. Paramount to these transfers and to the organization of these states is the public sector: immense portions of the contemporary GCC economies are operated through the public or quasi-public sector. Citizens in Qatar and the other Gulf states today expect public sector jobs, and the state is constructed around the twin role of disbursing state-held wealth (its traditional twentieth-century role) and guiding the states' diversification plans away from petroleum dependency. While citizens of Qatar and the other Gulf States enjoy limited political participation via municipal elections and consultative bodies, all the Gulf states are controlled by hereditary extended families (or tribes) – the Al Thani clan in Qatar, the Al Khalifa clan in Bah-

rain and so forth. In analytic terms, the welfare state and limited political participation common to all the Gulf states have been conceptually linked: scholars suggest that citizens have begrudgingly yielded their political rights in exchange for the astonishing benefits of welfare systems that convey wealth from state to citizen (Luciani 1987; Beblawi 1987; Kamrava 2009; see also Dresch 2006: 201). In public discourse, the leading families of Qatar and the other Gulf states conceptualize their role as cosmopolitan stewards of states whose principal task is to guide the more traditional and conservative components of the respective citizenries to modernity.

Qatar and the neighbouring Gulf states are, per capita, among the wealthiest states in the world. Citizens typically receive (and expect) subsidized or free utilities, land, education, medical care, no-interest loans and, often, public sector jobs. Most Qataris, for example, dwell in extremely large freestanding 'villas', employ a small to large staff of domestic servants, and drive new or relatively new cars. Oftentimes that car is a Toyota Landcruiser, a model that seems to function as a marker of citizenship in contemporary Qatar. It is not unusual to encounter families with six, eight or ten cars. While the wealth of Qatar and the other Gulf States can be perceived at the level of the individual citizen, much of the state-controlled wealth has been ploughed into development plans, and much of that development is urban in nature. Museums, heritage centres, sports arenas, skyscrapers, offshore islands, amusement parks, conference centres, national mosques, residential developments and many other components of urban development are directly or indirectly funded with the wealth generated by oil rents. Indeed, the pace of this urban development long ago surpassed the domestic labour supply. Today in Qatar, well over 1 million of the 1.6 million inhabitants of the small country are foreign residents, and the largest portion of that foreign population is made up of construction workers (typically from South Asia). Despite some of the highest natural growth rates in the developed world, in Qatar and several of the other wealthy GCC states citizens comprise an increasingly small portion of the overall population: the scale of transnational labour migration, driven largely by urban development, continues to outpace natural growth.

Thus, urban development is a central feature of the contemporary Gulf. Indeed, as Sharon Nagy (2000: 128) has noted, 'The public has come to accept, and expect, government action in the realm of development and maintenance of the built environment.' In most of the Gulf states, rural populations have migrated to the city, producing one of the most urbanized collection of states in the world. In Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman and the Emirates, the large primate cities are also defined by their function as political capitals. As I have argued elsewhere, the astonishing urban proj-

ects that rise in the Gulf also serve a symbolic function: Gulf cities are the trophy cases of a people and its leadership, and are directly intended to convey a particular message about the arrival of modernity in the region to a global audience (Gardner 2008, 2009). Sustainable development has emerged as an important discursive element in this urban development. Although the mission of constructing a more sustainable urban future is often tied to plans for the respective states' diversification away from oil dependency, the Gulf states also recognize sustainable development as an emergent and symbolically important attribute of the cosmopolitan modernity purveyed by other wealthy, urban and developed nations in the world.

With that brief background in mind, I now turn to three fundamental and intertwined challenges to the implementation of a meaningful form of sustainable development in the region.

