The world needs to grow in a way that it can meet the needs of today while preserving the resources for tomorrow. Global City 2009 held in Abu Dhabi recently highlighted some seminal issues confronting urban development - and the ways cities must tackle them. By Feby Imthias

When it comes to introducing dynamic new concepts, the UAE is probably one of the most proactive countries in the world. A top-of-the-mind recall of some of the most progressive projects: First Zero Carbon, Zero Waste city Mazdar, the tallest building in the world Burj Dubai, the world's most inclined tower Capital Gate... This dynamism has ushered in a happy chapter in the UAE's event calendar as some of the world's top names in practically every field come to its shores regularly to discuss, debate, strategise and implement new vision and wisdom.

‘Global City 2009 - Sustainability: Our Vision, Our Future’ is one such example. The event found its first home outside Europe in Abu Dhabi recently and showcased a stunning sweep of intellect and ideas on the symbiosis between urban development and its dwelers in the 21st century.

“Cities have never been so important. Over half of the world's population lives in cities. They are going to be instrumental in shaping our future,” said Frédéric Theux, president, Reed Exhibitions Middle East.

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A tale of many cities

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The fact is, though the world has shrunk to a single point of reference, where all stand on common ground in terms of lifestyle, reference to economic imperatives and technological universality, the place we choose to live in matters a lot. Why? Because itparenthesises our career, social network, family, lifestyle choices, the wealth we accumulate and our overall happiness resides within the general sentence that describes our overall modern-day living methods. This parenthetical makes us feel cocooned in an otherwise terrifyingly diffuse modern life.

Speaking of the city in which the conference is being held, he said, “To compete and prosper in the new global economy, Abu Dhabi must continue to expand and foster creativity. This extends beyond the Creative Class, to harness the resourcefulness of larger segments of service and manufacturing sectors.”

Planning a city comes first

“Building in sustainability from the outset is easier than attempting to make an existing city sustainable because you can plan and design your city in order to achieve the most efficient use of resources,” said Paul Bevan, secretary general of Eurecites, Belgium. “Bearing this in mind,udenise the importance of having an urban planning framework that acts as a challenge (at least for today) rather than a natural hydropod of development. For example, today, people often argue that implementing green building standards adds to the final price of a property.

But one of the strongest recommendations by green building experts is that factoring in environmentally friendly features in a building or a freestanding house reduces operational costs in the long run due to reduced maintenance and increased energy efficiency. It is ultimately the indisputable cogent logic of all-time: ‘A stitch in time saves nine’. Bevan stresses this point. “It is likely to be more costly to retrofit” higher standards to buildings at a later date, and in the meantime running costs are saved on energy and water, for example.”

World Cities

The term “global city” is a central node in the global economic system created in strategic geographic locations governed by global operations in finance and trade. These important spots of global affairs, also known as “world city”, have a direct effect on all world operations through socio-economic means. Cities like London, Tokyo and New York are archetypal global cities.

“Cities can be shown to be in the forefront of the environmental challenges,” said Sassen. “Because of this, many cities had to develop capabilities to handle these challenges. Cities like Tokyo and London had to address environmental issues in the 1980s even before the Kyoto agreement appeared (eg, for car fuel efficiency and zero emissions).” Cities today are confronting the environmental challenge directly and acting to overcome it.

As far as the UAE is concerned, Sassen pointed out project opening cities should be enabled by the fact that global cities around the world actually value the specialized differences of cities. Thus Abu Dhabi marks its difference by its environmental aims, compared to all kinds of other cities around the world.

“In a huge international study of 70 global cities around the world, using over 60 data measures, a very interesting finding is that even the most powerful cities, such as London and New York, do not get the highest score of 100 for being a global city. In fact London, which has the highest score, gets 79 – which if you were grading student work, for example, is not so great a score.”

What this tells us is that there is no perfect global city.

“Each city is different in its own way. Abu Dhabi can stand out for its own specialised differences, notably its serious approach with the environmental challenge.”

Think wider

“Developing and managing competitive and sustainable cities in the 21st century is more than a planning issue or a government issue,” said Maria Sillanpaa, founding director, Sustainability Advisory Group, who is one of a small number of people managing internationally as a leading practitioner in the fields of corporate responsibility and sustainable management.

“Ten years back, there was not so much awareness of sustainable development.

“Nowadays the stakeholders themselves incorporate this vision into their plan. If there is a bit more coordination between the various development authorities like ministry, water, electricity and urban planning and city planning departments at a higher level, so that plans do not clash or contradict, it would bring in greater results,” said Sillanpaa.

“At the same time, scrutiny of business should lead to an expectation that corporate responsibility should extend to encouraging responsible practices at every step in a value chain – wherever it may be in the world. Our aim for this region should be to make profit stem from responsible business practices. A lot of officials from city planning divisions will definitely list the lessons and try to implement them,” she concluded.

Copenhagen, Denmark, dubbed the world’s most liveable city, has managed to reduce emissions below the set standards.

