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## The 'creation' of a tourist destination: A success Story or a 'generic' place? The case of Dubai

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# THE 'CREATION' OF A TOURIST DESTINATION: A SUCCESS STORY OR A 'GENERIC' PLACE? THE CASE OF DUBAI.

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## ABSTRACT

The relatively short social and economic history of the urban Gulf has undergone radical evolutions over recent years. Cities in the Gulf have advanced on investing in holistic urban planning and branding strategies. The majority of these investments were not merely intent on supplying various infrastructures for local communities, but more importantly aimed at foreign influx, through tourism and attracting foreign businesses with the possibility to set-up regional offices and increase revenues. Important in this is both the hardware (city planning) and software (city marketing). In recent years, major cities – such as Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha – have been confronted with providing a strong and profitable infrastructure for their respective tourist/business industries.

This paper starts with the emergence of Dubai as a city – state and then looks at the impact its development had on its population. Dubai's urban development is discussed briefly, as well as within the international context. Then the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Dubai's tourism sector are presented, before discussing the strategies of Dubai's branding and marketing as a tourist destination. This is followed by the discussion of whether Dubai, as a 'Generic City', has a real identity or not, and the paper ends with the conclusions made.

**Keywords:** *Gulf Region, tourism, city marketing, city planning, leisure*

## 1. The emergence of the Dubai city-state

In contrast to major Western cities where the transition from pre-industrial to industrial and then to post-industrial status occurred over a period of two centuries, Dubai has undergone a similar transformation in only fifty years. The city state has made a remarkable progression from an insignificant fishing settlement on the Arabian Gulf to a cosmopolitan regionally dominant twenty-first century city. In regional terms Dubai's unemployment rate of 5% is less than half that of Egypt while its GDP per capita is more than five times that of its larger Arab neighbour. In addition, Dubai, with more than five million annual visitors, is now a more popular tourist destination than Egypt or India (Molari, 2004 in Pacione, 2005). The economic transformation of Dubai over recent decades has been accompanied by major changes in relation to its population structure and pattern of urban development (Pacione, 2005).

The origins of the modern city of Dubai are rooted in the tribal culture and political history of the region. In the eighteenth century, the southern part of Trucial Oman -now the territories of Dubai and Abu Dhabi- was occupied by the Bani Yas tribe while their historic rivals, the Qawasim, controlled the area north of Dubai -now the emirates of Sharjah and Ras al Khaimah. The period was marked by a struggle for maritime supremacy of the Gulf between the two tribes, with the British allied to the Bani Yas. In response to attacks on the shipping of the East India Company and the consequent disruption of trade with India a British expedition was sent in 1819 to defeat the Qawasim. Subsequently, in order to consolidate their position the British required the leading sheikhs along the coast of Trucial Oman, including those of the Bani Yas, to enter into a General Treaty of Peace. Not only did this secure the trade route to India but also enabled the pearling industry of the Gulf to prosper, to the benefit of Dubai where many of the pearl fishers and traders were based (Kazim, 2000 in Pacione, 2005).

A political change of fundamental importance for the growth of Dubai occurred in 1833 when a group of around 800 members of the Al Bu Falasah subsection of the Bani Yas tribe seceded from Abu Dhabi following a dispute with the ruler and moved to form an independent sheikhdom in Dubai. This community was ruled by Maktoum bin Buti from 1833 until his death in 1852. Significantly, all subsequent rulers of Dubai are descended from the Maktoum family that has exercised an ongoing and paramount influence on the development of the city state (Pacione, 2005).

A second key political decision that impacted on Dubai's post-war growth was the decision by Britain in 1967 to withdraw from its military bases east of Suez. This signalled the termination of the treaty relationships in Trucial Oman, and on 1st December 1971 a new

political entity of the United Arab Emirates came into existence, comprising the former sheikhdoms of Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al Qairain, Ras al Khaimah and Fujairah. While the administrative capital of the federation is in Abu Dhabi, Dubai has emerged as the principal economic and urban growth centre not only for the UAE but also for the other Gulf Cooperation Council countries of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman, as well as for the wider region (Pacione, 2005).

## 2. Development and its impact on population

The population growth curve for Dubai takes the form of an elongated S, with slow initial growth from 1500 inhabitants in 1833 to 10,000 in 1900, and to 59,000 in 1968. Thereafter, the city entered a period of rapid population growth. By 1985, the number of residents had risen to 370,788, representing a five-fold increase over two decades. The population has continued to grow at a (relatively) reduced rate, increasing to 689,420 in 1995 -an increase of 86% over the decade- to 862,387 by 2000, and to 961,000 by 2002 (Pacione, 2005).

The rapid population growth of recent decades is the result of two main factors. Of greatest significance has been immigration fuelled initially by economic expansion based on the oil industry that created a demand for labour and expertise that could only be satisfied from abroad. The second factor is the natural increase and it is the result of high fertility combined with a decline in infant mortality rates and an increase in life expectancy consequent upon the introduction of modern health care facilities (Pacione, 2005).

Despite a policy of emiratisation of the workforce since the mid 1990s based on repatriation of illegal immigrants, restrictions on entry of unskilled foreign workers and granting priority to emiri graduates in some state sector employment, foreign-born residents still constitute a dominant proportion of Dubai's population. In 2000, of the 862,387 inhabitants, 460,691 (53%) were born abroad (Pacione, 2005).