Sustainable Development as a Threat to Political Stability in the Gulf States

In the petroleum-rich state of Qatar, the unparalleled pace of urban development has become more than a fact of life for the inhabitants of the city. Indeed, the pace itself has become emblematic of the city-state's global identity; urban development has taken on a fetishistic quality that pits Qatar against the neighbouring Gulf states in a competition for superlative standing. In this competition, Formula One racetracks, large human-made islands, stadiums capable of hosting global sports tournaments, extraordinary skyscrapers, satellite campuses of American universities and a variety of other mega-features of the urban landscape function as the symbolic capital by which these states assert their position in the vanguard of a cosmopolitan rendition of modernity (see Nagy 2000 for an insightful analysis). This conversation with the rest of the world has a second purpose, for in asserting their modernity through urban construction, the Gulf states simultaneously forge unified nationalisms over the complex allegiances and heterogeneous traditions of their citizenries. Like the Statue of Liberty or the Eiffel Tower, the supermodern components of the Gulf city seek to symbolically construct a homogenous idea of nation, and thereby elide the differences characteristic of Gulf populations – the differences between *hadhari* and *badawi,* between Shi'a and Sunni or between citizens of Arab descent and those of Persian descent (see Nagy 2006; Longva 2006). As this line of reasoning suggests, these cities and their dramatic expansion can be best understood in symbolic terms.

More practically, however, the supermodern components of these urban landscapes are also portrayed as the infrastructure for an economically diverse future. Tourism and the ongoing development of 'knowledge-based economies' to which many of these urban development projects are tied are central features of Qatar and its neighbouring states' plans to wean their economies from petroleum dependency. Around the Gulf, similar diversification plans are largely intended to recapture capital that, for the time being, flows away from the Gulf states. A representative example of this sort of urban development project is 'The Pearl', a massive residential and commercial development constructed on a human-made island off the coast of Qatar. As a freeholder zone in a state that allows only Qatari citizens to own property, the residential development seeks to capture rent and investment monies that, in the past, have been channelled by foreign residents working in Qatar to other locations around the globe. In this sense, the astonishing urban commercial/residential developments characteristic of the region are, as a whole, portrayed as a form of sustainable development, in that they seek to shift economies from their obviously unsustainable dependence on petroleum resources to a potentially more sustainable and diversified economic foundation for the post-petroleum era.[6]

Yet while urban development, and particularly the trophy architecture of contemporary Doha, Dubai and the neighbouring cities occupies the spotlight, the political economy that drives this urban development is decidedly offstage. Moreover, the product of urban development includes much more than those architectural constructions whose symbolic resonance achieves global currency. Surrounding the tall buildings, museums and new universities is a sprawling sea of more mundane construction perhaps best typified by the housing compound and the apartment building. In all the Gulf states, the skilled foreign class needed to build, staff and maintain these supermodern cities is most typically housed in one of these two residential forms, as opposed to the free-standing homes (or 'villas') preferred by many *khaleeji* citizens, and the labour camps that house many of the unskilled transnational migrant workers.[7] Apartment buildings, I will assume, are familiar to readers. Compounds, while certainly not unique to the Gulf, are perhaps unique in their ubiquity in the region. Compounds in the Gulf states are characterized by the tall walls that surround them and a single entrance with a staffed security gate. Compounds may include villas (large single-family homes), apartments and often a combination of the two. Many compounds contain central recreation facilities, a small store and other services. Combined with the proliferating apartment buildings springing up in many of the Gulf cities, these compounds serve the burgeoning transnational middle class at

work in the region, and while they pale in the shadows of the symbolically laden super-constructions that garner global attention, understanding the political economy of their proliferation will lay bare the essence of my argument: a confluence of forces at work in the Gulf states has produced a spatially hungry system that directly challenges initiatives for sustainable development.

As this contention suggests, I wish to add a third facet to our understanding of the astonishing urban development characteristic of the region. In addition to its purported economic function of capturing global flows of capital, and in addition to building the idea of nation over the heterogeneous social reality of the Gulf states, the process of urban development has become a central conduit for the transfer of wealth from state to citizen, and hence key to the political legitimacy of the extended families that politically (and economically) control each of the Gulf states. A parallel argument has already been established in academic literature concerning the public sector in the Gulf states. In Qatar and all the Gulf states, public sector employment functions as a primary conduit for the transfer of state-controlled petroleum wealth to its citizen-constituents. In all of the Gulf states, foreign workers and entrepreneurs are the foundation and majority of the private sector. Citizens, meanwhile, are almost entirely employed directly by the state in public sector jobs. In Qatar, over 95 per cent of the citizen-workforce is employed in the public sector: they work directly for the ministries comprising the state, for the public utilities that serve both migrants and citizens, in the police force and national guard and in many other capacities.[8] A variety of reasons have been cited for the citizenry's preference for work in the public sector. These reasons include high pay and benefits of these state-provided jobs; the often gender-segregated offices that fit the cultural norms of the region (and thereby foster women's entry into the job market); the predominance of Arabic in these workplaces (as opposed to English in much of the private sector); and the timings of work in the public sector (typically, 7:00 AM to 1:00 PM). In my own previous work, I have focused on the underlying logic of the public sector, and argued that over the previous decades this sector of the labour market provided a differentiable system where qualities uniquely possessed by citizens – familial and tribal networks, and *wasta* (an Arabic term that is roughly equivalent to social capital) – could be used to secure employment in the public sector, thereby insulating citizens from the competitive meritocratic logic of a private sector in which many are poorly positioned to compete (Gardner 2010). Perhaps more to the point, however, social scientists have suggested that these public sector jobs function as the primary channel for the transfer of wealth from state to citizen, and thereby comprise the keystone in the legitimacy of

