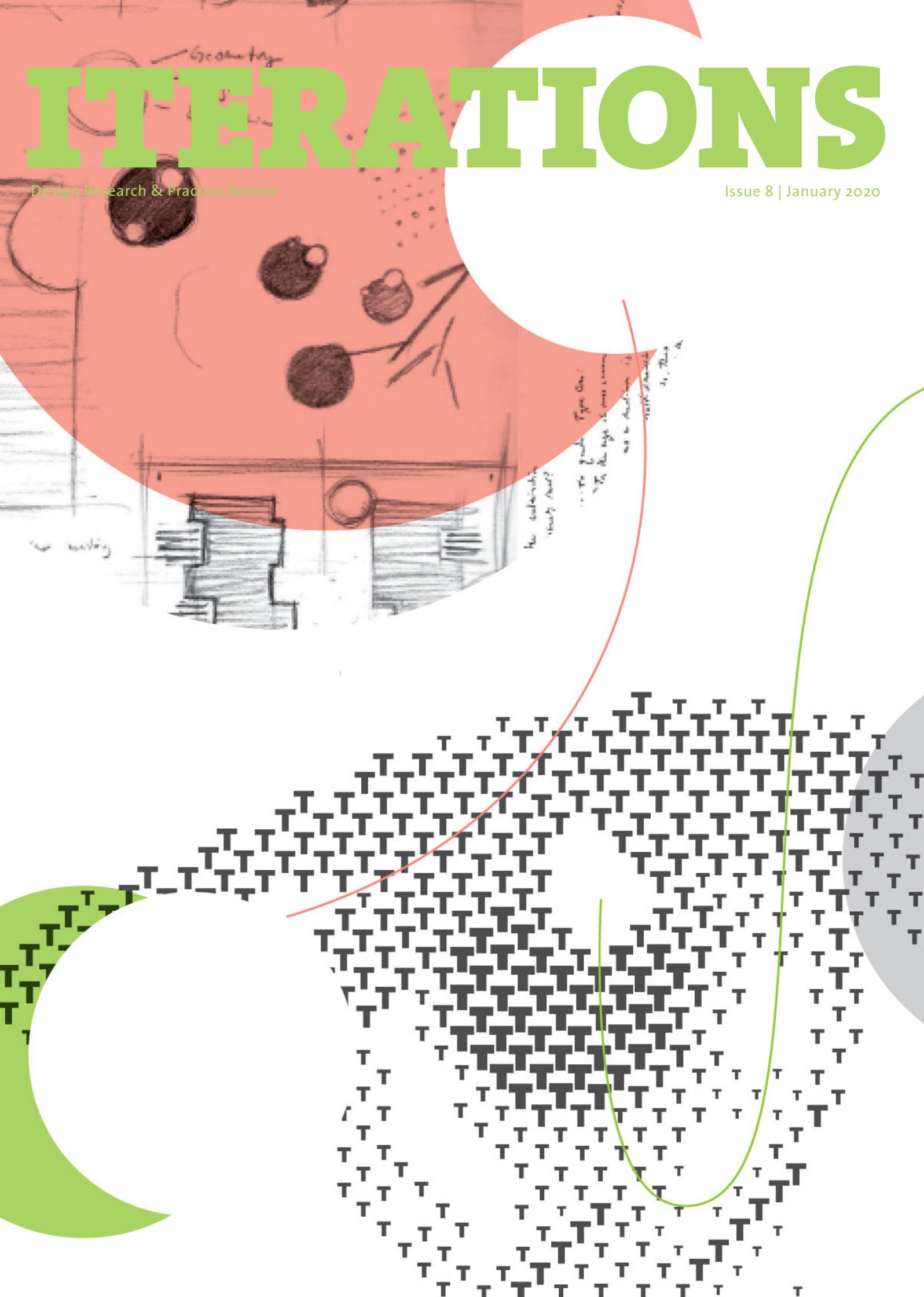


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Internationalising the Professional Standards of the Chartered British Architect for Socially Responsible Global Development

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The purpose of this opinion piece is to propose a method to translate the professional standards implemented in the delivery of construction projects in Dubai by certified British architects. It will achieve this by outlining an approach to analysing existing adherence to the prescribed standards in Dubai. This will identify the efficacy of applied British standards in their legislative and cultural context. Finally, it outlines how compliance might be improved by foregrounding human rights in building procurement through clean supply-chain structures.

