Dubai's tourism industry and its societal impact: social implications and sustainable challenges

Marcus L. Stephenson & Jane Ali-Knight

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Dubai's tourism industry and its societal impact: social implications and sustainable challenges

Marcus L. Stephenson[a]* and Jane Ali-Knight[b]

[a]*School of Health and Social Sciences, Middlesex University Dubai, PO Box 500697, Dubai, UAE;* [b]*Edinburgh Institute for Festival and Event Management – Middle East, Edinburgh Napier University, PO Box 71908, UAE*

This paper initially outlines the principles and strategies underpinning Dubai's ambitious plans to develop a rather unique destination of international distinction. The discussion, however, recognises the challenges presented by the global economic downturn as well as the recessionary measures that Dubai may have to pursue in order to encourage people to travel to the destination in significant numbers. It is proposed that Dubai may have to look to wider market segments beyond the traditional luxury travel market, particularly through the development of budget hotels. This could challenge any productive notion of a socially sustainable tourism environment and intensify prevailing social concerns. The paper then moves onto a detailed discussion concerning the social impacts of tourism development in Dubai. The discussion focuses on ethnic distinctions in migrant housing and geographical location, social ramifications relating to the urbanisation and aestheticisation of space, and limitations in the availability of cultural tourism resources and heritage infrastructure. Finally, constraints are identified in terms of mobilising local employment resources and human capital to serve the tourism and hospitality industry, and with respect to prevailing social issues concerning expatriate employment.

Keywords: tourism industry; development; Dubai; social impact; sustainability

Introduction

Dubai is one of seven Sheikhdoms (Emirates) of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), including Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Qaiwain, Ras al Khaimah and Fujairah. In the 2005 census, Emiratis totalled around 825,000 from a UAE population of 4.1 million, where 79.9% of the population is non-national (EIU, 2006). Like other Arabian countries of the Gulf region, UAE's rapid economic development and modernisation from the 1970s was due to the production and exportation of oil. Since the early 1990s, however, Dubai has pursued an economic diversification policy as a consequence of the gradual depletion of its oil reserves (Dubai Strategic Plan – 2015, 2007, p. 21). Dubai aims to project itself in the twenty-first century with an international development agenda. The Dubai-based company Emaar has been involved in developing resorts and properties in countries such as China, India, Jordan and Syria. The government company, Dubai Holding, has been involved in a

*Corresponding author. Email: m.stephenson@mdx.ac

variety of ventures. Its company, Sama Dubai, has been active in property development in Bahrain, Morocco, Oman and Qatar; and its hotel and resort company, the Jumeirah Group, also owns hotels in London and New York. For the past decade, Dubai Ports International has managed ports in places in Europe, India and the Middle East. Its acquisition of Britain's P&O was a notable venture in port management (Sampler & Eigner, 2008).

Nevertheless, the social ramifications concerning economic expansion through tourism development are quite conspicuous but not yet significantly deconstructed through a detailed and formal level of enquiry. The first objective of this paper examines the phenomenon and philosophy that is 'Dubai Tourism', outlining the principles and strategies underpinning Dubai's ambitious plans to develop a rather unique destination of international distinction. The second objective recognises the challenges presented by the global economic downturn and the need to attract wider market segments through the development and expansion of the budget travel market. The debate postulates on the degree to which Dubai may move towards a classic (though problematic) model of tourism development, with an emphasis on high volume consumption of standardised tourism products and services, heavily discounted package deals and aggressive marketing strategies. Any such development could further intensify prevailing social concerns and challenge any productive notion of a socially sustainable tourism environment. The third objective thus critically identifies the societal implications of tourism and development, where the discussion critically acknowledges concerns relating to rapid modernisation and cultural change. The work then discusses employment issues and dilemmas relating to the indigenisation of human capital in the tourism and hospitality industries. This discussion finally indicates aspects concerning ethnic distinctions in employment as well as issues relating to the social immobility of some sectors of expatriate employment.

Contextualisation of Dubai's tourism industry

Dubai's tourism phenomenon

In 1989, the Dubai Commerce and Tourism Promotion Board (DCTPB) was established to promote the destination to up-market tourists and business communities from largely affluent societies (Laws, 1995). The Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM) replaced DCTPB in 1997 and was given wider duties to oversee the planning, development and supervision of the tourism sector. DTCM operates around 18 overseas offices in major tourist-generating countries and is responsible for marketing in continents such as Africa, Australia, Europe, North America, and southern and eastern Asia. Although there is a popular conception that the past decade has been responsible for projecting Dubai as an international tourism location, the early to mid-1990s was a more crucial period of development as it sealed the foundations for a structured tourism infrastructure. The 1970s and 1980s boom in the construction industry laid the pathway to a buoyant and attractive service sector industry. In January 1994, seven airlines initiated direct flights from the UK to Dubai, and 10 international sports events were staged between June and December 1993 (Laws, 1995, pp. 190–192).

Economic modernisation and financial development have led to population acceleration. Dubai's population was estimated to be around 1.53 million in 2007 (Statistical Centre of Dubai, 2007). There has been a significant population increase of 8.5% each year from 2000 to 2005 (EIU, 2006). In 2007, Dubai received 6.9 million visitors and aims to increase tourist arrivals into the Emirates to 15 million by 2015 (TTN, 2008a, p. 9). The 2008 Country Brand Index (CBI) identified China, the UAE and Croatia,

respectively, as the top three 'rising stars', anticipated to become major tourist destinations within the next 5 years (TTN, 2008b). The UAE was also categorised as the 'best country brand' for resort and lodging options. Dubai has also creating a very strong image for hosting international conferences and exhibitions. In 2003, Dubai hosted the 58th Annual Meeting of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which attracted over 20,000 people, including heads of state, ministers and business leaders. This event strengthened Dubai's status as a main venue for high-calibre world conventions and exhibitions. New developments such as Dubai Festival City, Exhibition City and Sports City also aim to help elevate Dubai's global reputation in delivering 'flagship events' and position the state as an event tourism destination.

