

Presentation to the Chicago Architecture Foundation, March 2009.

Who would have thought that the whole vision of a community could be inspired by a bird – well that is the story I have to tell you.

The community is the *Emirate of Abu Dhabi* in the United Arab Emirates.

The bird is the *falcon*.

And the motivation for all of this was this man – His Excellency Mohammed Al Bowardi – the Abu Dhabi Minister of the Environment, General Secretary of the Executive Council and god-father, mentor and advisor of this man – His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nayhan – the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi.

You see, Mr. Bowardi is a falconer – one of the world's greatest falconers and the person who, almost singlehandedly, has brought the sport forward into the modern world from its ancient beginnings. He loves his birds and he makes sure they are very well taken care of – but several years ago he began to notice that they were losing some of their vitality; they weren't as robust as he knew they should be – and he realized it was because of the harmful impacts of pollution and degradation of the magnificent desert that is his and his falcons' ancestral home.

So Mr. Bowardi set off an audacious process, still underway, to revise the very relationship between man and the environment in Abu Dhabi – towards a more sustainable future – and this, in and of itself is a very good thing.

But the fate of the falcon became for Bowardi and many other people – and ultimately for the Crown Prince – a metaphor for the impact of unrestrained growth on the culture and habitat of the people of Abu Dhabi.

Just as the oil industry throughout the Middle East, unconstrained, has started to despoil the environment, the massive new urban development, unconstrained, has started to press the social tranquility, traditions and connection to the land of the people – think *Dubai* here, although

people in Abu Dhabi would never say it because they always present a positive united front among the Emirates to the rest of the world.

-And this has been compounded by the free importation of North American and European settlement patterns and scale and architectural styles – trends that do not sit well with the landscape, climate or culture of this Arab, Islamic, Bedouin homeland.

And so, a profound – and far reaching – decision was made by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed to go a different way: to shape his capital city, Abu Dhabi City, and all the settlements in the Emirate to emphasize quality of life for its citizens and sustainability for its setting; opening up the potential for a special model in Abu Dhabi of smart growth and true urbanism, in an Arab, Muslim form.

And that is where I come in.

-In mid-2006, I was the long-sitting Planning Director of the City of Vancouver in Canada, and had just announced my intention to retire after 32 years of public service. I had spent the previous 20+ years, along with hundreds of other Vancouverites and especially my closest colleague and Co-director in Vancouver, Dr. Ann McAfee, reshaping our city – especially our inner-city – as a more dense, mixed use, diverse and interesting place. Our work had received a lot of attention and we were increasingly identified as one of the more liveable cities in the world – Vancouver has even been identified as one of the early emerging “eco-cities” of the world, at least according to one writer, Richard Register of Berkeley.

-Well, I went to my e-mail one day and discovered what I thought was one of those scam e-mails from the son of a Minister of some Central African country that wanted investment – I’m sure every one of us has received this e-mail at one point or another. Frankly, I didn’t even open the note.

-Then I received a second similar e-mail but something about the title suggested it was legitimate; and it was, indeed, from an official from Abu Dhabi and the rest, as they say, is history.

I became the Special Advisor to Sheikh Mohammed and the Government of Abu Dhabi for urban planning – well, actually, all land planning in the Emirate. Then I discovered, upon assessing the situation in my first visit, that the land was, indeed, suffering like the falcon - we had a very tall challenge ahead of us.

-There were no contemporary plans at any scale for the Emirate or its settlements (all the previous plans were very old, out of date and actually counterproductive in their directions) – look at these pictures; can you imagine the City of Abu Dhabi started at this scale back as recently as the 1960's?

-There was no planning underway (well, except some very crazy and backward transportation planning).

-There was no affective planning agency.

-There was no planning capacity.

-There was no development management (this was the world of the “computer fly through”).

-There were no development regulations or policies – or, for that matter, even subdivision or land title arrangements.

-In a word, it had become an “accidental” place – developing randomly, in a totally unsustainable way; water hungry, car obsessed; with the most rudimentary public realm.

-But there was a tidal wave of development proposals (some very awful schemes but, admittedly, also several very cool initiatives that I will come back to).