Two principal waves of immigrants may be identified. The first influx arrived in the early part of the twentieth century and were largely Arabs from coastal Iran attracted by the economic opportunities. The second main wave of immigrants, arriving from the 1960s onwards, were primarily labour migrants from India and Pakistan, as well as from Iran, other Arab states and Europe and North America. This is evident in the distinctive demographic profile of the expatriate population that is characterised by a preponderance of economically active males in the 20–40 age range (Pacione, 2005).

The influx of foreign workers in the late 1960s occurred because the mainly British companies to which the Emirate's government awarded contracts for major developments, such as the airport, roads, port facilities and hotels, sourced cheap labour from these countries. In 1969, construction workers constituted 17% of the total labour force. The continued importance of the construction sector is indicated by the fact that in 2000 the sector accounted for 26% of the total labour force (Pacione, 2005).

Immigrants were also attracted to opportunities in the wholesale and retail trades. To the merchant tradition of the colonial period was added a new class of immigrant merchants from India, Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan who often occupied a particular niche in the commercial sector. Indian and Pakistani immigrants commonly sold clothing, electrical appliances or cameras, while Iranians frequently established grocery outlets (Pacione, 2005).

The influx of foreign workers has had a major cultural impact on the city, most visibly in variations in dress and language, and in the growth of restaurants, shops and other facilities to serve the needs of the immigrant populations. Immigration remains a key determinant of the urban character of Dubai. Across all main sectors of the economy the majority of the economically active male population have lived in the city for less than a decade. The urban outcomes of these major historical, economic, demographic and cultural processes are manifested most clearly in the socio-spatial pattern of city development (Pacione, 2005).

### 3. Urban Development

Four major phases of urban development may be identified in Dubai:

1900–1955: A period of slow growth and limited physical expansion due to constrained economic growth and marginal increase in population. At the beginning of the period Dubai's population of 10,000 was concentrated in three residential quarters of:

- Deira, consisting of 1600 houses and 350 suq shops, with Arabs, Persians and Baluchis making up the majority of the inhabitants.
- Al Shindagha, a former residence of the ruling family, where there were 250 houses but no suqs and only Arab residents.
- Dubai, the smallest of the settlement areas with 200 houses and 50 suq shops, and dominated by Persian and Indian merchants.

By 1955, the urban area remained a modest 3.2 km<sup>2</sup>. The majority of inhabitants lived in extended families in barasti houses, built of palm fronds. Residential quarters were built in

clusters for reasons of privacy and collective security. The internal parts of each enclave were connected by narrow walkways intended for pedestrians and domestic animals used for transport of goods and drinking water from four public wells (Pacione, 2005).

The first house constructed using concrete blocks was not built until 1956 (Heard-Bey, 1982 in Pacione, 2005).

1956–1970: A period of compact growth based on a 1960 master plan, prepared by a British architect, that called for provision of a road system, zoning of the town into areas for different land uses and creation of a new town centre. These modest goals were in keeping with the emirate's pre-oil resources. The master plan strategy was indicative also of strong central control over urban development (Pacione, 2005).

During this period it was acknowledged that a formal institutional structure was required to guide future urban development. In 1957, the Dubai Municipality was established to administer and co-ordinate all municipal services under the supervision of a city council whose membership was drawn largely from the ranks of the leading merchants. Regulation of the pattern of urban development in Dubai is also made possible by the structure of the real estate market that is markedly different from that of the Western world (Pacione, 2005).

In accordance with Arab-Islamic traditions land ownership is based on two principles. Within a settlement any plot of land that has been occupied by a homestead for a lengthy period belongs to the inhabitant. Elsewhere landed property is at the disposal of the ruler. In Dubai these principles have been applied based on a datum of 1960. Thus, in areas where by 1960 solid houses had been built the right to dispose of the plots normally belongs to the residents. In those areas of the city undeveloped by 1960 the ruler may sell the land, lease it, put it to special uses over a set period, or allocate it to the municipality for public utilities. If the land is disposed of without charge – 'granted land' – the ruler reserves the right to reclaim it at a future date. The titles to plots that were already developed in 1960 may be traded freely and if such plots are required by the municipality landowners must be compensated according to market value (Pacione, 2005).

The owners of private land may decide on its uses within certain broad guidelines (for example, they may replace their house with a more modern dwelling, or with a rental apartment block of several stories, or may sell the land on the open market). The fact that the ruler may freely dispose of lands outside the settled areas of 1960 affords considerable central control over the pattern of urban development (Pacione, 2005).

1971–1980: A period of planned suburban growth. In 1971, as a result of urban expansion and the availability of development capital a new and more ambitious master plan was conceived.

The plan made provision for ring roads around the city and a radial street network to the suburbs. Other major transport developments included the Shindagha Tunnel beneath the creek to connect Bur Dubai and Deira, and the construction of two bridges, Maktoum and Garhoud, thus linking city districts on both sides of the creek. The area east of the creek, around Deira, developed rapidly into the major business banking and administrative centre for the city, the main area for handling coastal and re-export shipping activities and the location for the international airport. On the other side of the creek the international import and container harbour was developed alongside the dry docks and several major industrial areas, as well as the landmark World Trade Centre (Pacione, 2005).