Despite acknowledging some challenges and potential threats, academics generally conceive Dubai as a strong exemplar of tourism development (Bagaeen, 2007; Govers & Go, 2009; Henderson, 2006a, 2006b; Sharpley, 2008). Bagaeen (2007, p. 174) draws attention to Dubai's role as an 'instant city' and the 'product of a super-fast urbanism', though recognising some tentative problems concerning the city's future as a sustainable urban locality given prevailing environmental concerns and socially divided lifestyles. Govers and Go (2009, p. 74) emphasise that Dubai is a 'very powerful international brand', due, in part, to the development and communication of diverse tourism products, innovative mega-projects and functional public sector initiatives, together with the consolidation of brand equity. Sharpley (2008, pp. 22–23) highlights a proactive range of 'pro-tourism' policies which serve to improve tourism growth: international investment, liberalisation of visa restrictions, revision of restrictions on foreign land ownership of particular tourism projects, non-interventionist trade policies (e.g. an 'open skies' policy) and relaxation of strict moral codes of conduct associated with the dress code and alcohol consumption.

Popular tourism destinations thrive on political stability linked to perceptions of social safety (Sönmez, 1998). Tourism development in Dubai has endured two Gulf Wars, the 9/11 aftermath and ongoing political conflicts in the gulf region. Since the establishment of the UAE in 1971, foreign policy has been founded on principles that have tended to avoid political conflict in the region (Hellyer, 2001). The UAE formulated a series of alliances (e.g. the US defense treaty in 1996) and became an active member of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC). The UAE leadership has a 'strong grip on power' and there is 'no organised political opposition . . . various ruling families are generally popular and well regarded within their own emirate' (EIU, 2006, p. 10). As Shihab (2001) suggests, political and social stability are necessary prerequisites for the advancement of liberal trade policies and international investment. A range of free-trade zones have been strategically established in Dubai, examples being Dubai Airport Free Zone, Car and Automotive City Free Zone, International Financial City, Academic City and Media City. Dubai is thus composed of an organised set of cities within a city. These economically auspicious but geographically distinct areas facilitate international production and trade and illustrate how market liberalisation and economic diversification operate within a national policy that welcomes globally motivated forms of investment.

Dubai's tourism philosophy: 'bigger the better'

Dubai's development ethos seems to be based on a desire to be 'bigger', 'better' and 'brasher' than the rest of the world, with a fundamental though implicit objective to build a financial and tourist centre to rival those of the West. The city itself projects a science fiction fantasy and has produced a range of home-grown brands such as the world's largest shopping mall (Dubai Mall), world's largest prize money for a horse race

(Dubai Cup), first purpose-built maritime centre (Dubai Maritime City), first (informally recognised) 'seven-star' hotel (Burj Al Arab), world's tallest building (Burj Kalifa) and the world's tallest hotel (Rotana Rose Tower). Burj Kalifa, which houses a hotel designed by Giorgio Armani along with private apartments and corporate offices, possesses the world's fastest elevator. The process of constructing tall buildings has been described as a 'sign of power and progress' (Elsheshtawy, 2010, p. 164). The conceptual relevance of the 'world' as a symbolic construct of Dubai's development ethos is emblematically endorsed through the micro-reconstruction of the world itself. Over 300 small real-estate islands representing each continent and country within each continent have been constructed in the Gulf, 5 km from Dubai's coastline.

State-owned property development companies were influential in the construction of the islands, and thus one significant component of economic development through the state's optimisation of existing resources is the process of 'reterritorialisation' (Hazbun, 2008). This author infers that the process of reterritorising space for tourism and other related economic activities is noticeable by the way in which the state develops tourism products and utilises local territorial resources to attract global markets and seek international attention. Reterritorialisation is also illustrated by the way in which large complexes are acquired and optimised for additional (and mixed-use) purposes (e.g. skiing and shopping at the Mall of Emirates). Although reterritorialisation is linked to globalisation through the economic dynamics of global economies, it also allows for a certain amount of localised governance. Hazbun (2008) notes that:

> . . .political authorities, backed by interests in the private sector, have been able to promote their territory's incorporation into transnational networks to the degree that they can assert territorial control over the spaces of development and promote forms of tourism development characterized by economic reterritorialization. By constructing and asserting territorial control over locations to be converted into tourism spaces . . . private firms and state institutions are able to drive (2008: 219) the reterritorialization process and control the generation of rents and external economies. (p. 220)

Developments in Dubai manifest a host of new-fangled realities in the world of contemporary tourism societies. The conceptual significance of 'retailtainment', referring to the postmodern trend of combining shopping and entertainment opportunities as a way to entice and playfully connect consumers to the shopping experience, has patented itself onto the consumer landscape of the Dubai shopping mall phenomenon. Shopping malls in Dubai are simply more than places to purchase consumer products. The Ibn Batutta Mall, for instance, presents itself as a place in which to learn about the prolific travels of the Arabian traveller who spent 30 years (1325–1354) travelling throughout Muslim countries. Also, the Dubai Mall accommodates an indoor aquarium and an Olympic-sized ice rink.

Dubai arguably presents itself as a 'hyperreal' destination. Steiner (2009, p. 4) notes that in contrast to other Gulf countries, 'Dubai is the undisputed epicentre of an iconographic destination development'. His assessment points to Dubai as a novel representation of a hyperreal destination (as opposed to a heritage destination) with the capacity to establish new concepts and progressive initiatives, as well as to importantly signify symbolically loaded messages associated with the strategic reconstruction of tourism spaces. The Burj Al Arab, for instance, which is built on an artificial island and designed to mimic a sail on an Arabian vessel, is popularly conceived as a tourism icon and is an integral part of the overall image of destination Dubai. The hotel is arguably a visible expression of 'symbolic capital' (Steiner, 2009, p. 9), due to its international media appeal and high social status in the world of iconography. Images of Andre Agassi and Roger Federer playing

tennis on Burj Al Arab's helicopter pad before the 2005 Dubai Duty Free Men's Open, and Tiger Woods teeing off from the same location prior to the 2004 Dubai Dessert Classic, illustrate the symbolic value of the building and its fundamental role in representing Dubai (Mouland, 2005). The notion of 'symbolic capital' has been endorsed through Dubai's attempt to seek celebrity endorsement for its various initiatives. One notable illustration of this was the opening of the Atlantis Hotel on Palm Jumeirah in 2008, which was an international media event involving celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey, Robert De Niro, Janet Jackson and Michael Jordan, as well as a banquet managed by Michelin-starred chefs and a Kylie Minogue debut concert (Harnan, 2008).

