

## How has Dubai Become a World – Renowned Megacity?

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**Abstract:** Megacities are large urban centers with populations in excess of 10 million inhabitants. Today Dubai is coming in at 1st place as the world's most developed and emerging world location, it tops Hong Kong and Copenhagen, ranking 3rd for its Economic Potential and 8th for Connectivity and Business Friendliness. These are the qualities that class Dubai as the Middle East's "2025 Hot Spot for Future Competitive Cities" (Economist Intelligence), as well as being the 7th most influential city in the world. Yet Dubai has only been anointed this status in its recent history. Its population has been expanding dramatically only as recently as 2005, with a surge of 25% in that year alone.

The scope of this review is limited to resources that have been published both online and in print in the English language. Primarily these are works of scholars educated in the West, published in the last ten years. This review will not explore the works of Emirati scholars written in their native language of Arabic, nor any sources prior to 2002. This is because the growth of Dubai and the relevant subsequent analysis has occurred mostly in the past decade. Its relevance to the West is of key importance to its growth, hence English publications have been chosen.

For the time being, Dubai's current status as megacity remains contested. Its population is roughly nine times smaller than the defined population size of a megacity, yet some critics insist on its megacity status given Dubai's global presence and publicity. Megacities are defined by a population of at least ten million inhabitants.

**Key words:** Dubai, development, megacities, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed.

### 1.0 Introduction: Dubai Dream

With a per capita GDP in excess of \$17,000 per annum, Dubai has become one of the richest countries in the world, and the most important city in the Middle East. Yet the city has only gained this global prominence since the 1990s. This paper aims to examine how Dubai has reached its status of world-class megacity. It is assumed that Dubai's tourism industry and oil wealth have contributed to making it a leading world city. The following literature review attempts to demonstrate and support this hypothesis.

With the beginning of the twentieth century was a famous port of Dubai, Dubai's population became nearly 20,000 people, Sheikh Maktoum has demonstrated ingenuity and efficiency in the Organization and management of the tribe, and it flowed into the tribes of Bani Yas, General and other tribes to Dubai so massively multiplayer number, thus the population increased to fold. Dubai city is after as one Emirate UAE, wonderful city after economic sophistication and privileged that happened on their territory, have increased their investments, many huge projects on the territory of the city of Dubai in the

Dubai hit 2011 all expectations on its economy and has developed recording Acceptable, where he led the growth of the tourism sector and the business sector, manufacturing and aluminum industry and foreign trade, reports and statistics underscore durability and prestige of Dubai's economy where still many major international companies prefer to work in Dubai and moved their headquarters to As a safe haven and strong economic power. And Dubai is seeking to develop in all areas to be a cosmopolitan city and that is what we are seeing today already a cosmopolitan city collected all the qualities.

**Problem Statement:**

How can Dubai become as megacity by its quality from populations, density, and economy. Or is Dubai in a difference type of megacity?

**Aim and Objectives:**

The primary objective of this investigation is to review existing publications that have analyzed the urbanization strategies contributing to Dubai's growth how can Dubai become as megacity. This involves exploring sources that comment on Dubai's investment in its tourism industry as opposed to its oil wealth, its unique approach to architecture, its 'free zones' as well as the lives and interactions of its 95% expatriate population with the local Khaleej population.

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**Methodology**

International publications were accessed online and through the university library. Overseas publications after 2009 were focused on the deconstruction of Dubai as a growing world-class city post the 2008 recession. (Ali, 2010, Kanna, 2011) Researchers have mostly noted their observations in an anthropological style of the city and its occupants in the majority of publications through interviews. (Barrett, 2010) Some have also made use of literature available since 1800 to draw a comparison between the Dubai of then and now. And, a lot of web-set U.A.E government collect from them data about Dubai. And, the interviews made with some engineering finished some projects in Dubai, and they give important data about how Dubai will becoming as megacity in future.

Dubai remains a fairly significant and topical subject in Western media sources, hence sources and publications were available in excess.