So, the purpose of my talk tonight is to tell you the story about how we have changed all of that – how we are bringing coherent planning and development management to the Emirate – and how we are trying to channel this to the most progressive planning principles in the world but also ground it in the reality of this most unusual place and people. My other purpose is to highlight some of the inspiration that I have discovered from this work for the problems facing our cities back here in North America.

And as I tell you this story, you can enjoy a backdrop of images meant to give you a tangible feel for the ambiance of the place. You might think of this as a photo essay to go with my talk.

Let me start by telling you something about this unusual land and its people.

-Abu Dhabi is one of the seven Emirates that make up the United Arab Emirates, which is a relatively new country, having been founded less than 50 years ago; and which is a very interesting place.

-It is a peaceful land of about four million people located on the edge of the Persian Gulf (they call it the *Arabian Gulf*) – but in a very dangerous neighbourhood.

-It is a relatively liberal Muslim country sitting within a network of much more fundamentalist Muslim countries.

-It is a very rich country, having about 10% of all the known oil in the world – and the Emirate of Abu Dhabi has about 80% of all the oil in the whole UAE.

-Included in the country is Dubai, the next Emirate over, which is much more famous than Abu Dhabi – but Abu Dhabi is the homeland of the UAE's founding royal family and is the capital of the country. To clarify a continuing confusion, I do NOT work in Dubai – in fact, I don't even like Dubai very much. But I will definitely come back to Dubai time and again in this talk because it is such a defining force for Abu Dhabi.

Abu Dhabi is a place of contrasts.

-While it is a pervasively Muslim society, it is also a modern secular society (you really see that in the various roles of women, from the most sequestered to the absolutely liberated).

-While it is a monarchy, with total power focussed in the royal family, Emirati citizens enjoy extraordinary rights and privileges, including free health care, education, land, housing and support for their many endeavours. There is no democracy but citizens tell me they strongly prefer this because their royal family respects them and satisfies their needs – in fact, there is a very interesting distribution of wealth that is very fulfilling for most citizens .

-While the native Emirati culture is strong and Emiratis' sense of themselves is strong – you always know them because they even *dress* differently than everybody else – they are an extreme minority in their own country. The native population is only about 20% of the total population; foreigners make up the other 80%. And this includes a minority of well paid managers and professionals commonly called “Expats” and a huge majority of modestly paid labourers known as “Visiting Workers”, because their tenure is very tenuous.

-Conditions for Emiratis are extraordinarily good but conditions for everyone else vary dramatically – the poorest paid are also poorly housed and, sometimes, poorly treated. And yet, Visiting Workers widely talk about Abu Dhabi as their “land of opportunity” – even though they can never be citizens and are generally excluded from the discourse of the country. I guess it is an understandable perspective given where they come from.

-There is also a vivid contrast between the natural environment, with its hot, desert austerity, and the urban environment, with all the modern conveniences – the good, the bad, and the ugly. They may be “accidental”, but these are not backward or deprived cities – they are not the typical “third world” cities that we have in our mind’s eye. But one mostly remembers the desert as such a powerful physical and spiritual force and presence in the Emirate.

-There is also contrast between the island environment at the edge of the Gulf, with the complexity of the inter-tidal zone – including those lush mangroves – and the overwhelming humidity; and the vast inland desert, called the “Empty Quarter”, with its simplicity and dryness.

The thing that makes the United Arab Emirates so fascinating is that they have just begun an extraordinary process of transformation, set off primarily by the hand-off of power from the founding generation to the new generation.

-It occurred first in Dubai, and so that city has been in a vanguard of change that has set the pace but also identified the contradictions for the rest of the country. Professor Michael Larice, of the University of Pennsylvania, has developed a characterization to compare and contrast modern cities and he calls the Dubai approach that of the “global city”. Dubai is both a phenomenon of massive development and one of the world’s big messes. With little oil for the future, it has pursued a strategy of land development to generate its wealth – a process meant to establish the

city as the financial and business metropole of the country and even of the whole Middle East – with a global profile and image to match that aspiration. But it may have gone too big, too fast and with too much speculation, if you look at the current situation of the last few months where the sparkle that we've heard endlessly about for the past few years has started to tarnish with the world-wide economic downturn.