The building of Port Rashid was also planned, and a large area, now named Jumeirah, extending towards Jebel Ali was designated for residential use. To the south of the city additional areas were set aside for health, education and leisure/recreation developments (Gabriel, 1987 in Pacione, 2005). Of particular significance for the structure of the modern city was the growth corridor along Sheikh Zayed Road towards Jebel Ali. Characterised as the 'New Dubai' this zone is emerging as the new commercial and financial centre of the city (Pacione, 2005).

1980–Present: A period of rapid urban expansion, in terms of both the scale and diversity of development projects and physical spread of the city that in 2004 covered an area of 605 km<sup>2</sup>. The annual urban growth rate is currently 3.9%, and the strategic plan envisages extending the built up area by a further 501 km<sup>2</sup> by 2015. The master plan of 1960 laid the foundations of the urban road network and the system of municipal services, but could not have foreseen the subsequent explosive growth of the economy and city. In the early 1990s, the government commissioned the Dubai Urban Area Strategic Plan 1993–2012 to guide the economic and physical development of the city into the twenty-first century. Key challenges to be addressed were:

- To accommodate urban expansion by allocating additional land, in a phased planned process, to meet current and future needs for residential, industrial and commercial uses.
- To extend the existing transport network and infrastructure facilities.
- To promote continued economic growth.
- To support and attract private investment by ensuring a sufficient land supply, adequate infrastructure, simplified administrative and planning procedures, and by conducting publicly funded feasibility studies for major development proposals to minimise the risk to private capital.

- To encourage co-operation between private sector companies and government agencies in undertaking development mega-projects.
- To encourage expatriates to reinvest capital and profits in local enterprises.
- To develop an inter-departmental planning framework capable of reviewing, monitoring and implementing the Structure Plan.
- To devise a regulatory environment capable of operating within a strong market economy and incorporating the needs and interests of a large number of agencies and organisations.

The Strategic Plan also represented an effort to provide an explicit spatial framework for urban growth (Pacione, 2005).

Three particular challenges relate to the adequate provision of housing, transportation infrastructure, and public services and facilities. Housing represents the largest use of urban space. As a consequence of the particular system of land ownership in Dubai allocation of land for housing is based on three main elements. A fundamental distinction is drawn between nationals and expatriate housing needs. The former comprise two elements. The first refers to the need for new dwellings to accommodate a growing number of households and to replace dilapidated housing units. The second type of nationals housing need stems from a state policy that dictates that all national males above 20 years of age receive a plot of land of 15,000 ft<sup>2</sup> (1400 m<sup>2</sup>) and that nationals with a plot of less than 10,000 ft<sup>2</sup> (935 m<sup>2</sup>) may be granted another plot of 15,000 ft<sup>2</sup> in addition to the original plot. Emiri nationals are also entitled to interest free loans to assist with house purchase. Both forms of nationals' housing need are the responsibility of the public sector (Pacione, 2005).

Expatriate housing needs are catered for by the private sector, with the municipal responsibility confined to identification of development areas. The Emirate's housing policy has several consequences for the physical development of Dubai:

- Because plots are provided to individuals rather than to households the total amount of land required for nationals' housing is increased.
- The relocation of nationals to new 15,000 ft<sup>2</sup> plots has been accompanied by deterioration of housing conditions in older inner city residential areas.
- The peripheral location of new housing plots has stimulated a process of suburbanisation and creation of dormitory communities on the fringes of the city, as at Mazhar and Nad Al Hamar. In response, some effort has been made by the municipality to reintroduce nationals' housing in redeveloped inner urban areas such as Har Al Anz and Al Hamriya.
- While some of the vacated nationals' housing filters down to low income expatriates, in general there is limited state provision of housing for this social group.



Indeed, the Structure Plan does not recommend public construction of low cost housing for expatriates on the grounds that it would place the state in unnecessary competition with the private sector. Furthermore, state policy requires industrial firms to provide accommodation for their staff in existing or new estates as at Al Quoz and Jebel Ali (Pacione, 2005).

A second major development challenge for Dubai is that of providing a modern transportation system in the context of a rapidly expanding urban area. Dubai is an automobile dependent city in which less than five percent of personal trips are made by public transport. Traffic congestion is a growing problem at peak times, especially at the road crossings of Dubai Creek (Pacione, 2005).

In addition, within the old central areas of Bur Dubai and Deira parking facilities are barely adequate. While there are plans to extend the road network including an outer ring route, to insert a rail system, enhance traffic circulation in the CBDs by means of traffic management schemes, and improve road and water transportation links across the Creek a major challenge is to expand use of public transport (Pacione, 2005).

A third key development issue refers to the provision of public services and facilities. Traditionally in Dubai services such as electrical power, water supply, sewerage, and waste disposal, as well as the capital and operating costs of facilities such as hospitals have been subsidised by the Ruler's Office. With an increasing population and declining oil revenues these social infrastructure subsidies are accounting for an increasing percentage of GNP. A fundamental challenge is how to maintain the level of service provision but restrain the rising cost of social welfare subsidies. Options under active consideration include higher cost recovery via increased user charges, improved demand management using price-related inducements to restrain consumption, and planned phased development of the city on land contiguous to the existing built up area in preference to leapfrog urban expansion (Pacione, 2005).