the Gulf states' leadership (e.g. Willoughby 2008). Indeed, employment is conceived as an integral part of the constellation of entitlements citizens expect from the state.

In the context of a state dependent on extraordinarily large flows of foreign labour (in Qatar, for example, there are more than eight foreigners for every citizen), real estate functions as a second vital conduit for the transfer of petroleum wealth from state to citizen (see Dresch 2006: 202; also Gardner 2009). With the exception of a few special economic zones and freeholder developments scattered around the region, only citizens can own property in the Gulf states.[9] In Doha, property ownership functions as the foundation of a scenario typical throughout the Gulf: the Qatari state, in conjunction with a constellation of transnational energy corporations, directly controls the wealth resulting from the sale of the state's petroleum reserves. In addition to controlling this wealth, the state assumes the responsibility of guiding the nation's infrastructural, economic and social development. In one of its various capacities – through ministries, universities, hospitals or quasi-statal industries, the state hires foreigners to come and design, construct, manage and operate the components of its developing city. The vast majority of the professional class arriving on the peninsula work directly or indirectly for the public sector, and the ministries, institutions, and companies for which they work place them in housing compounds or buildings owned by other citizens. The citizens who own these compounds and buildings then accumulate the profits generated by the astronomical rents characteristic of the region – in Doha, for example, villas in compounds can easily rent for US $4,000 or more per month. The suburban horizon of Doha is now filled with these compounds, and with citizens now outnumbered almost ten to one by foreign residents, the scale of this transfer can hardly be overstated: rental properties, in the guise of a workforce dedicated to urban development, comprise one of the principal mechanisms for transferring wealth from the state to its citizenry.

Yet transfers through rental properties are only the frontline of this political economy of urban development. The construction of an imagined compound, for example, includes the efforts and energies of a constellation of other businesses – the company that makes cement, the company that owns the trucks to move material and equipment to the site, the manpower agency that brings construction workers from South Asia to the Gulf and the firm that designs the villas and apartments in the compound. And once the foreign workforce is placed in the compound, villas must be furnished, automobiles much be purchased and children's tuition must be paid. Indeed, vast portions of the contemporary Gulf economies are oriented towards the project of urban growth, and countless citizens, as

the owner/sponsors of these various enterprises, depend directly on these transfers (and, more obliquely, upon the state's ongoing promotion of urban development as a national priority).

What I suggest, then, is that urban development has become an integral component of the implicit contract between state and citizen in the Gulf states. In its current configuration, this system is dependent upon an ever-present and ever-increasing flow of foreigners to the Gulf states.[10] Put another way, the expanding contingent of foreigners employed to assist and guide the Gulf states' development collectively function as the currency by which wealth is transferred from state to citizen. The highest rewards go to those citizens who, in terms of urban development, operate at the largest scale. The crux of the argument, then, reverses the apparent logic of this arrangement: it is not this urban development that forges new social relations in the Gulf, but rather the ongoing articulation of indigenous social relations that drives urban development.[11] Expanding families, and particularly expanding powerful families, require urban development. Guiding that development is what young, well-placed citizens do, and it is the basis of their and their family's economic power.