-Abu Dhabi, so far, has been more deliberate – either because of the temperament of its leadership or from the lessons of watching its neighbour next door. It was only about 3 years ago that Abu Dhabi opened up their country for limited private ownership of property by non-nationals. They immediately also saw a barrage of new development proposals of massive scale, not unlike Dubai, but, remember all that anxiety related to the falcon, they also started asking some essential questions. Would their environment be ruined through this explosive urbanizing process? Would their culture be able to survive? What would happen to the joys of their Bedouin way of life – the intimate engagement with the desert and the sea? Would their children be as happy and safe and healthy as they were hoping for and expecting because of their newfound oil wealth? And so they were predisposed to try to shape what was going on to meet a wider set of public and cultural objectives – yes, they were direct about the economic objectives – but they were also clear about wanting a lot more. Back to Dr. Larice's characterization, he calls this the approach of the “post modern city”.

Now, just because Abu Dhabi was more deliberate, it does not mean that they were not in a hurry. In fact, they felt a great urgency, not just because of the natural competition with their neighbour but also because they faced so many proposals of such huge import to the future of their cities. They didn't want their anxiety to turn away the schemes that would be good for their growth and they faced – and still face – strong demand for space and services in every sector. So I set them off on two trajectories.

-First, I urged them to found a proper planning agency and to give it the power and regulatory framework from which to be able to shape a wide array and continuous stream of proposals. So we designed and set up the agency with hyper speed. The “Urban Planning Council”, as it has come to be called, directed by a smart, young, well-placed Emirati leader, His Excellency Falah

Al Ahbabi, and chaired personally by the Crown Prince, was created just over a year ago and already has over 100 staff, now hard at work on planning for Abu Dhabi's future.

-Secondly, although they initially wanted a full "master plan" for the Emirate in 4 months, I urged them to take a more strategic policy approach. I explained that master plans, if they are any good, are not created in a day; but that strategic "urban framework plans" could be put together for each city in about 6 months each, followed by an overarching policy guide for the entire Emirate. We've used a 25-year time horizon for these framework plans and have now completed plans for the capital, Abu Dhabi City, and the romantic royal oasis city of Al Ain; and we are now completing plans for the oilfields, called the Western Region or Al Gharbia, and for the agriculture district, called the Eastern Region. In each case, we started with a detailed analysis and projection of the realistic growth potential of all sectors of the economy at play in the particular community or district – all the plans take off from that point of unavoidable realism – the "reality check". We came at all this from the *demand* side, not the *supply* side. Then, as soon as the plans have even come to draft form, we have put them immediately to work for the Emirate. They have been used to evaluate all pending major developments to bring them in line with the realistic economic potential and the future image of Abu Dhabi as it is now gelling. In fact, many people in Abu Dhabi have said that this process warded off the worst aspects of the global downturn because in almost all cases we have scaled down development schemes to be in line with true end-user demand, which is a novelty in the Middle East. Secondly, these plans have set the agenda for ongoing planning work. In the case of Abu Dhabi City, the framework plan set off the design for a new national capital district for the city that will accommodate about 300,000 people and just as many government and private-sector workers. In the case of Al Gharbia, we are now starting design of 3 completely new cities to serve growth in a way that is sensitive to the local ecology and impacts of the oil industry on inhabitants, rather than the random sprawl that was starting to unfold. And now a whole process is underway of regulatory development to bring predictability to the development approval process and of area planning to put shape and detail to growth patterns at the community level.

-Now, if you know anything about planning, you know that any planning exercise takes time – to put the process together, to gather data and understand issues, to be creative, to let creative ideas gestate and to put it all on paper with accuracy. We had to do all of this in breakneck speed in