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Introduction

The purpose of this opinion piece is to propose a method to translate the professional standards implemented in the delivery of construction projects in Dubai by certified British architects. It will achieve this by outlining an approach to analysing existing adherence to the prescribed standards in Dubai. This will identify the efficacy of applied British standards in their legislative and cultural context. Finally, it outlines how compliance might be improved by foregrounding human rights in building procurement through clean supply-chain structures.

The RIBA Code of Professional Conduct

The Royal Institute of British Architects' (RIBA) encourages its members through its Code of Professional Conduct to become leaders within the architectural profession, driving forward ethics, professionalism and sustainability (RIBA, 2019). Having undergone its '*most comprehensive and substantial update since 2015*' (RIBA New Codes of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures 2019, 2019), the revised Code, described as 'the gold standard of the architectural profession', became effective in May 2019. It claims to '*do more to protect the reputation of its members, to enable them to differentiate themselves*

to clients and to show their commitment to improving wider issues in the built environment'. Specifically, it includes an entirely new component covering, it notes the importance of ensuring clean supply chains and it is a welcome move in the RIBA's leadership role to tackle these issues. Component 5.1 states that 'Members shall comply with all applicable legislation concerning Modern Slavery' and 5.2 that they 'Shall exercise reasonable skill and care to use supply chains which are free from Modern Slavery (RIBA, 2019)'.

The Site

Its critics have frequently claimed human rights infringements in construction (Sevil Sönmez, 2013) as a fundamental concern of Dubai's recent expansion. The opening of the RIBAs first overseas office in Dubai as '*part of an expansion to increase its influence and standard-setting worldwide*' (RIBA, 2018) to coincide with the launch of the revised Code of Professional Conduct, must, therefore, warrant an open discussion on this topic. The United Arab Emirates is elected to the UN Council and reports (UAE Ministry of Labour, 2012) of compliance with the general guiding principles authorised by the Human Rights Council, however, it is not a signatory to a number of international human-rights and labour-rights treaties and consequently, may

not afford the practitioner with the usual reassurance of consistent labour practices. How then might British architects uphold their institutional standards in diverse jurisdictions? How might they exercise reasonable skill and care to use supply chains which can be accredited as clean and socially responsible? These circumstances undoubtedly provide a unique opportunity to frame and focus a forensic investigation of regulatory compliance in construction and to foreground Dubai as a real-world site to engage directly with critical global issues through structured investigation and grounded remedial speculation. Human rights are of course not just a concern for international practitioners, with the exploitation of the young and a mental health crisis affecting one-third of British architects (McAulay, 2018), whether obscured within complex global supply chains or hidden in plain sight in a culture of unpaid overtime and competition, responsibly sourced building starts with design.

Institutional Practices

Some have suggested that those institutions that have facilitated Dubai's recent transformation, from a trading port to a global city, must play a role in attending to the effects of global development. Certainly, the supply-chain of construction projects are as deep as they are established; from capital investment models, free-market procurement structures, legal frameworks, civil infrastructure and architectural ideologies, British institutions are well placed to affect change. The revised Code of Professional Conduct is a clear step in the RIBA's leadership role to tackle these issues. But the question remains: how will this be implemented in practice?

The creation of architecture contains long-established processes of conceptual and material production, typically systemic descriptive processes of which institutions control through promotion or regulation. Consequently, much of the labour of traditional British practice focuses on aesthetic communication and technical compliance, with little explicit documentation of social considerations. This, despite ethics being a central and perpetual subject of architectural and urban development. As recently as 1974, Malcolm MacEwen, conservationist, communist activist and editor of the RIBA Journal

controversially called for reform of the profession with his '*Crisis in Architecture*' manifesto in response to what he perceived to be the architect's response to market demands rather than social needs. He claimed they were "*caught up in a social system that rewarded their most selfish and destructive impulses while repelling their most generous and creative ones*" (MacEwen, 1974). His appeal for an environmental revolution anticipated what we now term sustainability. Perhaps, therefore, using the specific requirement of the RIBA's code as a catalyst for ethical change, we might pause and reflect on the behaviours of the institution and speculate on a new social theory for architectural design.

