ESSAY: THE INTROVERTED ICON

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1. **THE INTROVERTED ICON**
Over the past ten years we have witnessed dramatic changes in the global economy that have pro-
duced, accelerated, and ultimately relegated an architectural trend for *extroverted icons* that com-
municate a distinguished image through a particular form and style and are by and large produced by
"starchitects". This architectural trend that began as a radical, risky enterprise of formal innovation
eventually rendered itself as a commonplace, mainstream exercise of excessive real estate invest-
ment. As starchitects move from place to place, they create architectural icons that are based on a
concept of distinctive visibility, but fail to engage the local context by simply repeating standardized
forms and formulas. The hiring of brand-name architects to design high-profile icons has been occur-
ring in many emerging markets around the world, including Beijing, Dubai, Mumbai, Shanghai, and
Baku—all of which increasingly follow the same recipes in creating what is now defined as the
"global city." The increasing presence of these *extroverted icons* insinuates a culture of marketable
visibility, but not one of place-based interaction. As *extroverted icons* rise in place after place, gaining
in recognition, their continuous reproduction increases the short-term economic value of investment
capital, however lessens a place's distinctiveness in the long run.

This poses the question how architecture can contribute to a local identity in an age of global brand-
ing? While much emphasis has been given to the iconicity of architecture as a global branded phe-
nomenon in the form of "starchitecture," this argument proposes a strategic reversal of emphasis to
examine the deeper and more perplexing issue of the local in a context in which particularities of
both person and place are under immense pressure. Furthermore, the question is if what has been
described in recent years as "place branding" is really branding in the true sense of its definition?

2. **BRANDISM TM**
For a long time, urban identity and sense of place were created by specific cultures over long periods
of time. Urban identity, placemaking and culture were indivisible attributes of a particular place.
However, in recent years, we find that urban and regional identities are constructed as marketable
experiences, strategically managed by the visions of brand strategists. This merger of branding with
placemaking by using architecture as a vehicle is a relatively recent phenomenon, which I define as
Brandism. *Brandism* is a trend, where architecture and real estate are linked to the creation of a dis-
tinct identity that enhances the perceived value of an urban district, a residential development, or in
some cases, an entire city. This perception of architecture as a brand is keyed to the realities of
global capitalism, where cities or even nations are trying to position themselves favorably in the
worldwide marketplace in order to attract capital. In this regard, place marketing is primarily associ-
ated with the economically inspired desire to position cities more positively in the midst of a scaled-
up, mobile, and flooded market of locations and destinations.

For the past twenty years, architecture has therefore played an enormous role in the branding of
cities, initially with cultural institutions such as museums, concert halls and libraries that were de-
signed by star architects as inner-urban icons to elevate the status of a city in the global market. This
was the case first with Frank Gehry's Guggenheim in Bilbao in 1996 – a building, which put a formerly
economically depressed town in Spain on the map and turned it into a major tourist destination.
Other cities soon followed suit and have in recent years successfully used cultural institutions built by
star architects as part of a broader city branding strategy. Porto with OMA's Casa da Musica, Santi-
ago de Compostela with Peter Eisenman's City of Culture, Seattle with OMA's library, Manchester
with Daniel Libeskind's Imperial War Museum, Guangzhou with Zaha Hadid's Opera House, Abu
Dhabi with Jean Nouvel's Louvre, Giovanni and Marella Agnelli Pinacoteca, perched atop an enor-
mous Fiat factory in Turin, Italy, the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas, both designed by Renzo Piano
Building Workshop; the New Museum in New York by SANAA and the Museum of Modern Art exten-
sion in New York by Taniguchi; the Lois & Richard Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art in Cincin-

nati by Zaha Hadid; and expansions of the Reina Sofia Museum of Modern Art in Madrid by Ateliers Jean Nouvel, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and the Tate Modern by Herzog & de Meuron are just some of the examples that illustrate how cities have employed cultural institutions designed by star architects to reposition their image, revitalize urban districts and to draw tourists.

Following this first phase of *Brandism* where city officials leveraged architecture as part of a larger civic initiative to revitalize an inner-urban environment, we have since entered the second phase of *Brandism* in which architecture is strategically utilized to achieve a unique image for profitable real-estate ventures around the world. Celebrity architects who formerly designed cultural institutions are now hired in increasing numbers by real estate developers to design large-scale corporate, hotel, and residential developments, particularly in the emerging markets of the Far East, Middle East, and in Central and Eastern Europe in order to achieve higher profits. All these efforts to create a "unique identity" eventually coalesced into one grand formula, which at this stage has reached a level of "brand urbanism", perhaps most visible in New Dubai, a city, which grew rapidly out of the desert in less than a decade, virtually constructed from scratch. Burj Dubai, for example, is a mixed-use desti-nation project that incorporates the world's tallest tower, designed by SOM, the world's largest shopping mall, a large man-made waterfront, and an Armani-branded hotel along with several resi-dential communities.