A meaningful and substantial commitment to sustainability must include some provisions for controlling urban sprawl and, eventually, shifting away from a growth-based economy. By briefly examining the political economy of urban growth in the Gulf states, however, I suggest that the model of urban growth in Qatar presents a strikingly unsustainable socio-political and economic template for the near future. This model, while publicly conceptualized as merely the pathway towards a rapidly approaching endpoint (the depletion of petroleum resources and a diversified socio-economic future to cope with that reality), and now promoted in the discourse of sustainable development, has become deeply interlocked with the social and cultural fabric of the contemporary Gulf state. Citizens' notions of entitlement, their expectations of the state and the high natural growth rate in the region only fuel the situation. Reining in urban growth will undermine one of the two principle conduits by which wealth is transferred from state to citizen, and political stability in the region is partially contingent upon the legitimacy produced by these transfers. Hence a more sustainable model of urban growth represents a significant potential threat to political stability in the region.

Sustainable Development in a Top-Down Society

The role urban development plays in maintaining tribal and interfamilial relations in the respective Gulf states is a testament to the intricacies by

which modernity, development and the state itself have been integrated into the complex and often divisive social relations that previously predominated in the region. While urban development functions as a mechanism for maintaining traditional forms of stratification in these Arabian societies, the top-down character of political and social power in the region also poses significant challenges to the implementation of meaningful sustainability in the region. In this section, I consider how the precepts developed by several decades of thought concerning sustainability and sustainable development might founder in the contemporary Gulf.

Over four decades of its articulation, sustainable development has come to encompass a variety of grassroots approaches, community-based initiatives, activism and proposals for re-engineering contemporary forms of democracy. In development theory, these 'bottom-up' approaches emerged in the aftermath of the collapse of the centralized, monolithic and universalizing approach to development. The new paradigm sought to put people first, and to build participatory models for a successful and sustainable form of development (e.g. Chambers 1983, 1994; Cernea 1991). Bill Adams (2001) suggests that the incorporation of indigenous knowledge and community-based approaches was central to contemporary sustainable development, and more recent attention to the nexus between sustainable development and environmental justice clearly portrays the ongoing legacy of the American civil rights movement in sustainable development (Agyeman, Bullard and Evans 2003: 7). For many post-Marxist environmental scholars, participatory models and grassroots approaches are more than just an efficient means to a more sustainable end – they are the end goal in and of themselves. Franz Broswimmer's call for an 'ecological democracy', for example, is based on the contention that the protection of other species and their habitat will require that 'ordinary citizens be able to take part at the grassroots level in decision-making that effects their environment' (2002: 98). These participatory, community-based and inherently democratic frameworks are particularly prominent in the ongoing conceptualization of urban-focused sustainable development (Newman and Jennings 2008: 156).

Many popular books concerned with the implementation of sustainability in developed nations conclude with a chapter concerning what a person can do in order to make a difference with these issues (e.g Brown 2008; Orr 2009). The basic premise of these concluding chapters seems to be two-fold: first, we can and should make significant changes in our own lives and households; and second, we can and should vote and politically mobilize to help those ideas percolate into law and governing structures. What I suggest, then, is that a close reading of the sustainable development literature confirms the centrality of a democratic foundation to the ongo-

ing articulation of sustainable development's goals, as well as the methods and practices by which those goals can be achieved. Furthermore, while a significant portion of 'mainstream' sustainable development assumes this essentially democratic foundation, a significantly larger portion of what I have described as radical/classical sustainable development does the same, particularly in those radical renditions of sustainable development that challenge state-based deployment of a sustainability friendly to the interests of a corporate-dominated economy. Similarly, much of urban sustainability theory and practice suggests that individuals must have more power and control over the environment they live in and depend upon. In much sustainability theory, this power and control is portrayed either explicitly or implicitly in democratic terms.