## **2.0 Tourism: An Asset Greater Than Oil**

Contrary to popular belief, the revenue Dubai generates from tourism is far greater an asset than its fairly modest oil reserves. Initially, (Ali, 2010, p. 53) it was the discovery of oil that spurred the mills of development in Dubai. Yet in the region, Abu Dhabi and Qatar are better sourced in terms of natural resources. Dubai attainment of its megacity status is thus based on an innovative approach to tourism rather than oil reserves. (Barrett, 2010, p.2) even its government attests Dubai's success to be due to "visionary leadership, high-quality infrastructure, an expatriate-friendly environment [and] zero-tax on personal and corporate income". (Government of Dubai, 2015) these all contribute to significant pull-factors that attract the consistent flock of tourists and workers needed for a mega-population growth.

In Dubai, there is an attraction for everyone. Neighboring Gulf Arabs and Iranians flock to escape the rigid restrictions of their home regimes, European tourists go there for weather and luxury, Central Asians shop for business and goods that can be bought tax-free and resold back home. South Asian expatriates come looking for work that is paid higher than in their native countries; making up for the difficult working conditions. The United Emirates Airline has also made Dubai Airport its mid-destination refueling spot. (Barrett, 2010, p. 7) thus the airport becomes an ideal stop-off location for its long-haul flight costumers; with airport signs brazenly claiming "Welcome to the Future".

The majority of the sources in this review examine Dubai as a city that is growing at an extravagant, mind-boggling pace, with its tourism industry at the heart of its development. It is dubbed as a place known for paradoxes. Whilst infamous for its never-ending construction and extravagant consumerist excess, (Ali, 2010, p. 33) it is also known for prostitution, human trafficking and poor labor conditions. (Barrett, 2010, p. 6) these are the things that make up the 'Dubai Dream'; where extravagance is the standard and affluence is accessible to a conglomerate of tourists, travelers, expatriates, (Ali, 2010, p. 187) entrepreneurs and multinational corporations alike. A space of engagement between East and West, its luxury and extravagance is reminiscent of romantic oriental expeditions, yet its technology, development and aspirations are distinctly modern. Siting Dubai's recent global achievements, sources comment on the city coming in at 1st place as the world's most developed and emerging world location ( FDI magazine), it tops Hong Kong and Copenhagen, ranking 3rd for its Economic Potential and 8th for Connectivity and Business Friendliness. (Pivac, 2014) These are listed as the qualities that class Dubai as the Middle East's "2025 Hot Spot for Future Competitive Cities" (Economist Intelligence), as well as being the 7th most influential city in the world, (Forbes Magazine).

(Pivac, 2014) The city's population is extensively discussed in all sources; expanding dramatically only as recently as 2005, with a surge of 25% in that year alone. (Ali, 2010, p. 69) Between 2002 and 2008, the city's population doubled and its urban footprint quadrupled; (Brook, 2013) property development occurred at the same scale as Shanghai despite the city thirteen times smaller in population size.

One will find all forms of biggest and the best in Dubai. The tallest building, the biggest mall, replicas of the Eight Wonders of the World. All that is required is the approval of Sheikh Muhammad; no hearings or planning requirements hamper the process. (Ali, 2010, p.31-38) Of its many mega-structures, there is the Mall of Arabia; which at the time it was built was the largest mall in the world. It includes an indoor ski-slope that is maintained at sub-zero temperatures artificially despite the burning heat outdoors. Although ice-bars and ski-slopes are a common site in colder Western countries, they are a rare fiat in the middle of the desert. They require a surplus of water; a resource Dubai does not have without artificially desalinating its Gulf sea water.

Though seemingly homogenous and superfluous, Dubai's mega-structures serve a role in articulating the city as a central nexus for a new kind of global political economy. Its architecture plays a critical role in turning the city into a platform for a rapidly-growing range of globalized activities and flows, from economic to cultural and political. (Sassen, 2006, p.31) Sassen explains; "as the global economy expands and includes a growing diversity of national economies, it is largely in cities such as Dubai that the work of capturing the specialized advantage of a national economy gets done. (Sassen, 2006, p.29) To do this work requires state-of-the-art office districts, infrastructures and all the requirements of luxury living."

Dubai's gulf courses and sub-zero temperature ice-bars seem to be constructed with a complete disregard for its lack of surface water. (Barrett, 2010, p.1) There are even penguins in temperature controlled areas of Dubai Park; a theme park on the city's outskirts. These outlandish and preposterous creations have awed some and offended others given their implications for sustainability and environmental mismanagement. Yet the pace at which tourists still flock to see these wonders, and architects still bid to be able to build the next fantastical creation, has not slowed down due to these moral arguments. Still in the infancy of its global identity, Dubai remains a city open to making the boldest attractions, for which it requires an engagement in architectural entrepreneurship.