The iconic landscape of Dubai not only stands as a representation of symbolic capital but as a testimony of decolonisation, signifying ways in which Dubai (and the UAE) has moved towards an agenda of self-determination and economic freedom. Dubai's political relationship with Britain in the colonial era was largely based on a series of peace treaties which assured them of British 'trucial' protection, which was purposeful in instances of territorial and/or tribal conflict with other sheikhdoms (Lienhardt & Al-Shahi, 2001). Dubai's economic dependence on the colonising state was exemplified in Britain's intervention in pearl trading in the region during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In an attempt to increase dependency and control of the pearl trade and limit outside interference, especially from other European merchants, Britain blocked the importation of pearling equipment preventing the region from expanding its industry and foreign markets (Davidson, 2008). The denial of new equipment and steam-powered ships deprived pearl divers of a healthy work environment, where many divers suffered from respiratory illnesses and skin diseases, as well as long-term poverty (Al-Fahim, 1995). Given British impositions on the pearling industry, which restricted Dubai's ability to compete successfully in the global market, the industry deteriorated considerably in the 1930s and 1940s thus contributing to economic decline in the region (Davidson, 2008). Consequently, the current iconographic landscape not only depicts Dubai's ability to overcome an economically harsh and coercive past but an opportunity to celebrate political autonomy and self-governance, not necessarily in relation to the UAE Federation but in terms of its intelligible detachment from its colonial past.

Dubai planned for many other projects to be developed. The government-owned real-estate developer, Limitless, started excavation work on the 75 km long Arabian Canal, which is intending to be one of the most challenging projects undertaken in the region since work started on the 163 km Suez Canal in 1859. The new Al-Maktoum International Airport is another major development, aiming to become the world's largest airport upon completion. The opening of Terminal 3 at the Dubai International Airport represents a much needed expansion of Dubai's aviation infrastructure. Another mega-project, Dubailand, is being built to encompass various themed resorts and entertainment complexes. Although the economic recession has meant that some mega-projects have been either scaled down or put on hold, the key issue is that Dubai has invented (and invested in) an image that has captured international attention through the construction and/or reconstruction of novel experiences, experimental or otherwise.

Elsheshtawy (2010, p. 134) notes that the 'spectacularising' role of architecture contributes to a 'hegemonic Dubai', further elevating its regional and global status. He also suggests that Dubai's close affinity with luxury, stature and fakeness has fostered a trend towards the 'Dubaization of cities' (Elsheshtawy, 2010, p. 250) and adoption of the 'Dubai Idea' (p. 266). This process is illustrated through Dubai's active investment and construction activity in a range of other Arab/Muslim cities (e.g. Amman and Cairo, pp. 259–271).

The changing nature of the tourism industry: market adaptation and budget travel

Despite Dubai's optimistic tourism development initiatives and the significant expansion of its tourism infrastructure in the past two decades, the emerging concern relates to the ambitious target to attract an average of 15 million visitors annually by the end of 2015. Destination marketing objectives may very well have to focus on re-positioning Dubai from being an exclusive destination to a more amenable, realistic and cost-attractive destination. DTCM figures show that hotel occupancy rates in Dubai fell by 14% in the third quarter of 2008, where attracting more 'value for money visitors' could be the new, re-expressed vision of Dubai's future success (Ferguson, 2009). The hotel industry occupancy rates are believed to have decreased to a conservative estimate of 73% in the first quarter of 2009, reduced from an almost 90% occupancy during the same period the previous year (Bains, 2009, pp. 36–37). Other estimates indicate that hotel revenues in Dubai declined more than 40% in May 2009 compared with figures representing the same period in 2008 (Jain, 2009). The significant decrease in hotel occupancy in the first half of 2009 led to significant reductions in room rates. In some cases, it has been reported that some five-star hotels were reducing rates by 40–50%, especially to attract the domestic market through special weekend rates (Safdar, 2009). As indicated, Dubai as a tourism destination has been proactive in creating exclusive tourism and hospitality products. Yet the phenomenon of 'massclusivity', involving high-income groups consuming luxury ('exclusive') products en masse, could be rendered less significant in a global economy where people's discretionary incomes are impacted by the current recession.

In light of a global downturn affecting the financial capacities of those who originate from tourist-generating markets such as Germany, Russia, UK and USA, as well as the industry's financial need to both accommodate and sustain the rapid development of tourist serving infrastructure (e.g. retail outlets, hotels, amusement parks, and event and entertainment venues), the potentiality of the development and expansion of budget hotels in Dubai is promising. Budget hotels were not traditionally high priority for Dubai investors, where construction companies and developers favoured luxury hotels as a consequence of high land prices and business costs (Henderson, 2006b).

Nonetheless, there are initial signs of market adaptation to the new economic climate. The two-star Ibis chain and the Holiday Inn's Express hotels are hoping to monopolise on the holiday market in Dubai, with other low budget hotels such as the UK's Premier Inn brand also starting to position themselves in the region (Yaqoob, 2009). Moreover, Nakheel Hotels purchased the British 'no-frills' brand easyHotels in 2006 as a regional franchise (Bakr, 2008, p. 6). Euromonitor International (2008) noted that a change in destination perception is taking place where Dubai is starting to appeal to a broader spectrum of tourist segments. The rapid increase of low-cost airlines in the Middle East, locally illustrated through UAE-based carriers such as Air Arabia, also means that broader markets can be targeted.

However, if Dubai does not attract significant numbers in the immediate future, tour operators in Europe could start to promote bargain basement package deals through a multitude of charter flight holidays. If this proves to be the case, then perhaps Dubai would be commonly perceived as the new 'Costa del Sol of the Middle East'. Moreover, the current impacts associated with high volumes of tourism could precipitate and challenge any productive notion of a socially sustainable tourism environment. The social threats associated with mass tourism activities have been widely observed (Burns & Holden, 1995; Shaw & Williams, 2002). Nonetheless, there are some clear indicators of how tourism and development have had a social impact on society and culture.