Central to the planned urban growth, and as part of the city's strategy to establish itself as the region's hub for commerce, services and leisure, is the construction of a series of 'cities within the city' mega-projects. Principal among these are:

- Internet City: One of the first mega-projects, it is designed to provide an infrastructure and environment that enables ICT enterprises to operate locally, regionally and globally from Dubai, with significant competitive advantage, and is home to a number of major international companies including Microsoft, Oracle and Canon.
- Media City: Located close to Internet City this houses studios and offices of major media organisations including CNN and the Reuters News Agency.

- Festival City: One of the largest mixed use private sector developments, located along the shores of the creek, and comprising fifteen residential communities with a complementary world class environment of entertainment, shopping and leisure facilities.
- Dubai Marina: Situated adjacent to Internet City and developed by a government real estate agency (EMAAR) as a master planned community and the world's first intelligent city it will house 35,000 residents in 10 districts of upmarket apartments, with advanced IT systems as standard in every house.
- International City: An 800 hectare mixed use development comprising 21,000 residences for 60,000 people designed in a series of 'national themed' districts built to architectural styles from a variety of countries, including England, Italy, China and Indonesia; a 21 hectare central business district; an international exhibition centre and hotels, and a range of tourist facilities (including a re-creation of the Forbidden City in Beijing).
- Dubai International Financial Centre: This financial free zone is a multi-billion dollar real estate development on 450,000 m<sup>2</sup> of desert. Offering advantages such as zero tax on income and profits, and no restrictions on repatriation of capital/profit, and featuring a 50-storey headquarters building and 14 other towers, the DIFC is intended to become the financial centre for a region encompassing the countries of the GCC, the Indian sub-continent, Caspian states, Levant and East Africa.
- Burj Dubai: The 'Dubai Tower' is a planned office and hotel complex that is designed to capture the distinction of being the world's tallest building.
- Dubai Mall: Located adjacent to the Burj Dubai, with 9 million ft<sup>2</sup> of floor-space, this 'Mall of Malls' is planned to be the largest shopping mall in the world, and is expected to attract 35 million visitors in its first year of operations (Pacione, 2005).

#### 4. Dubai and its development within the international context

Dubai has developed into a city of regional importance, with a planned objective of becoming a city of significance within the global urban-economic system. Development of the city has been energised by a synergistic relationship between global and local forces embedded within a particular historical and geographical context (Pacione, 2005).

Dubai's development also usefully informs the 'convergence–divergence' debate regarding contemporary urban growth by demonstrating the dialectic relationship between the forces of globalisation -economic, political and cultural- and localisation (e.g. environment,

demography, history and ideology) in the production of the urban environment (Smith, 2001; Newman and Thornley, 2005 in Pacione, 2005).

From the global perspective, within the capitalist world system concern with economic performance dominates the urban agenda, but this objective is pursued differentially within particular ideological and institutional contexts that vary from the neo-liberalism of the USA to the state entrepreneurship of Asia. Just as different societies embrace the economic imperative of capitalism in different ways and to differing degrees, particular cities follow distinctive development trajectories that reflect the interaction of global forces and local context (Pacione, 2005).

A primary global force, working in favour of some form of 'convergent urbanisation', is the competitive international environment engendered by economic globalisation that drives city managers to take steps to ensure that their city is an attractive location for investment. This competitive imperative is manifested in city promotion and marketing strategies embraced (unavoidably) by most large (ambitious) cities. In terms of physical development impacts the desire to attract multinational corporations and specialist service functions leads to provision of state of the art office, entertainment and residential areas to cater for the needs of 'footloose' capital. Dubai's mega projects represent some of the most spectacular of such developments in the modern world. Tourism has also become a major economic growth sector in the global economy. Property-based tourist-led development has transformed the economies and impacted upon the physical structure of many cities worldwide. Dubai with its attractive 'sun-sand-sea' ecosystem has become the leading tourist destination in the Middle East. In addition to hotel, entertainment and retail complexes the city has developed trade centres, conference facilities and theme parks in order to enhance its image as a major leisure-tourist destination (Pacione, 2005).

Global pressures also place greater emphasis on infrastructure provision in the form of airport extensions, rail transit systems and road projects, all of which are currently in progress in Dubai. Notwithstanding the force of global processes, local context also prefigures how global forces are operationalized and impact upon cities in different parts of the world. A key factor is the political ideology of the state. Whereas in the USA city planning is undertaken by a range of development agencies with only limited co-ordination at the city-region scale, in Western Europe the state is involved more centrally in urban planning and development. Dubai represents a hybrid model between state control and economic liberalism in which urban development is determined largely by the planning vision of the ruling family within an

environment of market capitalism that seeks to attract foreign investment and reduce restrictions to free enterprise (Pacione, 2005).

Dubai provides a striking example of 'convergent urbanisation' in terms of the city state's response to global economic forces, but equally demonstrates the power of local environment, history, culture and politics to mediate the impacts of global processes to promote an urban form embedded in particular local context (Pacione, 2005).

