



5000 and 5ive Trees - Abu Dhabi - John Fuller - May 2010



It is a wise man who plants the tree, whose shade he knows he will never sit in. greek proverb

Introduction

The 5000 and 5ive Trees concept is an on going performance for any community wishing to maintain and improve its social fabric - its place. It is a move towards social sustainability.

Abu Dhabi has experienced massive recent growth which has put considerable pressure on planning - future decisions. Fortunately for some areas, the planting of trees was included in previous decisions resulting in a good number of mature trees - the shade, ambience and atmosphere that nature does so well. In some places trees are missing, for whatever reason, these are 'holes' in this potential atmosphere that could be filled.

One of the highlights of cities such as Abu Dhabi is the way the community use their outside spaces. The life on the streets, the social interactions within the interior space of many built areas, relates to a notion of the 'urban living room'. This living room, like its interior counterpart, should be designed and maintained to create safety, comfort and beauty - in short, livability.

Design Process.

Now that the many patterns of living are well established in many city areas, the need for trees [with all their attendant qualities] in certain places has become obvious. Obvious to who? Mostly to the users of that space, but not necessarily to the authorities who are rightly concerned with the bigger picture, rather than the detail. This is not to suggest that they wouldn't want the correct detail, just defining that it can be a difficult process without local knowledge. Locals know where that important shade and amenity needs to be, or where the vision and access needs to exist.

Attracting involvement to any neighbourhood project can be tricky, especially if the community is transient, though this doesn't mean that there isn't good will or intention, it just needs a process to include helpful actions and provide individual connection. If plantings could be designed, recorded and maintained by both community and council this process gives a great chance for 5005 successful new trees, based on local knowledge and the desire to contribute.



The Act

Act 1 - Where to start.

An individual could propose situating a tree or trees by placing a green ring*, on the ground where they believe a good result is possible. [I would, for example, place 2 rings at the entrance to our building, on the footpath where probably there was the intent for trees to provide the welcome afternoon shade]. The green ring* is symbolic, but could be made from recycled newspaper, be about .8m diameter and in the curved triangular shape of khamisa - 5 in Arabic. Other individuals could then confirm this proposal by placing more green rings on top to eventually form a mulch ring, the centre being where the tree needs to go.

Act 2 - The right tree in the right place.

This action would attract the wanted attention of council who would then investigate the proposal, recommend variations [shifting position because of 'roots into infrastructure' reasons, species scale and suitability], then support the action by recording the proposition and providing the tree[s] with 5 years of care to ensure healthy survival. Individual actions can continue with the basic care - regular watering.

Act 3 - Long term Survival

The proposing, recording and maintaining can all be done via a council-tree web site. Each tree would have a specific GPS reference from the start which includes them in councils inventory of 'assets'. Those who propose and maintain the trees would be recorded as the parents of those 'assets'. This permanent web record will give credit to those who wanted to connect to this place and had the desire to provide the shade for anyone to enjoy.

Act 4 - More Long term Survival

As trees are planted and grow the patterns of living may change with opportunity to focus attention in the form of street furniture and art -taking advantage of shade, provoking reflection.

footnote. This is very much an act of placemaking, of designing space and the art of involvement. The use of newspaper as the mulch ring is designed to attract the needed media attention to grow the project plus use a common material that anyone can shape [paper mache] plus provide a connection to recycling.