Societal impacts of tourism and development

Housing and urbanisation issues

Economic liberalisation and increased urbanisation have obvious social ramifications. Khalaf's (2006, p. 252) synthesis of key characteristics of migrant housing patterns in typical Gulf cities concerns the following core features: (1) construction and industrial workers on temporary contracts living in residential camps on the periphery of the city; (2) unskilled and semi-skilled migrants living in old residential neighbourhoods where indigenous communities once lived or owned property, and where single rooms are often shared by several individuals; (3) high-rise residential buildings and suburban villas rented by middle-class professionals from America, Europe, India and the wider Arab world; (4) residential zones that are older and serve to house lower middle-class families; and (5) villas and town houses by older expatriate communities, usually located in large, secure compounds close to Western educational institutes and culturally familiar supermarkets. These locations are often built adjacent to popular tourist sites such as Dubai's Jumeirah strip. This district is associated with the infamous 'Jumeirah Janes', popularly perceived to be expatriate wives who are married to affluent European men; whose conspicuous activities are associated with rather deluxe lifestyles and lavished with all the high brand paraphernalia.

The social distinctions within the ethnic strata of expatriate communities are indeed conspicuous when it comes to issues of urban residency. European communities generally occupy more salubrious surroundings near to the tourist locations, hotels and restaurants, and sport and recreational complexes. The tourism environment has, in many ways, cemented the ethnic distinctions within the expatriate communities, particularly in terms of non-Western and Western communities; though affluent individuals and families from Asian and Middle Eastern countries are also located around prime sought-after locations in south Dubai. Villa complexes have a tendency to be built in prime, up-market locations close to large 18-hole golf courses. These courses contribute to Dubai's image as a superior golf tourism destination and exemplify ways in which the city is socially (and culturally) planned, especially those new areas located within semi-urban spaces (Khalaf, 2006). The golf industry worldwide has been disapproved of by the Global Anti-Golf Movement, not only for its negative environmental impact but for creating elitist societies and promoting socially exclusive lifestyles (http://www.antigolf.org), which further limit social interaction and integration with other urban lifestyles and communities. Miller, Lawrence, McKay, and Rowe (1999), for instance, imply that the neo-colonial context of Westernised sports potentially overrides the notion of sport being an integral component of a society that productively represents civic characteristics. Nonetheless, cultural heritage can be recognised through localised sport activities and nationally celebrated activities such as falconry, camel racing and tent pegging. These popularised activities serve to remind Emiratis of ways to celebrate recreational activities that are historically associated with Bedu culture and desert life.

Nevertheless, the aestheticisation of urban space is one prime development objective of Dubai as a tourism destination, particularly the need to 'green' urban space and redevelop older areas to make way for new, postmodern developments. One such development was the proposed Jumeirah Garden City Project involving part of the district of Satwa. This area is one of Dubai's oldest, culturally diverse communities where employment is noticeably community-based, expressed through small businesses representing occupational roles such as tailors, barbers, restaurateurs and bookkeepers. Satwa is a significant business district for Indian, Arab and Pakistani communities, and is socially and economically distinct

in comparison with Dubai's mega-mall phenomenon. In the summer of 2008, the UAE press (Ahmed & Menon, 2008; Johnson, 2008) focused on particular residents who were requested to vacate their properties to make way for the first phase of the Garden City Project. The initiative involved the large-scale development of shops, apartment blocks, green spaces, villas and a canal network, anticipated to take 10 years to complete. The project's intention was to beautify an area perceived to be run down, especially as it is in close proximity to Burj Kalifa and other iconic buildings such as the Emirates Towers. However, the emerging economic recession meant that the project did not develop beyond the initial phases of eviction, and apparently some of those who left eventually returned to their Satwa homes (Hope & Khan, 2009). Nonetheless, the displacement of individuals and families from their homes as a consequence of the aestheticisation (and gentrification) of space is a frequent social concern in districts that prioritise both economic development and touristification of urban areas (Balibrea, 2001; Tait, 2008).

In the early 1970s, free accommodation was available for low-income nationals in the form of tenements located in places such as Al-Ghusais, Karama and Satwa. As national wealth significantly increased, Emiratis rented out these properties and had more prospects to become upwardly socially mobile (Davidson, 2008). There were more opportunities for nationals to reside in more selective areas of the city, facilitated by considerable welfare support from the government. The government compensates nationals with specific daily expenses, such as free healthcare and education to university level. Career-based opportunities through such employment schemes as the Emiratisation programme are also available. Consequently, socio-economic distinctions between UAE nationals (the Al-Muwateneen) and foreign immigrants, referred to as incomers or expatriates (the Al-Wafedeen), vary considerably in relation to rights of citizenship, and ethnic and civil forms of citizenship. The social stratification system of the Emirati population is indeed distinctive (see especially Kazim, 2000). Despite common perception, UAE nationals are by no means a socially cohesive group. In addition to tribal and territorial differences, nationals can be subdivided into four main social groups: (1) the lower-income groups, represented by settled Bedouin nomads, and families of former pearl divers and oasis farmers; (2) the merchant class, known as *al-tujjar*, traditionally pearling merchants who now sell international consumer goods; (3) the new middle class, represented by increasing numbers of professionals who have benefited from free state education; and (4) the ruling families, whose members hold the highest political positions.