Considering the assuredly non-democratic political structure of Qatar and the other Gulf states, how transferable is the package of ideas and methods operating under the banner of sustainable development? Qatar and its neighbouring states lack many of the political and social components that play a central role in the practice of sustainable development. Civil society in the region is generally perceived as absent, anemic or imported (Kamrava 2009; Reiche 2010). Claims of indigeneity are muted or absent: those Bedouin groups with claims of indigeneity are not participants in the growing congress of global indigenous peoples. Citizens rarely form neighbourhood groups or action committees to assert sustainability initiatives. In the larger lexicon of sustainability practice, this suggests that 'increasing awareness', which seems to perennially serve as the most palatable aspect of a typical sustainability campaign, would not have the same sort of traction here as one might expect elsewhere in the world. Because citizens in Qatar and the other Gulf states rarely have the power to elect the officials who might configure social and environmental policy, the impact of grassroots organization – or, simply changing citizens' perspectives on the importance of the environment – is structurally de-linked from its conceptual fruition in policy and law. Instead, political power in the region is strongly top-down: leaders assume the role of configuring appropriate policy for state and citizenry, and citizens generally yield individual or personal responsibility for social, economic or environmental change to that leadership. This top-down approach is evident in the broad penchant for master planning, the strikingly opaque and primary driving force behind sustainable development in the region (which I will consider in more depth in the next section).

While my basic contention, then, is that the social, cultural and political context of the contemporary Gulf state meshes poorly with many of the central assumptions of sustainable development theory and practice, one might also consider the potential advantages of the top-down political

structure of Qatar and the other Gulf states in building a more sustainable future. Significant policy steps towards sustainability are, in many ways, simply one decree away from reality in the contemporary Gulf. Combined with the possibilities produced by the astonishing wealth of these states, the top-down structure of policy decision making yields a nimbleness that might potentially benefit sustainability, for policy decisions avoid the mire of congressional or parliamentary politics typical of Western and democratic forms of governance. Furthermore, I would also add that even foreigners with a few months of experience in the Gulf states can quickly perceive that simply classifying these societies as 'non-democratic' does little justice to societies in which citizens are, in many senses, quite capable of voicing their concerns through indigenous familial and tribal networks. While citizens may lack the capacity to elect representative leaders, other networks, including tribal and familial associations, social networks and professional connections provide ample opportunity for many citizens to assert their opinions to policy makers and power holders. These very same networks challenge the rigid definitions of civil society developed in the west and purveyed broadly in the critiques levied against the region. So perhaps the better question is this: how can these indigenous forms of social relation and consultation come to play an instrumental role in building a sustainability drive at the grassroots or community level?

With those important caveats aside, the centralized and top-down nature of political power in the Gulf states has resulted in a highly filtered rendition of sustainable development. In practice, the models of sustainability promoted and adopted by the state focus heavily on technological innovation and infrastructural development. These particular aspects of sustainable development mesh seamlessly with the imperative of urban development described in the previous section, while simultaneously marginalizing the more threatening socio-cultural and political facets of the sustainability paradigm.

Master Planning and the Perils of Supermodernism

In practice, the imperative of urban development and the top-down political structure of the Gulf state coalesce in urban master planning. As the primary avenue by which sustainable development is articulated in the contemporary Gulf states, master planning drives urban development – an urban development, as I have argued above, that is a socio-political necessity in the typical Gulf state. Master planning also confirms the central role of the state and its hereditary leaders in that urban development and, therefore, in the extrapolation of urban sustainable develop-

ment. In addition to reinforcing the top-down structure of political power, and in addition to fuelling the transfer of wealth via urban development, the discourse of master planning in the Gulf produces an urban form that diverges significantly from the models and best practices that have accumulated in decades of conversation about urban sustainability and sustainable development. More specifically, I will argue that the super-modernism that results from urban master planning in the Gulf city consigns sustainability to a spatial discourse antithetical to its meaningful implementation.

The modern Gulf home is behind a tall wall. The wall itself delineates the property and yields a culturally normative degree of privacy to the family that resides behind that wall. The private spaces inside these walls are often highly manicured, carefully tended and surprisingly green. This managed and manicured private space contrasts sharply with the interstitial land between and beyond these walls. From a vista anywhere in the suburbs of Doha, one can observe a strange combination of elements: high walls that shield private space from view, towering mansions that peer over the walls that surround them and chaotic interstitial space that fills the space between and beyond these ubiquitous walls. This interstitial space is of particular note – piles of construction debris lay abandoned, ad hoc dirt lanes become shortcuts between boulevards, sidewalks peter out in the hardscrabble desert and garbage blown by the wind accrues against the exteriors of these walls (see figure 14.1). In passing from these chaotic and abandoned interstitial spaces into the private spaces of the family property, one crosses the distinct threshold between disorder and order.

