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## **Preface**

Throughout the Arab region, rapid urbanization fueled by speculation and geopolitical transformations have had a significant impact on architecture and urbanism. The flow of people, goods and capital into the Gulf states has prompted fundamental changes resulting from economic growth and diversification intended to lessen the dependence on oil revenues. As a result of its ability to entice investors and instantly translate funds into real estate ventures, Dubai has become a prime example and a potential focus of study. Architects and planners struggle to adapt to processes of rapid change and there seems to be little time for reflection on the long-term socio-cultural or environmental consequences of current practices.

Although on the geographical periphery of the Arab world, the cities of the Gulf are positioned to play a central role in the growth and development of the Arab region and beyond. Gulf-based developers and holding companies have boldly built upon successes at home to export financial clout and development practices to other emerging markets. Liberal economic policies have encouraged fierce competition among Gulf states and fueled efforts to attract human and financial capital. This has resulted in the need for instant infrastructure and a rapid expansion of the urban landscape.

The speed of development makes it difficult to explain the present or speculate on the future. In spite of the challenges, it is important to interrogate the trends that are emerging in the Gulf states as they will undoubtedly exert influence in the Arab region and across the world. The momentum, innovation, scope and caliber of urban growth and development in Gulf cities like Dubai, have created an aura that has attracted the attention of others wishing to replicate the economic successes of the emirate. Cities across the region have sought to adapt, rehash, and at times simply copy ideas and initiatives inspired by Dubai and its urban experiments. As Gulf-based sovereign fund managers and developers seek investment opportunities elsewhere, we may very well see a Palm Island off the coast of Porto or a Business Bay in Beirut in the future.

*Instant Cities: Emergent Trends in Architecture and Urbanism in the Arab World* invited colleagues from across disciplines to develop analyses that identify, explicate and theorize emergent trends in architecture and urbanism in the Arab region in general and the Gulf states in particular. While the conference was primarily concerned with conditions in the Gulf, organizers invited contributions that address how

rapid urbanization affects the (re-)production of architecture and the lives of inhabitants throughout the Arab region and beyond. Over two hundred twenty abstracts were received and one hundred fifty-nine authors submitted full papers for peer review. The thirty nine papers that were selected for the conference come from a variety of disciplines and contribute to our understanding of contemporary development practices that impact the built environment. This volume has been organized into seven chapters that correspond to the conference sessions: Emergent Urban Patterns & Life Style; The Dubai Enigma; Contextual Architecture & New Regionalism; Built Form and Identity (Re)construction; Cities, Representations and Branding; Ecological and Social Sustainability and Neo-Traditional Design.

Ideas expressed by authors range from empirical investigations to conjectures about the future of architecture and urbanism. The volume provides no definitive answers and, as a result of the rapid change that is being discussed, some of the claims made may seem quaint and outdated almost immediately after publication. Papers in this volume suggest that the only constant may be change and the future of the built environment may depend on our ability to keep up.

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