Cultural and heritage representation

Rapid urbanisation and modernisation have had considerable social impacts on 'Islamic cities' in the Middle East, where accelerated urbanisation has increasingly threatened the historical districts and local heritage of these developing nations (Orbasli, 2007). The Director of the General Projects Department at Dubai Municipality noted:

> We are losing our built heritage at the rate of one historic building a day. Unless they are protected by law, there's little that can be done to reverse the process. (Paradkar, 2006, p. 29)

Nonetheless, there are some proactive initiatives to help restore selected parts of Dubai, especially those which are perceived to be aesthetically conducive and authentically pleasing to the 'tourist gaze' (Urry, 1990). Steps are being initiated to conserve what remains of the Bastakiy'ya district, a collection of about 40 traditional buildings close to Dubai Creek which recall earlier life in the region. However, the absence of local life and social

continuity (see Orbasli, 2007, p. 181) makes it a place disconnected from its cultural associations with Emirati life. Although there was some attempt to restore parts of the district in the late 1970s (e.g. restoration of Dubai Fort and its transformation into a national museum), many other historical buildings deteriorated and were eventually destroyed in the 1980s (Elsheshtawy, 2010). It is noted that only 300 of the 3000 historic buildings in the city of Dubai survived modern expansion (Paradkar, 2006). Although there are several museums promoted as part of the tourist circuit (e.g. Dubai Municipality Museum, Al Ahmadiya School and the Heritage House), Dubai's tourism industry does not overtly focus on cultural heritage institutions as the major component of the destination product, especially compared with the neighbouring emirates of Abu Dhabi and Sharjah. In examining 'heritage revivalism' in Sharjah, for instance, Fox, Mourtada-Sabbah, and Al-Mutawa (2006a, p. 285) discuss the emirate's proactive policy to revitalise itself as an Islamic city as well as a cultural and educational centre. UAE, along with Kuwait and Qatar, are the only countries in Arabia currently without a 'World Heritage Site' inscription. The problem concerns ways in which modern buildings have superseded the vernacular and indigenous architecture of Dubai, leading to the demise of older parts of the town. Nonetheless, Dubai has not completely abandoned its regional Islamic traditions. Some well-known tourist locations (e.g. the Atlantis Hotel) architecturally reflect the 'Arab eclectic' (Elsheshtawy, 2010, p. 146).

The scarcity of heritage resources and institutions reflecting Dubai's history, ethnicity and tradition is significant, and has societal repercussions. In Govers and Go's (2005, p. 86) content analysis of photographic and textual material of 20 Dubai-based company websites, it was concluded that Dubai's image as a destination did not 'coherently reflect its true cultural identity'. Host culture can be perceptually misrepresented if the destination image of tourists is not accurate and 'rooted in a sense of place' (Govers & Go, 2005, p. 87). Heritage representations and resources help sustain shared social memories of a given community as well as induce a sense of prestige and human continuity (Park & Stephenson, 2007). In the case of Dubai's heritage industry, associations with a shared lineage, kinship and/or tribal affiliation relate to the historical narratives of the Bani Yas tribe. The tribal aspects and ethnic variations of Dubai life, as well as the significance of tribal society, culture and social structure, arguably remain a rather nebulous topic of social enquiry in the heritage tourism landscape. Yet the collectivised identity of a UAE national is also complex as there are various facets and tribal associations and histories in the region (see Rugh, 2007). Another representation that has yet to be fully contextualised relates to the identity construction and cultural attributes of the 'Afro-Emirati'. Khalifa (2007) investigates ways in which tribal populations previously interrelated and communicated with slaves of African descent. She productively explores contemporary illustrations and associations between Dubai society and African heritage, especially in the form of music and related cultural rituals.

Heritage representations are not just important resources for international tourists to appreciate and learn about another society, but are ideologically and culturally important for the local (national) population. Domestic tourism and cultural representation may indeed help to foster a sense of geo-ethnic identity, socio-cultural understanding and ethnic awareness of the complexities of Dubai's history and heritage. Moreover, localised representations, together with an indigenous-led model of heritage tourism development, could help us to socially sustain and ground local communities threatened by rapid urbanisation, postmodern redefinition of urban space and pro-Western cultural influences. Appropriately, Stephenson, Russell and Edgar (2010) examine ways in which Dubai could develop localised concepts of hospitality within a wider framework of Islamic forms of

tourism development, especially through the expansion of Sharia'ah compliant hotels, propagation of Islamic principles of business and finance, and the promotion of service encounters based on Islamic notions of reverence and honourability.

Employment and the tourism (and hospitality) industry

Emiratis constitute around 20% of the UAE population but expatriates workers hold around 99% of all jobs in the private sector and around 91% in the public sector (Langton, 2008). UAE is arguably the most reliant of all Gulf countries on expatriate labour (Fox, Mourtada-Sabbah, & Al-Mutawa, 2006b). The 2008 figures illustrate that Emiratis constitute less than 1% (40,000) of the private sector workforce (Dubai Economic Council, 2009, cited in Alserhan Ahmad, Forstenlechner, & Al-Nakeeb, 2010). Mashood, Verhoeven, and Chansarkar (2009) note that possible barriers to the career development prospects of an Emirati-dominated workforce in the private sector relate to popular perceptions held by private sector employers concerning the lack of ambition and productivity of some UAE nationals. A study conducted by UAE University indicated that Emiratis lacked confidence and were apprehensive in competing with the expatriates (Yousesef, 2009). Other barriers for nationals considering working in the private sector concern irregular hours, lower salaries, less job security and longer working hours (Forstenlechner, 2010). Research also suggests that low-standard educational skills also limit the effectiveness employment access (Al-Ali, 2008). Moreover, it has been estimated that between 15% and 20% of UAE nationals in 2008 were unemployed (Emirates Business, 2008, p. 21).

The limited employment of nationals in the hospitality industries is seemingly a social concern. The Emiratisation of the workforce has been encouraged by the federal government for the past decade, especially in the private sector. The objective of Emiratisation as a form of indigenisation is to provide value development, helping in meeting the recruitment, training and retention needs of the country as a whole. Some success has been observed in the banking sectors, which operates a formal framework requiring clear quotas for national employment (Forstenlechner, 2010). Progress has also been made with Emirates Airline, where 35% of senior management are estimated to be UAE national. However, only 12% of the cockpit crew, aircraft engineers and mechanics are nationals (Randeree, 2009). Several Emiratisation programmes have been developed to recruit nationals to work within the hospitality industries though they have not been overly ambitious in terms of their learning objectives and length of involvement. The Maharat Programme attracts UAE nationals to work in the hotel industry and pursue career progression pathways in the hospitality industry. This 9 week training programme was orchestrated by the Emiratisation Task Force for Tourism, which functions under the aegis of DTCM. The programme, initially attracting over 725 UAE nationals including a significant number of females, enables individuals to become employed in five-star properties managed mostly by global hotel chains (Express Hospitality, 2008). The Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority (ADTA) has also worked with the educational sector to encourage UAE nationals at undergraduate and government sector level to engage in frontline 'visitor engagements'. The objective of the Ambassador Programme is to positively and constructively represent the Emirates (ADTA, 2010).

