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Urban Transformation and Social Engagement in Wadi Makkah: A New Perspective to Heritage and Identity

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Abstract In its formation, the Agency for Business and Innovation at Umm Al-Qura University proposed a new master plan to stimulate entrepreneurial activities. The new master plan is located within The University campus, in the city of Makkah, and was called Wadi Makkah. Due to its location and the sacred status of Makkah, any urban transformation has to contemplate the existing University's campus and the city's rich heritage. The University campus considered the city's heritage by selecting urban elements from the Muslim heritage but did not respond to users' requirements: students, academic members, and researchers. Thus, the Agency for Business and Innovation at Umm Al-Qura University proposed an alternative approach to urban transformation: social engagement. This paper chronicles the Agency for Business and Innovation approach. It interprets the Agency's archival reports historically. Interviewing members from the University and the Agency's advisory committee highlights the internal process and the perception towards heritage and identity. The analysis includes a comparison between the University's master plan and the Wadi Makkah's master plan in terms of buildings configurations, people's movements, and landmarks. This paper recommends a framework for urban transformation by social engagement of representatives' stakeholders. Further studies encompassing the end-users perceptions can support or negate the result.

Keywords: *masterplan, heritage, perception, identity, innovation*

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1. Introduction

It was one of the hottest days of the summer of 2020 when I reviewed some significant archives to analyze the Wadi Makkah master plan. Dust spread through the room with each turn of a page. The sun penetrated the room through the window in the afternoon and formed a light line. That was when I realized: the narrative was taking shape. It dates back to 2012 when scholars from Umm Al-Qura University's Agency for Business and Innovation came together in a brainstorming session to fulfill the University's third mission. Wadi Makkah (WM) was launched to transform Umm Al-Qura University into an entrepreneurial place that enables startups. A year later, the agency hired a professional firm (SETs) to manage the process. The challenge included creating an innovative entrepreneurial environment to foster synergy among faculty members, researchers, and students as part of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. The current university campus was inappropriate; Wadi Makkah required a new master plan.

The American firm Perkins & Will, with a local partner, Architect Ziyad Zidan, designed The Umm Al-Qura University's campus several decades earlier. It was in the early '80s when oil prices were at their peak. The cost then was not a problem. For Saudi Arabia, developing the education system and building universities were priorities. Umm Al-Qura University formed a committee to direct the process [1]. Only one member from the department of Islamic Architecture at Umm Al-Qura University was in that committee; the University's Rector "required a project" and did not need endless discussions [1]. The meetings took place in the site in a temporary building to get the feeling of the local context. However, the site was located 15km from the urban fabric of Makkah at that time; it is possible to observe only a vast desert. The irony is that a member of the department of Islamic Architecture designed the building; it reflected Western-style in the design Figure 1. Later, some department members became members in the administration of projects and moved to that building [2].

Figure 1. Umm Al-Qura's university first building in the site, by the author

Makkah has a harsh climate condition: very hot and dry in summer and warm in the rest of the year. This climate condition suggests environmental treatment. The geological site is remarkable, located between two central valleys: Wadi Orana and Wadi Numan. Historically, the site was private farms for individuals that provided Makkah's daily vegetables. Some remains of the vegetation are evidence. According to Al-Salafi: "it was possible to observe the remains of the farms…people used to camp in this area" [2].

The master plan was finally submitted. A square shape abstracted from the layout of the Kaaba was the basis of Perkins' design for Umm Al-Qura University's master plan; it formed the basis of the esthetic to link the design to the local heritage. The square initiates a cluster pattern to cover openings and windows. Each building has a courtyard, but only corridors and restrooms look out onto it. The overall composition is meant to replicate traditional Islamic cities. In the traditional Muslim cities, courtyards functioned for environmental treatment and privacy, allowing buildings to release hot air during the night and providing space for families to practice different activities without being seen by neighbors. According to Al-Salafi: "courtyards were among traditional element in Muslim cities…for this reason the use of the courtyard were essential in the university campus" [2]. Burhan stated: "no doubt courtyards and the use of the courtyards was remarkable…most essential was employing them wisely" [1].

Perkins then proposed a shadowy corridor called the academic spine Figure 2. The Academic spine extends as an arch in the site plan view, and the center of the arch is the nearby Arafat mountain to initiate reference to Islamic heritage. The spine also invokes the design of traditional Muslim cities where the main streets are non-linear and organic to enrich the visual experience. Perkins designed buildings on each side of the spine. The academic spine determines users' movement between buildings.