Themed districts such as "Sports City," "Motor City" "Arabian Ranches," and "Dubailand" are other examples of real estate branding in an effort to create unique lifestyle destinations—each offering a particular architectural style that ties into a larger narrative, a consumer fantasy built upon a particu-lar theme. In addition to building new satellite cities in the desert, Dubai realized an entirely new place-branding enterprise by launching a very profitable "island urbanism" built upon the idea of maximizing beachfront properties. The three Palms—Palm Jebel Ali, Palm Jumeirah, and Palm Deira, which is still under construction,—have all since become desirable real estate properties, designed to draw international investors. Dubai's desert location makes water a precious commodity, and a wa-terfront lifestyle most desirable. In simple real estate terms, the Palms look like inverted canal es-tates, maximizing waterfront real estate. They also redefined the notion of an icon, being the largest manmade islands in the world, visible from space. Needless to say, this formula was so successful that it was repeated throughout the Middle East, most notably in Qatar with the Pearl, which incor-porates several marinas along with residential and commercial real estate in the iconic shape of a pearl. Meanwhile, Nakheel Developments, responsible for the Palms, has added yet another scale to the waterfront with the World, a set of exclusive private islands in the shape of a map of the world, a project, which has been put on hold in 2008, when Nakheel declared bankruptcy.

On the other side of the world, branding has also deeply infiltrated the real estate market in New York: real estate developers now regularly collaborate with star architects in the effort to create a brand for their buildings. This trend began with Richard Meier's two residential towers on the West Side, flanking the Hudson River. Almost ten years ago, celebrities such as Martha Stewart, Nicole Kidman, and Calvin Klein were among the first to spend $2,000 per sq. ft. of raw space, which con-vinced New York developers that architecture with a capital "A" could help them sell real estate by making their projects "unique". The most prominent examples of such collaborations include the New York Times building designed by Renzo Piano, which created a new icon for the New York Times; Norman Foster's geodesic vertical extension for the Hearst Corporation Building Cook + Fox's Bank of America tower; Frank Gehry's iconic mountain range for the IAC Corporation and, more re-cently, his residential tower at Spruce Street in the Wall Street area, Jean Nouvel's massive residen-tial block on Eleventh Avenue, Herzog DeMeuron's residential COOP building on Bond Street, and BIG's massive residential building on West 57th Street, among countless others. All these ventures have been highly successful in creating desirable addresses for the rich and famous, transforming

entire neighborhoods in the process—from affordable places to exclusive enclaves. Thereby, they become catalysts in the creation and redefinition of places, driving up real estate prices in the process. As the discussion of urban form suggests, architects' designs become useful economic tools to speculative real-estate developers and city agencies alike. Produced under the same social conditions as consumer products, these buildings have become cultural commodities that follow the same patterns of both standardization and market differentiation.[i] Extensive publicity furthermore expands the cultural value of designers' ideas and in the process enhances the market value of both the architects and their buildings—demonstrating what Sharon Zukin defines as the "interacting circuits of economic and cultural capital".[ii] Thus, "it has become impossible to separate the perception of urban form from the effects of internationalized investment, production, and consumption."[iii] As signature buildings move from place to place, gaining in recognition, the continuous re-production of the architectural brand not only unifies economic and cultural circuits, but also more importantly increases the economic value of invested capital.

The dominance of leading signature architects is mirrored by many other cities, around the globe, which include Frankfurt, Berlin, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Tokyo – all of which increasingly follow the same recipes in creating what is now defined as the "global city". Evidently, the continued use of star architects produces an architecture that is less risky for investors but also less and less evocative of a sense of place. As superstar architects stamp their own signature on the urban landscape they become more and more akin to franchises creating standardized contexts as they move from place to place.[iv] Ultimately, because of their cultural commodities, superstar architects mediate the leveling of local and regional distinctions by transnational economic investment, and as a result cities begin to resemble one another progressively more as the same formulas and forms are repeated around the globe.[v]

From the perspective of our current media and marketing-driven environment, architecture is now in a pivotal position. If we count all the buildings that are currently under construction in the Far East, the Middle East, the United States, and elsewhere as part of an attempt to redefine urban, regional, and in some cases also national identities, we cannot but notice how integral architecture is to place branding and vice versa. Thinking about architecture as part of our economic environment leads us also to think about opinion shaping, power, identity, and experiencing the world. When seen in a socio-economic context, architecture is now no longer part of marketing our environment; it has become the essence of it.

3. THE GLOBAL ECONOMY: A BRIEF RETROSPECTIVE
There is of course an economic reason for this. To understand a little bit of where we are in architecture and development, I would like to give a brief overview of the last decade—focusing on key moments in the global economy and how they informed the "making of places" and simultaneously accelerated the production of architectural icons, which is inevitably linked to a structural change in the global marketplace, most visible in the emergence of new markets.

