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# **Young Emiratis' Perspectives of the Quality of Life Impacts and Long-Term Sustainability of Tourism in Dubai**

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## **Abstract**

*The purpose of this study is to analyze how tourism in Dubai is perceived by Emirati citizens, particularly the younger generation. The study explores the perceived social-cultural, economic, and environmental impacts of tourism on the Emirati community. Although the economic development of Dubai as a result of tourism has been well documented, little research has examined the social and cultural impacts. Moreover, despite the significant level of enquiry that has been directed to the study of tourism in Dubai, there is still a considerable lack of empirical engagement with the indigenous perspective. Thirty interviewees were conducted with 'young' Emiratis. The findings help to contextualise ways in which 'Destination Dubai' is locally perceived and the extent to which nationals perceive tourism to be conducive to the maintenance and long-term sustainability of their culture and society.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Dubai has a relatively consistent high tourism growth rate compared to other destinations in the region. Dubai has promoted itself to as a luxury tourism destination, and the Emirate has initiated a range of 'pro-tourism' policies and initiatives in order to improve tourism growth (Sharpley, 2008). Mega-initiatives and significant levels of investments have been dedicated to support the active promotion of Dubai. Tourism has been emphasised as a main component with which to diversify the economy and improve the standard of living of its residents. One of the main objectives of 'Destination Dubai' is to demonstrate itself as a destination of 'hyperreality' and Western influence, but the same time trying to maintain a sense of local and regional identity. It has been asserted that Dubai aimed to provide a secure and enjoyable environment to create a balance between the benefits that the visitors receive and the satisfaction of residents (Laws, 1995). The potential conflict between these two objectives has been documented particularly through global media outlets. Numerous studies have examined residents' perceptions of tourism as a means of analyzing the positive and negative impacts of tourism for a

destination (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2010; Besculides, Lee, & McCormick, 2002; Tyrrell, Paris, & Casson, 2010).

Although the economic development of Dubai as a result of tourism has been well documented, little research has examined the social and cultural impacts. Moreover, despite the significant level of enquiry that has been directed to the study of tourism in Dubai, there is still a considerable lack of empirical engagement with the indigenous perspective (Stephenson and Ali-Knight, 2010). This study thus aims to analyze the viewpoints (values, attitudes and aspirations) of residents who are UAE nationals. The work will highlight and examine ways in which local conceptions of the tourism industry and the tourists themselves can contribute to a crucial understanding of how cultural norms and traditions are understood, negotiated and contested. Moreover, the work helps to contextualize ways in which 'Destination Dubai' is locally perceived and the extent to which nationals perceive tourism to be conducive to the maintenance and long-term sustainability of their culture and society. Accordingly, the research study is based on the employment of thirty in-depth interviews with members of Dubai's young Emirati community, establishing a critical narrative concerning people's perceptions; especially in relation to such issues as: tourism development in Dubai, the perceived impact of tourism on Emiratis' quality of life, the difference in the perceived impacts of tourism on the individual vs. the impacts on Dubai as a whole, and the strategies for maximizing the benefits and minimizing the negative impacts of tourism in Dubai for the 'local' population.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In 1971, Dubai became one of six Emirates (Sheikhdoms) of the independent federal nation of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), including Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Fujairah, Sharjah and Umm al-Qaiwain. Ras al Khaimah joined the federation in 1972. Dubai's economy was traditionally based on camel breeding, fishing, pearling and sea trade. Like other Arabian countries of the Gulf region, UAE's rapid economic development and modernization from the 1970s was due to the production and exportation of oil. Since the early 1990s, however, Dubai pursued an economic diversification policy as a consequence of the gradual depletion of its oil reserves (Dubai Strategic Plan- 2015, 2007: 21). Economic modernization and financial development in the UAE led to rapid population growth. By the end of the first half of 2010, UAE had a total population of 8.26 million. Emirati nationals only represented 947,997 of the population whilst non-nationals numbered 7,316,073 (Sanbridge, 2010a). Dubai's population was estimated to be around 1.53 million in 2007 (Statistics Centre of Dubai, 2007), which increased by 8.5% each year from 2000 to 2005 (EIU, 2006), and by the first quarter of 2010 its population reached 1.8 million (Sanbridge, 2010b). However, only 168,000 were classified as nationals (Sanbridge, 2010a).

