

Eventfying Cities: Developing a Successful Image in the Arab Gulf Context

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Abstract

The current city development policies in the Gulf region put an increasingly emphasis on the diversification of economic resources, such as experience economy and creative economy. Within the experience economy, the production and consumption of many major spaces of the gulf city is transformed gradually into event places of many sorts. The hosting and organization of international and regional events and festivals highlights that trend. Yet, this phenomenon has also generated urban and economic development through processes in what so called Eventification. In this context, Eventfying cities is a process that turns a real life scenario into a dramatized, mediated, memorable, profitable and ultimately an aesthetical experience.

The image of some gulf cities, much like some of the world cities, is striving to be connected with events taking place in them. The strong connection of the image of Cannes with its Film Festival “Festival de Cannes”, the image of Venice to the “la Biennale di Venezia” and the “Carnival of Venice”, the image of Bilbao with the “El Bilbao BBK Live” or the scene of Bilbao Museum, among other numerous examples, manifest that the urban image of those cities was a melt of place and event. Likewise, the image of Abu Dhabi became much connected with the “Formula 1”, the “Abu Dhabi Film Festival”, or the forthcoming events planned in the most significant Saddiyat Island. Nowadays, the image of Dubai is much connected with the planned “Expo Dubai 2020”. Also, Doha image is connected with various events such as hosting the “FIFA World Cup 2022”, while Riyadh is strongly attached to the National Festival of Culture and Heritage “Janadriyah”. These examples show how some of the Gulf Cities have succeeded in promoting their positive and distinctive image through their unprecedented events and festivals. Eventfying Gulf cities, is often connected with temporary or permanent cultural experiences, as one of the most important city branding strategies, in which city space and culture are in a mutual interaction. This paper demonstrates how Eventification of cities fosters new relationships between the developments of public space and enhances city image in major Gulf cities with a special focus on Ajman city. Through the critical review of selected current directions and best practice for creative approaches in the development of event-cities, the paper will provide a special reference to possibilities of (re)making of the image of Ajman city through Eventification. In addition, how can those creative approaches be incorporated into “excitement”, “communication”, “entertainment”, and as a generator for establishing “Experiencespace”, as a notable city development strategy.

Introduction

City spaces have been one of the crucial components of cities for centuries, from the Greek agora and medieval open market places to today's pedestrian promenades, shopping malls, city squares, corporate plazas and atria. However, in spite of this historical significance, city spaces have also become subject to concern over the past few decades (Carr et al., 1992; Tibbalds, 1992; Boyer, 1993; Crilley, 1993; Madanipour, 2000). Under the influence of globalization trends, city-marketing, cultural industries, place destinations and urban regeneration projects, the new landscape of contemporary cities has witnessed the emergence of attractive and fascinating new public spaces (Hubbard, 1995; Madanipour, 2000; Mcinroy, 2000). The emerging interest in public spaces is leading to a significant change in the quality of contemporary city spaces. Constantly, changing concepts of public space are not only advancing the traditional city image and its ability for competitiveness, but it has moved further to critically transform the setting, structure, and function of city spaces.

Typology of Events

Events are classified following its temporal, spatial, audience, activities, and scales. Some events are classified as historical ones, or deeply rooted in our culture, while others were recently invented to recall our history or traditions. Events, which are recently created, will produce our future's history. Events are many in terms of types and nature. It varies between cultural, religious, historical, sport, entertainment, etc. Based on literature on events and event management, events can be classified following into several types, such as cultural, religious, business, sport, etc. Table "1", shows the main classification of event typology (based on Getz 2007).