## **2.1 Building Dubai: Architectural Experimentation**

This city of One Thousand and One Arabian Nights, dubbed Shangri-La of the Middle East, exports hope. (Hari, 2009) It is the vision of current ruler Sheikh Muhammad, seen as the creative genius behind its seven-star hotels and city-sized economic and residential-entertainment zones. (Kanna, 2011, p. 5) Dubai's building ventures are analyzed here in context of their purpose. That is to help maintain Dubai's relevance to the West; presented as rich, strange and new. (Brook, 2013) In its pursuit of remaining continuously successful, Dubai is a city constantly reinventing itself with each new project. This carefully constructed image is crafted through a constant flurry of attention seeking headlines, which it grabs mostly through its outlandish construction projects. These projects, ranging from artificial islands taking on prominent shapes in its aqua blue waters, to theme-parks twice the size of Manhattan in its desert planes, in turn ensure a stream of curious and perplexed visitors. (Ali, 2010, p. 52) Taken on purely

for their potential as branding mechanisms and profit-making ventures, these constructions have been enormously successful in advertising Dubai as innovative, audacious and constantly evolving.

Responses to Dubai's highly luxurious, outlandish and unique projects range from total satisfaction to complete disgust. Residents of the Burj Khalifa see their home as a work of art, with its sculptural furniture, luxury amenities, valet parking, exclusive grocery store, gourmet spas and restaurants. (Karrar-Lewesley, 2012) Yet with the 2008 recession, a lot of high-profile projects were put on hold, halting the city's neck-break building pace and allowing critics to ask important questions. A lot of criticism was drawn by the Koolhaas-Nakheel Waterfront project. The project exemplifies Dubai's approach to its commissioning process; hiring world-famous architects to create iconic buildings to replicate the 'Bilbao Effect' and demonstrate their flare as patrons of innovative, sophisticated foreign talent; (Ali, 2010, p. 82) the *Medicis* of the Middle East.

Waterfront city, commissioned in 2007 and on hold since 2010, was to be home to 1.5 million people. (Ali, 2010, p. 81) It was marketed with a lot of exotic "culture talk", with words such as "vernacular", "Arab settlements", "global nomads", "souks, canal-sides and waterfront promenades". (Ali, 2010, p. 81) Sustainability was also flaunted to sell the project, claiming air-conditioning requirements were reduced and pedestrian thorough-fares were prioritized over vehicles. (Alderman, 2010) These are attempts to salvage the city's image as environmentally unconscious.

Of its most recent architectural undertakings, the World Islands have probably been the most controversial. First commissioned in May 2003, the islands consist of 320 million cubic meters of sand dredged into the sea. Built in a lagoon protected by a 17 mile long water-break, they are constructed from 34 million tons of rock. (Luck, 2010) The project has thus far cost local developer Nakheel \$14 billion to build. Islands have been sold between \$15 to 50 million. (Trenwith, 2014) Although a series of allegations were made in the wake of the 2008 recession of halted investment and construction, the project has picked up pace since 2014. From private homes to dream resorts, the resorts are once again open for sale.

Thus it can be ascertained that Dubai's fantastical metropolis is seen to be newer and more vigorous than the West, representative of the future. (Ali, 2010, p. 6) It continues to be a site of growing architectural experimentation and entrepreneurship. (Ali, 2010, p. 76) The city's success does not only lie in importing foreign talent for its architectural blueprints however. To create its infamous 'free zones', intellectual blue-prints have also been drawn up by international law firms to allow business to function seamlessly under codes that lift restrictions on profitable activities as much as possible.

## **2.2 Investment: Free Zones**

Sheikh Muhammad's goal in transforming Dubai from trading port to global city has been accomplished. The international press has been smitten by Dubai's economic and social freedom during its boom years. (Ali, 2010, p. 190) For a time, the 2008 recession threatened taper off the city's growing

popularity abroad. Uncertainty rose with “stories of debtor jails for professionals with unpaid credit card and mortgage debt, with high-level executives fleeing Dubai to escape the threat of prosecution for collapsed businesses. Stories of exploitation of labor became more pronounced.” (Ali, 2010, pp. 190-191) Many thought this a downfall Dubai would not recover from. (Government of Dubai, 2015) Yet a timely investment from neighboring oil-rich Abu Dhabi meant Dubai successfully meandered this difficult period and has continued to grow at a time where world centers like New York suffered.