Tourism development in Dubai has also attracted considerable academic attention (see Balakrishnan, 2008; Bagaeen, 2007; Govers & Go, 2005, 2009; Henderson, 2006a, 2006b; Junemo, 2004; Sharpley, 2008; Yeoman, 2008). Although many of these insights conceive Dubai as a visionary form of tourism development, some tentative problems and challenges are emerged including: prevailing environmental concerns, socially divided lifestyles and ethnic division of labour issues (Sharpley, 2008); limitations in the availability of natural and cultural heritage attractions (Henderson, 2006a, 2006b), and problems relating to the way in which

‘brand Dubai’ is actually being positioned, especially in terms of the limited utilization of local representations (Govers & Go, 2005, 2009). More recently, work has started to focus on concerns relating to the social impacts of tourism (Stephenson & Ali-Knight, 2010) and the political economy of tourism development (Meethan, 2011).

Tourism is one of the main enablers of economic growth; according to the 2008 Country Brand Index (CBI) the United Arab Emirates was identified as one of the top three ‘rising stars’, expected to become major tourist destinations (TTN, 2008a). Dubai’s government has factored in tourism development as a key form of economic diversification, in-turn providing Dubai with the necessary support to become the popular destination it is today while continuing to grow at relatively high growth rate (Handerson, 2006). Dubai has a notoriety world wide as a result of the highly publicized iconic developments and tourism infrastructure (Sharpley, 2008). Since the 1970s Dubai had a strategic plan to develop in a way that it becomes the economic and cultural focus of the Gulf Region. The city has become a meeting place for worldwide flows of capital, people, culture, and information (Junemo, 2004). As a result of this strategic planning Dubai has become the city of superlatives in which all the developments are described as the ‘bigger’, ‘better’ and ‘brasher’ compared to other cities in the world. These developments include: the largest shopping mall (Dubai Mall), highest building (Burj Khalifa), largest amount of prize money for a horse race (Dubai Cup), first purpose built maritime centre (Dubai Maritime City), first (informally recognized) ‘seven star’ hotel (Burj Al Arab), tallest hotel (Rotana Rose Tower) and the highest residential tower (the Torch). Dubai’s tourism attractions have been constructed to promote Dubai as a luxury destination for high end tourists. According to Stephenson and Ali-Knight:

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 post-modern 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 (2010: 281).

Dubai is seemingly the most liberal emirate of the UAE and is aiming to reach its goal of being a ‘Global Arab City’. Emirati Nationals are a main area of focus in terms of a future indigenous development pathway, regardless of the fact they comprise of a small percentage of the population. Emiratis have control over a considerable amount of assets and at the same time have high rates of unemployment (Balakrishnan, 2008). One of the most significant challenges in employing Emiratis is that the majority of the local population is under employment age. This demographic structure of the city makes Emiratization (localization of jobs) very difficult to implement as a policy to increase the number of Emiratis in different sectors, especially the private sector (Govers & Go, 2009). The UAE’s population is comprised of around 20% Emirati, but expatriates maintain around 99% of all jobs in the private sector and around 91% in the public sector (Langton, 2008). However, the move towards employing Emiratis is reinforcing a sense of balance between the demographics and at the same time the importance of culture and knowledge management for the local nation (Balakrishnan, 2008). With the rapid growth of tourism in Dubai, nationals are feeling that their culture and traditions are not being acknowledged. According to the Director of the Sheikh Mohammed Center for Cultural Understanding:

We have a unique situation in the UAE where locals are a minority the majority are expats. It is our duty as the minority to introduce our traditions to foreigners who know nothing about our life, our language, and our history (Flemming, 2011).