Figure 2. Umm Al-Qura University Master Plan

Wind towers every 30m marked the entrances to the buildings. Wind towers function as landmarks and as an environmental treatment Figure 3. Wind towers are remarkable in the coastal sites of many Muslim cities. The concept of a wind tower is to capture the wind to penetrate interior spaces in the houses. Usually, water surface is designed at the bottom of wind towers to filter winds from dust and particles. However, wind towers are aliens to Makkah's architecture.

At Umm Al-Qura University's master plan, there was no commune space or a building to connect the college's members, researchers, and students. Meeting with others requires walking through the spine and entering other buildings. There was no innovative physical environment for the exchange of ideas and innovations. Needless to mention that Perkins grouped the main library, mosque, student center, and administrative buildings around the north of the spine; in so doing, he cut off these buildings from the rest.

Figure 3. Umm Al-Qura's entrance to the Main Spin marked by the wind towers

A recent change to the master plan, adding standard classrooms, did not contribute to an innovative environment. From the outside, they were a replica of the University's buildings. From the inside, they were classrooms on either side of a corridor. If we consider Kevin lynch's work *Image of the city* it is possible to state that the spine represents the path, the faculty buildings are edges, the spaces between buildings are nodes, the wind towers, and the Mosque minarets are landmarks, and each group of buildings is a district [3]. The University's master plan reflected a Western theory with the attachment of forms from heritage to legitimize its existence. The process revealed a demonstration of power by the University instead of understanding the urban heritage of Makkah.

Figure 4. Meeting of the Advisory Committee, by the author

The Agency for Business and Innovation formed a multi-stakeholder advisory committee to promote an innovative environment in the WM master plan [4] Figure 4. Among the advisory committee was Muhammad Burhan, who was under the Ziyad Zidan design team for the University's project. This time it was a different task for Burhan, who stated: "It was a privilege to start my career in the University project; It was a knowledge transfer process and lifetime experience" [1]. The rest of this paper demonstrates the Agency of Business and Innovation's shifted approach towards heritage when dealing with the WM master plan. It includes people's

perceptions of identity through interviewing Jameel Al-Salafi, who participated in the University's master plan. This paper adopted an interpretive historical approach by reviewing the Agency for Business and Innovation archival reports with a comparative analysis between the University's master plan and the Wadi Makkah's master plan regarding the building compositions, movements, and landmarks as the most significant urban features.

2. Heritage: Real and Representation

Muslim cities were an outcome of social practice. In some cases, they were results of political ambitions, and in others were products of economic changes. In all cases, Islamic principles guided the design process. However, today Western hegemony reshaped the process of urban development in many Muslim cities. Tensions between modern and traditional forms coexist and challenge the development of an environment that can represent heritage. Edward Said argued that the Orientalism discourse constructed the Middle East since the nineteenth century [4]. For Said, orientalists portrayed the Middle East without a deep understanding of its traditions and cultures. For architect critic Abeer Allahham, the Orientalism discourse established the concept of heritage in the region, and it was about the old tangible elements of esthetic value and special meaning [5]. The process has two main stages: first, the deep layer, continuous process of "inheritance," included selecting items as instruments of power by the authority. In the second layer, the manifestation of heritage for the society. The selective process by authority made heritage the contemporary production of an unreal image of the past or the past that never exists, or (simulacra) in Baudrillard's term of de-traditionalization [6]. Heritage was represented rather than elaborated as a lived reality in an era of a nation.

Architectural historians and co-editors Sandy Isenstadt and Kishwar Rizvi in their work compiled after a 2003 conference, Yale University, attributed the changes in the urban fabric of many Middle Eastern cities to the spread of modernity [7]. Contributors to the book provide a wide range of studies as alternative versions of modernism. The studies show that in the early period of colonialism, Europeans represented their model of modernity via architecture [7]. Western architects were concerned with modernity rather than tradition.