## 5. Dubai tourism sector SWOT analysis

According to the Dubai Chamber Economic Research Development (2009), the SWOT analysis for Dubai's tourism sector is the following:

1. Strengths: Over the years Dubai has gained a reputation as a safe Middle Eastern destination. In terms of tourist infrastructure, Dubai and the UAE as a whole offer excellent standards of accommodation along with expanding coastlines and local cultural heritage. The government's commitment to diversifying the economy has meant that continuing investment in the tourism industry is certain. What's more, the sector is witnessing large amounts of investment by multinational hospitality groups as demand for accommodation continues to rise.
2. Opportunities: Whilst the tourism industry has witnessed robust growth in recent years, it is still a relatively young sector and hence there is still a huge potential to extend the tourism industry in Dubai. In addition, there are possible opportunities to develop the tourism industry outside Dubai as well as to extend the country's offering in terms of the range of airlines available.
3. Weaknesses: The UAE still needs to encourage tourists to think of it as a holiday destination rather than merely a transit point to ongoing destinations. Also, the focus of development in the tourism sector has been on Dubai, and other Emirates have not benefitted from the growth in the sector to anything like the same extent.
4. Threats: The tourism sector is very susceptible to oil price fluctuations and the recent collapse in crude oil prices does not bode well in terms of investments in the sector.

## 6. Dubai city branding and marketing as a destination

Branding of a destination can take some cues from corporate and service branding. The branding of a destination begins with the strategic vision of that place as a strong vision results in performance (LaBonte, 2003 in Stephens Balakrishnan, 2008). Vision, as a driver should facilitate trade and investments (Hankinson, 2005 in Stephens Balakrishnan, 2008). Strategic vision of any destination can look at five drivers for their branding strategy: economics, tourism, retail, services and transit hub drivers. These drivers are derived from destination case studies and research work by Jamrozny (2007), Eraqi (2006), Wong et al. (2006), Hankinson (2005), Gonzalez and Bello (2002) and Warnaby and Davies, (1997) (Stephens Balakrishnan, 2008).

Vision must be focused, yet considered the diversity of stakeholder needs (Pike, 2005 in Stephens Balakrishnan, 2008) often looking for commitment from inhabitants to get performance (Hwang et al., 2005 in Stephens Balakrishnan, 2008). Stakeholders can be internal like people/citizens (Aaker, 2004 in Stephens Balakrishnan, 2008), business/governing bodies and influencers like media or they can be external governments, NGOs, businesses, or influencers. When looking at internal stakeholders; heritage, citizen values and priorities, level of citizenship and ethnocentric tendencies need to be considered (Aaker, 2004; Javalgi and White, 2002 in Stephens Balakrishnan, 2008). With respect to external stakeholders which might influence or contribute to the destination branding, factors like the country of origin (COO) effect, destination product portfolio performance, ability to match/contribute to international quality and delivery of services, and information are some of the factors that must be considered (Aaker, 2004; Javalgi and White, 2002 in Stephens Balakrishnan, 2008).

Branding must often start with the people of that destination – the feeling of pride, the essence of the place and maybe even sufficient knowledge to create a positive association for visitors with the destination. Vision must take destination limitations into consideration. Besides, perceptions about the place, Dubai needs to look at future revenue. It lies in the heart of the desert and oil which is a critical economic contributor to most GCC countries is less than 6 percent of Dubai's GDP. It is estimated that oil will exhaust itself in 20 years (Middle East Monitor, 2007 in Stephens Balakrishnan, 2008). Hence, there is an overwhelming need to diversify Dubai's assets. This fact is realized in the government's vision as outlined in the 2015 Strategic Plan, which is to make Dubai a "globally leading Arab city" and a "Global City" (HE Sheikh Mohammed, 2007 in Stephens Balakrishnan, 2008) with services being a

key contributor to its growth. Dubai has identified tourism, transport, trade, construction and financial services as the key drivers of its economy in its 2015 Strategic Plan.

Tourism in the ME region is booming post 9-11. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) predicts the UAE travel and tourism industry will grow at 5 percent (2007-2016), which is higher than the ME average of 4.4 percent and the world average of 4 percent. UAE T&T industry attracts one in every 8.5 jobs whereas the world average is one in every 11.5 jobs (Rahman, 2007 in Stephens Balakrishnan, 2008). A lot of the UAE activity is primarily due to Dubai. As of 2006, 6.5 million people visited the emirates excluding visitors staying with friends and family (Rahman, 2007 in Stephens Balakrishnan, 2008).

Tourism according to DTCM's Director, Mohammad Khamis Bin Hareb, currently contributes 18 percent to Dubai's GDP directly and 29 percent indirectly (Al Hakeem, 2007 in Stephens Balakrishnan, 2008). Current destination focus seems to be on individuals: the lifestyle, business conferencing, sports (17 golf courses, dhow racing, horse racing, and tennis), entertainment and shopping. Future sports attractions range from cricket, football, formula one racing and the development of the "Sports City" make it an ideal venue for future Olympics. Dubailand will also host the Bawadi – a hotel strip similar to Las Vegas and the world's largest Ski Dome which will attract an additional 200,000 visitors per day (Husain, 2007 in Stephens Balakrishnan, 2008). The "family" is partly the focus with Dubailand's Universal theme park, however these are expensive options. Dubai should look at culture and historical exploration as other areas for development (Stephens Balakrishnan, 2008).