The positioning of emerging markets started in the year 1999—a year marked a broad global economic recovery, which continued, albeit at a slightly slower pace well into the early 2000s. This wide and unusually high economic growth was the result of improvements in all major regions of the world and was associated with double-digit growth in the volume of international trade.[vi] The improvements in growth during 2000 were widespread due to the continued buoyancy of the economies of North America and the unexpectedly strong recovery in many other developed market economies, but particularly marked in a number of developing countries and economies in transition.[vii] This vigorous performance was essentially driven by three phenomena: rapid technological progress in the computer industries, the internationalization of the US economy and changes in the

financial environment, which in turn led to the opening of new markets and to the expansion of international trade and financing. In 2004, this recovery broadened across every major economy and resulted in a very rapid growth in the emerging markets, visible for example in parts of the GCC, Central and Eastern Europe, and in countries that formerly belonged to the Soviet Union. During this period of economic expansion, the developed economies, particularly the economy of the United States, continued to function as the engine of global growth and these were also the years when the US Housing Bubble peaked. A key feature of the global recovery, however, has been the rising economic weight of the two most populous countries, China and India, both of which began to grow at a rate of more than twice the world average.[viii] In the years of 2006-2007, world economic growth slowed noticeably but kept at a steady high in the emerging markets, particularly in China, India and a few other large developing economies.

After several years of robust growth, 2008 marked a major turning point in the world economy. The end of the housing bubble in the United States of America, as well as the unfolding credit crisis, the decline of the United States dollar vis-à-vis other major currencies and the collapse of large financial institutions, began to threaten the sustainability of economic growth.[ix] The financial uncertainty in the US eventually lead to a worldwide ripple effect, which in the subsequent years snowballed into a global financial crisis. Growth was slowing to a near stand still.

The following years were marked by a very uneven recovery largely with the support of massive fiscal stimuli and taxpayer bailouts on a massive scale. 2013 essentially paints a very mixed picture: Weaknesses in the major developed economies are at the root of continued global economic woes. Most of them, but particularly those in Europe, are dragged into a downward spiral as high unemployment, continued banking fragility, heightened sovereign risks, fiscal tightening, and slower growth viciously feed into one another. In the US, the lingering uncertainties about the fiscal stance continue to restrain growth of business investment. Adding to an already grim scenario are anticipated spillover effects from a possible intensification of the euro area crisis, unrest in the Middle East, a noticeable slowdown in China and India, as well as greater weakening of other major developing economies.[x]

The consequence of this unsettling picture is that financing in real estate development has increasingly become more difficult and, in some economies, virtually impossible. International investors have vanished and many communities scramble for money to finish grandiose projects. In this uncertain climate, real estate developers have no choice but to focus on the end user, develop projects for the long run, with less and therefore local resources.

4. THE EXTROVERTED ICON: A RETROSPECTIVE

When we look at architecture and real estate over the last decade, we see how a worldwide climate of economic optimism—tied to global expansion and commerce—manifested itself in the emergence of iconic architecture. A global restructuring took place with more and more international actors entering the global playing field. This phenomenon of the *extroverted icon* exploded in the last decade with increased foreign investment and international trade. Countless cities, countries and regions commissioned iconic buildings to position themselves in the global marketplace and to celebrate their success and newborn global status. It was a phenomenon driven by the desire to garner the world's attention, to attract investors, tourists and buyers. Architects and developers were thriving, investment was booming. The US was flourishing, China was quickly rising, the Middle East was thriving, India was up and coming. Every project suddenly had to be branded and iconic, different, recognizable, and marketable.

It was a decade of icon building that was driven by superlatives – the tallest tower, the coolest development, the most cutting edge destination. As more and more locations competed for the world's attention, *extroverted icons* had to be produced at an ever-increasing pace to capitalize on the investment before the next icon captured the investor's eye. Icons of the previous decade were driven by star architecture to meet this mandate: the Canton Tower in Guangzhou by Ove Arup; the Galaxy Soho by Zaha Hadid in Beijing; Sadiyaat Island in Abu Dhabi featuring the Guggenheim Museum by Jean Nouvel and other cultural institutions designed by Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, Norman Foster, and Tadao Ando. In this regard, *extroverted icons* exemplify the status quo of co-branding, a process of branding from the *outside-in* that leverages the established signatures of star architects. Despite vast construction values, *extroverted icons* are perceived to benefit from personal architectural autographs, hence the expression "signature building." From long standing world economic centers to currently emerging nodes of post-colonial commerce, from London to Singapore, immediately recognizable architectural formulas were exported to almost every corner of the world. It was a time of glamour and optimism, of showing off to the world. It was the era of the *extroverted icon*.