According to many theorists, the built environments of many Middle Eastern cities were shaped by Western architects. The work of Frank Lloyd Wright in Baghdad was an attempt to represent the spirit of the classic tales and adventures of *A Thousand and One Nights* envisioned a fantasy of the city [8]. Walter Gropius's master plan for Baghdad University in 1953 and Joseph Luis Sert's design of the American Embassy in Baghdad (1955-61) were examples that suggest only western values can be applied [9]. They were Western modernist architects who imposed their theories of modernity with limited perceptions of heritage as myths [9]. Attaching traditional elements to modern buildings dominated their practice. For example, Hellmuth, Obata, and Kassabaum (HOK) were commissioned to design the King Saud University campus, and Caudill, Rowlett, and Scott (CRS) were commissioned to design the University for Petroleum and Minerals in Dhahran, adjacent to Aramco's headquarters [10]. Both firms were American-based and both designs featured colonnaded arcades and pointed arches [11].

Western modernity imposition without a deep understanding of local culture resulted in many theorists railing against it. The consolidation of Islamic values in architecture and urban design approaches emerged from the above discourse. Ahmad Farid Moustapha published *Islamic Values in Contemporary Urbanism*, reflecting his vision of urbanism based on Islamic instructions and values [12]. Architect and urbanist 'Abdul - Baki Ibrahim's interview with Le Corbusier in 1964 left him with the perception that developing theories in architecture depends on the set of principles and values which guide the design [13]. However, the outcome revealed that the discourse could not reach appropriate conciliation [11]. A few institutions, if any, adopted their approach. The approach was theoretical, lacking a deep understanding of everyday practice. The Agency of Business and Innovation found social engagement pragmatic in dealing with heritage. Farhan Karim in *The Routledge Companion to Architecture and Social Engagement* suggests entrepreneurial mode in architecture via social engagement and public participation. The model suggests shifting from individual desires to public interests and requirements [14].

3. The Agency for Business and Innovation' Advisory Committee' Directives to Wadi Makkah: The Master Plan

The Agency for Business and Innovation formed an advisory committee from various stakeholders. The committee included representatives from the University (Department of Islamic Architecture, Department of Geography, Institution of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Institution of Research and Studies, College of Computer and Information system, Agency of Branches) beside architects and experts from the private sector. The initial response of the advisory committees to the Master Plan was comprehensive. It involved multiple levels and addressed many issues. The committee recommended considering the existing Umm Al-Qura University campus. Nonetheless, the process should not include selected heritage elements. The focus was on functional considerations, representations with embodied meaning, profound insights, and interpretations.

Wadi Makkah is strategically located within the campus of Umm Al-Qura University. The site is facing Prince Sultan Highway, which connects the city of Makkah with the nearby city of Taif. It leads to Mount Arafat, the Hajj's site. For this reason, WM focused on startups developing innovative products and services for pilgrims. SETs managed the master plan for Wadi Makkah; the firm conducted several workshops. The first phase of the master plan was a competition among three internationally recognized design firms. HOK and its sub-consultants were selected to continue with the second phase and develop an innovative master plan for Wadi Makkah.

HOK's brief was to design an innovative and inspiring concept for the allocated site. According to the earlier study, WM could immediately focus on providing the following services: IP Services, Incubation Services, Park Land & Space Management Services (management of core park facilities), Business Services, Land and Facility Services (management of support facilities and facilities outside the park), Investment Management Services [15]. WM would create a physical environment that encourages, facilitates, and practically supports innovation. This physical environment is a park that will become a meeting place for minds. An essential success factor in sharing ideas and fostering innovation is creating an interactive hub. The master planner faces several challenges, including:

1. Developing a master plan that reflects the program and components of Wadi Makkah.
2. Developing an interactive design that establishes a relationship between the various components
3. Enabling dynamic future expansion and capturing the dynamic future planning through flexible phasing
4. Controlling the cost [15].

The main components of WM include WM offices: which represent the space that houses all the staff of WM to provide essential services. Corporate incubators: which include the office space and shared laboratories that house the University faculties' members, students, researchers, and entrepreneurs. Enterprise Zone: This includes the office buildings and laboratories that house SMEs. Foreign companies and large Saudi corporations. Commercial and Residential: represents the supporting facilities. Additional public services: public functions, including a conference center (conference hall, meeting rooms, exhibition hall, hotel, etc.). For Burhan, it was essential to highlight the education system's changes advocating vivid urban quality [1]. Al-Salafi's point, the new masterplan should respect the current master (Umm Al-Qura masterplan); any intervention without considering the existing building may create chaos [2].

