

Expo 2020 Dubai

When Dubai won the bid to host World Expo 2020 in 2013, we asked our experts to weigh in on what it would mean for business in the Emirate. Despite setbacks, Expo 2020 Dubai was finally inaugurated in 2021 with huge pomp and to much acclaim. Postponed due to the pandemic, the world fair showcases all that humanity has achieved so far, and offers hope for a creative future. On the occasion, we once again turn to our experts to weigh in on what impact the Expo may have in a post-Covid world and what, if anything, has changed.

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Damian Regan, Middle East Assurance Leader for Sustainability

What Expo 2020 Dubai has demonstrated is the ability to weather this particular Covid storm through continued effort, goodwill and adaptation. It has put in place its own sustainable story of low emissions, recyclable and reusable construction, and sustainable tourism. The country pavilions and their exhibitions highlighted many innovations that will help the world move forward in terms of sustainability. In many ways, Expo 2020 Dubai has more impact and has shown us all what we must do in an ever-changing world that leads with sustainability at its core.

Of the many things that Covid-19 has taught us, one is that not only are companies highly vulnerable to the effects of nature, where supply chains are disrupted, demand dries up, physical assets are unable to be used, and workers stay at home, but also that those companies that are able to quickly adapt to disruption and respond are those that remerge quickly and thrive. These companies are often deemed sustainable in the sense that they have evaluated and responded effectively to both risks and opportunities. In many ways, climate change presents a similar force of nature, outside the control of companies, but over a longer time-frame. Companies need to factor in climate change and other environmental and societal changes, in order to position themselves strongly for what the future may hold.

Emmanuel Durou, Partner, Consulting, Technology, Media and Telecommunications Leader

The learnings and impact of Expo 2020 Dubai could not be more relevant for a Covid world, where technology and digital have taken center stage in shaping our ways of living. For Dubai and the UAE, two core aspects of Expo are profoundly impacting the technology landscape of the Emirate and will form an integral part of the Expo legacy in the country and for Dubai: the build-up of a vibrant tech start-up ecosystem, enabling its ambition to become the smartest city on earth.

Firstly, Expo 2020 Dubai has brought about profound changes in the UAE tech SME and start-up ecosystem. In the ramp-up to the Expo, over 16,700 contracts were awarded, and more than half of these to SMEs, including a significant proportion in the technology sector. Local start-ups across supply chain, logistics and events have benefited from ancillary services delivered to the most significant global gathering since the start of the pandemic, while local emerging tech (e.g. agtech, cleantech, etc.) have greatly benefited from the cross-pollination of ideas from international start-ups with platforms such as the Good Place Pavilion, home of the Expo Live impact and innovation program, and other networking and collaborating events across Expo. As important, the legacy strategy of Expo with District 2020 and the Scale2Dubai initiative are bound to provide fertile ground to further build the UAE start-up ecosystem. Given the scale and ambition of District 2020, we see its unique central infrastructure, mixing corporate, SMEs and start-ups combined with the latest smart city technology to bring to scale similar existing concepts in the Emirate including Area 71.

The second impact relates to the position of Dubai and the UAE on the smart city agenda. In many ways, Smart City is the Eiffel Tower of Expo 2020 Dubai. Expo 2020 Dubai has been a unique demonstration

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of how diverse yet universal the concept of Smart City can be—from the Smart Pavilion replica of Finland to Germany's Future City Lab or India's Smart City Mission. All bear in common the advantages that technologies such as IoT or 5G can bring to smart urbanization and sustainable development. Yet, Expo 2020 Dubai in itself is delivering a real-life glimpse of smart city in action with hundreds of thousands of data points being captured daily throughout tens of thousands of sensors onsite, contributing to enhance visitors' experience, reduce emissions and improve the site's operations.

The Expo legacy, via District 2020, stands at the heart of these two themes—a vibrant tech start-up ecosystem, enabled by a unique smart city infrastructure. When the Expo site will be converted into a 400+ hectare city inside the city, it will become a unique test bed for new technologies and innovation, leveraging concepts such as the Urban Lab for start-ups to test new ideas and products. District 2020 will not only embody the vision of the smart city developed during the six months of the event, it will also turn into a living tech lab for the hundreds of SMEs and corporations in the district. ➔

Cynthia Corby, Partner and Regional Construction Industry Leader,

The Expo 2020 Dubai motto “Connecting Minds, Creating the Future” resonates even more in a post-Covid world. The subthemes Opportunity, Mobility and Sustainability are, in particular, very relevant and powerful after several months of lockdowns, a period of disconnection and uncertainty around the world. Sustainability is now more than ever at the heart of several government, business and personal objectives as evidenced during the COP26 summit in Glasgow.