Then, by 2008, the US crashed, Europe crashed, lending stopped, and investors became cautious. We had bailout schemes in the US, bailout schemes in Europe. Even India, the Middle East and China shifted into lower gear. The country which showed the most accelerated pace may have also lead to the phenomenon's demise as every new architectural idea and signature was copied ad nauseum lessening its impact in the process. Whole new cities in China studded with icons remain empty, as in Ordos, the Mongolian desert utopia that was built but never occupied. MAD's featured, new museum now draws architectural pilgrims, but little else to what is essentially an empty city. The once present unbridled optimism is now replaced by a more conservative approach. While some countries continue building, they do so cautiously and locally.

On a cultural note, the accelerated pace of architectural production has produced a new type of colonialism. Western architectural styles, contemporary gestures, and institutional frameworks have conquered, colonized, and assimilated emerging markets. Furthermore, "architecture's ability to define moments of change has been compromised by the extraordinary velocity of urbanization, most notably in China; and by the way history and the subtle, historically grounded meanings of lives and places are being replaced by ephemeral realities driven by hyper-consumption and social-cum-marketing media such as Facebook." [xi] With less and less time to design complex, distant projects; standard architectural practice has solidified a consumer culture of the copy. The "culture of the copy" has reduced architectural objects to consumable commodities whose perceived added value has dramatically inflated the price and scale of global architectural projects, yet, at the same time diminished their significance and realness. As Micheal Benedikt commented a decade ago: "One can see how buildings constructed rapidly by indifferent men with indifferent plans, using remotely made and general parts, are bound to create indifference (…) These buildings lack significance to anyone, and are less real for it." [xii]

While it is evident that urban development needs to take its cues from global economic and cultural developments, it is also abundantly clear that copying concepts and formulas from other parts of the world is no longer sufficient as a means of differentiation. In most cases, these strategies have resulted in a conglomeration of Disneyfied ersatz locales, where meaning and form increasingly disconnect, resembling one another in their offerings and aesthetics. The repetition of icons competing with each other through formal gestures—almost all designed by the same architecture firms—has resulted in a superficial monoculture. It is doubtful if a sustainable urban identity can be developed solely through the implementation of emblematic forms, emanating from a climate of neoliberalism. In a time of talks on austerity after the lull of the global economy in 2008, municipalities like Galicia, Spain, are being criticized for their unrestricted use of taxpayer money, while the opti-

mistically promised benefits of a sustained economic boom, are yet to manifest. Now, in 2012, Eisenman's City of Culture has been completed after 10 years of construction at a price that was four times over the region's original budget.

5. PLACE-BRANDING: A RECAP
As more and more businesses are attuned to the advantages of multiple international locations and accelerated employment mobility, it is a fact that cities need to confront a growing number of competitors in their efforts to attract scarce resources within an ever-expanding range of possibilities. This is just as true for large cities and metropolitan areas as it is for small communities. Therefore, it is vital for places to adopt a market perspective, establish a strategic vision, and communicate their competitive advantages along with a distinctive image in order to make potential investors aware of their inherent attributes and features. As cities strive to gain the attention of multinational corporations, visitors, and inhabitants, they need to establish a market-oriented planning process to diversify their economic base and develop mechanisms for flexibly adapting to changing conditions. No longer are places merely the settings for business activity. Places must develop and nurture entrepreneurial characteristics to keep up with the changing economy.

As every community is increasingly forced to transform itself into a business of selling goods and services, places have become more like corporations, developing products, markets, and customers.xiii Today, places are ranked and evaluated on every conceivable dimension: where to start a business, where to raise a family, where to plan a vacation, hold a convention, or go for entertainment. From quality of life considerations to charm, culture, and ambiance, the criteria in the quest for livable, investive, and visitable places increasingly revolve around a perpetual search for the new and vibrant. Therefore, cities act as brands— as do corporations— in order to attract business, investment capital, and tourists. However, there is one important difference: While corporations are driven by the well-known slogan *"think globally, act locally*," places however are confronted with the need to do exactly the opposite: they must *think locally and act globally,* using their differences as equity. Therefore, as opposed to corporate branding, where the architecture creates an experience that is unique to the corporate brand—by and large disregarding local differences—for architecture to create or strengthen an urban brand, it has to express the latent qualities of the city. This requires an acute awareness and understanding of the region's self-conscious perception, but also how its qualities could fulfill the needs and expectations of others. In other words, architecture must express a city's unique characteristics, surroundings, landscape, and even the way people interact.

However, this is precisely the point where most brand managers fail. Instead of branding a place like a corporation, namely from the *inside-out*, by examining a place's core identity, leveraging its specific potential, culture and characteristics, they often simply resort to the import of standardized formulas that have worked in other parts of the world. A branding from the *outside-in* is applied by prescribing a mix of well-known star-architects in the effort to elevate the image of a place.