Despite the fact that Dubai as a destination that is growing rapidly, however it is not promoting its culture and traditions that are considered to be the main elements of the tourism experience. Tourism has a very important role in this and it should be looked at from a different perspective, perhaps perspectives from the local population. As a matter of fact, tourism has a very productive role in the society when it comes to promoting expressions of culture, regional and national identity (Park & Stephenson, 2007). Therefore, Dubai as a destination is facing an important challenge which is cultural inconsistency. The city's rapid urbanization and modernization like other cities in the Middle East is affecting its historical districts and local heritage (Orbasli, 2007).

Tourism destinations are always facing the challenge of being perceived as safe destinations, especially in terms of geopolitical stability (Sönmez, 1998). As a result of wider conflict in the region, UAE's image as a secure and stable destination continues to attract tourists at a time when the Arab world is rife with political conflict and social turmoil, particularly in light of the Arab Spring uprisings. Compounding these regional issues, Dubai has been able to continue its growth in midst of the global economic crisis. In 2010, Dubai received 7.4 million international visitors (UNWTO, 2011), which is roughly four times the number of people residing in the Emirate. The international tourists contributed \$8.4 billion directly to the local economy (UNWTO, 2011). International arrivals grew by nine percent in 2010, and tourists expenditures grew by seventeen percent. The country has maintained the positive upward trend in terms of tourist visits and hotel occupancy numbers for the first quarter of 2011. Dubai, for instance, witnessed a 7 per cent surge in passengers in the first quarter of 2011 compared to the first quarter of 2010, where 12.3 million passed through the airport compared to 11.5 million over the same period in 2010 (Jain, 2011).

Dubai received 6.9 million visitors in 2007, aiming to achieve 15 million by 2015 (TTN, 2008b:9). These figures show that Dubai is arguably the most vibrant city in the Middle East. The area has been rebuilt by partnerships between the government and the private sector. This has helped in privatizing the planning process which helped in reshaping the destination to become a hub for commercial, leisure and business activity (Hazbun, 2008). Services depend on rules and policies as much as it depends on people. Dubai is known to have the latest technological advancements and has the highest usage of internet and mobile phones in the Arab world. The government continuously benchmarks itself against other countries to maintain its global competence (Balakrishnan, 2008). The long-term sustainability of the tourism industry in Dubai is dependent upon the continued maintenance of the balance between economic growth and socio-cultural and environmental impacts, a balance faced by many growing destinations. As a matter of fact the weaknesses of Dubai like the hot weather and desert landscape has turned to be the city's unique selling points for the modern taste of tourists (Henderson, 2006).

This study aims to explore some of these issues from the Emirati perspective, with a focus on the positive and negative impacts of the current tourism development in Dubai. The

work will then seek from the findings certain recommendations concerning the future direction of tourism development in Dubai.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

Semi-structured (in-depth) interviews were conducted with thirty Emirati citizens during the summer and fall of 2011. All of the individuals interviewed were in their twenties and thirties. This age group of respondents was targeted because they all have grown up during the recent modernization era of Dubai's development. To put this into perspective, the respondents were all between the age of eight and twenty-two, when the iconic Burj al Arab was completed in 1999. These individuals have generally grown up in the "new Dubai". All of the interviews were conducted by one of the members of the research team who is fluent in both English and Arabic and is non-Emirati. The notes of several of the interviews that were conducted in Arabic were translated into English prior to analysis. The interviews were not recorded, as in some cases it was not culturally appropriate.