There is an urgent need to closely consider management competences and educational skills required by future UAE nationals to work effectively in the tourism and hospitality industry, especially if an indigenous-led model of national development is perceived crucial for the advancement of a socially sustainable approach to tourism development. However, the tourism and hospitality industry face two main obstacles: (i) limited capacity

for tourism-related employment to be perceived as legitimate career pathways, responsive to the religious principles, socio-cultural sensitivies and economic needs of UAE nationals, and (ii) common perceptions and negative stereotypes of the industry as a racially and ethnically divided sector, and financially non-attractive (Stephenson et al., 2010).

Popular interpretation of the term 'hospitality' should be localised to clearly represent the ethnicity and social dynamics of the host society and culture. This concern is related to issues of national and cultural ownership, where the hospitality (and tourism) industries should be conceived, to some extent at least, as products of Emirati culture and society. It is thus ethically and politically appropriate that nationals are positioned in key service sector roles within the industry to deliver and manage hospitality (and tourism) products and services. Global hotels chains in Dubai often represent Western characteristics, where the cultural or Islamic interpretation of hospitality and civility are not fully apparent. The development and expansion of localised human capital within the hospitality industries would help to represent indigenous values and cultural products (Stephenson et al., 2010).

Although recent data concerning the ethnic constitution of the UAE population is difficult to generate, it is generally estimated that 60% of the population are of Asian origin, comprising of workers from places such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and the Philippines. Westerners constitute less than 5% of the population (EIU, 2006). At the lower ends of the employment strata, UAE's hospitality industries are staffed in the more menial positions by expatriates from countries such as the India, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

There have been a range of mobility concerns associated with the movement and location of migrant workers. One major concern relates to expatriate (migrant) workers who often have to leave the country with the intention of returning once new work permits and visas have been organised. Kish, an Iranian island located 200 km from Dubai, is a popular location for 'visa runs'. Flights are relatively cheap and there is no visa needed to enter the country. The problem concerned cases where some UAE employers did not renew employees' work visas. It was reported by the local press that the Philippines consulate in Dubai, for instance, expressed concern over numerous citizens being stranded on the island and not being able to return. This issue has not just been isolated to Kish but to other places in the Gulf region (Ruiz, 2005). Other press reports have monitored the problems that migrant workers experience, especially with regards to employment grievances such as non-payment of salaries (Khaleej Times, 2005). The Dubai press has significantly focused on construction workers building residential, recreational and tourism complexes. One report concerned workers who protested at the Burj Dubai (later renamed Burj Kalifa) building site, who demanded higher wages and better working conditions (Hadid & Saberi, 2006).

There is an entrenched social stratum in the Asian community in the GCC region. Indian expatriates are relatively well represented in the business and the IT sectors. As this community has a long association of working in the region, they are able to become more socially mobile. Nepalese and Sri Lankans are still perhaps commonly perceived as cleaners and maids, i.e. 'marginal employees'. However, the tendency for Gulf states to recruit labour from the Asian continent rather than non-GCC Arab countries has been popularly discussed (Kapiszewski, 2006). Kapiszewski (2006) further notes that labour migration from Arab countries was initially encouraged because of familiar linguistic, cultural and social associations. Nonetheless, pan-Arabisation of the labour market did not succeed. The Arab share in the foreign population of the UAE was estimated to decrease by around 50% from 1975 to 2004. The post-1973 oil boom meant that the demand for foreign workers surpassed supply from Arab countries. Accordingly, despite the fact that migration (and its social consequences) in the UAE, and its Gulf neighbours, has been

closely scrutinised, there is evidence to suggest that remittances to migrant homelands are helping to challenge impoverished family and community environments. It has been estimated that poverty reduction in Kerala has been reduced by 12% as a result of working opportunities in the Gulf (Shah, 2006).

Junemo (2004, p. 183) interestingly perceives Dubai as a 'place adapted for conditions of high mobility and an extensively interconnected world'. The sociological dilemma, however, is that the means of movement for certain communities of Dubai is not holistically determined by aspects of hyper-mobility and autonomy of movement but by employment, social status and ethnicity, where movement is often geo-politically and economically determined. Accordingly, these issues raise important questions concerning any future movement towards a serious consideration of the (re-)development, perception and (re-)branding of Dubai as a socially sustainable, tourist-receiving society.

Conclusion

This paper illustrated ways in which budget sector tourism could expand as a consequence of market adaptation to a global economic downturn and changing market segments (and new product developments). Intense marketing campaigns, enhanced visitor number projections and the future possibility of attracting the mass tourism market could exacerbate the social concerns raised in this paper. Given Dubai's wider development strategy and increased investment in tourism infrastructure, the importance of maintaining and increasing tourism demand could be of paramount importance to Dubai's tourism industry. Therefore, bargain basement holidays and charter flight tourism could thus become the norm. The discussion has already indicated the problems concerning the modernisation of the city and the social distinctions between communities living and working in Dubai. Thus the key question concerns whether Dubai is socially and culturally prepared for extreme accelerated growth in tourism numbers, which could eventually occur once the economic climate has strengthened fiscally. Historical lessons from around the world have taught us that mass tourism unfortunately challenges any productive notion of a socially sustainable, tourism environment (Turner & Ash, 1975).

If the Dubai tourism industry recognises the importance of fostering a socio-cultural approach to a sustainable tourism development, constructive outcomes could be achieved in the long term, but structural changes would have to take place in the medium term. However, this would concern aspects of redistributive justice and aspects of social equity in terms of employment, where nationals could or should have a concerted involvement in the industry and where the ethnic distinctions within the tourism-related labour force are gradually addressed, especially to ease social distinctions and create relatively, socially harmonious environments.

