

## **Analysis of Milestones and Achievements to Increase Sustainability at Expo 2020**

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### **Abstract**

Dubai, a city synonymous with multiple world-record-breaking achievements in terms of architecture, rapid growth, and advancement in several fields. A definitive force in the region that aims to not only excel ahead of its neighbors but lead amongst the world's best. The next ambitious project is hosting the World Expo 2020 that will utilize modern technology and design in daily transactions and innovative infrastructure to fuel the city's movements. There are many challenges and concerns that are immediately apparent when revisiting the long-term effects of previous World Expos through the years. The purpose of this scientific study is to identify and to anticipate these challenges while ideating possible solutions for them at the same point in time. The following methods were used for the research at hand: Identification, analysis, and comparison of most relevant secondary data sources within the research areas of event and sustainability management. In addition, depth interviews with academics that are well-versed within the field of sustainability, as well as with individuals working within Expo 2020, were conducted. The research presents an overview of key learnings from previous World Expos along with what additional novel and creative measures have been introduced in the blueprint for Expo 2020 and its future. The scope of this article is limited to an analysis of past mega-events, while external circumstances may vary in 2020 due to dynamic and fast-changing external environments. Additionally, interview bias was reduced to a minimum but cannot be fully eliminated.

**Keywords:** *Dubai, Event, Expo, Expo 2020, Sustainability*



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### **INTRODUCTION**

Needless to iterate in-depth, the world is at a critical point regarding its fast-paced path towards harmful climate change. Virtually all countries and major global powers around the globe have taken serious note of this. The world is in an unprecedented state of reflection in terms of ensuring growth with not only the tools required to make it but also strategically adopting the right methods of execution to ensure that all relevant processes do not charge a long-term ecological cost on the available but limited natural resources and ecosystems. The research at hand aims at understanding how Dubai, a city that prides itself with world-topping innovation, is looking to make its mark on the *World Expo 2020* in what is believed to be one of the most critical challenges that face the modern era, climate change and achieving growth in a sustainable manner.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Besides the obvious straight-forward gains that can be seen on the surface from a major event like the Olympics or the Expo, there are several specific questions that arise whether the event does end up serving its goal and its bottom-line that the project had promised for all the stakeholders involved. There are many variables as to what can be considered a "successful" Expo and even more unpredictable factors that attribute to the execution of what can be considered an event of this size to contribute in a positive manner in terms of goals and pushing forward the ideas that the theme wishes to propose or the imaging aspirations the host destinations wish to portray on the world scale (Westlund & McAlvanah, 2017).

Starting with the Milan Expo 2015, from the first day, it has been noted that the construction and organization of the event seem to be lacking in terms of standard and timed-vigilance. The set-up is quoted to be a "disaster" and has had unprecedented cost overruns compared to the initial offering from both the host city and contractors.

This disorganization is harmful in regards to the negative press already received due to six politicians/businessmen along with an event manager being arrested, charged with corruption, allegedly caught on camera, offering bribes to secure contracts. This fuels the concerns of environmentalist and anti-globalization or protectionist protestors that took to the streets a day prior to the event. With these protests at hand, the large scale added security had levied extra costs to the host city, furthering the tumble they're in without the event even starting (Clark, 2015).

These events were important to note because in order for an event to have sufficient resources to bill its space as sustainable for future use, it must carry the positive morale that attracts investors (Clark, 2015).

The main theme of Milan Expo 2015 was meant to showcase one of the integral subsections of Sustainable Development, which is "Food of the World". Spectators and visitors alike were hoping to see discussions that would raise awareness regarding the diminishing of precious agriculture around the world. It was purposed to be a place of sharing new ideas and technologies that will push forward many food-related topics such as malnourishment, grain-distribution & scarcity, etc. However, this Expo failed to deliver its purpose, and controversial issues were criticized rather than civilly discussed (Borron and Holt, 2016).

Besides a total expenditure of 13 billion euros, reportedly, the sustainability of the premises is jeopardized due to poor-construction decisions. "The second was covering it all in concrete – when the theme is about feeding the planet and reviving urban agriculture. They should have used a site they already owned that was in need of regeneration" (Wainright, 2015, para. 22).

In this report, it can be seen how the Seville Expo barely was able to find adequate repurposing of the vast space and expensive infrastructure built for the event (Neild, 2015).

Naturally, one of the most impacts that make cities rush and push to hosting the World Expo is in the hopes of increased exposure and significant boosts to the local economy whilst branching out further transactions around the world. However, in this case, the Milan Expo does not seem likely to deliver on those desired results ("Expo Milan 2015 - the end or a fresh start?", 2015).