9/11 has been sited as a benefit to the city, with Saudi Arabia alone investing \$340 billion in assets from the U.S. to Dubai. The Gulf states combined had foreign assets valued at \$2 trillion in 2006 alone. (Ali, 2010, p.50) Since 2000, Dubai has become a major player in global business venture investment, especially safe options such as US treasury bills and world-renowned multinational corporations such as Citigroup. (Ali, 2010, p.50) With the War on Terror, oil prices spiked, from \$20 per barrel (2002) to \$150 USD barrel (2008). Dubai became the closest regional financial hub of the Middle East. (Brook, 2013) These funds have been invested in public relations. Yet the biggest investments lie in Dubai’s property market. Mostly constructed post 2002, Sheikh Muhammad took advantage of growing interest in the Gulf after the US market took a downturn post 9/11. He waved restrictions on land ownership, allowing outright property ownership in especially created free-hold zones. (Ali, 2010, p.37) This permitted anyone to buy property, with added incentive of residency visas for buyers. (Brook, 2013) Dubai is unique in this approach to land-ownership in the Gulf countries.

Dubai’s relative freedom in its business laws is another unique feature compared to its neighbors. (Easterling, *The Space in Which We're Swimming: Keller Easterling at TEDxYale City*, 2013) Dubai has employed the urbanization model of the free-zone, which architect and urban theorist Easterling dubs the “dominant software for making urbanism in the world”. She sees this as the reason why free-zones are increasingly becoming models adopted by mega-cities today. Easterling claims the free-zone has become popular due to its ability to produce incentivized urbanism; adopting every program within its boundaries from financial, to residential, to resort to culture. (Easterling, 2013) For example, Dubai Humanitarian City demonstrates that the free-zone can be an intentional community filled with prestigious cultural institutions, universities, or NGOs.

In Dubai’s free-zones, business is done as it is within the West, with a legal code geared towards port businesses, given Dubai processes over 10 million shipping containers annually. (Brook, 2013) Jebel Ali was the first free-zone in Dubai, now there are several. Since 2004, the successful Dubai International Financial Centre has lured international banks including Morgan Stanley, Deutsche Banke, Credit Suisse and Goldman Sachs. Attracted by no tax, no restrictions on ownership, no restrictions on foreign exchange or repatriation of capital, these firms continued to flock to Dubai’s free-zones long after the 2008 financial crash. (Ali, 2010, p.52-53) Each operates under its own unique legal code, drawn up by American firms. (Brook, 2013) Described as “a state within a state,” these zones operate like the Vatican, with its own

official language (English), an imported British judge, its own currency (U.S. dollars) and exemption from debtor's prison. (Brook, 2013) Thus the free-zone model has become "a germ of an epidemic of city building in the world ... [operating under a] legitimized, legalized form of lawlessness ... a city in a box." (Easterling, 2013) This creates a curious situation where foreign culture sits very much distinctly from local practices, and creates a unique culture where two worlds meet.

### **2.3 Culture: What Culture?**

With a 95% foreign work force, everything and everyone in Dubai is truly imported; from luxuries to laborers, architects to accents, aspirations to talent. (Brook, 2013) Dubai is dominated by companies that are state-owned but managed by Western experts thriving in open international competition. (Brook, 2013) A high volume of expatriates has created a clear segregation between locals and migrants, business and personal relationships. (Ali, 2010, p. 13) Locals only rely on foreigners for work, not for socializing, which remains tight-knit and internalized. Foreigners are cautioned to maintain respect for local Islamic customs on the streets, though in hotels and bars all restrictions are lifted.

