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Deconstructing the Dualities between Design and Use through a Case of Sustainability

Theme: Ethnographies in the studios, Phenomenology, Social Dialogy.

The International Conference

ARQUITECTONICS NETWORK: MIND, LAND AND SOCIETY

Abstract

The paper focuses on the design and use interaction through an empirical case study. It utilizes Science and Technology Studies (STS), and more particularly Actor Network Theory (ANT) to develop an understanding of designs and technologies that do not rely on a single actor that shapes them in a singular, straightforward, or detached way. On the contrary, they involve a collectivity of actors that contributes to them in more complex ways. Through such design, they either engage or disengage it from its local actors and integrate or disintegrate it from its surroundings. Whether or not the local actors and context are integrated in the design, they ultimately contribute to the collectively that grows and keeps growing as the design is received, adapted, or appropriated. Of interest here is the fact that non-human actors have equal roles and effects as human actors as they similarly contribute as part of the actors of design and use.

The selected case is Masdar City in Abu Dhabu - UAE, which has been designed by the architectural and urban planning firm Foster + Partners in the UK (F+P) and implemented in the Middle East, more particularly in the Gulf. It is the first sustainable example supporting research and application of technological breakthroughs and innovations. The case then promotes a particular example, where the relation between design and use is not directly aligned or easy to tackle. More interestingly, it is still under design and implementation, which gives the opportunity to follow it in the making when the interactions are ongoing as the project is initiated and situated. Within such case study, emphasis is given to Masdar Institute of Science and Technology (MIST), featuring its first stage and representing its core pillar.

Based on a seven-month fieldwork in the architectural office as well as the field, this paper traces the interaction between design and use through following the collectivity of actors that

contributes to the design, where use is merged within the process. The paper argues that sustainable architectural designs should be seen as complex, dynamic, and predicted and societies and contexts where the designs proceed as heterogeneous with localized specific needs and expectations. They should be dealt with from the start in accordance to such consideration.