Each interview had two main parts. During the first half, a quasi-free-listing interview method was employed. During this part, respondents were asked to verbally list things that came to mind in response to each prompt. After an initial list was compiled, the interviewer used a series of techniques to elicit even more detailed responses. This technique was used to overcome some of the limitations resulting from the interviews not being recorded. The second part of the interviews was based on a series of questions which aimed to elicit more detailed insights relating to the responses in the first half of the interview. After the interviews were all completed the research team met to debrief. The analysis of the interviews was done through a two step process of coding and thematic analysis. Six main themes emerged. Four of these themes were based on the perceived impacts of tourism development in Dubai, including: 'economic impacts', 'environmental impacts', 'positive socio-cultural impacts', and 'negative socio-cultural impacts'. Another theme that emerged was the 'Tourist-Expat' theme that focused on the relationship between the impacts of international tourists and those of expatriate residents living in Dubai. The final theme represents the future recommendations of the respondents for sustainable tourism development in Dubai.

## **RESULTS**

Seven overall themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews. First, 'environmental impacts' and 'economic impacts' will be discussed. This will be followed by a discussion concerning 'positive' and 'negative socio-cultural impacts', which is the main focus of this paper.

### **Economic Impacts**

Overall, there was a consensus that the tourism development in Dubai has brought about many positive economic impacts. The contribution of tourism to Dubai's economy and the income generated for individuals working in tourism industry were the primarily benefits highlighted in the interviews. The success of the diversification policy of Dubai is evident in both the growth of the industry and the positive perception of this by the young Emiratis interviewed. The positive economic impacts can outweigh the negative impacts of tourism in Dubai, as Respondent 1 claims:

*In my opinion the positives are much more than the negatives. At this stage the negative impacts are not significant. Tourism generates local income and it is very important for the economy.*

In addition to the increased income generated by tourism, several of the individuals particularly focused on the generation of new jobs of the tourism industry. In the near future, even more jobs can be expected to be generated for Emiratis, as the government sponsored Emiratisation of the private sector could thus result in even more opportunities for Emiratis to gain employment in the hospitality and tourism industry. Respondent 3, for instance, suggests that the entrepreneurial opportunities for Emiratis in the tourism industry are huge, stating:

*I can see Emiratis revolutionizing the tourism industry in the UAE and the GCC. I am personally planning to be the biggest tour operator in the Middle East.*

The tourism and hospitality industry is also perceived as one of the main forces driving the future economic development in Dubai and the increased Emiratisation. As Respondent 11 notes:

*Emiratis are now encouraged by the government to enter this field. There are many institutions that are educating Emirati people about tourism. Everything is going in the direction of tourism.*

Another one of the major focuses of the development of the tourism industry in Dubai has been the emphasis on large scale infrastructural developments including the recently opened Dubai Metro, the expansion of the Dubai International Airport, the new Al Maktoum International Airport, a new cruise terminal, large scale hotel and entertainment/leisure developments, shopping malls, and the numerous iconic attractions. Another point highlighted by the interviewees was the fact that tourism has helped Dubai establish itself as a globally known city, which in turn has positively impacted other industries, such as banking or real estate.

While the overall perception was that tourism has brought significant benefits to Dubai and Emiratis, there were some potential downfalls that have also emerged or will need to be addressed in the future. One respondent referred to the potential issue of gender for the Emiratisation of the tourism and hospitality industry, as there could be potential cultural conflicts with women working in the service industries. This respondent stated that Emiratisation:

*...will be a problem for Emirati women to do evening shifts or mix with other men, even if it's for work (Respondent 9).*

Another negative that was noted, was the inflation of prices in Dubai. As a consequence of tourism development, land prices have increased significantly for instance. Moreover, consumer durables have also rapidly increased.