This sharp contrast is not consigned to the residential level. Aspire Park, for example, is the agglomeration of stadiums, parkland and athletic facilities built to host the 2006 Asian Games (see figure 14.2). This highly managed and modernistic space abuts two large shopping malls. It now functions as a public park, and is cared for by a small army of South Asian custodians, gardeners and guards. The interior of the park echoes James Holston's description (1989) of Brasilia and James Scott's (1998) critical description of the urban results of high-modern design. Humans struggle to make use of the intricately planned spaces and pedestrian boulevards that carefully connect the various facilities of the park. They are dwarfed by the surroundings, and even when people are about the park feels almost empty. In contrast to the centre of this planned space, the periphery of the park is chaotic: rickety chain-link fences demarcate the transition to unplanned interstitial space. Walking paths simply end in a rocky dirt lot; grass fields suddenly give way to gravel or sand. Indeed, the threshold one encounters upon entering walled private property is replicated at this supermodern scale: at the interstices of the massive planned develop-

Figure 14.1. Debris outside the wall of a housing compound. Photograph by Kristin Giordano.

ments and trophy projects typical of the Gulf city, the managed and mani-cured gives way to empty lots, debris, gravel and sand.

The lived experience of dwelling in the modern Gulf city, then, in-volves movement back and forth across the threshold between modern-istic planned spaces and the chaos of the interstitial space that surrounds them. I suggest this experience is indicative of one of the principle pat-terns of the Gulf city: the energy, planning and management of the Gulf city is directed inwardly at the discrete units of urban space. Surrounding these planned and modern spaces is the field they punctuate – an inter-stitial urban domain seemingly beyond the gaze of urban planners. This pattern can be traced across scales in the Gulf city: the threshold observed at the level of the individual residence is replicated at the level of the su-permodern structures that now proliferate in the urban environment of the region.

Figure 14.2. Aspire Park grounds on the weekend. Photograph by Kristin Giordano.

The term *supermodernism* has a long and vibrant pedigree (Ibelings 1995; Auge 1995). Here, I am interested the portion of that discussion which concerns the expanding scope of these planned modern spaces. In the Gulf states, rapid urban development and the extraordinary wealth flowing through the region have continually expanded the scale of the typical component of urban development. The planning and construction of hotels, particular buildings, parks or mosques continues, but increasingly larger spaces are being incorporated into this supermodernist and highly planned spatial discourse.[12] In part, *supermodernism* refers to the expansive scale of these constructions, a spatial discourse in which whole planned communities, discrete 'cities', offshore islands and other vast planned spaces sprout in and around the city. In Doha, for example, The Pearl development, which was briefly described earlier in this chapter, is a resort-like residential and commercial development constructed on a

large human-made island just north of the city. It is intended to be home to some 40,000 residents in a combination of private villas and tall apartment buildings. The Pearl includes dozens of restaurants, high-end hotels, a marina, commercial space and, perhaps most problematically, only four lanes of road connecting it with the mainland peninsula. Similarly, 'Education City' is a vast complex of American Universities and other institutions located in what is for the time being the periphery of urban Doha. In Dubai, these supermodern spaces have proliferated for years: 'Internet City' is a free economic zone and information technology park; Media City is a tax-free zone intended to attract the media industry active in the region; Knowledge Village, International Humanitarian City is an independent free zone authority that houses institutions devoted to internationally-focused humanitarian aid and international development; the Masdar Project in Abu Dhabi is a sustainable city (intended to have a zero-carbon footprint) capable of housing approximately 50,000 people upon completion. These are only a handful of the numerous examples that, as I have already suggested, are emblematic of the spatial discourse central to urban development in the region – a spatial discourse that, following others, I refer to as supermodernism (e.g. Ackley 2007).

