LIVERPOOL VS DUBAI

CLOUDED THINKING

By: Hind El Ramly

Buildings are generally not considered controversial, but many buildings have sparked controversy during their building process and well after. One of the world’s iconic structures was met with a lot of criticism and even considered an eyesore by many. To many people’s surprise it’s the Eiffel Tower. With the huge advancement in technology combined with the architect’s affections for peculiar designs nowadays, buildings have officially gone wild, from drawings to controversial construction. Read on to discover two buildings (or clouds for that matter) that have sparked controversy on two sides of the globe: Liverpool and Dubai. Genius or clouded thinking? You decide...

Liverpool’s Clouded Judgment

After a lengthy drama spanning two years, one of the most controversial building proposals in the UK titled “The Cloud”, never saw the light. The story began in 2002 when Liverpool was entering the bid for the European Capital of Culture 2008. The city officials wanted to build a project for the occasion. The plan was to augment a “Fourth Grace” building to be located on the Liverpool Pier Head, joining the three historical landmarks of the area: the Royal Liver Building, Port of Liverpool Building and the Cunard Building which are collectively known as the Three Graces. A competition was set up, where renowned architects Lord Richard Rogers, Lord Norman Foster, Will Alsop and Edward Cullinan submitted their designs for the Fourth Grace. The Fourth Grace was scheduled to be multifunctional; with office space, a hotel, homes, a museum and other commercial facilities in addition to a viewing gallery. Even before a proposal was picked, people expected it to be the future landmark of Liverpool. An exhibition showcasing the proposed designs was held in 2002, offering what many thought of as a glimpse of the future. The project was city talk while the exhibition extended due to popular demand. Visitors were encouraged to give their views on their favoured design and send them to the city council.

Alsop’s Cloud

Will Alsop’s winning design, won surprisingly - coined the one that many perceived as the most unsightly proposal. The unusual design was named “The Cloud”. The design was representative of the British architect, often described as adventurous, controversial, and daring. It mainly consisted of a tower and a structure shaped like a broken down diamond or a cloud. Costing a whopping £200m, Alsop believed The Cloud captured the spirit of the original three graces, and that it would complement them. The building was intended to be embellished with hieroglyphics representing Liverpool’s 800-year-old history. Before Liverpool ultimately secured the bid for the European Capital of Culture 2008, funding for the building was continuously delayed over concerns about its commercial practicality. Even when it became obvious that The Cloud would not be finished in time for 2008, many thought that was acceptable, as it would become part of Liverpool’s cultural legacy.

Commercial Controversy

To address the commercial factor as well as other factors, Alsop was forced to redesign The Cloud almost ten times. Pleading everyone was no easy feat. The financiers wanted the project to be profitable while the city planners and heritage groups had their own concerns. Heritage and government advisers thought that the two residential towers in the design (the most lucrative part of the project) detracted from the view of the original three graces. This led Alsop to re-work the design, thinning the towers and placing them one behind the other instead of aligning them. Thinner towers meant fewer apartments; thereby disrupting the financial equation that made The Cloud attractive to the project’s private financiers. The idea of making the towers taller to house more apartments again were opposed by many.

then the towers would be taller than the iconic Liver Building. Liverpool council’s former member for regeneration Richard Kemp, said he wasn’t surprised by project delay. “I don’t think there was enough thought about the practical issues when Will Alsop’s design was taken on. It’s not a building, it’s a concept. Someone needs to work out the practically of what you do inside.” Finally the project was deemed unfeasible due to the spiraling costs; that by the time of the cancellation of the project in July 2004 reached £324m. Another reason for The Cloud cancellation was that by the time the design was finalised it looked very different than the original proposal that won the competition. An investigation was scheduled by the Liverpool council to understand the fall of The Cloud.
Dubai’s Clouded Dreams

After creating the Palm Islands and the tallest building in the world, the sky’s always the limit for the young Emirate of Dubai. “The Cloud of Dubai”, a mixed-use building including a resort presented at the International Design Forum in Dubai in 2007, has been stirring up heated debates making it one of the most controversial concepts ever for Dubai. The unconventional project was masterminded by Lebanese architects Nadim Karam and Atelier Hapsitus. According to them, The Cloud of Dubai is inspired by the nomads, whose lives were defined by the rigours of their relations to sun, water and sand, and whose travels followed the borderless movement of clouds. The Cloud of Dubai is a horizontal presence on an elevated platform, which Atelier Hapsitus designed in order to act as an antithesis to the sum of skyscrapers plaguing the Gulf region. Unlike Aslop’s Fourth Grace, for Atelier Hapsitus the Cloud is “a dream suspended between artificiality and reality” and a “playful adventure in the city”.

Half Skyscraper, Half Island

Intended as a sustainable project standing at a height of approximately 300 metres, the Cloud is a 20,000m sq landscape-in-the-sky comprising a lake, gardens, rotating bridges, spiraling walkways and terraces, an auditorium and a sky-sports platform. Unlike your usual skyscraper, The Cloud of Dubai is designed to appear like a cloud floating in the air as it is approached on ground level from a walkway with a pool reflecting a forest of inclined columns reaching up to the huge, translucent floating island. Access to this Cloud is gained through a few non-inclined tubular shafts, which double as structural support. In collaboration with ARUP AGU (Advanced Geometry Unit), significantly creative technological solutions are being developed for the realisation of such a complex technology. The supporting columns which are structured in a slanted angle are meant to resemble rain. Essentially The Cloud of Dubai is rich with representations. In a place where it never rains, rain is created. It’s also a cross between a skyscraper, and an island- two things Dubai is certainly notorious for. What makes The Cloud of Dubai so controversial is the view that it’s too far from reality due to practical concerns, and because if the technology became available and practicality issues were resolved people have yet to digest the idea that a hollow space of 300 metres underneath the cloud exits with no use at all...