What we have witnessed over the course of the last decade is a short cut to branding, by and large achieved through the import of a handful famous architects who have become recognized brandmarks in their own right. So they, and their buildings, become joint brands, which heighten the commercial value of the star-architecture they produce.xiv Rather than place-branding, this is a process of *co-branding*, whereby the status of a place is elevated by importing a readymade product—a signature item, which ultimately has nothing to do with the characteristics of a specific place. "Today," as Jay Merrick aptly comments in his article *Is the Era of the Stararchitect Over*?, "it is about a kind of apostrophized possession: Renzo Piano's Shard, Rem Koolhaas's CCTV Headquarters, Norman Foster's Gherkin, Zaha Hadid's MAXXI Museum. Architecture, at this level and at such vast construction values, is perceived to benefit from personal architectural autographs: hence the expression

'signature building'."[xv] On the urban level, large corporate firms, most notably big three-letter firms, design large mixed-use districts, which tend to duplicate the same stylistic formula from place to place.

To counter the generic appeal of corporate tower districts, many cities incorporate pre-established themes that are based on narratives imported from elsewhere—a strategy that originated in Las Vegas casinos where specific narratives are translated into experiential commercial landscapes. These themes are now applied successfully to shopping malls and urban entertainment districts in the effort to create an entertaining consumer experience. In terms of residential communities, a "Boca Raton-style gated community," complete with golf courses and other leisure-time amenities, aptly surrounded by Spanish-style villas, seems to be favored from Shanghai to the Middle East, giving rise to a real-estate cliché that is exported everywhere.

Thus, aside from the cultural aspect, it could be argued that place branding in many cases had a paradoxical effect. "Far from projecting distinctive identities, re-imaging strategies have tended overwhelmingly to homogenize places, with an endless repetition of standards devices, from advertising slogans to building types." [xvi] In trying to gain a competitive advantage, urban actors failed to capture the distinctiveness of their city, which resulted in a similar image to other cities.[xvii] The speculative nature of investments in place promotion has led to a "logic of competitive caution or entrepreneurial conservatism, which has spawned the repetition of tested formulas."[xviii] While seeking to improve their image, local interests simply hire "name" architects whose reputations minimize financial risk, yet boost international recognition – resulting in an *imperative of uniformity.*[xix]

What is puzzling here is that this kind of branding is not branding in the classical sense. A brand is typically developed by analyzing a firm's core values, identity, mission, potential and products. The purpose of the brand experience is to express these values *within* the company—to employees and management and as an image *without*—to potential customers, investors and the public at large. If we apply this strategy to the creation of place brands, the mission would be to analyze a place's core identity, resident cultural values and local economy. The purpose of place-branding would be to express these values first and foremost *within* the community and to communicate the resulting brand experience to investors and tourists. This can only be created in a participatory process—bottom-up—through an active participation of a place's citizens, in order to create a place that people can truly identify with and that inspires pride within the community. This is branding from the *inside-out,* where the creation of a place-based experience rests on the expression of a place's latent potential, cultural values, and a strategic leveraging of local intelligence. Place-marketing strategies have usually been required to embrace two not easily compatible objectives, corresponding to the two main groups of audiences to which they have been addressed: the external economic investors and the internal (local) population. [xx] However, most place-marketing strategies to date have focused the use of architecture mostly on the external audience, by attempting to create an image that appeals to realtors and investors. This approach replaces branding in its true meaning, with the application of well-established real estate formulas that opt for instant recognition, where architecture is used as a trophy in the attempt to gain status in a global playing field. With more and more emerging markets entering the global arena, this phenomenon of co-branding has been progressively equated and subsequently confused with place-branding, moreover exemplified and amplified in the building of extravagant icons.

In contrast to this *outside-in* approach of co-branding, the grounding of strategic identities would lead to more attention on the internal audience by utilizing architecture as a means of providing an experience, which acknowledges the daily life and routines of its inhabitants by going beyond the concept of visual consumption. By building an open-ended, relationship oriented culture that en-

courages sensitivity and understanding along with a creative questioning of the status quo, an architecture informed by market *and* place encompasses a larger social and cultural context through a dialogue-based approach—internally and externally— one that fosters sensitive connections to specific cultural environments and places, and one that encourages public activity in an age where communal spaces have turned into prime real-estate. Ultimately, it comes down to the contemporary redefinition of the fundamental role of architecture to fight for social values and accelerate positive potential in an economy, where the world's largest corporations drive the most radical cultural and economic changes.