Table 1: Events' Typology, based on Getz 2007

Type	Definition	Example
1. Cultural Celebrations	'Cultural celebrations' are solemn or joyous events that have cultural meaning. They are separated from entertainment by the cultural values being expressed.	<i>Thanksgiving celebrations</i>
2. Festivals	Festivals are themed, public celebrations, or a special time for fun and activities, rather than a celebration	
3. Carnival	Carnival is a celebration preceding Lent and is associated with feasting, costumes, parades and revelry.	<i>The Carnival in Venice. Quebec's Winter Carnival which has become the city's hallmark event</i>
4. Heritage Commemoration	'Heritage' is open to interpretation, often being a politically charged term. It means more than historic, and implies a value judgment as to what is important.	
5. Parades and Processions	Parades are usually an organized, celebratory procession of people, and the most popular ones are mobile spectacles.	<i>flotillas (of boats), cavalcades (of horses), religious processions (often with objects of reverence).</i>
6. Religious Events	Religious events embody solemn rites and rituals, and are considered to be sacred within the context of specific religions.	<i>The Japanese 'Matsui' are a type of religious event. Pilgrimage is a journey for religious or spiritual purposes. The largest events are the Hajj in Mecca, attracting millions of visitors annually</i>
7. Political and State Events	Any event produced by and for or by governments and political parties falls into this category	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The G8 summit of leading industrialized nations. • Royal weddings. • Political party conventions.
8. Arts and Entertainment	Almost any activity, sport, artistic display or event can be viewed as 'entertainment',	<i>It includes including music concerts, award ceremonies, theatre, art and dance shows.</i>
9. Performing Arts	All performances are planned events. Performing arts traditionally involve people performing.	Every form of musical concert, dance, Fashion and alternative performances
10. Literature	Festivals and other planned events that feature poetry or written works	
11. Visual Arts	'Shows' or 'exhibitions' of visual arts are planned events	'Installation art' is a cross between an exhibition and a special event.
12.a Business and Trade Events	The fundamental purpose of this type of event is to promote, market or directly engage in commerce.	Farmer's markets, fairs and exhibitions (trade and consumer shows). World's Fairs, or Expos,
12.b Meetings and Conventions	People assemble for many reasons. 'Conventions' are generally large assemblies of people from associations, political parties, clubs or religious groups.	The first convention bureau in the USA was established in 1896 in Detroit
12.c Exhibitions (Trade & Shows)	Common types are industrial, scientific and engineering or health care. Many include educational presentations.	
12.d World's Fair EXPOs	'World's Fair', often called Expos. They has derived from an international agreement in 1928 and regulated by the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE)	
13. Education & Scientific Events	emphasis on creating and exchanging knowledge.	
14. Sport Events	By definition, sport events are the actual games or meets during which sport activity occurs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indoor or outdoor • Local, regional, national or international in scope.

Events and festivals as city development strategies

Festivals and events have become city development key factors whereby cities can stimulate major programs of urban regeneration and development, express their personality, enhance their status and advertise their position on the global stage via place-marketing (Harvey, 1989). Events act as a key instrument of development policy within their host cities (Essex and Chalkley, 1998; Chalkley and Essex, 1999a and 1999b; Essex and Chalkley, 1999). The events' impact on the city economics, functions, forms and spaces whether cultural, such as a World's Fair or World Expo, or sporting events, such as the World Cup or the European Games, or even political, such as the G8 E clear to identify the significance that such events have had upon spaces and users. While Events are frequently seen as important instruments in an urban development strategy; they are seen important factors in creating competition between city regions, or even between countries, in pursuit of enhancing their image and ultimately promoting urban renewal programs. A prime example of this is where Barcelona has regularly hosted international events as means of enhancing Catalan identity and prestige. These events have been utilized as a trigger to various urban improvement projects. However, events can be classified according to their scale and size either as hallmark, mega or major, and local events. Therefore, Eventifying Cities manifests the shift from production to consumption. The much quoted example of this is Barcelona which now has a rejuvenated coastal area with a marina, recreation facilities and sandy beaches (Essex and Chalkley 1998: 192). This area has proved beneficial in both attracting tourists and improving the quality of life for local residents (see figures 1 & 2): "The development opened up the city to the sea by improving access to 5.2 km of coastline for the inhabitants of the metropolitan area. Here the new beaches and waterfront facilities have transformed the landscape and will potentially alter the shape of the future growth of the city" (Essex and Chalkley: 1998).



Figure 1: Top view of the water Front in Barcelona, Spain



Figure 2: Water Front Development, Barcelona. Spain

Harvey (1989) argues that major events can be used as a tool for urban regeneration, as they offer the host city the opportunity to present a new and exciting image of itself, in essence a chance to recreate their personality thus enhancing their status on the global stage. "How a city looks and how its spaces are organized forms a material base upon which a range of possible sensations and social practices can be thought about evaluated, and achieved" (Harvey 1990: 67). The use of event development projects as a tool for urban regeneration was initially researched by many scholars. This would include a more joined up approach across the relevant agencies which measure social and economic impacts. Moreover, Festivals and Events greatly influence people's idea and perception of a city. They provide many aspects of identification and contribute to the emergence of unique urban identities.

Current Directions for Developing Cities through Events

Hosting events is often viewed as a recipe for successful city development, as it not only provides the opportunity to improve the infrastructure and appearance of the host city, but it also gives global media exposure, meaning that the image of a city can be transformed in the eyes of viewers. Such improvements can include updating the transport system or network and upgrading areas of the city's space. Developing cities is not only targeting competitiveness and improvement of city image that attracts tourism, but also attracting high caliber labor and creative class residences. As per the Global Competitiveness report 2014-15 published by the World Economic Forum (P. 2), "Singapore ranks 2nd overall for the fourth consecutive year, owing to an outstanding and stable performance across all the dimensions of the GCI. Singapore tops the goods market efficiency pillar and places 2nd in the labor market efficiency and financial market development pillars. Singapore possesses world-class infrastructure (2nd), with excellent roads, ports, and air transport facilities". In this regard, Florida (2002) refers to the promotion of cities revitalization through culture, to attract new creative individuals/ citizens, and to increase financial support of cultural industries and amenities. Zherdev (2014) suggested to "switching strategic priorities of urban development away from the emphasis alone of hard location factors (i.e. hard infrastructure) to soft location factors such as leisure activities and place-based images, emphasizing experiential and cultural characteristics of a place". An illustrative example is the events strategy for Edinburgh. Graham Devlin Associates, (2001:4) argues that 'cities, governments and the private sector have

all invested in creating, sustaining and developing a wide range of festivals in order to reap a number of benefits'. These include:

- Improvements to the quality of life in the city;
- Creative activity;
- The growth of audiences;
- The creation of partnerships;
- Recreational and educational opportunities;
- Economic and social benefits;
- National and international profile raising; and
- moreover, eventifying cities deals with (re)creating city image.

Many cities such as Las Vegas, to Edinburg, to Singapore and Shanghai among other cities, draw attention to the creation of production of images (either real or illusionary) for remarkable cities. For example, the replicas of Eiffel Tower, Egyptian Temples and monuments, the Asian-style lavish buildings along with ad strips, stunning performances, diverse amusements, etc. and fragments in Las Vegas (as in Fig. 3) show approaches of image production in the built environment, in the form of extraordinary architecture, mega-events, and large-scale projects - share the objective of making the city more competitive on the American and global scene.



Figure 03: The scene of Las Vegas, shows eventifying cities through spectacular architecture



Figure 04: The annual Festival of Edinburgh celebrates the Heritage

Consequently, the production of images of the city can be manifested in the processes and strategies for transforming places/cities into extraordinary urban spectacles. As a result, the produced images of urban projects are frequently used to promote the future image of a city at large, from multi-media presentations, to international events or competitions, to promotional brochures, and postcards depicting the local skyline or architecture. Sadyiat Island, Abu Dhabi (as shown in Fig. 5) is an example of Eventification not only through celebrating culture by all means, but also through spectacular iconic architecture.



Figure 05: Sadyat Island, Abu Dhabi shows Eventification through celebrating culture and architecture

Regional perspective: City Events and Festivals in the Gulf City

Many Arab Gulf cities realized the importance of their branding through festivals and events. Some cultural events in Gulf Cities simulate some foreign cultural events, while others are authentically coming from the cities local culture. Cultural festivals and Events in the Gulf Cities are many, such as film festivals in Doha, Dubai and Abu Dahbi. Some other sport oriented events have strengthened or created the image of some cities, such as Abu Dhabi in which its image became much connected with the “Formula 1”. Also, Doha image is connected with various events such as hosting the “FIFA World Cup 2022”. Nowadays, the image of Dubai is much connected with the planned “Expo Dubai 2020”, while Riyadh is strongly attached to the National Festival of Culture and Heritage “Janadriyah“. These examples show how some of the Gulf Cities have succeeded in promoting their positive and distinctive image through their unprecedented events and festivals. Eventfying Gulf cities, is often connected with temporary or permanent cultural experiences, as one of the most important city branding strategies, in which city space and culture are in a mutual interaction.

It is argued that the Gulf city is a center for vivid urban life that demonstrates the visions of many city governors and administrators (Helmy 2008). A wide variety of urban celebrations in the form of festivals, religious, cultural events, sport, international athletics, social carnival, and much else create part of the image of the Gulf city. This animated and vibrant aspect of the city was necessitated

at the time of planning the city life, in which a calendar of activities is carefully planned and continued to be promoted widely as places of events and celebrations.



Fig. 06: Formula 1, Abu Dahbi, UAE



Fig. 07: Janadriyah Festival, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia



Fig. 07: Expo 2020, Dubai, UAE



Figure 09: Shopping Festival, Dubai, UAE

Eventfying Ajman:

Ajman is the smallest in size of all the established seven emirates of the United Arab Emirates. Ajman has a 20 miles long sand beach, situated along the Arabian Gulf Coast. It has shared borders with the emirates of Sharjah, Fujairah, and Ras Al Khaimah. The city has a population of 225,000 (2003 census estimate). The urban area runs directly into the city of Sharjah along the coast to the south west, which in turn is adjacent to Dubai, forming a continuous urban area. Ajman city contains the beautiful old fort at its center. In addition to the Ruler's office, various companies, banks and commercial centers the emirate is also blessed with a natural harbour in which the port of Ajman is situated.

There are many possibilities to transform the city of Ajman into an eventful city, full of activities and opportunities, diversifying more economic resources and raising a strong identity and influential innovative city image. Following Ajman vision, and through Eventfying Ajman, there are many possibilities to invest the various opportunities provided by the city's locating, heritage, landscape, people, etc., into major development transformations. There are many ways in which Ajman city for events can be created and linked to the culture, identity and physical space of the city. Following the approach by Greg Richards and Robert Palmer (2010), creating single or multiple events is insufficient for a city to move from being a city 'with events' to becoming an 'eventful city'. This shift requires the development of an integrated approach to the relationship between the city and its events, which maximizes the benefits of the event program as a whole.