Abu Dhabi to achieve those 6-month targets so we have used what is called a “charrette” process. This is a highly productive, focussed and intensive, fast and vividly creative engagement among experts and local people to learn the situation quickly and then generate the key ideas and themes of each framework plan. We were able to get among the world’s finest professionals because His Highness told me that he wanted the best people available regardless of cost. This includes a splendid “Base Team”, shown here, and some of the leading lights of contemporary urbanism, shown here and here and here – these only being some of the over 40 top thinkers and practitioners that we have brought in so far – including, of course, Chicago’s own John Buck. We clashed these visitors together with the most senior local authorities and opinion makers, including the personal involvement and direct guidance from the royal leadership. We added in very wise and involved locals. And with this mix, the magic just happens. The falcon soars! We tap into the genius loci of the place and the spirit of the people by looking and listening carefully. We mix in the best ideas in the world and challenge these ideas with the specifics of the place. We integrate it all together into the most progressive concepts we can imagine. And we press everyone’s boundaries to grasp a new kind of city: contemporary, sustainable, Arab, humane, Islamic, beautiful and a real contrast to Abu Dhabi’s own past and also to that of its neighbour, Dubai.

-Now, I want to be upfront, the process has not been without its conflicts and confusions – and there are still contradictions in the pattern of development and the unfolding of events for change in Abu Dhabi. Some of the ideas in the plans, even though the plans have achieved formal government proclamation and clear endorsement, remain challenging to past practices. People are still trying to wrap their heads around some of the themes that deny bad habits of the past. Some problematic development proposals are still moving forward because they were too far along and some still get approved contrary to the specifics or principles of the framework plans. Some big initiatives, with powerful sponsors, are still not yet reshaped to their optimum form according to all the creative visioning that has been underway. But, to some degree, these are growth pains as the transition occurs from a random to a deliberate approach.

But, by-in-large, the Emirate means business. They are making it happen more-or-less as we have envisioned it.

-The Urban Planning Council has solid and deep powers and is under the personal auspices of the Crown Prince. It has quickly become the force to be reckoned with in the Government of Abu Dhabi.

-The *Abu Dhabi 2030 Plan* is totally operational and becoming more influential every day. Just a few months ago, we used it to stop a freeway proposal, under technical design and development for over 2 years, which would have crashed through the historic inner city and changed forever how people move around the city. Development sites are already being assigned in the newly designed Capital District. A completely new and more responsible approach is now being implemented for the design of Emirati neighbourhoods, moving away from those totally inappropriate “Minnesota subdivisions”, as I call them, which had been stretching out at the urban fringe. And the ongoing planning agenda is a very aggressive one by any standards.

-The *Al Ain 2030 Plan*, proclaimed just last week, portends to be just as influential. This is the plan for the royal oasis city that I told you about. It will set a new standard for the protection and revival of the 5 great historic oases of that city. It will protect the few heritage buildings that exist in a society without a rich building history. It has set an unprecedented scale of maximum 5-story building heights for the entire city except for mosque domes and minarets; and already many proposed buildings have been brought down in height to be consistent with this vision.

-Both the *Abu Dhabi* and *Al Ain 2030 Plans* dreamed of a new green architecture that would reflect or surpass world standards and start to address the water and energy demands of the Emirate’s aggressive climate. Now, in a program soon to be proclaimed, called “Estidama”, which means “sustainability” in Arabic, all of this will be made patently real. Once in operation, there will be no environmental shame in Abu Dhabi’s buildings as they will compare in green performance with the best in the world – and, like LEED in North America, the same themes are being extended to the neighbourhood scale.

-And now, upon completion of the final plans for the oil fields and agriculture district, the government is starting to consider our idea of doing a strategic plan and implementation program for what I call the “profound sustainability”, including carbon and waste neutrality, of the entire Emirate by 2050. This builds upon their “Masdar” initiative that has become famous around the

world. This is the project to build a carbon and waste neutral community for 50,000 residents and 50,000 workers that is currently under detailed design by Norman Foster and Partners from London. Masdar was a forerunner to our work and is a strong start that our Emirate-wide initiative would echo.

-And all of this time, we have been training, training, training – to build up an indigenous planning capacity and sophisticated perspective of cities among both public officials and private business. My whole idea has been to plan myself out of a job as soon as possible so that the destiny of Abu Dhabi will then be in strong, informed Emirati hands – not just at the level of the leadership, which has always been strong, but at all levels, private and public, so that all the thousands of upcoming urban and environmental decisions that will be made will be very forward looking, with long-term implications in mind.