Identity, in this regard, might be viewed as a malleable entity under (perpetual) construction, rather than a fixed image, in order to avoid both the pitfalls of nostalgic obsession with a constructed authenticity and the celebration of its demise. Just as a brand identity has to be renewed by counteracting and destabilizing any received notion, true longevity and coherence in urban renewal can only be insured by vigilant destabilization. In terms of branding, this would mean that the expectations and the demands of the market must be successfully combined with the exploration and mobilization of a community's changing social, economic, and cultural potential. On the basis of an increasing global awareness, the challenges of urban developments will increasingly depend on the design of surprising and distinct experiences, rooted in the distinguishing human resources and goals of a city and its communities. In these lie new sources to be drawn upon in creating original designs to which people can become emotionally bound and in which they will recognize themselves and each other, and which will contribute to a more sustainable identity of the city. Inclusive strategies result from public dialogues based not on the flawed pursuit of the "public interest," but on the politics of inclusion and mandatory negotiation. [xxi] Only if people take an active part in shaping and building a place, can a lasting sense of identification be initiated.

As not only corporations, but also people, organizations, and municipalities are increasingly forced to market themselves in the global economy in the effort to attract scarce resources, it falls to architecture to provide a cultural context that is no longer limited to the provision of a representational image but seizes the opportunity to create new organizational structures. Consequently, architecture has no choice but to insert itself into the highly contentious *liaison dangereuse* between its own cultural ambitions and the exigencies of the market. Pessimists will contend that this seals the fate of architecture—that its cultural role is finally played out, and that it has lapsed into a mode of decadence driven by extreme commercialism. Yet, for architecture to play an active role in the workings of power, it must simultaneously speak the languages of consumers, of marketers, and of civil institutions. It must establish relational frameworks that are at once specific and open and that encourage new cultural, economic, and social realities to manifest while allowing others to simply evolve. Then, architecture becomes not only a strategic medium for the representation of individuality *and* social attitudes—of identification, recognition, continuity, and collectivity-–but also a catalyst for cultural and economic change. This needs to be an integrative process that capitalizes on the dormant or explicit potential of particular places, services, and social relationships between people that distinguish one location from another.

6. IN SEARCH OF A REGIONAL APPROACH
Undoubtedly in what is a very insecure global economy, architects and developers need to develop new concepts and strategies. Industry leaders need to think out-of-the-box on how to create innovative and meaningful work with limited resources. The current economic downturn along with the exhaustion of iconic star architecture, therefore, marks an important turning point for architects. Architecture is now at a crossroads. The global market has been saturated with signature architect styled icons that do neither reflect a specific site nor a cultural context. Every formal exercise has been played out and we are surrounded by beautiful, yet sometimes egocentric buildings that leave

us visually excited, yet emotionally cold. Without a specific social and material context, the organizing principle in these post-modern landscapes is simply a visual theme, an image, or a signature, creating a landscape of consumer activity that has no reference to the regional context. Star architecture has been inevitably and uniformly described as iconic, inspiring, uniquely innovative, environmentally sophisticated—tick box words in the real-estate industry at least for two decades. As Merrik aptly comments: "We are left with the cult of the starchitect as a facet of corporatism, national identity, and infotainment." For the most part, the media treat architecture (now) as little more than tweetable, blogtastic cultural trivia.[xxii]

What can be learned from previous urban renewal projects is that while the development of a global culture offers socially and economically exciting prospects, it also introduces new dilemmas and challenges.[xxiii] While co-branding seems to be a very marketable strategy at present, the question of long-term differentiation arises. As star architecture has been elevated to an absolutely perfect image that is publicized and replicated everywhere, the question becomes: What's next? We have achieved picture-perfect developments designed by the best of architects; we have every luxury awaiting us in residential developments, shopping malls, ski resorts, golf courses and amusement parks. And so the pressing question becomes ever more pertinent: how can developments and cities differentiate themselves in order to be unique and interesting in a world where standardized uniqueness has become the benchmark? I believe that for communities to effectively differentiate themselves in the future, it will be vital that they start to create their own definition of what an icon could be. Perhaps these icons will not be perfect or expensive but they will involve a participatory process and therefore designate a sense of ownership. They will exude character rather than power and forge lasting connections with the surrounding community. "Significant buildings, real buildings", as Michael Benedikt notes, "are achieved rather than provided. They are built over time by someone rather than arriving ready-made by strangers."[xxiv]

In summary, I predict that people in an age of global consumerism will be looking for relevance rather than status, for a sense of purpose and significance that endures over time. They will be looking for real experiences versus trademarked experiences. They will be looking for architecture that enriches local identity and difference rather than generic recipes and guidelines. While commodified experiences fade over time no matter how memorable they are, authentic environments are driven by a sense of moving people toward the fulfillment of a genuine purpose.

