Memory and permanence of monuments in new and conceptualized cities

The debate for monuments and their definitions has shifted with various theories about the city, significant of which began in the 1940s that included Nine points on monumentality by Sigfried Giedion, Jose Luis Sert, and Fernand Leger, to Louis Kahn’s theory on monumentality with use of current materials, to late 1960s with Aldo Rossi’s publication of The architecture of the city which included an argument for monument’s purpose within the city.

For Rossi, the monument defines the structure of the city, as it is a symbol that evokes a collective feeling and memory of the past, and which continues to build new memories. For new cities such as Brasilia, Rossi wrote “We cannot judge the designs of these cities strictly as architectural designs. Their formation is independent, autonomous; they are specific designs with their own history”.

The principle of this paper is to determine and examine whether new isolated cities that are not planned with traditional urban design principles of blocks and parcels, such as the future unbuilt city of Masdar in Egypt, RAK Gateway in UAE, and the completed city of Poundbury in UK, can embody Rossi’s theory for a city. How can the architectural style for these cities create monuments that resonate memory and permanence for a city with no history? What history or memory can be evoked in the designed architectural elements and open spaces which are spatially different than traditionally designed cities? What urban monuments are present that have the potential of becoming urban artifacts and what is their symbolic significance?

The central focus of the paper is to determine the importance and role of monuments, according to Rossi’s theory, in current cities with no history or spatial precedent.