So what are the substantive themes upon which all this is being shaped for the future? Let me go back to the *Abu Dhabi 2030 Plan* as a case in point to show you the personality of our work. Of course, this is the framework plan for only one city in an Emirate that will ultimately have many towns and cities, but it clearly shows the direction that the Emirate wishes to go in building its settlements and managing its environment as it moves forward. Here's a snapshot of *Abu Dhabi Plan 2030*.

-The Plan is driven by an aggressive environmental protection agenda - we call it the “green gradient” of protected places: channelling development to less sensitive locales; preserving most of the offshore islands and wide desert fingers; and establishing “national parks” to make this all a serious reality.

-The Plan shapes development for major growth, up to a projected population of 3.5 million inhabitants, into two intensive and mixed use focal points that are the big shapers of the whole city: an expanded and revived inner-city Downtown; and that new Capital District that I have already alluded to (with the detailed design, by the way, completed by a great Chicago firm, based upon the conceptual plan done by our Base Team). And this Capital District is surrounded by urban neighbourhoods and a constellation of smaller, widely separated, outbound settlements that the Plan calls “eco villages” on suitable islands and at carefully selected locations within the

desert. These eco villages, in particular, will accommodate the unending rhythm of migration that has shaped Abu Dhabi life from time immemorial and still holds strong sway today: the move to the sea to fish in the cool, less humid winter months and then the shift to the deep desert to ranch camels and farm dates in the hot summer when life on the humid coast becomes almost unbearable. Locals are no longer driven by the economic imperative of this but the climatic advantages and the related traditions are still meaningful to them. Neighbourhoods and villages are shaped for an Arab culture with what is called the “fareej” or clustering of housing for extended families and a focus on the mosque. There is still a very strong social organization of blood linkages in families and tribes that define the day-to-day life of Emiratis so we wanted their settlements to facilitate that rather than deny it as today’s subdivisions were tending to do. And the Plan has many more areas of an array of densities and diverse mixes of uses that respond to the urban preferences of the growing population of Expats as well as younger Emirati Nationals for whom a more urban lifestyle has become more appealing with their international education. Our inspirations here are the fascinating ancient communities of North Africa that have a long built tradition but also share common cultural roots with Abu Dhabi – places like Marrakesh and Beirut. There are new and better standards for worker housing and worker communities, with more integration into the urban fabric close to where labourers work.

-The Plan pulls Abu Dhabi away from a formerly massive program of freeway expansion and construction; instead, creating a dense network of human-scaled boulevards and streets that widely distributes auto traffic. It insinuates a major network of new transit, with special provisions for Arab women. It emphasizes walking and the idea of a street culture that, generally, does not currently exist – remembering that for at least half the year it is very pleasant to be outside, even though the climate can be brutal at other times. And I have to say, stopping that one freeway link, that was within days of letting contracts, has been one of the high points in my time there.

-The Plan supports a whole suite of initiatives for high culture – such as the amazing set of proposals for museums and galleries in a new island district, by the world’s greatest architects: Frank Gehry; Jean Nouvel; Zada Hadid; Tadao Ando that were already in the conceptual design stage when we arrived.

-The Plan gets right down to the level of the details to show what the emerging city should look and feel like. For example, in what are called “building blocks”, the Plan outlines a strategy to revitalize inner city blocks that are now overrun by traffic and parking and offer few opportunities for pedestrian life, even though a great majority of the people are pre-disposed from their home cultures to outdoor living. By decanting the pervasive on-street parking into strategically located parking structures, it will be possible to insinuate a delicate pattern of local streets and walkways, called in Arabic “mushtarakas” and “sikkas”, add finely scaled open spaces, maximize shading and cool areas, mix in desperately needed local services, focus on the mosque and local shopping opportunities and therefore build an attractive nearby streetlife that will cut the trips people now take by car. In other detailed expositions, the Plan sketches new cross-sections for streets, new ideas for weather protection, and new policies for low water-use landscape and green architecture that has been picked up in *Estidama*, the building certification initiative that I have already mentioned.

-And the Plan shapes everything to reflect some profound principles rooted in Abu Dhabi’s unique Arab way of life – that it will be an *Arab city*, have *measured growth*, be sensitive to the *natural environment*, manifest a *capital destiny* and reflect the *unique community values* of local people. These are principles that truly respond to the plight of the falcon.