According to (Greg Richards and el), once the city has begun to think holistically about events and to organize and manage its event program effectively, it can move from being a city with events to become an eventful city. Some of the key differences are summarized. Organizing and managing such complex processes offer major challenges, even for those cities that already

Table 2: A city with events versus the eventful city (Greg Richards and Robert Palmer 2010),

A city with events	The eventful city
Sectoral	Holistic
Tactical	Strategic
Reactive	Proactive
A container of events	A generator of events
Ad hoc	Coordinated
Competition	Cooperation
Pandering to audiences	Provoking publics
Left brain thinking	Right brain thinking
Event policy	Events as a policy tool
Market led	Market leader
City marketing	City making
Spectacle	Involvement

This need for the future plans of Ajman city should take into consideration a number of key considerations, including:

- Developing an effective stakeholder network.
- Creating a strategic vision
- Programming the eventful city
- Marketing events to publics and audiences.
- Sustainability

Eventfying Ajman City: Key Issues

The construction of a comprehensive and integrated city event program is important. In this regards, comprehensiveness is crucial, as the impact of a city event program is greater than the sum of its individual events. This is primarily based on the assumption that there are economies of scale and scope to be gained from a “city-wide event program”. The key questions that might be addressed here include the following:

- 1- How does the event program affect Ajman as an event city?
- 2- How does the city affect the event program?
- 3- How can Ajman city be developed as an event city?

This set of major questions, among other questions, need to be discussed and debated in details when setting event city plans for Ajman.

Event City: A Strategy

Cities around the world are beginning to consider events as far more than public celebrations and far more as multi-faceted vehicles for development strategies. According to Greg and el (2010), “the ability of events to provide a wide range of outcomes for the city explains in large part why more cities have become eventful in recent decades. Not only have events increased in number and frequency, but a diverse range of event models has emerged as well”. For Ajman as an event city, this may broaden the range of cities where events are held and can be directed toward an ‘event capital’ that will likely to attract major, global/regional -scale events, building and mobilizing the ability to host them, including its own local events.

An event portfolio for Ajman as an event city should concentrate on the wholeness of a city event program, which emphasizes the relationship between the city and all of the events it stages, rather than on individual events. Following the Edinburgh event strategy, as a pilot strategy and one of the international best practices, (City of Edinburgh, 2007:9–10): The strategy is to create and deliver a balanced portfolio of major events for the next 10 years. These will achieve one or more of the following:

- 1- generate significant economic benefit for the city region;
- 2- help make the city lively all year round;
- 3- reflect the political and civic importance of Edinburgh as the capital city; and
- 4- reinforce the City Vision and the City Region Brand.

Event City Portfolio

The suggested Ajman events portfolio can be a mixture of potential successful events, new created events which we will create or commission and regional/ international events which will bring to the city. As part of the portfolio, it can aim to present at least one major event of national or international standing each year. Based on Greg and el (2010) and related sources, the event portfolio can be conceived of, among other things, as:

- An attitude – a vision which helps the city understand what it wants to achieve through event city strategy.
- A catalyst – a source of renewal and new ideas.
- A space – appropriate spaces in the city that can be imbued with new meanings and possibilities.
- A time – a metronome for the city life as well as a wake-up call for complacent citizens and policy-makers.
- An image – cities that are perceived as being eventful also tend to be seen as more attractive.
- An action – conceptions and strategies are transformed into activities and projects that can be experienced.

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Images Sources

Fig. 01: Top view of Water Front in Barcelona, Spain: Available at

<http://cruisetalk.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/01/columbusmonumentbarcelonaharbor2.jpg>

Fig. 02: Water Front Development, Barcelona. Spain

Source: The author

Fig. 03: Las Vegas

Source: http://pvtistes.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/las_vegas3-800x532.jpg

Fig. 04: Edinburgh Festival, Edinburgh

Source: <http://beauty-places.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Edinburgh-Castle-Night-Wallpaper.gif>

Fig. 05: Sadyat Island, Abu Dhabi, UAE

Source: http://www.abudhabiinformation.info/abu_dhabi_images/saadiyat_island.jpg

Fig.06: Formula 1, Abu Dhabi, UAE

Source: http://www.formula1.com/photos/races/circuit_history/large/history_lrg_87.jpg

Fig. 07: Al Janaderyah Festival, AL Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

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Fig. 08: Expo 2020, Dubai, UAE

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Fig. 09: Dubai Shopping Festival, Dubai, UAE

Source: A collage poster created by the author, based on internet sources