HoK's concept was an interpretation of a valley (Wadi) where ideas flow from researchers and developers. Entrepreneurs then pick up these ideas and transform them into innovative products-finally pitches in front of venture capitalists. The site designated for the WM master plan is on the east side of the Umm Al-Qura University's campus. It was in the shape of a triangle divided into two parts by the existing entrance of the university (Gate 2): A and B. Five primary nodes formed the main meeting points: Business, entertainment district, multinational companies, entrepreneurs, and residential district.

HoK grouped buildings around each node according to their functions. The business node and the innovation node are located at Site A, facing the main street. The amenity node includes the exhibition center, hotel, and apartments designed on the opposite side of Site B. Both nodes form the entrance to WM from the main road. The buildings for larger businesses extend to the second corner and end with another hotel. These buildings frame the main road façade of the master plan. The designer placed international and multinational companies in the rear, while he placed residential buildings and community clubhouses in the third corner of the triangle. HoK assigned the center for entrepreneurs, researchers, and businessmen, and the main building in the middle was named RIM (Research, Innovation, and Market), which is the heart of WM. The overall design was organic, meaning that each building could stand on its own Figure 5. Burhan stated: "it was not easy to design a site next to Umm Al-Qura university campus with its dominating architectural appearance…the proximity to Arafat was also challenging… Wadi Makkah is visible from the road; thus, compression will start between those three sites and their architectural features" [1].

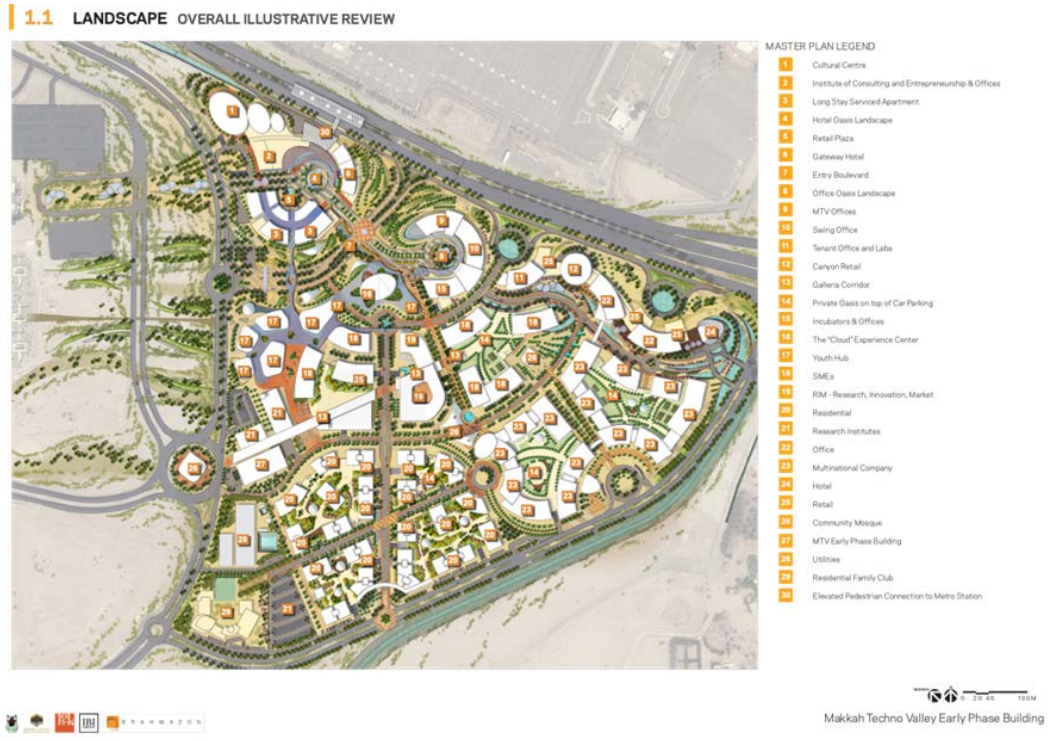

Figure 5. The Wadi Makkah Masterplan

Figure 6. Wadia Makkah Master plan: The Landscape Relationship

The landscape complements the master plan by focusing on several points on the wadi (valley) concept. The following diagram illustrates the conceptual structure of the landscape design for the WM master plan Figure 6. The landscape should consider enhancing the user experience. In many ways, the wadi represents the changing nature of the desert. It lies dormant most of the year and comes to life during the rainy season. The oases represent a rare and incredibly unique ecology found in an otherwise arid landscape. They provide shade and an escape from the environment. By combining planting nodes with a family of shade canopies derived from the geometric pattern language of the region, the campus landscape can provide minor oasis points that help create a comfortable microclimate at significant locations on the site.