In other published work, I have envisioned this spatialization of the urban form as a strategic plan to compartmentalize foreign matter, to segregate that foreign matter, and to thereby assert the predominance of indigenous culture and its sovereignty over the vast flows of people and culture hosted by the Gulf states.[13] This explanation echoes the conceptualization of graduated sovereignty as one of the principle tools by which Asian states strategically grapple with neoliberal flows. Here, however, my focus is on the implications of this pattern of urban development for the expressed goal of sustainability in the urban centres of the region. The supermodern compartmentalization of urban development in Doha, Dubai and the other Gulf cities functions as the principal frame for urban sustainability: in Masdar City, the region's first and largest attempt to construct a 'sustainable' city, we see the significant capital at hand devoted to the sorts of sustainable goals that other cities only dream of, particularly through the utilization of a constellation of technologies targeting net-zero carbon emissions (Reiche 2009, 2010; Sgouridis and Kennedy 2009). Qatar now has its own plans for an 'Energy City' that will use the latest green technology, rely heavily on solar energy and work carefully to improve air and water quality while reducing the waste stream (Reiche 2010). These projects interlock with the political economy of urban development, for their construction and ongoing maintenance relies upon the foreign labour that transfers wealth from state to citizenry. Supermodern urban development also confirms the top-down structure of political power in

the Gulf states – even if the projects are not directly implemented by the state, the land grants and permits for developments of this scale require intricate connections with the top echelons of the Gulf state. But my concern here is with the product of this system and, more specifically, with the friction between urban supermodernism and sustainability.

I suggest two essential and interrelated flaws inherent to the spatial discourse evinced by these projects and plans. First, descriptions of Masdar City footnote the fact that some 40,000 to 60,000 workers will commute to the planned city on a daily basis. Throughout the Gulf, these supermodern projects and monumental spaces are the visible stage presented to the cosmopolitan global audience. Behind the stage curtain, however, lie the support industries, service facilities and labour camps that house these immense labour forces. In Qatar, the South Asian labour force that builds, cleans, maintains and serves the various supermodern projects and urban spaces in Doha typically resides in the Industrial Area, a gritty and expansive grid of industry and labour camps at the periphery of the city. Similar areas exist in most of the Gulf cities, and plans for extensive 'Bachelor Cities' abound in planning circles throughout the Gulf. This offstage activity is central to the day-to-day operation of the Gulf city. It belies the discrete and compartmentalized presentation of these supermodern spaces, and in this case, challenges the logic of Masdar's calculation of its sustainability – how can a discrete and bounded 'sustainable city' account for the impact of the vast labour force that traverses the backstage/frontstage divide every workday?

Second, the compartmentalization of sustainability to a master-planned development essentially consigns sustainability initiatives to the status shared by the constellation of other principles, ideas and whims guiding the spatial articulation of the Gulf city. In other words, a 'sustainable city' located on the periphery of Abu Dhabi frames sustainability as a thematic attraction – a symbolic commodity scavenged from environmental and urban discourses to exemplify the modernity of the nation (see Hubbert 2009). In this spatial discourse, sustainability is therefore on par with the industry of 'Industry City' in Dubai, with education in Doha's 'Education City' or with the opulent Venetian conception of The Pearl offshore residential community in Qatar. Moreover, the spatial compartmentalization of sustainability to one of many master-planned supermodern Gulf spaces corresponds with the ideological compartmentalization of sustainability as both distinct and equivalent to the constellation of other objectives of the contemporary nation-state.[14] While the master-planning frame preserves the political economy of urban development and the centralization of power in the state and its leadership, it contrasts with the central contentions of the meaningful rendition of sustainability sketched at the

outset of this chapter: forging a sustainable future requires comprehensive action in all facets of urban existence. There can be no compartmentalized solutions.

The contemporary Gulf city suggests that, as humans, we are capable of working together to construct and perhaps maintain these discrete and highly managed places – a skyscraper, a shopping mall, a home, a park, even a vast master-planned residential community. But a short trip around Doha or any of the other Gulf cities also suggests the difficulty of linking these discrete, managed spaces together into a functional and potentially sustainable whole. This observation leaves me with questions. Can a sustainable urban environment really be master planned? Can we connect all the complex pieces and parts that comprise a planned city? Or is the managed and manicured perfection of modernism and its master plans an elusive goal? Will these chaotic interstitial spaces always exist? And will the cities of the Gulf always need a dirty backstage, like the bachelor cities now being constructed around the Gulf, or Doha's industrial area, where I spend my weekends interviewing migrant labourers who live in a Doha that most middle class residents never see?