Of particular importance, and a strong emerging trend, is that funding of largescale projects in the short to medium term will require the project owners to have incorporated sustainability into their overall objectives for the capital asset. That these projects can operate as zero-carbon footprints in the future will be an imperative.

Expo 2020 Dubai offers a great platform for the construction sector to showcase emerging trends, specifically in the Sustainability Pavilion, which demonstrates how a capital project can be built and operated, as through investing in sustainable building technologies and capabilities, accelerating the use of more efficient power and water technology. Digital transformation is also an integral part of responding to today’s challenges and other transformative changes that will have a long-lasting impact on the industry and allow more proactive management and decision making.

Expo has opened in a world where people and business are still cautiously approaching ways to work, with many adopting hybrid working policies that focus on using key opportunities to connect when it matters most. Expo offers this unique opportunity for countries, businesses, and people to reconnect and build relationships in the moments where face-to-face connection matters. Expo 2020

Dubai has set the stage to demonstrate how to attract much needed global investment for all participants and has been a key enabler to reopen for business and to stimulate economic growth, which for the UAE is being driven during the Expo by the visitor expenditure and the knock-on effect this has on several other industries, specifically around Tourism, Hospitality, Food & beverage and Retail. Dubai once again feels like the Tourism destination it has had set its sights on.

In 2017, the UAE’s National Committee for Sustainable Development Goal’s priorities were to map the SDG targets to UAE’s federal and local development plans. A country-wide effort to raise awareness of the SDGs and to engage with a range of stakeholders across federal and local government, the private sector, academia and civil society organizations was launched.

The UAE simultaneously launched Energy Strategy 2050, which is considered the first unified energy strategy in the country that is based on supply and demand. The strategy aims to increase the contribution of clean energy in the total energy mix from 25 per cent to 50 percent by 2050 and reduce carbon footprint of power generation by 70 percent, thus saving AED 700 billion by 2050. It also seeks to increase consumption efficiency of individuals and corporates by 40 percent. The Expo legacy, which is when the Expo will transition to District 2020, will serve to continue to be that catalyst for achieving this vision.

Looking beyond the Expo, District 2020 will become a hub for technology and innovation and a place for businesses to connect, exchange ideas and solutions and create an ecosystem to foster sustainable economic development to support the growth of key industries such as travel, tourism, education, real estate and construction. More than 120 permanent buildings across Expo 2020 Dubai have been certified by the U.S. Green

Building Council in a major sustainability milestone, not only for the mega-event itself, but for its legacy project District 2020, the humancentric sustainable smart city that will repurpose 80 percent of the Expo site. What the global pandemic has accelerated is the need to reassess several capital projects, how they will deliver a more sustainable future, through design priorities and new processes in construction as well as digital innovations.

Expo 2020 Dubai represents a great opportunity, under its strategic subthemes of Opportunity Mobility and Sustainability, to come together and build a common understanding on how to deal with the challenges of a post-Covid world and plan for the call to action that will deliver the net carbon zero goals and create a sustainable future. ➔

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Neil Batson, Director, Consulting

Though the advent of Expo is a significant and momentous occasion for the UAE, especially as it celebrates its 50th year, there are a number of factors both directly and indirectly linked to the Expo that will undoubtedly contribute to the impact it has.

The original business case for hosting the World Expo was based on increasing economic activity, building the intangible Dubai and UAE brands, Expo visitation and the rise in tourists and spending, as well as other qualitative and social impacts, such as the strengthening of trade and business with global counterparts. The Expo has already delivered on each of these pillars of success, despite (and in some ways as a result of) the global Covid-19 pandemic. When talking about brand Dubai and brand UAE, it is important to highlight the reaction of the UAE government to Covid-19, when tackling the question around the impact of Expo 2020 Dubai, given how intertwined Covid is to all aspects of our lives today.