An artificial, consumer driven attitude to culture thrives in Dubai. The city has invested in entertainment zones such as Sports City, Internet City and Media City. Internet City is home to cutting edge telecom and technological infrastructure; a magnet for foreign direct investment. It projects the veneer of a new network mediated metropolis of the digital electronic era... a place where people live and work in the same building... but also gathering virtually in electronic meeting places and link themselves up to enable decentralized production. (Michael, 2014) It allows for restriction-free browsing for its 1,400 companies and 20,000 employees to conduct e-business. (Brook, 2013) Leading companies such as Microsoft were enticed to move in by a 50 year rent-free space contract. Once Microsoft moved in, other businesses followed and development was underway. In this way, Dubai has been more successful than other cities at exploiting globalization; it has plugged into global industries and captured the headquarters or lesser corporate centers of these globalized companies. Media City allows for journalists to base themselves in a quiet, stable and relatively Western environment whilst reporting on the turmoil in the Middle East. It also creates free publicity for Dubai, and is the secret to how its real estate projects and shopping malls have become world-famous. (Brook, 2013) Media City's channels and publications are popular in the Middle East, but a lot of their broadcasts are orientated to Western interest to keep Dubai relevant in Western discourse. This creates another dichotomy in Dubai's cultural production.

The resulting disconnect between locals and foreigners has produced frustrations on both sides. The government has come under fire for creating a culture of the privileged few versus the marginalized many. Indeed, the relatively small local population is given generous allowance, earning governance the reputation of being a 'nanny state'. (Kanna, 2011, p.51) For some this makes it difficult for even locals to engage in meaningful active citizenship, let alone foreigners, leading to a stagnant, plastic culture of detachment and consumerism instead of proactive engagement. (Kanna, 2011, p.53) Yet Elsheshtawy

argues this is a misinterpretation of a new notion of culture forming within a globalized world. Now the Gulf is investing heavily in its arts and cultural quarters, constructing world-class museums and acquiring contracts with internationally renowned universities to nurture local talent and produce its own culture. (Elsheshtawy, 2013) Among the sources consulted, Elsheshtawy is unique in his optimism for Dubai's future. He belies the sources that claim Dubai's demise since 2008, insisting the city will continue growing the way it has despite coming under so much international scrutiny. His belief is this growth will allow Dubai to remain an established megacity for years to come.

### **3.0 Conclusion and Recommendation:**

There are many elements that influence conclusions about whether Dubai's transformation as megacity is a short or long term phenomenon. These include moral and ethical concerns about sustainability and labor-rights, as well as the perceptions of risk and benefits of its debt-ridden investment sources.

For the time being, Dubai's current status as megacity remains contested. Its population is roughly nine times smaller than the defined population size of a megacity, yet some critics insist on its megacity status given Dubai's global presence and publicity. Megacities are defined by a population of at least ten million inhabitants. According to the World Urbanization Prospects 2009, Dubai population numbered 1.567 million (2010), projected to reach 2.076 million (2025). Its growth rate is 1.64% with an increase of 500,000 people over 15 years. Mass migration into the city is constant and greater now than ever before. (Prakash, 2011) Thus Dubai's growth, capitalizing on real estate boom and its unprecedented construction projects label it a megacity.

Megacities are usually categorized given a set of common challenges. These include slums, traffic congestion, urban sprawl, pollution, and health issues- all amplified tenfold given the vast population size. Medium cities are in tension with their current challenges, whereas megacities function regardless of these strains. In the public eye, Dubai is not seen to be in tension with its identity. Rather it is a city preoccupied with the continual construction of its brand and image. Instead of addressing concerns of social inequality and class-divides, the city focuses on projects like the Burj Al-Arab to define itself internationally. Built to burgeon Dubai's tourism industry in the wake of oil shortage, these mega-structures are an alternative sustenance for an economy that cannot sustain its oil-boom past 2016. (Kanna, 2011, p.5) These ambitious and expensive projects are the international symbols of Dubai, classing its growth as "mega-development" that is "supermodern"

Dubai's social structure prevents foreigners from becoming naturalized citizens of the UAE and limits work-stay to six years. Thus Dubai promotes nationalism whilst banishing its lower working class population. Workers from worksites are shunted back and forth to worker camps outside the city by



corporate buses, unseen and dismissed. This class segregation can have a significant impact on Dubai's growth towards true megacity status, especially in terms of population size.