Well, I am sure you might well be asking yourself right now what my experience in Vancouver and what the experience of the many people we have brought from around the world have to do with the unique circumstances of Abu Dhabi. You might well be worrying as I always do about the effects of globalization in the spread of similar ideas and similar theories all over the world, creating places that are more the same rather than more different as we might all prefer. I think you can see that we have not been in the business of bringing packaged solutions to Abu Dhabi – we let the place and the people generate indigenous solutions. Our mission is not to implant a way of life from somewhere else but, rather, to realize the cultural potential of these people in this place and at this time. And that is where we are quite different from many Expats who are in the design and planning business in that part of the world.

But we *do* bring an ethos about planning and the need for a community to move forward with a clear vision and a clear sense of direction; we talk a lot about deliberate *choices*, which is

definitely in contrast to the randomness that seems to be more the norm in the Middle East. We also bring a kind of planning practice that reflects a re-integration of land use policy making and urban design – I call it “experiential planning” – which involves creating the real, direct experiences within any setting that people tell us they want, and making sure our places are accessible to and are fulfilling for people on their own terms. This means getting beyond the broad patterns and systems of the city. This means getting down to what people see and smell and hear and feel, at the level of the street, and shaping things in four dimensions to deliver the emotional side for people, not just efficiency or fiscal prudence or even environmental sustainability. And this is how we stay absolutely grounded wherever we are working. And, finally, we bring a strong set of dependable urbanistic themes that seem to be applicable wherever humans build cities. Here in America you call this the “new urbanism” but it carries many different names around the world. It is about density and mixed use and diversity and human scale and alternatives to the car and character specificity.

But, you know, this is not a one-way street. I have found my work in Abu Dhabi is very inspirational for our efforts to build better communities here in North America. Frankly, my work there offers me a cold clear view of where we stand in the United States and Canada when it comes to the best of contemporary city building.

-For example, we are not nearly as far ahead as we think we are on the ENVIRONMENT agenda. I’ve told you about “Masdar” and “Estidama” and their advanced environmental protection legislation and now the talk of a proactive program for profound sustainability and carbon and waste neutrality for the whole state. Even with some great and commendable efforts, such as what is occurring here in Chicago, who can say that we are ahead of this thinking in Abu Dhabi? And remember this is a country where the harsh climatic conditions and aggressive economic development imperatives could easily have given them ample excuse to fall behind on sustainability. Their forward thinking has brought vividly to my mind the message of Dr. Bill Rees, the professor at the University of British Columbia who invented the concept of the “ecological footprint”. He has said over and over again that every city must go so much further and our actions have to be pervasive if we are to get our ecological footprints anywhere close to what is our fair share of the earth’s resources. Can we match the kind of initiatives that this newly minted country is up to there in the Middle East? Well, I think we have to.

-Abu Dhabi has also taught me something about the extraordinary impacts that are possible with strong investments in CULTURE: growing and supporting a wide array of cultural institutions not just as the best expression of a society but for vital reasons of economic development. You certainly know something about this here in Chicago; and your experience parallels that of Abu Dhabi, where, as I showed you before, they are bringing a branch of the Louvre from Paris, and the Guggenheim from New York, along with other primary museums and galleries, as part of that cultural island that I was showed you a picture of before. This has to be seen as an audacious move for a small emerging city. In fact, these initiatives are symbolic of a world movement to support culture – but most cities are still just not with it. This has to change.

-Many western cities are on the verge of seeing a diminishment of their QUALITY OF LIFE because they increasingly cannot house their people nor offer them affordable housing options. The spectre of homelessness and inadequate housing is pervasive throughout North America. It should inspire us all that Abu Dhabi is committed, as a prime government policy, to GIVE every citizen a comfortable home – housing is seen as a basic right of citizens. I have not seen one homeless person on the streets of Abu Dhabi. We North Americans seem only to be able to give the illusion that comes with sub-prime mortgages; and the disillusion that comes when those mortgages backfire on a vulnerable family. And this has starting me thinking more and more about the need for a third sector of housing – beyond the private market sector and the public non-profit sector that is our western tradition. Like many other people, I'm thinking about a *private non-profit sector*, where, to keep prices affordable for at least a portion of the population, we will have to find a way to get some housing out of the spiralling value stream. We might take the Madrid model, where they build and sell the housing and then if a person wants to re-sell, they have to sell it back to the builder at a predetermined rate so it can be sold again and again at an increasingly affordable price as general market prices go up. People in this housing forego the investment dimension of the housing, although they do build equity, but in exchange they get much better affordability at better locations and more housing for less money. Surely we can do this kind of thing – as well as invent other models that help our modest income citizens find a way to stay in the city. What will our cities be like if the range of incomes is not represented? How will we get our basic services done? How will we ever achieve sustainability if people are pushed more and more to the edge with longer and longer commuter trips? What will happen to