## **Environmental Impacts**

While the interview questions were not directly targeted to elicit the views on the environmental impacts of tourism development, this theme did emerge from the two questions related to sustainable tourism in Dubai. Nearly every individual interviewed equated the term 'sustainability' to the natural environment. As a result there were several negative impacts on the environment that were seen to be the result of tourism development in Dubai. Several individuals suggested that the large scale tourism developments, including the man-made palm, world, and Burj al Arab islands have drastically reduced the marine life off the coast of Dubai. The lack of emphasis on environmental impacts of development is simply explained by respondent 9:

*Dubai is not a place for environmental concerns. Dubai is a place for big projects.*

This includes a reduction the fish population and the destruction of the coral reefs due to dredging, building man-made islands, and pollution. Air pollution resulting from the increased number of automobiles on the roads was also highlighted. With regards to impact of the land, two interviewees suggested that the taming of the desert by the development of Dubai has resulted in the ‘nature of the desert’ being impacted. One individual, Respondent 10, although indicated that these negative environmental impacts are not just the result of the tourism development but actually have deeper roots, “we are not a very eco-friendly people in the UAE”. Nonetheless, the outlook for the future is very optimistic as Respondent 10 continued:

*We are trying to be eco-friendly and we are trying to look into things that are considered eco-friendly.*

The local heritage in Dubai has traditionally been tied to the people’s relationship with the natural environment including the Bedouins relationship with the desert, and the fisherman and pearl divers relationship with the sea. The recent development in Dubai, including tourism development, has resulted in a mantra of taming the harsh natural landscape from which the modern city of Dubai has emerged. Respondent 11 reflects on this issue:

*In our everyday language, we always say that we have civilized the desert. This is not a good thing in general. In order to be perceived as a civilized country we have built over the sea and the desert, which has made us lose a lot of our identity. They [the developments] have forced the fisherman to change their places and the newly built projects have affected the lives of many people, even the younger generation.*

Consequently, Dubai’s economic development agenda, as well as its emphasis on tourism development as a specific diversification option, has in many ways also resulted in ranging socio-cultural benefits and negative impacts.

### **Negative Socio-Cultural Impacts**

While there were many positive impacts of the recent development of tourism in Dubai, the respondents noted many trade-offs that have resulted. One of the main issues is the potential ‘cultural clash’ between international tourists and Emiratis. Respondent 1 states that:

*There is a clear cultural clash. The food is not the same. The clothes are not the same. Tourism in Dubai has definitely affected our way of life.*

As one respondent noted, tourists often provide a bad example by “*smoking, drinking, using bad language in public.*” The development of the industry has also resulted in an increase in prostitution and access to alcohol in bars and night clubs. Some of the respondents attribute some of the clashes to the disrespect for local traditions and culture, as is the case with improper dress and public displays of affection. The increased number of tourists has also resulted in other issues, such as congestion and over-crowding, particularly during high tourist seasons. Many of these issues are similar to those faced by local populations in tourist destinations around the world.



On a deeper level, however, the respondents also highlighted several ways in which tourism development has had a negative impact. There has been a Westernization of Dubai resulting in a change in daily life and traditions. One respondent, for example, suggested that tourism has contributed to a 'busier' and more 'rushed pace of daily life', with city life 'dominating'. Respondent 10 gave the example that:

*The family gathers on Fridays [now], when we used to gather for every meal.*

There was recognition that there has been an increased emphasis on materialism, which also contributed to the 'fakeness' of Dubai. As Respondent 13 suggests:

*It [Dubai] has become a very fake city. There is a lot of money spent in this country, but it's not used in a positive way.*

The threat to Emirati identity and traditions was also noted by several individuals. Respondent 2 notes:

*Emiratis are open now to other cultures. The diversity is very obvious wherever you go. However, some people now are so open [to other cultures] that they forgot their own traditions and values.*

This point was even further emphasised by Respondent 7, who claims:

*We are growing very fast, so our traditions are being demolished so our children in the future will not know much about our traditions and heritage.*

Some felt that in the rush to cater to tourists Emiratis are often discriminated against, or even feel that they are outsiders in their own country. Respondent 11 informatively notes:

*Tourism has caused cultural clashes and discrimination. We as Emiratis feel that we are not treated as well as tourist in our own country.*

One example given concerned the large emphasis on Christian holidays such as Christmas or Easter, but a much lesser public emphasis on Islamic holidays like Eid. There was a worry that the overall loss of tradition will be particularly evident for the new generation of Emiratis. Importantly, it has been asserted that Dubai's history, tradition and ethnicity is significantly inferring a series of social repercussions (Stephenson and Ali-Knight, 2010). In Gover's 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'.