“Two-thirds of the energy is consumed in cities, two-thirds of CO2 emissions are from cities and 50 per cent of the world’s population resides in cities,” he said. “It is vital that young cities like Abu Dhabi take the same mistakes that European or American cities made.

“There are several cities in the world where the commitment to be carbon neutral. Copenhagen, Denmark, dubbed the world’s most liveable city, has managed to reduce below the set standards. They do this by switching behaviour. More than 60 per cent of the people use bikes now, even though the weather is rainy. “Such changes begin with individuals. If the public is provided with alternative transport systems, why would one family have two cars?”

Usage of local building materials that are low-emission makes sense. “Why would one family have two cars?”

Getting from point A to B

With the UAE fast forwarding into travel time with its state-of-the-art metro rail systems that come at

\[\text{ISSUES}\]

\[\text{From left: Paul Bevan, secretary general of Eurecites, Belgium. Mohammad Al Hameli, Deputy Director General and Senior Adviser to ADDED; said that local authority players played an important role in the future of Planet Earth and must therefore place sus- tanability at the heart of urban planning policies.}\]

\[\text{Global City is organised by Reed Exhibitions Middle East as a knowledge gathering, networking and working platform. The organiser decided to host Global City in Abu Dhabi in recognition of the capital’s inspiring record in the area of key trends of sustainability, progress and strategy.}\]

\[\text{One of the fallouts of modern urbanisation has been the awareness that sustainability is increasingly being seen as a challenge (at least for today) rather than a natural hydropod of development. For example, today people often argue that implementing green building standards adds to the final price of a property. But one of the strongest recommendations by green building experts is that factoring in environmentally friendly features in a building or a freestanding house reduces operational costs in the long run due to reduced maintenance and increased energy efficiency. It is ultimately the indisputable cogent logic of all-time: ‘A stitch in time saves nine’. Bevan stresses this point. ‘It is likely to be more costly to retrofit’ higher standards to buildings at a later date, and in the meantime running costs are saved on energy and water, for example.’}\]

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absolutely the right time, the aspect of urban transport, which is one of the most important facets of a city's sustainability ratio, comes under the spotlight.

At Global City, city planners looked into the best ways for cities to fully integrate their transport systems to build a reliable and usable system for the future. The five key elements in adding life to downtown areas and sustainable regeneration were promotion, communication, leadership, hospitality, and climate.

"City centres should be planned in such a way that people live close by and commuting distances are reduced. Public means of transport should be integrated into mainstream travel immediately. Pedestrian-friendly road structures and bike paths should be planned at early stages. "If you give a high-quality service and create living spaces rather than just bus or tram stations, the system quickly becomes integrated into the city," said Upendra Tripathy, IAS, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Minority Affairs and former Principal Secretary for Transport and Home in the Government of Karnataka, India.

Tripathy reminded attendees about an unavoidable fact: today urban transport developments are so highly advanced, they are a shoe-in for sustainability.

The idea of broadcasting public transport schedules to people in their homes thereby informing them about transport schedules to people in their sustainability.

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**What can we do?**

- **What we can do to build a sustainable future for ourselves and the world.**
  - Raise awareness: Build a healthy relationship with nature and environment.
  - Live simply: Differentiate between needs and wants.
  - Consumerism is not based on real needs, but pushed by an inflated standard of living influenced by clever marketing.
  - Reduce energy consumption: Use energy-saving electronic devices. Save water.
  - Avoid wasting food: Eat locally produced food.
  - Drive less, switch to fuel-efficient cars.
  - Paint your home a light colour if you live in a warm climate, or a dark colour in a cold climate.
  - Recycle and reuse.
  - Teach your children sustainable values.
  - Avoid using household cleaners, air fresheners, interior paints, carpets and even furniture items that contain toxic materials.

**‘Five elements in adding life to downtown areas and sustainable regeneration are promotion, communication, leadership, hospitality and climate.’**

Almost 28 years trying to improve co-ordination between cultural and economic projects in Toronto.

"Only when migrants feel the cities they work in are their own, will they contribute earnestly to its growth," he said. The best way to integrate local citizens with immigrants is through sharing of local culture and heritage.

Cultural projects can express universal values through literature, cinema or art, well rooted in specific cultures. The approach is not turned towards the past; in fact, it's an open-door policy which shows respect to history and local identity while contributing to the creation of future cities through inclusion.

Offering a platform for peoples to showcase their cultural offerings; one can often channel it all into the melting pot of a city's overall holding. "The communities built their cultural offerings, which become incubators for the large non-profit institutions. This trend has received support from the city, federal and provincial governments (the world over)," he said.

No one today can possibly predict the predicament in which a town or city will find itself in 20 or 30 years from now. We as humans must face the implications of the growing pressures on our natural resource base as well as the human capacity to bear and re-grow.

While it's perhaps too soon to tell the results of initiatives in the UAE, on the other hand, the country has already taken a huge step on its way to being a Global City. That in itself is sustainable progress.