our social diversity? Abu Dhabi may be rich, but so are we – and if they can dare to make housing a human right, we better start to consider this as well.

-And what about SOCIAL EQUITY? Even Abu Dhabi, who does not have a defensible record on this issue in regard to their Visiting Workers, is starting to face the Emirate's profound social contradiction between rich and poor – their aspiration is a harsh reminder to us that we have been cutting back on our social safety net for about a generation and the victims are all around us in the drug culture and the mentally ill zombies that float around our streets along with the dispossessed, often abused children. The struggle just beginning in Abu Dhabi would suggest that we are just too complacent.

These inspirations could go on.... but I want to come back to the situation in the United Arab Emirates – particularly the contrasting reality of Abu Dhabi and Dubai. It has been said that these two new and growing cities out on the “edge of world experience” actually offer the essential metaphor for the modern process of urbanization. As I have said before, one is the “global city”, exploding with growth, relevant to the world investor, with high international profile. This kind of city wants to be big and bold and brash – and it will sacrifice a lot to get there. This is the Dubai reality that is targeted to create great wealth fast and secure its place in the world from that wealth and the business prestige that goes with it. The other is the “post modern city”, growing more deliberately, carefully balancing public and private objectives, sensitive to the human implications of what it is becoming. This kind of city will be the opposite of big and bold and brash – and it will sacrifice just about as much in economic strength to get to where it wants to go. Of course, this is said to be the Abu Dhabi reality, especially since the environmental frame and our experiential planning have arrived on the scene; and especially because the huge economic strength of the Emirate is not drawn first from civic growth but comes from the ground, from the vast oil reserves.

Well, a metaphor for the world these cities might look like from outside, but the story from inside is a lot more complicated. Abu Dhabi undoubtedly also wants to be a “global city”, but of a different kind. It too wants to be known and to be acknowledged for its innovations and to be iconic – but perhaps for a different set of themes. I think it wants to become a model for a *humane urbanism* that the world is searching for. I think it wants to become a model for a

sustainable urbanism that the world is also searching for. I think it wants to become a model for an *Arab urbanism* that at least the Arab, Muslim world is searching for. And I think it wants to be a model for achieving a unique, differentiating character in its urbanism that confounds the down side of globalization while taking maximum advantage of its benefits. And I think that the Abu Dhabi approach may in the end be the preferred approach for smart cities in the future – rather than the “quick fix” that is now represented in what are so often called the “global cities”; but a “quick fix” that is found to be very disappointing when you actually experience what these kind of cities have to offer on the ground.

And this brings me back to what I hope you have begun to see as the pervasive metaphor for my message today: the *falcon*. For Abu Dhabi, the falcon is really a metaphor for their aspiration for excellence – and we can all be inspired by that.

William Butler Yates, the great Irish poet, paints a horrendous portent. In his poem, “The Second Coming”, he says:

- “*Turning and turning in the widening gyre*

The falcon cannot hear the falconer;

Things fall apart; the center cannot HOLD;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world...”

For Abu Dhabi, and for all our modern cities, we have to push back this image, this potentiality. Let us be the falconers that can be heard; let us bring our falcons safely to ground. I hope Abu Dhabi does become the model that it wishes to be. And I hope their model motivates us all to dream about – and create – cities that are not only productive but are also fulfilling for all of us on every level.

My dream is that one day that falcon – that beautiful bird – might fly high above the City of Abu Dhabi or any city in the world in tranquility and health as a powerful symbol of our success in making our urban world humane, beautiful and sustainable.

Thank you.