Dubai actively pursues ingredient branding. There are over 400 international brands in Dubai. Its no direct tax policy encourages investment. Its open skies policies allow any airline to land, increasing transit traffic. It has been the promoter of the Dubai Shopping Festival which has spurred retail sales and resulted in the world's best brands being found here. Its free trade zones have many Fortune 500 companies setting up offices (Microsoft, Nokia, CNN, Pepsi), Banks (Credit Suisse; Merrill Lynch; Deutsche Bank, etc.) and Hotels (Sheraton, Hyatt, Meridian, Raffles, etc.). Home brands like the Jumeira International Group (hotels), Emaar, Nakheel and Dubai Holding (real estate), Dubal (Aluminum), Emirates Airlines and DP World (port management) are among its brand ambassadors. It is estimated that in order to promote the "Dubai" brand, the Department of Tourism and Commerce's unofficial marketing budgets are to exceed US\$32 million. Emirates Airline is a Brand Ambassador for Dubai like Singapore Airlines was for Singapore or Lord of the Rings was for New Zealand. It is the world's youngest and fastest growing airline (it will accept delivery of an aircraft every month for the next eight years) and the strongest brand in the UAE and the second

strongest in the ME (Dore, 2007 in Stephens Balakrishnan, 2008). Its association with FIFA as the principal sponsor has helped change the image of Dubai. Emirates Airlines is perceived as a global carrier. During the 2005 FIFA World Cup campaign, their emphasis was “We all speak the same language” (implying football) which helped negate the negative COO effect. Today, over 120,000 UK citizens and 5,000 Germans have established residency in the UAE, plus over 1 million UK visitors and 30,000 Germans come every year (Anastasiou, 2007; Zahid, 2006 in Stephens Balakrishnan, 2008). Their current campaign “Keep Discovering” encourages people to explore through emirates (Stephens Balakrishnan, 2008).

There are cautions. The “tallest, biggest, richest, unique” are all short-lived differentiators and when building destination images, it is better to build it on the promise of something more tangible and concrete than a passing title. Though Dubai is associated by so many images, not all images encompass the image of Dubai totally. There is no single logo or symbol representing Dubai. Singapore has the Merlion, the Singapore Airlines fabric, New York has its “I Love NY” logo, the Statue of Liberty and the “City that Never Sleeps” campaign, Egypt is associated with the pyramids but Dubai has yet to decide what will be its key image differentiator. Most tourists buy a camel as a souvenir which is alright if that is a part of the branding strategy, but more likely it is an entrepreneur’s interpretation of a destination. Image also needs to be linked to an emotion. What emotional experience does the Destination want to engineer? These are areas that Dubai needs to work on branding. Services are the driver for the “Dubai brand.” The portfolio of products Dubai has to offer: real-estate, business investment, financial services, lifestyle, tourism, shopping, healthcare and education have a strong dependency on people and other auxiliary systems like laws, regulations, infrastructure and social support to ensure that the overall “image” is reinforced (Stephens Balakrishnan, 2008).

The vision is clear, but it needs to be focused. Dubai is associated with too many images which makes it confusing. City of Dreams is too vague. To build a brand image sometimes we need to focus on a few key elements at least in the initial stages to get greater recall, association and usage (Stephens Balakrishnan, 2008).

## 7. Dubai and lack of real identity: is Dubai the end of public space?

As mentioned above, in the last twenty years the city of Dubai has developed at a remarkable pace to the cosmopolitan global crossroads that it is today. Dubai thrives on newness and

bigness, in an act of ongoing self-stylization and fantasy. Hence architecture is crucial, for it defines these elements. Little more than a grand-scale shopping mall, the city is comprised of 'mindzone' spaces, and of airport-like lobbies. In this theme park oriented cityscape, there is no differentiation between old and new. Everything is recent. Yet everything seems to point to the twin towers of consumerism and tourism. What used to be the 'thrill' of the urban voyage is quickly giving way to banality and exhaustion: one has nothing more to discover; nothing other than immense, general and non-descript spaces. The visual voyage through the city like in any contemporary cityscape operates like a continuous shift between eye and mind, as though differences no longer existed between the two (Katodrytis, 2006).

The city has definitely ceased to be a site: instead, it has become a condition. Perhaps the city has even lost its site: it tends to be everywhere and nowhere. Rem Koolhaas, in his well-known essay "The Generic City" which was published in the Italian magazine *Domus* in 1994 contemplates the following observations, which pertain so well to Dubai:

"1.1 Is the contemporary city like the contemporary airport – "all the same"?"

1.6 It is big enough for everybody. It is easy. It does not need maintenance. If it gets too small it just expands. If it gets old it just self-destructs and renews. It is "superficial" – like Hollywood studio lot, it can produce a new identity every Monday morning.

6.3 The Street is dead.

9.2 The Generic City had a past, once?

10.2 The only activity is shopping...

11.5 Because the Generic City is largely Asian, its architecture is generally airconditioned.

11.8 The apparently solid substance of the Generic City is misleading. 51% of its volume consists of atrium." (Katodrytis, 2006).

Dubai is an extreme and complex example of urbanism. One of the fastest growing cities in the world today, it represents the epitome of sprawling, post-industrialist and car-oriented urban culture and most of all real estate villages and spectacular enclaves. Almost overnight, the city has become a juxtaposition of barren desert, 21st-century skyscrapers at extravagantly optimistic construction sites. The city is a large construction site, preparing itself for the incoming international nomads: new settlers, labourers, consultants and in-transit business travellers and tourists. New building precincts and cities are planned as the existing fabric sprawls out to the arid region. The explosion of mega-scale structures and satellite cities provides opportunities for the study of new typologies of building programs and forms. Within the urban grid, and the monotonous and predictable urban condition, the generation of



prosthetic geometries and new morphologies acts as a catalyst for innovation (Katodrytis, 2006).