This sentiment of going local, of doing more with less, of focusing on sustainable strategies is mirrored in the consumer world where people are increasingly searching for meaning, for content, for originality, for personal involvement. Fact is that in a consumer society, where everything is handed to us as a packaged consumer good, where every experience is commodified, where information is so readily available, where everything is broken down to a tweet; there is nothing left for us to learn and to discover, nothing that we really own, nothing that makes us really curious—a phenomenon, which is best described as "Facebook fatigue". As people become saturated with the same offerings, however, we also witness a growing hunger for surprise and provocation, for mystery. These emerging consumer trends signify a shift from convenience, diversion, and experience to enrichment and personal transformation—a trend, which I believe will also gradually affect the real estate world. Therefore, the idea of the architectural icon has to be inverted to recreate secret worlds that challenge and enrich us. That impart a lost sense of mystery and discovery.

I would argue that in an increasingly fierce competition for the biggest, tallest, and most spectacular buildings, the challenge in the future will be to establish a *blue ocean*—an uncontested marketspace,[xxv] which is not possible to create by relying on established formulas. A *blue ocean* can only be achieved by breaking intentionally from the benchmark to create a truly unique experience that will

then make competition itself, to some degree, irrelevant. This *inside-out* strategy may demand a sense of original invention, of the rough, the incomplete, the aspirational; a perfect copy cannot make this strategy succeed. In a world where the staged icon has become the ultimate building typology, this question becomes ever more pertinent: How can we create sustainable and personalized environments that serve both as an extension of the personality of a place and as an expression of the regional and cultural environment in which we live?

7. LIVING BRANDS

As we are faced with an increasingly homogenized brand-world inhabited by exchangeable offerings—golf communities, retail brands, or resorts—we are developing a growing hunger for the "real." Consumers in a world filled with deliberately and sensationally staged experiences—an unreal or fantasy world—increasingly make their purchases based on how *real* they perceive an offering to be. Yet, too many real estate developers and companies advertise "authentic" experiences when in reality they offer standardized "me-too" experiences that span the globe. This, in turn, drives up the demand for genuine place-based experiences that draw their inspiration from local cultures and offerings. As brands compete increasingly on a global basis in different markets, it becomes ever more important to create *regional brands* that provide not only a standardized mix of convenience, diversion, and entertainment but also allow for an expression of cultural preferences, of site-specific interventions that respond to the particular climate, landscape, and topographical conditions of a particular place. Regional brands are not perfected stylistic veneers, but imperfect expressions that grow from character. Place-brands can afford to be inconsistent as long as they don't abandon their defining attributes. They are like people. I'll venture one step further and would argue that developments that are based on a fixed image eventually result in cardboard characters. When cities and buildings project a three-dimensional personality, inconsistencies and all, we know that the brand resonates with authenticity.

In order to facilitate inspiring encounters with global culture without risking loss of identity and originality, architects must come up with new solutions that are surprising and distinctive but firmly anchored to a city's local character by taking a place's DNA, its unique social and economic potential as a source of lasting transformation. Only by designing from the *inside-out* and not (as seems to be the current fad), from the *outside-in*, can scenarios emerge that are particular and unique to one specific place. Formal intent, therefore, needs to be augmented by a strategic intent, which is about extracting meaning, establishing direction, and identifying undeveloped potentials. Designed from the *inside-out* by capitalizing on the local context and its potential and by using architecture as a medium to create a scheme that is unique to that specific culture and region, eventually, the brand can eventually become symbolic for the place.

For the reasons stated above, I believe that in today's global context the strategic positioning of places can no longer be merely about the repetition of a particular style but in order to effect lasting differentiation, must entail a regional approach. The goal must be to highlight the particular identity of a region and to inspire genuine, place-based experiences that benefit the community rather than outside investors. It will be vital to create icons that are rooted in the distinguishing characteristics of a place and that enrich local identity and difference. That guide communities toward realizing a genuine aspiration through original, and innovative expression. That connect commerce with culture, and community in meaningful ways. In an age of global restructuring, place-brands should no longer serve as physical markers, but must serve as cultural connections. In order to be relevant to our new economic order, place-brands must evolve to become more organic, flexible, and people-driven. They need to support humanistic organizational structures that endorse new interactions between different stakeholders as well as with the general public. Just as logos and brand personalities are now being consciously designed to bridge the gap between people and corporations, place-brands

must join the gap between the marketplace and geographic space.[xxvi] While the process of branding may be standardized, each case study must leverage the unique potentials of the local culture, language, and climate, in addition to the site. This strategy, by definition, is bound to effect a unique positioning that cannot be readily copied.

8. THE INTROVERTED ICON

Perhaps now the moment has come to turn *inward* rather than *outward*, to create icons that define space rather than form; that emit personality rather than just visibility. Perhaps now the time has come to design projects that are not just entertaining but also enriching. It's a time to rethink tried and true formulas. It's a time to focus on the unique conditions of a particular place and culture and asking how one might leverage these constructively in the global landscape. It's a time to be creative. It's a time to focus on local technologies and methods, to build local participation and pride. It's a time to focus on the end user rather the investor and create sustainable environments that are enduring and create lasting impact.