The widening generational gap between older generations and the new generation of Emiratis is particularly noticeable from the narratives of the younger generations. Respondent 12 presents a rather nostalgic narrative of earlier years:

*The family life was closer, and old generations always comment that it used to be better before... The new generation prefers it [the way it is now] more. The newer generation is now less attached to the beliefs, cultures, and traditions of the UAE.*

Respondent 13, a mother with young children, is particularly worried about threat to traditions caused by the increased level of development, westernization, and cosmopolitanism in Dubai. She proclaims that:

*...there is a very big cultural clash. As a mother I am not very happy that there are too many cultures around. My sons are learning too many bad words at school. The attention is not given to religion and Arabic language anymore. They should teach students at school how to respect other cultures.*

Despite these very valid concerns, Respondent 13 is optimistic by also relenting that:

*...tourism has changed Dubai a lot. In many ways it was a positive change...I feel so proud of the country's image. I wish that everybody feels proud about Sheikh Mohammed's accomplishments. This country has given the Emiratis everything...education, health services, and entertainment so they should feel proud about their country.*

### **Positive Socio-Cultural Impacts**

Throughout the interviews there was a genuine acknowledgement that the increase development of tourism and number of international tourists visiting Dubai resulted in positive socio-cultural benefits and opportunities for Emiratis. Tourism provided a growing opportunity for cultural exchange resulting in the opportunity for Emiratis to sample new food, fashion, and entertainment. The cosmopolitanism resulting from the large percentage of expatriates and the international tourists has resulted in a more open-minded population. Additionally, some of the respondents noted that tourism has had a secondary effect of increasing Emiratis' awareness of their own culture, increased local pride in sharing their culture, religion, and language with visitors. Respondent 6 emphasises that, the consequence of tourists visiting Dubai:

*...gives me pride, I feel proud that I am from this country. I feel excited that tourists are happy in my country.*

He even seeks out interactions with tourists as he explains that:

*...sometimes I take the camera and take pictures of the tourists on the Jumeirah beach because I feel great joy when I see tourists happy in Dubai. Sometimes I start a conversation with them to find out how they feel about Dubai.*

The cross-cultural interaction has been promoted through institutions like the Sheikh Mohammad Center for Cultural Understanding as well as by individual Emiratis interacting with visitors. Tourism has also:

*...increased Emiratis' cultural conscious. They try to help tourists as much as they can, you can see that when they try to speak in English to tourists to give them assistance.*

Several interviewees also indicated that tourism has also, indirectly, contributed to an increased quality of life. As Dubai has developed during the last two decades the level of education, healthcare, and other local amenities has also improved. As Respondent 7 indicated "we have everything here that we need, we do not need to go anywhere." The access to high quality education was particularly emphasized by the respondents. Additionally, Emiratis have access to a wider selection of entertainment and leisure activities and venues that have encouraged individuals to 'enjoy Dubai more.' Respondent 2, for instance, noted that:

*In the 1990s it [life in Dubai] was very quiet, and there were a very limited number of things to do and life was simple.*

'Increased opportunities' were also recognised as a significant change indicator that can be attributed to the development of tourism in Dubai. Respondent 11, for instance, suggests tourism:

*...did change the life of Emiratis significantly. Instead of watching TV and gathering at Majlis now we are participating in tourist activities. It changed my life a lot... I started going out more and I started enjoying Dubai more.*

While many of these perceived positive and negative impacts were attributed to tourists, some are more a result of the large expatriate population in Dubai. The following conceptual theme examines the tourist vs expatriate relationship further.

