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Expo 2020 Dubai: Morocco: Architecture, Authenticity and Pride ^[1]

Note from the CPD Blog Manager: This is part 5 of a photo essay series exploring Expo 2020 Dubai through historical context, individual country participation and public diplomacy opportunities through World Expos. The author is CPD Assistant Director for Engagement and CEO of ExpoMuseum.com. Read part 1, part 2, part 3 and part 4 (Germany Pavilion).

During my first day at Expo 2020 Dubai, I planned to visit the pavilions of countries that tend to be the stars in these mega-events. As I walked through the Expo site, one pavilion that was not on my plan caught my attention. There was something about the Morocco Pavilion that attracted me, and after enjoying its exhibition and talking with its hosting staff, it became one of my favorites in terms of public diplomacy best practices.

Perhaps the most impressive public diplomacy quality of the pavilion is the immediate effect it had on me. I entered the Morocco Pavilion with a relatively good awareness of the country but

left with a much richer understanding of its role in the world, particularly as an Arab state. In my mind, Morocco went from a regular country to one that has played an important role in the history of humankind. From the hundreds of pavilions I have visited in six Expos, only a few have changed my perception so deeply and quickly.

National participation in Expos takes different shapes. In my [last post](#), I talked about Germany at Expo 2020 Dubai with its message focused on education, strong participation framework derived from consistent governmental efforts, and clear understanding of the nature of Expos and their audiences. Morocco came to Expo 2020 Dubai with strengths complementary to those of Germany: a message of tradition through architecture, authenticity through original art and pride through a multi-faceted exhibition.



Facade of the Morocco Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai (César Corona / Expomuseum).

Purposeful communication through architecture is a public diplomacy best practice. Architecture is a powerful communication channel because of its multi-sensorial qualities and the ability to fully immerse the visitor in a narrative. At Expos, architecture often carries messages of modernity or tradition.

For Expo 2020 Dubai, Morocco's architecture is both traditional and modern. Its impressive seven-floor pavilion used new and ancient earthen architecture techniques and materials brought from within a three-mile radius that keep the interior cool.



Ramp connecting exhibition rooms in the Morocco Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai (César Corona / Expomuseum).

The pavilion has 22 rectangular volumes and 10 hanging gardens built around a central courtyard, reminiscent of traditional Moroccan architecture. Just like the U.S. Pavilion at Expo 1967 Montreal, which continues today to communicate a national message through architecture, the Morocco Pavilion will remain after Expo 2020 Dubai and will be repurposed for housing as part of the District 2020 project.



Exhibit about clean energies featuring traditional Moroccan doors in the Morocco Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai (César Corona / Expomuseum).

Authenticity is the second public diplomacy best practice worth highlighting in the Morocco Pavilion. Visiting an Expo is a unique experience that many visitors remember for decades 📄. Host and participating countries make large investments to be as well-represented as possible for the limited duration of the Expo. However, only a few countries make the extra effort to add value to the visitors' experience by exposing them to original objects brought from the country, particularly art and archaeological pieces. A notable case of original art in an Expo is Pablo Picasso's painting "Guernica," which was commissioned for the Spain Pavilion at Expo 1937 Paris.



Original modern art in the Morocco Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai (César Corona / Expomuseum).

Morocco exhibits a considerable collection of original art in different rooms, with a selection that shows a mix of tradition and modernity. In terms of archaeological pieces, however, Morocco brought a replica of a 315,000 year-old *Homo sapiens* skull discovered in the late 2000s and considered the oldest ever found. Seeing the original *Homo sapiens* skull may have offered a memorable moment of deep reflection to many visitors.



Herbal medicine exhibit in the Morocco Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai (César Corona / Expomuseum).

My overall impression of the Morocco Pavilion was a sense of national pride without implying any superiority, which is the third public diplomacy best practice I would like to highlight. Morocco presents some of its contributions to humankind unassumingly through diverse themes: from the discovery of the oldest member of our species and the works of famous Moroccan explorers to knowledge of botanical medicine and the use of new energies. It also does it through different channels: from architecture and art to food and cultural events. The hosting staff is effective in communicating the pavilion's message in a friendly manner.



Explorers room in the Morocco Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai. (César Corona / Expomuseum).

Aspects that could be improved at the Morocco Pavilion include a more focused message in a shorter exhibition. The pavilion's 13 exhibition rooms seemed too much for several visitors with whom I interacted. In terms of communication, at the time of this writing sections of the pavilion's website have been offline. With a few more weeks until Expo 2020 Dubai closes, this is a lost opportunity to deliver an online message to interested audiences.

I invite you to visit the Morocco Pavilion virtually [here](#) and watch a video of the exhibit [here](#).

The next post will introduce a different set of public diplomacy best practices by a country with a strong tradition of hosting Expos and official participation.