The *introverted icon* is an anti-thesis to the *extroverted icon*. A paradigm shift within architecture is proposed away from the *extroverted icon* that greets the world to the *introverted icon* that capitalizes on local intelligence. The *introverted icon* is plain on the outside, but complex on the inside. As a consequence, it is always underestimated, people might even overlook it. And that is precisely its intent. Like a bunker, it is more powerful than you think. Because it harbors a surprise on the inside, like a Trojan horse. While the *extroverted icon* spells the obvious, the *introverted icon* is mysterious. It wants to be discovered. While the extroverted icon is overstated, the introverted icon is underrated. Rather than attention seeking, it focuses on self. While the *extroverted icon* is characterized by visibility, the *introverted icon* imparts personality. While the extroverted icon provides the expected, the introverted icon claims the unexpected. It is modest yet strong in intention. While the *extroverted icon* is symbolic of something, the *introverted icon* is significant to someone. While the *extroverted icon* is driven by western values, the *introverted icon* highlights eastern values. Instead of trying to be trendy, it strives for timelessness. While the *extroverted icon* reaches for the sky, the *introverted icon* is embedded in the earth. While the extroverted icon highlights the mundane, the introverted icon aims for the sublime. It is integral to the land where it belongs. While the extroverted icon accentuates the positive, the introverted icon carves out the negative. Instead of being an expression of global culture, it highlights regional significance. It is not an import of foreign material; it rises from the land to which it belongs. It is private, exclusive but not expensive. It is not about importing an image but about conveying an identity. While the *extroverted icon* speaks to investors, the *introverted icon* speaks to the local community. It doesn't arrive readymade but is built by people over time. It is not full of goods and pushy displays and of design but leaves room for our imagination. It is no longer about *more* but about *less*. It is seductive and makes us curious. Instead of numbing our senses it awakens them. It doesn't dazzle for a short time but provides value in the long run.

In summation, the *introverted icon* challenges image-oriented architecture and favors spatial and experiential architecture. It accepts and leverages the existing topography and resists a homogenized look and feel. The *introverted icon* evokes an aura of mystery, discovery, and a sense of arrival *in that* particular place *in that* particular country.

[i] Sharon Zukin, _Landscapes of Power,_ Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991, 42.

[ii] Ibid., 260.

[iii] Ibid., 42.

[iv] Ibid, 47.

[v] Ibid., 45.

[vi] Department of Economic and Social Affairs and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, "World Economic Situation and Prospects 2001", New York: United Nations 2001, 7.

[vii] Ibid.

[viii] Department of Economic and Social Affairs and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, "World Economic Situation and Prospects 2004", New York: United Nations 2004, 9.

[ix] Department of Economic and Social Affairs and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, "World Economic Situation and Prospects 2008", New York: United Nations 2008, 3.

[x] Department of Economic and Social Affairs and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, "World Economic Situation and Prospects 2012", New York: United Nations 2011, 1-3.

[xi] Jay Merrick, "Is the Era of the Starchitect over?", Emirates Inflight Magazine, 10/2012, 93.

[xii] Michael Benedikt, _An Architecture of Reality,_ New York: Lumen Books, 1987, 42.

[xiii] Philip Kotler, Donald Haider, Irving Haider, _Marketing Places, Attracting Investment Industry and Tourism to Cities, States, and Nations_, New York: The Free Press, 1993, 346.

[xiv] Jay Merrick, "Is the Era of the Starchitect over?", Emirates Inflight magazine, 10/2012, 94.

[xv] ibid.

[xvi] R. Griffiths, "Making Sameness: Place Marketing and the New Urban

Entrepreneurialism." In _Cities, Economic Competition and Urban Policy_, edited by N. Oatley, London: Paul Chapman, 1998, 43.

[xvii] B. Bramwell and L. Rawding, "Tourism Marketing Images of Industrial Cities", _Annals of Tourism Research_ 23: 1996, 216.

[xviii] Ibid., 56.

[xix] Ibid., 56.

[xx] Ibid., 43.

[xxi] Leonie Sandercock, _Towards Cosmopolis: Planning for Multicultural Cities_, Chichester UK: John Wiley & Sons, 1998.

[xxii] Jay Merrick, "Is the Era of the Starchitect over?", Emirates Inflight magazine, 10/2012, 93.

[xxiii] Berci Florian, "The City as a Brand, Orchestrating a Unique Experience," in _City Branding_, Veronique Patteeuw (ed.), Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2000.

[xxiv] Michael Benedikt, _An Architecture of Reality,_ New York: Lumen Books, 1987, 38.

[xxv] Kim, W. Chan, Mauborgne Renee, _Blue Ocean Strategy: How to Create Uncontested Market Space and Make the Competition irrelevant_, Cambridge: Harvard Business School Press, 2005, 14.

[xxvi] Marc Gobé, _Emotional Branding_, New York: Allworth Press, 2001 123.