Conclusion

In her introductory comments to a recent conference, Qatar University's president, Dr. Sheikha Abdulla Al-Misnad, expressed an interest in how sustainability might serve as a counterbalance to the sense of entitlement and, more broadly, the rampant consumerism that has taken hold amongst the citizens of the *khaleeji* states.[15] Three decades ago, Sulayman Khalaf described something quite similar to the problem identified by the university's president – a broad set of cultural conditions that manifest themselves in the individual as what he describes as 'the notion of unlimited good' (1992). In my own conversations with Qatari citizens, the extraordinary level of consumption typical of the Gulf citizen is often juxtaposed with the impoverished past from which many citizens' parents and grandparents emerged. Petroleum wealth, often conceived as a blessing from Allah in reward for the penurious past, has provided them with an era of plentitude. At the current juncture, that consumer culture is the focus of much conversation but very little scholarship in the Gulf states. In a sense, these broader cultural issues lurk behind the more focused analysis I have provided here, and certainly merit more sustained attention.

In my analysis I have attempted to delineate three arenas of potential difficulty for the implementation of a substantial and meaningful sustainability. To recapitulate, I first suggest that urban development has become

an integral conduit for the transfer of state-controlled wealth to its citizenry, and that interrupting urban development in the interests of long-term sustainability will potentially disturb the legitimacy constructed by the political leaders in the GCC states. Second, I contend that the socio-political organization of the GCC states poorly matches the fundamentally democratic assumptions under-girding both theory and praxis in sustainability. Finally, I question whether a meaningful and transformative form of sustainable development can truly be master planned for the urban environment. As I suggest, the predominant spatial discourse of urban development in the region produces highly organized and managed spaces, but also seems to produce interstitial and backstage spaces of a strikingly different character. None of the conditions described here are consigned to the Gulf alone, and it's certainly true that the implementation of the meaningful, substantial and transformative sustainability I chart at the outset of this chapter would face significant, if not insurmountable, challenges in a variety of socio-cultural settings. With significant reservoirs of capital at hand, however, the Gulf States seek to move rapidly towards these expressed goals. This chapter seeks to chart several significant problems that have yet to enter the public discourse about sustainability in the region.

Notes

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1. See von Sivers (1980) for a longer discussion of Ibn Khaldun's conception of the city.
2. Adams (2001) constructs his analysis of the florescence of sustainable development thinking around what he calls the mainstream and the counter-current definitions. Baker provides a more complex categorization, including idealists, proponents of a strong version of sustainable development, proponents of a weak version of sustainable development, and proponents of an approach consigned to controlling pollution (Baker 2006: 30–31).
3. Two of many published examples include (Qatar 2006a, 2006b).
4. This is not to suggest the same critique does not apply to most cities of the world.
5. These coastal towns were important nodes of social and cultural heterogeneity in the region. The entirety of the region also shares a history in the ambit of British imperialism, largely administered via British India. All of the states are deeply Islamic and, with the exception of Oman, Sunni, although a significant Shi'a population resides in western Saudi Arabia and in Bahrain.

6. Reiche (2009: 379) briefly makes this point in his discussion of the impetus behind Abu Dhabi's construction of Masdar City.
7. Nagy (2006) details the proliferation of the villa in Qatar as a force of social change.
8. While the line between the public and private sector is difficult to clearly delineate in the Gulf states, a variety of sources point to the ongoing centrality of the government in supporting industries and apportioning jobs to citizens (Qatar 2007: 26; Berrebi, Martorell and Tanner 2009; Willoughby 2008; Niblock 2007).
9. Although the proliferation of these spaces led Basar (2007: 103) to note a 'freehold revolution' in the extrapolation of Dubai's urban model.
10. Indeed, one suspects that the plans for a tourist-based economy have misapprehended the flow of skilled foreign labour employed in the region as evidence of an economically substantial population interested in recreational travel to the Gulf states.
11. It is also of note that as a result of this arrangement both state and citizen have configured and idealized roles as stewards of the development process.
12. See Nagy (2000) for a portrait of master planning in Doha a decade ago.
13. See Gardner 2010, 2009, 2008.
14. It should be noted that Masdar was conceived as an innovative supermodern space from which sustainable ideas and practices would eventually flow to Emirati society at large, a process Reiche (2010: 2) refers to as 'policy transfer'.
15. Dr. Sheikha al-Misnad, keynote address, the Second International Social Sciences Symposium, Qatar University, 5 November 2009.

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