### ***Tourists vs Expatriates***

Throughout the interviews, several interesting threads emerged which related to the perception of international tourists and international expatriates residing in Dubai. The overall perception of tourists was mixed with some of the interviewees perceiving them extremely positively. For some, the positive perception of tourists has emerged more recently, as Respondent 4 suggests:

*At some point we all hated tourists, but now we are more tolerant and it is allowing Emiratis to become more independent.*

Others presented a more negative general view of tourists. The negative connotations relating to tourists particularly emerged when some of the interviewees discussed how some of their fellow citizens viewed tourists. Some even suggested that there is a level of prejudice towards international tourists, often stemming from negative interactions or perceptions relating to negative socio-cultural impacts. There is some difficulty in distinguishing tourist from expatriates. Accordingly, Respondent 9 states:

*Dubai is a multicultural place and we can't really say who is a tourist and who is not.*

Some of the respondents suggested that the tourists are a minimal cause of a lot of the negative impacts often attributed to them, as tourists are often here for a short period of time and spend a lot of their time in segregated areas, such as resorts. Rather, some suggested that it is the international expatriates that are the real cause of the cultural clashes. Respondent 9 said that:

*I do not have anything against tourists; actually tourists respect the rules more than the residents. The major problem is the residents.*

This is related to another root cause mentioned by respondents, the rapid development of Dubai, particularly in the last twenty to thirty years. The speed of this development has resulted in heightened numbers of international expatriates migrating to Dubai. Along with the fast-paced development, some of the respondents suggested that the Westernization of the development is more to blame for the deeper socio-cultural changes than tourism itself. According to respondent 9:

*The lives of Emiratis changed for the better in terms of education, healthcare, and lifestyle, but this is the impact of the West on the UAE in general and not only tourism.*

## **CONCLUSION**

Looking to the future, the respondents offered several suggestions on how destination Dubai can develop sustainably in a manner that maximises the benefits for the quality of life of Emiratis and other residents of Dubai, as well as providing a quality and authentic experience for tourists. These recommendations can be summarized as:

1. *Continue the focus on building awareness and opportunities for intercultural interactions between Emiratis and tourists.*

2. *Preserve and promote the local cultural identity both for tourist consumption and to preserve the religious, language, and cultural traditions through school programs*
3. *Re-orientate future development so that it is more environmentally friendly*
4. *Develop a program of locally theme cultural festivals and events*
5. *Provide more opportunities for local community participation in tourism planning and development*
6. *Continue the emphasis on luxury tourism, while also creating more options for more budget-minded tourists*

These six general recommendations are illustrative of the genuine positive outlook and support for the future of tourism in Dubai that emerged from the interviews with thirty young Emiratis. While there was a strong recognition of the negative impacts and potential future threats of tourism in Dubai, the forward-looking attributes of the individuals interviewed in this study are a manifestation of Dubai's recent history and visionary leadership that had allowed this small Emirate with relatively little natural resources to become a global city with a high standard of living.

This exploratory study provides some interesting insights that contribute to the growing body of literature on resident attitudes towards tourism. Future studies can expand on this study to focus on the attitudes of other populations in Dubai, the UAE, and other gulf countries. However, more qualitative interviews are indeed necessary, focusing on different generational levels within the Emirati, especially to investigate further and with more critical depth the degree to which members of the Emirati community are willing to be caught up in the seemingly infinite process of acculturation and Western influence. Although this study has concentrated on a small sample and raised some rather tentative concerns and issues concerning Emirati perceptions of tourists and tourism, it can hopefully be developed further in terms of engaging in more diverse local perspectives and attitudes towards the influx of tourists and the expansion of the tourism industry. More importantly, however, future research should look more closely at various permutations of Emirati ethnicity and culture, which is complex and requires a more situational and contextual approach.

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