Thus for some, (Pope, 2008, p.48) Dubai may be a megacity in its projected image, yet it remains a metropolis as opposed to a "megalopolis"; the urban city-model of the future according to Pope (2008). Pope defines a Megalopolis in accordance to centralization, verticality and congestion. A megalopolis is a polycentric rather than the typical metropolis mono-centric model of organization. Its urbanism is of wide dispersion rather than congregation. There is no formal control at a single hierarchical focus, rather a distributed organization over a poly-nuclear field. (Pope, 2008, p.50) Given this definition, Dubai can still be seen as a center focused model of urban organization. It is an oligarchic order where the transfer of wealth from oil-consuming to oil-producing countries is occurring. (Pope, 2008, p.57) In these terms, Dubai is still limited to a model of a metropolis, not a future megalopolis. Until it progresses to this model of urbanization, perhaps its megacity status remains unsustainable.

These research findings suggest there is an ever-evolving understanding of Dubai and the trajectory of its growth in the global context. (Cambanis, 2013) Whilst some are convinced of its eminent downfall, others see it as a space unburdened by ancient history and blessed by a mix of cultures, thus perfectly positioned to provide the world with a "blueprint for our urban future". It is seen as a site for an emerging paradigm transformation of cities, dissolving antiquated notions of nations and borders, creating seamless connections between people and places, navigated by world-wide travelers. (Elsheshtawy, 2013) Elsheshtawy insists it to be a "laboratory for experimenting with a new form of citizenship and place formation the presence of a unique hybridized culture and populace, a form of transnational urbanism linking migrants to their home countries but also allowing for an assertion of their identity" within Dubai.

It has been noted that certain cultural influences such as orientalism introduce an element of bias to the publications analyzed. (Kanna, 2011) A wider sample of text from a longer period of time is to be explored for a further, more thorough analysis.

In the end Dubai city turned from a desert or a small town to a cosmopolitan city full of towers and skyscrapers in the Middle East and throughout the world. This is because rapid economic development in the Emirate of Dubai by attention to the physical and economic sphere, where are many major economic projects. Which helped to attract many visitors and investor. And we may see that the city has come in a long way in trying to access among megacities and strives to increase the population by attracting foreign investor in its territory. And too many cities adopts global projects.

#### **Acknowledgment:**

I would like to thank my professors DR. Leonard Rodberg, university staff, colleagues and family for their continued support and most valuable assistance in equipping me with the resources and information required for me to complete this paper.

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الملخص: المدن الكبرى هي المراكز الحضرية الكبيرة مع السكان ما يزيد على 10 مليون نسمة. اليوم دبي هوتأتى في المركز الأول في العالم الأكثر تقدماً والظهور العالمي موقع، تنصدر هونغ كونغ وكوبنهاغن، المرتبة الثالثة "الإمكانات الاقتصادية" والثامن للاتصال والود الأعمال. وهذه هي الصفات التي فئة دبي كمنطقة الشرق الأوسط "عام 2025 بقعة ساخنة للمستقبل منافسة المدن، فضلا عن كونه السابع المدينة الأكثر نفوذاً في العالم بعد مسحه دبي قد تم فقط من هذا المركز في تاريخها الحديث. وقد تتوسع سكانها جذريا إلا مؤخرا في عام 2005، بزيادة 25 في المائة في هذا العام وحدة.

ويقتصر نطاق هذا الاستعراض للموارد التي تم نشرها عبر الإنترنت وفي شكل مطبوع باللغة الإنجليزية. الدرجة الأولى وهذه أعمال العلماء المتعلمين في الغرب، ونشرت في السنوات العشر الأخيرة. سوف يستكشف هذا الاستعراض لا يعمل العلماء الإماراتي مكتوبة بلغتهم الأصلية اللغة العربية، ولا أي مصادر قبل عام 2002. هذا سبب نمو دبي وتحليل اللاحقة ذات الصلة قد حدث معظمها في العقد الماضي. أهميتها للغرب ذات أهمية أساسية للنمو، ومن ثم المطبوعات باللغة الإنكليزية التي يتم اختيارها. في الوقت الحاضر، ما زال الوضع الحالي في دبي كالمدينة الكبيرة المتنازع عليها. سكانها حوالي تسع مرات أصغر من حجم السكان المحددين المدن الضخمة، ولكن بعض النقاد يصرون على مركزها المدن الضخمة نظراً لوجود عالي في دبي والدعاية. يتم تعريف المدن الكبرى بعدد سكانها على الأقل 10 مليون نسمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: دبي، تطوير، والمدن الضخمة، الشيخ خليفة بن زايد.

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