4. The Advisory Committee's Interpretations

The committee was clear that the HoK concept celebrates the idea of nodes, stating: "The concept is about buildings grouped around nodes according to their functions. The amenity node, the business node, the innovation node... However, the node at the southern edge of the master plan has lost its strength, especially in the zone of foreign companies". Burhan shared this view stated: "The focus was on nodes and the relationships according to their functions" [1].

The bridge to Arafat in gate 3, and the planned route of the Makkah Metro has narrowed the southern edge. HoK moved the junction to the back to create a new entrance far from the bridge, gate 3, and the Makkah Metro tracks. HoK placed the foreign companies' buildings on the top of two podiums. Then the designer proposed a parking garage on the underground level; the showrooms and sales outlets on the first and second floors. He designed meeting space and a roof garden on the top. The buildings formed the foreign companies' zone gateway. The owners can add buildings for future needs. The composition retains the concept of a node but above the podium. This composition reflects the perception to create a place related to its contexts Figure 7.

Courtyards are one of the most significant urban features in many cities across the Muslim world. Buildings become curved liners revolving around the nodes forming courtyards. This composition enhances the visual and physical relationship between the indoor and the outdoor spaces Figure 8. This visual connection is a visual structure connecting the masterplan components in a cohesive format; A formation intensified by the advisory committee as they commented:

> "Courtyards pattern in addition to atrium buildings & atrium spine are all essential to the nature of the place and the project. [A]trium spine and atrium buildings in addition to their obvious roles as iconic place-making elements that define and give structure to overall urban design, their climatic/spatial nature, as transitional spaces between a single building, group of buildings, and the whole complex…[I]t maximizes formal and informal meetings, and accordingly, maximum networking and exchange of ideas and activities" [15].

Figure 7. Wadi Makkah Master Plan and the Concept of Nodes

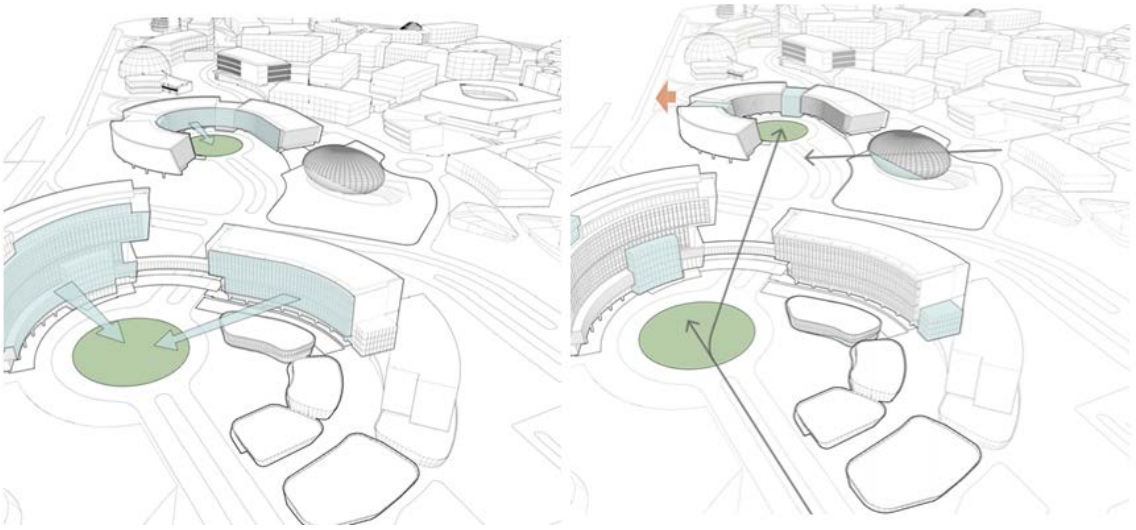

Figure 8. The Relationships between buildings around a node

The master plan generates places of functional relations and social activities.