Rapid urbanisation and modernisation redefine the way in which the tourism industry has developed. The challenge, however, is to develop cultural forms of tourism in situations where various key national resources can be effectively utilised. There is an impending need for UAE cultural institutions to readdress its hospitality and tourism products in association with culturally oriented particularities and distinctions, i.e. 'cultural capital'. There is no proactive movement towards the product enhancement of Emirati gastronomy, for instance, which is not comprehensively recognised by expatriate or tourist communities. Such innovation and reflection requires investment in product development and research, integral to a broader trend that ought to consider Emiratisation as a cultural philosophy.

Nonetheless, although domestic tourism and cultural heritage representation could possibly enable Emirati culture and society to be rediscovered through the tourist gaze,

the ethical dilemma concerns the degree to which Emirati society is willing to expose itself and risk being caught up in the seemingly infinite process of acculturation and Western influence. The privatisation of social life and levels of social detachment from tourists and expatriates may be one way to cope with the fact that Dubai (and the UAE) is often under the international spotlight, vulnerable to public scrutiny and the political gaze of Western nations. Thus there is an urgent need to empirically examine tourism's impact on Emirati society and culture, particularly through investigating 'local perspectives' and 'community voices'. This would help inform and redevelop conceptual approaches to the study of Emirati societies. The ethnographic method is one important and effective approach to pursue in engaging local perspectives concerning attitudes towards the influx of tourists within destinations and the expansion of the tourism industry (see Stephenson & Bianchi, 2007).

References

ADTA. (2010). *'Abu Dhabi Ambassador Programme' ADAP (for tourism) 2010 programme modules*. Retrieved March 22, 2010, from http://www.abudhabitourism.ae/cmsv2/ data/global/ ambassador%20eng.pdf

Ahmed, A., & Menon, S. (2008, March 11). Old villas in Satwa area make way for new project. *Gulf News*. Retrieved February 6, 2009, from http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/uae/housing-property/ old-villas-in-satwa-area-make-way-for-new-project-1.91072

Al-Ali, J. (2008). Emiratisation: Drawing UAE nationals into their surging economy. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, *28*(9/10), 365–379.

Al-Fahim, M. (1995). *From rags to riches: A story of Abu Dhabi*. London: Centre of Arab Studies Ltd.

Alserhan Ahmad, B., Forstenlechner, I., & Al-Nakeeb, A. (2010). Employees' attitudes towards diversity in a non-western context. *Employee Relations*, *32*(1), 42–55.

Bagaeen, S. (2007). Brand Dubai: The instant city; or the instantly recognizable city. *International Planning Studies*, *12*(2), 173–197.

Bains, E. (2009). Lack of power holds back industry. *Middle East Business Intelligence*, *53*(22), 36–37.

Bakr, A. (2008, November 26). Budget hotel boom on the horizon. *The National*, p. 6.

Balibrea, M.P. (2001). Urbanism, culture and the post-industrial city: Challenging the 'Barcelona model'. *Journal of Spanish Cultural*, *2*(2), 187–210.

Burns, P., & Holden, A. (1995). *Tourism: A new perspective*. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall.

Davidson, C.M. (2008). *Dubai: The vulnerability of success*. London: Hurst and Company.

Dubai Strategic Plan – 2015. (2007). *Dubai, where the future begins*. Retrieved January 5, 2008, from http://egov.dubai.ae/opt/CMSContent/Active/CORP/en/Documents/DSPE.pdf

EIU. (2006). *Country profile 2006*. London: Economist Intelligence Unit.

Elsheshtawy, Y. (2010). *Dubai: Behind an urban spectacle*. London: Routledge.

Emirates Business. (2008, April 10). Economic threat that haunts UAE (F. Kane). *Emirates Business*, p. 21.

Euromonitor International. (2008, October). *Travel and tourism in the United Arab Emirates*. London: Author.

Express Hospitality. (2008, February 16–29). *Dubai's Maharat training programme moves to the next level*. Retrieved May 25, 2008, from http://www.experesshospitality.com

Ferguson, J. (2009, January 29). Dubai on budget. *Gulf News*, p. 47.

Forstenlechner, I. (2010). Workforce localization in emerging Gulf economies: The need to fine-tune HRM. *Personnel Review*, *39*(1), 135–152.

Fox, J.W., Mourtada-Sabbah, N., & Al-Mutawa, M. (2006a). Heritage revivalism in Sharjah. In J.W. Fox, N. Mourtada-Sabbah, & M. al-Mutawa (Eds.), *Globalization and the Gulf* (pp. 266–287). London: Routledge.

Fox, J.W., Mourtada-Sabbah, N., & Al-Mutawa, M. (2006b). The Arab Gulf region: Traditionalism globalized or globalization traditionalized? In J.W. Fox, N. Mourtada-Sabbah, & M. al-Mutawa M (Eds.), *Globalization and the Gulf* (pp. 3–59). London: Routledge.

Govers, R., & Go, F.M. (2005). Projected destination image online: Website content analysis of pictures and text. *Information Technology and Tourism*, *7,* 73–89.

Govers, R., & Go, F. (2009). *Place branding: Glocal, virtual and physical identities, constructed, imagined and experienced*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan.

Hadid, D., & Saberi, M. (2006, March 23). Labourers turn violent at work site. *Gulf News*, p. 4.

Harnan, E. (2008, November 19). Atlantis opening sparks party fever. *The National*, p. 8.

Hazbun, W. (2008). *Beaches, ruins, resorts: The politics of tourism in the Arab world*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Hellyer, P. (2001). The evolution of UAE foreign policy. In I. Al Abed & P. Hellyer (Eds.), *United Arab Emirates: A new perspective* (pp. 161–178). London: Trident Press Ltd.

Henderson, J.C. (2006a). Tourism in Dubai: Overcoming barriers to destination development. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, *8,* 87–99.

Henderson, J.C. (2006b). Destination development: Singapore and Dubai compared. *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, *20*(3/4), 33–45.

Hope, B., & Khan, S. (2009). Evicted Jumeira Gardens residents return home. *National Newspaper*. Retrieved February 23, 2010, from http://www.thenational.ae/article/20090107/ BUSINESS/ 599826714/-1/OPINION.