To the visitor this cosmopolitan city might seem peculiar and hyperactive, with no layering or apparent hierarchy. Its allure lies in its ability to adjust rapidly, in its complexity, in its contradictions. The city of Dubai represents the truly generic condition of the contemporary city. These are places where history has been almost completely blotted out, where the terrain has become completely artificial, where the urban tissues do not hold together beyond a relatively short time. This type of generic city amounts to no more than the coexistence of a number of apparently unconnected buildings that, by virtue of proximity, happen to form an urban condition. A new phenomenon that takes place without architecture, without extraordinary architects (Katodrytis, 2006).

In this type of city, the notions of centre and periphery have lost their validity. What is more, it seems as though the city has lost its site, for it tends to be everywhere and nowhere. This fragmented and collaged city, which is perpetually being made and remade “a la carte,” is really a replica. The city has lost its meaning but not its search to be spectacular, the impressive display of staged buildings and iconic complexes. Here, architecture and interiors act as interfaces to consumerism, to the act of purchasing, to the ephemeral experience. Interior shopping spaces are ever larger, more luxurious and seductive. The advent of airconditioning liberated the architectural form and gave rise to a new set of formal possibilities (Katodrytis, 2006).

Dubai is a prototype of the new post-global city, which creates appetites rather than solves problems. It is represented as consumable, replaceable, disposable and short-lived. Dubai is addicted to the promise of the new: it gives rise to an ephemeral quality, a culture of the “instantaneous.” Relying on strong media campaigns, new “satellite cities” and mega-projects are planned and announced almost weekly. This approach to building is focused exclusively on marketing and selling (Katodrytis, 2006).

Flying over Dubai, one may easily be confronted with a huge urban condition: a 21<sup>st</sup> century and new diagrammatic urbanism, both as carpets over the land and as prosthetic islands along the seashore. As a tourist, there is no need to travel to distant destinations, to desolated islands. Islands are now close to shore, in a new typology of hydro-suburbia. The island is the lowest form of spatial organization. Pure accumulation, it has an iconic form and a certain perimeter and location. It can be reached by dramatic arriving. The surface of the island reveals everything there is, all contents; islands are fundamentally consistent and predictable: they give an assurance of security. But they have potentials; they are exclusive; they attract

investors and tourists and they can sell. These are exotic islands, the most media frenzied and newsiest islands in the world, isolated and made to stage the grotesque, at a large scale that looks like no other architecture (Katodrytis, 2006).

This exceptionality accords well with the mechanics of mass tourism. Once cities relied on a specific confluence of raw materials, transportation routes, and labour to generate industrial revenue; now cities rely on a different confluence of architectural fantasy, slightly different transportation routes, and tourists to generate entertainment revenues. Increasingly, the kind of contemporary architecture that simulates mass tourism has to be not only photogenic but also telegenic – buildings that look striking in a sequence of rapid-fire cuts or that stand out in a static shot behind the pretty features of a talking head. Many buildings of this sort end up as backdrops (Katodrytis, 2006).

Today, as places increasingly get restructured as spaces of consumption, and as tourist activities merge with other mass-consumption practices, from shopping and sports to culture and education, architecture is becoming an integral part of the conception and economy of tourism, and vice versa. Dubai's recent development has put it on the map of iconic projects, of real estate prospecting and holiday dream destinations. Yet what is missing is the visionary realization of its architecture. The modern tourist resort is by definition a constructed one. The tourist's perception seems to have shifted away from the pictorial 18th century: there is no longer the desire for the panoramic view. The excessively visual contemporary culture has made everything look familiar. Contemporary tourists are looking for familiarity: they want to feel at home in a strange place (Katodrytis, 2006).

This has led to concentrated tourist infrastructures and mega-structure complexes (containing hotel + apartments + mall + cinema + expo + anything goes), which are clustered very close together. In this sense, architecture and landscape are part of a single system, characterized by stratification and controlled spatial experience. In mass tourism, a dose of familiarization is required. Whereas it was once uncommon to shop for ordinary clothing items while on vacation, brand-name stores and outlets mall have popped up all over the world. One buys not only souvenir but also personal and household items, the identical kinds of shorts or running shoes available back home (Katodrytis, 2006).

Similarly, with the spread of franchised restaurants and hotels, it is possible to eat and sleep in circumstances that are remarkably alike, and tune into CNN almost everywhere. Mass tourism is indeed like mass media. A profusion of tour guides, and especially Internet sites, launches the tourist into touring weeks or months before the actual trip begins. What is striking about this body of preparatory information is the degree to which issues of touring comfort and

efficiency take precedence over historical information about architecture or place (Katodrytis, 2006).

From the airport to the air-conditioned bus to the four- or five-star hotel, package tourists spend much of their time within a cocoon. They might as well be at home, or at the mall. The orchestrated itineraries, with their chosen spots for lecturing, picture taking and shopping, and their frequent driving ellipses over ignorable terrain are similar to the experience of movies and television (Katodrytis, 2006).

In Dubai there is little difference between holiday accommodation and housing. Architectural programs are becoming fused and undifferentiated. The morphology of the landscape and seascape is becoming fabricated to the point that it may soon be difficult to differentiate between the natural and the constructed. Dubai's natural beachfront is 45km long. Artificial islands will add another 1,500km of beachfront, turning the coastline and the city into an inexhaustible holiday resort. This constructed landscape, like a stage set, provides edited scenes of adventure and entertainment (Katodrytis, 2006).