As Covid-19 infection rates rise again, and governments begin to tighten restrictions once more, the UAE has so far vaccinated over 90 percent of its population and the booster programme is now well under way. The economy has been open for close to a year. The way that the UAE, and Dubai specifically, has handled the global pandemic since February 2020 is exemplary, and is now paying dividends. It is directly linked to encouraging both leisure and business visitors to visit Dubai and the Expo. It is also the catalyst to its economy rebounding faster than expected: according to the World Bank, Expo 2020

Dubai has “gotten off to an excellent start and hotel occupancy is up from 54 per cent in 2020 to 62 per cent in Q3 2021.”

One of the measures of the success of an Expo is measured in number of visits achieved, and Expo 2020 Dubai had been targeting 25 million visits during the six-month event. More than 10 million visits have been recorded in the period up to 18 January 2022 – and though this may be lower than what was initially expected pre-pandemic, it is still significant and should be considered a fantastic success of Expo given the current circumstances.

What has changed is the proportion of local vs. international visitors, with initially over 70 percent of visitors expected to be living outside the UAE, and 30 percent to be from within the UAE. Figures for the first three months showed that almost one third of all visitors came from abroad, with the split most likely changing over the coming months through increased tourism and other parts of the world travel restrictions. The biggest impact Expo 2020 Dubai has had to date however in our opinion has been the strengthening trade and business with global counterparts. A perfect illustration of this was the recent visit of Emmanuel Macron, French President, to Expo 2020 Dubai where he was received by His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces. The two leaders discussed the friendly relations, cooperation and development opportunities in various fields under the strategic partnership that brings the two countries together, especially in the investment and economic aspects, advanced technology, energy

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and food security, in addition to the cultural, educational and other fields to achieve their mutual interests. President Macron’s visit to the UAE also provided the right platform to sign over ten important agreements and deals on the sidelines, with one of the most significant being the ordering of 80 Rafale fighter jets and 12 military helicopters through an arms contract worth US\$19.20 billion.

We anticipate Expo 2020 Dubai to build on its successes to date during the event, which will create a fantastic platform for its legacy. Looking beyond the Expo, District 2020 will become a hub for technology and innovation and a place for businesses to connect, exchange ideas and solutions and create an ecosystem to foster sustainable economic development to support the growth of key industries such as travel, tourism, education, real estate and construction.

Wayne Thomas, CEO, Financial Advisory

I think there are a few reasons why Expo 2020 Dubai can have a greater and more significant impact for Dubai, the UAE and the GCC in a post-Covid (and, crucially, a post-COP26) world:

Innovation

The Expo showcases innovation in thinking and technology, and supports collaboration to build a better future. Although totally relevant themes in 2013 and in 2019, it feels like the new world with Covid, and the watershed change in perceptions of the global impacts of climate change demonstrated at COP26, really bring these themes to the forefront of global thinking. The UAE’s agenda to diversify away from oil, particularly towards greener technology, has never seemed more important (both for the economy and for wider perceptions) and the Emirates can play a leading role in the development of sustainable sources going forward. The infrastructure landscape is also being shaped by the change to the ways that people will work after Covid, with less office space and more demand for green space. The need for residential, commercial and wider infrastructure to support the sustainability agenda is also clear, and Dubai in particular has a clear role here.

Better government

Another key theme that resonates across the region is the desire/agenda to make government more effective, efficient and better at delivering for its citizens. Expo should be a catalyst for driving further change, particularly given recent global and regional events. The impact of Covid, both directly (in terms of changing working conditions, changes to the way we are

allowed to travel, etc) and indirectly (the relationship between government and its citizens through restrictions and new laws) has magnified the importance of effective governance and regulations. The competition to challenge Dubai’s status as the regional leader for foreign talent and business will only intensify over the coming years, increasing the importance of being able to demonstrate the ability to create, refine and adapt public policy and delivery to offer the best results for those they serve. Dubai is well placed to do this. ●

By **Neil Batson**, Director, Consulting, **Cynthia Corby**, Partner and Regional Construction Industry Leader, **Emmanuel Durou**, Partner, Consulting, Technology, Media and Telecommunications Leader, **Damian Regan**, Middle East Assurance Leader for Sustainability and **Wayne Thomas**, CEO, Financial Advisory, Deloitte Middle East