The advisory committee recognized the absence of the central spine in the WM master plan. In contrast to Umm Al-Qura University's master plan, each building has its spine. The reason for this is due to the harsh weather conditions. HoK has created an internal spine to be air-conditioned. The committee appreciates the idea of multiple spines:

> "In the master plan, there was no main axis connecting the different buildings. Extending the foreign companies' spine to the business hub may be appropriate, especially because it has a strong symbolic motivation, namely the direction of the Kaaba (the Qibla)…The spine in the housing zone needs redesigning due to its length and geometry, which contradicts the other surrounding spines" [15].

The committee enhances the concept of the spine by embedding meaning and connotation. Rather than structured spines as in the University, each building has an internal spine that extends from either end. The spines in each building can be connected-the designer connected buildings according to their relationships and functions. Burhan stated: "the relationship between spaces well understood and manifested in the form of the semi-courtyard" [1]. Al-Salafi argued that the central spine is the center of Umm Al-Qura university design; having removed this concept is removing the identity of the University [2].

HoK suggested atriums and merged them with the spines to create spaces for interactions and social meetings

in each building. In the University master plan, the function of atriums was limited by locating them in the entrances of each building. Spaces between buildings remained without functions. Atriums here with the spines created patterns of activities and movement between buildings. Al-Salafi acknowledges that atriums are among the elements used effectively in urbanism [2]. Burhan views this composition as an advancement in the design process not only for WM but can inspire and inform the local practice of urbanism [1].

The relationship between pedestrian movement and vehicle movement needed attention due to the harsh climate in the region. Walkability is curial in such a project to enable more synergy. The temperature n Makkah is very high during the daytime. Some of the previous urban treatments focused on adding elements, e.g., the shadowy corridor in the University campus. However, the corridor lacks other activities; thus, users prefer to move from one building to another via cars. The committee directed the consultant to propose a new treatment. In their words:

> "The shading of pedestrians needs to be developed and defined including pattern, the orientation of its elements particularly the roof, material, color, etc…" [15].

HoK suggested a suspended canopy to connect buildings and to provide shaded pathways. This connection is limited to a year when the weather is suitable. The connection also depends on certain circumstances when needed to move from one building to another. As mentioned before, main buildings of similar functions were grouped around nodes and connected via atriums and/or podiums. The dingers dedicated the RIM building for the grand gathering. It has become the fusion space for research, investment, and market with optional path walk within buildings.

Wind towers spread in many Muslim cities, especially in the gulf region. According to some references, some traditional houses in Makkah used wind towers. However, little evidence supports wind towers in Makkah. The University's master plan used wind towers. Perkins proposed wind towers for two functions: climatic treatments and symbolic representation. However, the high temperature during summer undermined the functional ability of wind towers, as the climatic treatments compromised the symbolic function emphasized by the University. Wind towers functioned as landmarks and were located in front of faculty buildings to articulate their entrance.

Nonetheless, the committee saw wind-tower as ineffective elements to play this role; they stated:

> "The master plan needs a strong "perhaps vertical" landmark…The plan needs to show landmark anchors…Clearer Urban Design place defining elements".

The wind towers have been perceived according to their primary function (climatic treatments) and failed to function as landmarks. Although there was an attempt to brand wind towers and the main spine in many posters and some visual contents at the university, they never replaced Umm Al-Qura University's official logo nor established a parallel branding theme.

Furthermore, wind towers have been abstracted in some buildings and used for visual connotation as solid structures in buildings entrances. The climatic function was removed and left with weak symbolic representation. The committee never considers wind towers and seeks an alternative. HoK developed some iconic buildings as landmarks. The cloud building tacks a shiny ellipse shape, and the Wadi Makkah hotel expressed a cascaded water feature through the glass Figure 9. Burhan attributed the changes in dealing with landmarks to the changes in the local practice of architecture. The architecture of the wow effect does not work in the context of Wadi Makkah, which seeks real entrepreneurs to innovate and dream beyond physicality [1]. Al-Salafi disagrees with the changes in wind towers as their functions were limited; he maintains: "if the contractor constructs the wind towers properly they will work…and people would appreciate their environmental treatment" [2].

The advisory committee required a unique architectural expression. After covering visibility, connectivity, and functionality, it was time to convey WM's messages. The message should be vibrant and call for innovation and creativity. The committee urges not to repeat the error of the past by copying and/or importing from foreign cultures. "There is a need to develop the Park's [WM] unique/distinguished architectural vocabularies. The consultant shall start to develop the project's architectural expressions for each cluster rather than providing images" [15].