No matter in which part of the world, whenever architecture is built from a tabula rasa –it seems to show a penchant for a universal language of spectacle and the exoticism of the new. It therefore might be useful to draw on another understanding of the exotic at this point, and ask in what ways specific examples of architecture are elusive and other to the city itself. This is also a way of asking how the exotic intervenes in the cultural politics of global tourism (Katodrytis, 2006).

To explore this further, one may look at some cities in particular –Shanghai, Beijing, Hong Kong, Singapore and Dubai – all popular tourist destinations that have been transformed by new architecture. This is something that every tourist notices, in fact, cannot help noticing, because new buildings are everywhere; so that whether or not architecture as intended destination for tourism, it becomes a focal point. Most tourists soon notice that there is something not quite right about these new buildings that appear to try hard to look modern and in effect nondescript; there are either details missing, or too many extraneous details, usually in the form of additions that attempt to assert a “Chinese” identity for some, and an “Arabic” for Dubai – a form of exoticism (Katodrytis, 2006).

The emirate's expansion has followed the Los Angeles model: new developments sprout in the desert, beyond the older cores of Deira and Bur Dubai, linked by freeways and ring roads. The open spaces left in between are gradually filled with a lower-intensity, car-dependent form of urban sprawl. If Rome was the “Eternal City” and New York's Manhattan the apotheosis of 20<sup>th</sup> century congested urbanism, then Dubai may be considered the emerging

prototype for the 21st century: prosthetic and nomadic oases presented as isolated cities that extend out over the land and the sea. Yet, while Dubai is perhaps becoming architecturally the ultimate fantasy city, it has not provided many opportunities to innovative architects. Most of the new projects do not push the boundaries of design innovation. They stay within a safe range of design styles that are palatable to the masses. This is the story of the 21st century new metropolis: generic, mega-city, impressive but not original and above all: consumable (Katodrytis, 2006).

## 8. Conclusion

Dubai's development as a destination is continuing and it should be remembered that several schemes are not yet complete. Their fulfilment and that of the underlying vision of the future of tourism will depend on favourable circumstances, which cannot be relied upon in an era of uncertainty. Doubts might also be expressed about the feasibility of certain ambitions and forecasts and whether demand can keep up with the proposed enlargement in accommodation and air transport capacity. The appeal of some of the larger artificial attractions, with themes that are removed from the local culture and natural environment, may be disappointing and environmental costs overall will have to be met (Henderson, 2006).

Dubai has perhaps arrived at a critical stage in its development as a destination when it is necessary to maintain high growth, increase length of stay, fill expensive hotels and leisure venues and strive to establish a tourism industry that is economically and environmentally sustainable. The authorities therefore might be advised to proceed with their marketing and product development initiatives to reposition Dubai as more than just a beach tourism and shopping venue, but one that has unique natural and cultural heritage attractions.

Dubai's many strengths as a vacation destination should be constantly highlighted, although contrasts between expectations and behaviour of Western tourists and those from the Arab world must be appreciated, and there is potential for conflicts between the two that must be managed. International travellers should be reassured about value for money as well as personal safety and security. Business, conference and exhibition and healthcare and education tourism markets are now being targeted and there is scope for expansion in order to secure a better balance and more even seasonal spread of visitors. Nevertheless, the 12% annual average increase in arrivals demanded by the official strategy could be reassessed and revised downwards in acknowledgement of prevailing realities (Henderson, 2006).

The study of Dubai yields insights into how a small and comparatively remote state with an imperfect supply of conventional natural and cultural attractions can become an internationally known tourist destination. Possible weaknesses have been turned into selling points of consistently hot weather and awesome desert landscape and elaborate attractions have been constructed to satisfy modern tastes, with technology allowing them to function irrespective of climatic and other geographical impediments (Henderson, 2006).

Economic wealth has meant funds to support expansion in all sectors of the industry, including the fostering of a global air transport system and stock of lavish accommodation. The urban metropolis founded on such wealth is itself of interest to tourists. These features have been marketed in such a way as to enable Dubai to entice tourists from outside the region to a part of the world that is often dismissed as dangerous and unappealing. It has thereby achieved some success in recognising and negotiating the barriers that have impaired tourism development elsewhere in the Middle East and beyond (Henderson, 2006).

Dubai's accomplishments are of interest to other destinations looking to emulate its example and aspects of its experiences can be observed elsewhere, yet few countries share the emirate's defining characteristics that have made possible such a distinctive pattern of tourism. However, development is ongoing and further research is required to monitor the evolution of Dubai as a tourist destination and evaluate underlying policies. Some obstacles remain and new ones may be confronted so that the future is not without formidable challenges. The merits of the Dubai model and the wider lessons to be derived about factors critical to destination development can then be more fully assessed, the results also contributing to an improved understanding of the somewhat neglected topic of tourism in the Middle East (Henderson, 2006).

Lastly, there is the necessity of a strategic urban development plan (at least with a 5 year vision), especially for cities with a strong infrastructure for tourism & business, incorporating:

- City marketing plan involving the cooperation of tourists, businesses & residents (focus on the quest for local identity)
- Leisure plan (combining tourism, culture, sports & entertainment)
- Time master plan

Focusing on the strengthening of the local identity is very crucial to the success of Dubai's – and any city's – success as a tourist destination, as it risks otherwise becoming a 'generic city'.

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