Jain, S. (2009, July 1). Two five-star hotels at Festival City shelved. *Emirates Business*, p. 7.

Johnson, A. (2008, October 3). Soul of Satwa. *Gulf News*, p. 8.

Junemo, M. (2004). Let's build a palm island!: Playfulness in complex times. In M. Sheller & J. Urry (Eds.), *Tourism mobilities: Places to play, places in play* (pp. 181–191). London: Routledge.

Kapiszewski, A. (2006, May). Arab versus Asian migrant workers in the GCC Countries, Paper presented to the United Nations Expert Group Meeting on International Migration and Development in the Arab Region, Popular Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Secretariat, Beirut.

Kazim, A. (2000). *The United Arab Emirates, A.D. 600 to the present: A socio-discursive transformation in the Arabian Gulf*. Dubai: Gulf Book Centre.

Khalaf, S. (2006). The evolution of the Gulf city type, oil, and globalization. In J.W. Fox, N. Mourtada-Sabbah, & M. al-Mutawa (Eds.), *Globalization and the Gulf* (pp. 244–265). London: Routledge.

Khaleej Times. (2005, October 19). Fund to assist workers who get no salary. *Khaleej Times*, p. 1.

Khalifa, A.B. (2007). African influence on culture and music in Dubai. *International Social Science Journal*, *58*(1888), 227–235.

Langton, J. (2008, April 28). Tomorrow's leaders today. *The National*, pp. 2–3.

Laws, E. (1995). *Tourist destination management: Issues, analysis and policies*. London: Routledge.

Lienhardt, P., & Al-Shahi, A. (Eds.). (2001). *Shaikhdoms of Eastern Arabia*. Oxford: Palgrave.

Mashood, N., Verhoeven, H., & Chansarkar, B. (2009, April 16–17). Emiratisation, Omanisation and Saudisation – common causes: Common solutions? *Proceedings of the Tenth International Business Research Conference*, Crowne Plaza Hotel, Dubai, UAE.

Miller, T., Lawrence, G., McKay, J., & Rowe, D. (1999). Modifying the sign: Sport and globalization. *Social Text*, *17*(3), 15–33.

Mouland, B. (2005, June 19). Watch his drop shot!. *London Evening Standard.com*. Retrieved January 29, 2009, from http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/sport/article-16812350-watch-his-drop-shot.do

Orbasli, A. (2007). The 'Islamic' city and tourism: Managing conservation and tourism in traditional neighbourhoods. In R.F. Daher (Ed.), *Tourism in the Middle East: Continuity, change and transformation* (pp. 161–187). Clevedon: Channel View Publications.

Paradkar, S. (2006, April 21). Preserving a slice of life. *Friday Magasine: Gulf News*, pp. 26–32.

Park, H.Y., & Stephenson, M.L. (2007). A critical analysis of the symbolic significance of heritage tourism. *International Journal of Excellence in Tourism, Hospitality and Catering*, *1*(2), 1–26.

Randeree, K. (2009). Strategy, policy and practice in the nationalisation of human capital: 'Project emiratisation'. *Research and Practice in Human Resource Management*, *17*(1), 71–91.

Rugh, A.B. (2007). *The political culture of leadership in the United Arab Emirates*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ruiz, R. (2005, November 19). Stranded Filipinas. *Emirates Today*, p. 19.

Safdar, A. (2009, July 18). Home for a holiday. *The National*, p. 3.

Sampler, J., & Eigner, S. (2008). *Sand to silicon: Going global. Rapid growth lessons from Dubai*. London: Motivate Publishing.

Shah, N.M. (2006, May 15–17). *Restrictive labour immigration policies in the oil-rich Gulf: Effectiveness and implications for sending Asian countries*. Paper presented to the United Nationals Expert Group Meeting in International Migration and Development in the Arab Region, Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Secretariat, Beirut.

Sharpley, R. (2008). Planning for tourism: The case of Dubai. *Tourism and Hospitality Planning and Development*, *5*(1), 13–30.

Shaw, G., & Williams, A.M. (2002). *Critical issues in tourism: A geographical perspective* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Shihab, M. (2001). Economic development in the UAE. In I. Al Abed & P. Hellyer (Eds.), *United Arab Emirates: A new perspective* (pp. 249–259). London: Trident Press Ltd.

Sönmez, S.F. (1998). Tourism, terrorism, and political instability. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *25*(2), 416–456.

Statistical Centre of Dubai. (2007). *Dubai in figures, Dubai Municipality*. Retrieved October 10, 2007, from http://www.dm.gov.ae/DMEGOV/OSI/dm-osi-mainpage.jsp

Steiner, C. (2009, April 4–7). *From heritage to hyperreality? Prospects for tourism development in the Middle East between Petra and the Palm*. Paper presented at the conference Traditions and Transformations: Tourism, Heritage and Cultural Change in the Middle East and North Africa Region, Amman, Jordan.

Stephenson, M.L., & Bianchi, R. (2007). 'Journeying into the lives of others': A critical analysis of analysis of ethnography, tourism and tourists. *International Journal of Excellence in Tourism, Hospitality and Catering*, *1*(1), 1–41.

Stephenson, M.L., Russell, K.A., & Edgar, D. (2010). Islamic hospitality in the UAE: Indigenization of products and human capital. *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, *1*(1), 9–24.

Tait, R. (2008, July 22). Forced gentrification plan spells end for old Roman district in Istanbul. *Guardian*. Retrieved January 10, 2009, from http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/jul/22/roma.turkey

TTN. (2008a, October). Dubai to attract 15m tourists by 2015. *Travel and Tourism News Middle East*, *26*(10), 9.

TTN. (2008b, December). UAE deemed a rising star. *Travel and Tourism News Middle East*, *26*(11), 11.

Turner, L., & Ash, J. (1975). *Golden Hordes international tourism and the pleasure periphery*. London: Constable.

Urry, J. (1990). *The tourism gaze*. London: Sage Publications.

Yaqoob, T. (2009, April 11). Hotels seek to satisfy low budget travelers. *The National*, p. 8.

Yousesef, M. (2009, March 25). Emiratis shunning public sector, too. *The National*, p. 5.