

My name is Ahmed Bin Shabib and I am an urban geographer by background. Mainly I look at unpacking the understanding of how our cities in the gulf have evolved, and who has played a role in its evolution.

Today's discussion is an extension of the research conducted when I was a student at Oxford. It retrospects our understanding of what role the 1970 Osaka expo played in the Gulf.

From a city design and architectural perspective. It is generally believed that the cities of the gulf are influenced by western architects and planners. When in reality most of our income was from energy exported to places such as Japan.

This is a picture of His Highness Shaikh Khalifa during the opening of the Osaka expo 1970 giving a presentation about the participation of the Abu Dhabi pavilion before we federated as a nation.

To understand the Osaka expo of 1970. We must take a moment to examine the epoch of this time.

In the early 1970 Motorola introduced the first wireless phone. The ability to communicate "mobile" and wireless was a psychological shift for humanity.

In 1969 we landed on the moon. Humanity was able to choreograph it's mechanical and technical capacity to send human beings to the moon. It was a time when everyone's imagination was tested.

This is Skylab. Which was essentially a self sustaining floating building in space - predating the international space station.

It was powered through solar panels and was self sufficient. Conducting tests and had people living in it. It was these ideas which fascinated and inspired the architects of its time.

On the ground the world was getting much closer physically than we are today. This is an image of queen Elizabeth taking a flight from London to NY in less than four hours. The 1970's was literally ahead of our time.

The 1970 Osaka expo materialized all these ideas in an experience. Hosting pavilions from all over the world. Keeping in mind that Japan was an isolated island and this was one of the first international interactions Japanese people had with the world.

The design of the main pavilion had the idea of automation and robotics at its core. With self building structures and a future of machines.

It was embodied in other elements such as fashion. Women wore futuristic designs, sitting in plastic bubbles talking on wireless phones.

Pavilions floated hung with tensile cables.

The movement which embodied these ideas was an urban ecological movement called the metabolists. Students from the university of Tokyo headed by Kenzo Tange believed that cities and building should expand, and contract according to human needs. They were the curators of the Osaka 1970 expo.

This was a proposal by Arata Isozaki for Shibuya which connects buildings from the sky. Because of limitation in land plot size the architects would only need to acquire the space for the buildings spines.

In the sea. Kenzo Tange's proposal for Tokyo Bay connects both sides through a central spine - expanding based on the city's needs.

In architecture the philosophy was rooted in the concept values of harmony (ecological) and reincarnation (adaptability and usage). The Nakagin Capsule Tower for example by Kisho Kurakawa. Would allow individuals to

live in one place and should they move to another city, they can move the capsule with them. If you happen to be in Ginza they have an airbnb dinner tour.

The philosophy was as well expressed within personal dwelling. Here kikutake's skyhouse is designed in a manner which allows for plug in modules from the bottom. For example if you had a child. You can attach to the bottom a room, or a study. But it's expandability was key.

And we were part of it. This is a photo of Abdullah Rashid our then foreign minister inspecting our plot of land before our participation.

The design Abu Dhabi pavilion was based on the traditional Hosn fort. And interestingly what was presented was not oil and the economy. But paintings and poems as told by Abdullah Rashid during a recent interview.

We were not the only gulf nation to participate - Kuwait was also a participant as well as Saudi.

This was the starting point of the gulf - Japanese modern relationship.

While these interactions were taking place in Japan, the world was going through another set of economic changes. The collapse of the Bretton woods accord meant that the printing of currencies was no longer linked to gold reserve. Historically If you needed money to build a project. You would need the reserve in gold. The value of currencies as a result of this became abstract - and so with it the concept of production.

The second set of conditions was that gulf states were now an indispensable part of the world economy.

The shortages in oil in the 1970s as you can see in this picture effected some of the most advanced nations. This is the king of Norway using the public transport system.

Japan with shortages of toilet paper (I have tried to understand why and have not found an answer yet)

This brought to the attention of the world to the gulf. These are images of Japanese oil workers in Das island in Abu Dhabi - playing golf

Das island golf

But engineers work closely with architects - and this is Kisho Kurakawa of the capsule tower in Ginza sitting with His Highness Shaikh Humaid Al Nuaimi in the 70's proposing a project in Ajman.

This is Kenzo Tange with His Highness Sheikh Al Sabah with the proposal of kuwait airport.

This is Tange wearing a igal in Saudi. And as you can see they were in Kuwait, Ajman, Saudi and knew that japan post war reached a saturation point. And their thinking was that their ideas could be realized in the gulf which at the time was urbanizing rapidly.

These ideas include a floating hotel in Saudi away from the shoreline. Jeddah by Kikutake.

A Masterplan for Mina. With the core infrastructure was built around the mountains, and expands in the center to accommodate incoming pilgrims.

Their plans went into intricate details. Designing trucks, walkways and expandable packable tents. And here you can see similarities with the capsule tower.

A floating hotel in Abu Dhabi by Kikutake the same architect as the sky house. And so on.

Although their ideas at the time were radical and perhaps unattainable. The Gulf was one of the few places which embraced their ideas. In the picture you can see the Japanese architect. Dr. Takahashi who was introduced to the UAE through the Japanese embassy in Kuwait provided the first spatial planning for Abu Dhabi.

Kuwait airport was the first airport realizing the project. Shaped with expandable wings which has the capacity for growth.

Dubai municipality building designed in 1978 by Kazuyuki Matsushita who was a member of Tange's lab during the Expo 1970.

King Faisal Foundation in Riyadh along with a mosque with its symbolic outward protruding crescent.

So. This brings us back home. We live in a city and a country which arguably continues this futuristic thinking of the time.

In conclusion. I am not saying that we were influenced by these architects or by their thoughts. But what they have started we as a country and a region are continuing in some way.