## RESEARCH METHOD

Through the use of secondary sourcing of information via published journals and scientific articles, the researchers aim at identifying the main points where previous World Expo's have

succeeded and failed regarding sustainable operations. A preliminary in-depth interview with the Head of Sustainability at Expo 2020 and with the Director of Sustainability at Expo 2020 was conducted.

Limitations of the above-presented research methodology will be a bias that needs to be cautiously taken into account when conducting these interviews. This is why it is important to seek out further peers and members of the industry that are not directly involved with the development of the Expo.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

There are a number of challenges for Dubai ahead. The city sits in a unique stipulation where the world is watching, with the constant notion of sustainable development being on everybody's lips and forefront conscience. The city itself has been pushing for city-wide awareness and implementation of sustainable efforts across its public services and promoting several branches of the industry within its land to follow suit. However, the UAE is still topping pollution lists across the world (WDI, 2015). And on its website (expo2020.com), Expo 2020 advertises that the space being built has innovation and sustainability as one of its main philosophies in mind as they proceed to continue construction.

The designs focus on making sure that the facilities are not only accessible and suitable for the event, but also usable for further future purposes for many years to come.

Beijing 2010 provided a shining example of how to carry out a successful event, before, during, and after the point of. But as mentioned, that example does not resonate with every Expo, and the purpose of this research is to look at what measures the team that has been assigned by the Department of Sustainability at Expo 2020 along with how the Dubai government is overlooking these implementations.

It is vitally essential to point out that by now, it is apparent that when the term sustainability is used, researchers are not only referring to environmental aspects (climate change, depletion of resources, consumption of resources more rapidly than regrowth, etc.) but also how a viable such mega-projects with their immense cost of funds that can alternate towards other uses under the guise of benefiting the people of a certain place. On that point, how important it is to look ahead and make sure that these ambitions also translate to economic sustainability as well as social sustainability, how viable and enriching this endeavor is for its inhabitants, investors, and visitors alike.

Even more so important now than ever, these factors should be in line with the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) which are visualized in the following figure:



**Figure 1. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals**

These are major goals mapped out by the UN to be met by 2030 in order for the world, its growth in population and transactions, does not decline opportunities or resources as time goes on. A majority of the goals fall in line with the ambitions of the Dubai Expo 2020. However, it can be stated that a ripple effect leading to the rest could be caused by Goal #11 “Sustainable Cities and Communities” (in tandem with Goal #7 “Affordable & Clean Energy”), Goal #12 “Responsible Consumption and Production”, and Goal #8 “Decent Work and Economic Growth”.

- Goal #11 Sustainable Cities and Communities: As the urban environment is rising in numbers of occupants and land scale around the world, thoughtful efforts must be put forth by planners and designers alike at how each element of accommodation, commute, and transactions are self-sustainable and naturally integrated into the social fabric. This works in tandem with Goal #7 (“Affordable & Clean Energy”) because energy infrastructure plays a pivotal role in urbanized societies, and having carbon neutral, renewably-sourced, & accessible to people of all classes is a factor that cannot be omitted. Not only does the Dubai Expo rely on such infrastructure to operate its event, looking into how the projects life-span can be extended after the conclusion of the world event can be a major step forward for site sustainability.

- Goal #12 Responsible Consumption & Production: Focusing on ensuring that all relevant chains from the accrual of raw materials, to the manufacturing, to the delivery, to the consumption of products and services, that the ideology of wasting the least amount of resources without hindering quality of life or productivity. How consumers interact with their products is also important to note. Not only in the life-span of the product, but also after the fact, when the materials need to be disposed of. Both usage and disposal need to be executed thoughtfully.

- Goal #8 Decent Work & Economic Growth: Synonymous with the pitch of World Expos is the pitch of economic benefits and boosts for the host city. In today’s world, a boost in transactional

numbers is no longer the only indicator of a successful event. The demand is the event has a notable influence in the long-term on a bigger scale than just itself, touching the surrounding areas to invigorate a notable increase and improvement of quality in social and economic activities within the roles of employment opportunities, working conditions, and pay gaps.

By reflecting other goals such as Goal #4, #17, #14, #15 ("Quality Education", "Partnership for the Goals", "Life below Water", "Life on Land" respectively.), the initial set goals can trigger a chain-reaction resulting in the latter-mentioned goals, especially with the Expo 2020 slogan of "Connecting Minds, Creating the Future".

## CONCLUSION

Considering how the volatility of the climatic threshold and an uncertain global economy, it is important to have a solidified view that Dubai is not only capable of delivering a memorable event on the world stage, but that it also has the thoughtful-resources to have the actionable impression of forward-thinking. This will not only put forth an imprinting stance in Dubai's global image but also provide motivation to other countries, regions, and cities around the world on how a small, young destination can drive a new way to operate large-scale events tangled with business and cultural identity.

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