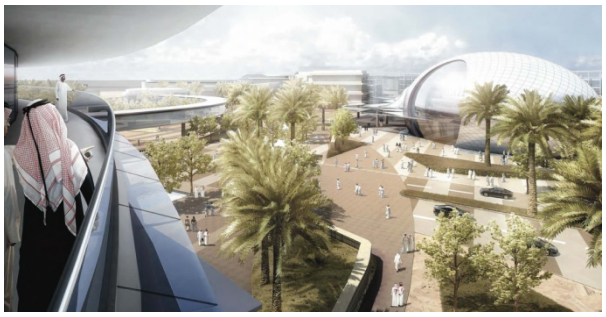

Figure 9. The cloud building and its shiny ellipse shape

Figure 10. Wadi Makkah Master Plan

The consultant dealt with the master plan as parts, then studied the part to form the whole Figure 10. It is worth noting that some members of the committee proposed to study some examples, e.g., Arab Center in France and Downtown Chesterfield Office Building, UK, in their words:

> "There is a need to develop local architectural vocabularies but not copy them…the Arab center in France provides a successful example…As directives, we would appreciate if the consultant started from the deep windows provided in the examples of Downtown Chesterfield Office Building, UK" [15].

The attempt was to provide living examples and to study them rather than copying them. Both projects faced technical challenges. In general, such similar examples and projects were rejected due to ignoring local content; only a few prove suitable to their localities with a futuristic vision.

5. Conclusion

Heritage, in some cases, has been an instrument of power, establishing norms imposing individuals' ideologies. It is a process of eliminating tradition and reshaping the collective memory in a false and inauthentic manner. The orientalism discourse has shaped Middle Eastern cities' heritage. Then, it has been affected by the practice of both Western and local architects. Today, the heritage represented to audiences is a virtual, fantasy, and magical environment. It represents the orientalist and the adoption of those who admire Western culture. The search for a dynamic identity requires an understanding of both heritage and technology. The consciousness of identity cannot be formed through the imposition of particular architectural styles or specific forms but through the formation of 'ourselves' to the 'other.'

The central spine (the academic corridor) in the Umm Al-Qura university campus, the atriums, and the courtyards were developed in the WM masterplan as multiple spines. They become an innovation in themselves, a fusion of inner atriums and nodes. Curved liner buildings revolve around them. They were merged to enable maximum functionality and connectivity. The composition can be seen as utilization of heritage concepts. The process does not involve imposing a particular element but rather an evolution to fulfill Wadi Makkah's vision of creating an innovative environment.

The University's master plan promoted a fixed assumption of users' movements and interactions. The central corridor (the academic corridor) showed the path walk from the car parking to the faculties. Inside the faculties, systemic corridors linked spaces together around courtyards. In the WM master plan, the emphasis was on flexible path walk and flexible connections between buildings. Building relationships are initiated according to the users' behaviors to allow synergy.

Umm Al-Qura University's master plan pursued homogenous architectural expression by repetitive buildings. In comparison, the WM master plan adopted a versatile architectural configuration. Unity does not mean all buildings should be the same. It can be achieved in the interrelated connections between users and the intersections of functions between buildings. Today, many Academic institutions have adopted an interdisciplinary approach in their educational systems; therefore, the built environment should reflect this notion.

While Umm Al-Qura University's master plan focused on local symbolic representation and images of the local heritage, the WM master plan celebrated the interpretive manifestation of heritage. This does not suggest disregarding symbolic representation and connotation. In contrast, symbolic representation and connotation should reflect embodied meaning. The perceived image of WM was different from the perceived image of Umm Al-Qura University. It reflects moods of collaborations and engagement to achieve innovations.

This paper focused on tangible heritage and how it has been perceived from the viewpoint of key stakeholders at Umm Al-Qura University. Through the historical interpretation of the advisory committee reports, this paper explored how the master plan WM was perceived. It also showed the changes in persp ective on the discourse between heritage and modernity and the significance of social engagement in the design process. Those who adopted an interpretive approach towards heritage eliminated any power in forming the master plan from the solo view of point and managed to understand the embodied meanings and innovate an environment that can be called entrepreneurial. The process demonstrated a new perspective towards heritage.

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