The Business Case

The UK has a world-renowned architectural pedigree and is the leading exporter of architecture in Europe. However, recent changes in global trade dynamics will inevitably lead to not only a reappraisal of service compatibility (European Commission, 2016) within Europe but professional mobility in markets beyond for more than 42,000 worldwide members (RIBA, 2017). The value of UK architecture exports reached £500 million in 2016, with 38% of chartered practice international revenue from projects in the Middle East (RIBA, 2017, p. 16). The business case for such reform is clear, as "*demands for cost-effectiveness will exist in parallel with demand for environmentally and socially responsible actions, leading to new partnership and operating models*" (World Economic Forum and Boston Consulting Group, 2015). Despite the complexities, it is vital to develop research to bridge the gap between the financial models of policy, public perception and the practices of architects (Samuel, 2018, p. 97). Without the tools necessary to demonstrate legal and regulatory compliance, British architecture might find itself in a predicament of assumed or active support of incompatible or contentious practices, or compromise access to those international markets that have been central to its commercial success.

A Precedent?

With no existing mechanisms in place to evidence clean supply chains in architecture, perhaps the inspiration for a solution might come from other sectors? Some have reformed ethical and environmental

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standards through a process of radical transparency. Formal disclosure processes are now commonplace (BS 8900:2013 (BSI Group, 2013), ISO 26000:2010 (International Organization for Standardization, 2010), BES 6001 (BRE, 2014), Equality Act 2010 (Crown, 2010), CDM Regulations 2015 (HSE, 2015), United Nations Global Compact (United Nations, 2000) and, of course, the New Urban Agenda (United Nations, 2016)). Some industries have also witnessed a rise of procedural transparency to improve traceability and provenance of products (Forest Stewardship Council (FSC, 1993), Kimberley Process (Kimberley Process, 2000), Fairtrade (Fairtrade Foundation, 1992), Soil Association (Soil Association Certification, 1946) Significantly, the United Nations Kimberley Process (Kimberley Process, 2000) has been embraced by Dubai Multi Commodities Centre (DMCC) in an attempt to stamp out the trade in blood diamonds, the UAE being the first Arab country to chair the scheme (The National, 2015), with the participants responsible for stemming 99.8% of the world's conflict diamonds.

In order to demonstrate adherence to legal and regulatory requirements, a practical technique, such as those listed above, is required to evidence compliance of the highest standards of international development ethics throughout a buildings' supply chain. It is hoped, therefore, that the advocacy of responsible development by practitioners has the capacity to both challenge routine procedures and prove the feasibility of traceable construction and self-regulation through visibility of local and global methods of production.

Conclusion: An Ethical Challenge

To engage with the significant ethical challenges faced by rapidly urbanising cities around the world might be to reimagine the relationship between architects, ethics and technology. To translate the professional standards implemented in the delivery of construction projects in Dubai by certified British architects is to hold practice to a level of principle. However, the engagement with, and negotiation of development ethics through transparent working methodologies have proven results in a diversity of sectors. The analysis of existing adherence to the prescribed standards in Dubai will identify the efficacy of applied British standards in their legislative and

cultural context. Such research across disciplinary boundaries could, therefore, offer a unique ontopolitical understanding of regulatory policies and be applied to prevent any qualitative attrition that might occur in diasporic processes. Positioned at the intersection of research and industry, speculative proposals may perhaps focus academic and practical perspectives of humanities in architecture by foregrounding human rights in procurement through clean supply-chain structures.

One decade of architectural practice in the UK followed by another as Regional Director of the Middle East and North Africa has provided the author with a comprehensive understanding of British and international working methods and professional standards. More importantly, this experience has bestowed sincere respect for both diverse alternative practices and a profound desire to make a change from the inside; a change that is necessary, but entirely possible.

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