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Tourism Development in the GCC States:
Reconciling Economic Growth, Conservation and Sustainable Development

**Thought Piece for the
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Abstract

Tourism is one of the world's largest as well as fastest growing industries and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states are expected to be increasingly important engines of such growth. By boosting both international travel and generating increasingly vibrant regional or domestic tourism sectors, tourism promotion is often considered an integral element of their economic strategies. The sector is generally publicized as a vital source of employment, revenue, foreign exchange benefits, public infrastructure, diversification and inducement in reviving national pride. Nevertheless tourism as a catalyst for economic development can be a controversial device. While certain short term economic benefits clearly arise from an expanding tourism industry in the Gulf economies, its unsustainable rapid development has had detrimental environmental, socio-cultural and security impacts, particularly because this industry is dependent on and a major user of natural resources and habitually collides with the values, skills, and aspirations of GCC nationals.

One feasible response to these negative side effects could be the promotion of sustainable tourism, which stimulates a prominent concern for equity and fairness. Thus it can contribute to the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources, the protection of local heritage, and a revival of indigenous cultures. Nonetheless, the concept of sustainability in general and especially when applied to tourism is either perceived in various ways or even worse entirely misunderstood by local stakeholders. Indeed, the term has been bent into a variety of shapes and meanings and some policy makers seem to believe it means 'business as usual'. Consequently, the tourism sector still justifies expensive infrastructure developments that primarily serve to enhance the power and privileges of local elites, sustain their underlying political ideologies and simultaneously expand control over their societies.

While the pace of the current large scale tourism expansion in the GCC should conceivably best be seen as a 'threat multiplier' that intensifies existing problems and vulnerabilities in the region, there is a dearth of studies that have deconstructed the efficacy of these policies. The objective of the session is hence to fill this void and to draw together interdisciplinary research on the relationship between tourism, conservation and sustainable development in the context of the Gulf economies with respect to lessons learnt and conclusions drawn from the utilization of tourism as a diversification tool. In this context, we will explore questions concerned with achieving environmental, social and economic sustainability of tourism alongside the governance mechanisms needed to support more sustainable development pathways. In addition to these specific aims, there is an urgent need to explore the institutions of the political culture, the power dynamics, and the benefits and costs of tourism development for regional and local development and to ensure that long-term prosperity and the quality of life of future generations of Gulf nationals is not placed at risk.

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Thematic Rationale

Tourism is one of the world's largest as well as fastest growing industries and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states are expected to be progressively more important engines of such growth. By boosting both international travel and generating increasingly vibrant regional or domestic tourism sectors, tourism promotion is often considered an integral element of economic strategies, particularly for developing nations where once prevalent primary industries are in decline. The sector is generally publicized as a vital source of employment, revenue, foreign exchange benefits, public infrastructure, diversification and inducement in reviving national pride.

Euromonitor International revealed at the World Travel Market Vision Conference in 2011 that both the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia will experience some of the world's strongest inbound tourism growth over the next five years. Their Travel and Tourism Global Overview report forecasts Saudi Arabia to have one of the largest annual growth rates in the world which will result in an additional 9.3 million visitors to the Kingdom and a 12.3 percent increase in arrivals between 2010 and 2015. This makes Saudi Arabia the fifth largest country in terms of absolute arrivals growth over

the forecast period. The anticipated growth is driven mainly by religious tourism, in particular the annual Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, supported by infrastructure developments in air transportation and travel accommodation. By contrast, the UAE will experience an annual increase in arrivals of 6.9 percent, resulting in 3.6 million new visitors, being the 14th largest country in terms of absolute arrivals growth over the same time frame. Here again the report highlights the significant infrastructure developments on which the growth is build. On a regional basis the market evaluation mentions that among the positive developments are the regions strong air transportation sector and the 2022 FIFA World Cup taking place in Qatar (Euromonitor International, 2011). A few more basic and unquestionably contradicting indicators of the tourism sector in the GCC are presented in Table 1. Next to three developed nations for comparison the table also shows the basic indicators for Nigeria, a country that certainly does not represent a so called "tourism destination" and hence reveals the practical absurdity of some of these figures. Nevertheless, Nigeria and Saudi Arabia share one atypical characteristic, the fact that these two nations are so far inaccessible to individual leisure travelers.

Table 1: Basic Economic Indicators of the Tourism Sector (World Ranking in Parentheses)

	Direct Contribution to GDP 2011 (US$bn)	Direct Contribution to GDP 2011 (% share)	Direct Contribution to Employment 2011 ('000)	Employment: Direct Contribution Average real growth p/a 2011-21	Direct Contribution to GDP Average real growth p/a 2011-21	International tourist arrivals in 2011	Projected international tourist arrivals in 2021
Bahrain	1.59 (76)	6.59 (037)	33.1 (117)	3%	4.4%	5,817,000	7,166,000
Kuwait	4.17 (53)	2.78 (107)	71.6 (94)	0%	2.1%	362,000	639,000
Oman	1.93 (72)	2.98 (103)	35.1 (114)	3.6%	5.4%	1,182,000	1,929,000
Qatar	1.04 (95)	0.75 (181)	9.5 (153)	3.6%	6,4%	1,685,000	2,206,000
Saudi Arabia	13.45 (27)	2.96 (104)	289.7 (45)	1.6%	3.1%	14,740,000	26,590,000
UAE	18.36 (20)	6.05 (039)	140.0 (64)	4.1%	6.5%	10,509,000	15,011,000
Nigeria	3.21 (61)	1.05 (175)	526.9 (27)	2.9%	5.7%	1,217,000	1,808,000
US	403.96 (01)	2.63 (110)	5491.6 (03)	1.5%	3.5%	62,823,000	79,323,000
UK	57.04 (09)	2.43 (119)	955.7 (15)	2.3%	3.9%	29,646,000	44,819,000
Germany	53.89 (10)	1.68 (156)	750.0 (21)	-0.2%	1.6%	26,690,000	30,010,000

Source: World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), 2011. World Economic Impact Research Report. London, 14th February.

Concomitantly, these positive statistics offered by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2011 of the World Economic Forum, and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) project an illusory picture of the contribution of tourism particularly in respect to developing nations. While all of these institutions essentially represent the industry, those often highly manipulated data sets serve to justify expensive infrastructure developments that primarily according to Hall (2005) serve to enhance the power and privileges of local elites and their promotion of the myth of sustainable tourism. Mowforth and Munt (2003) refer to the fact that the WTTC has consistently lobbied for the expansion of travel infrastructure, the liberalization of policies to encourage even further growth of the tourism sector and the removal of physical, bureaucratic and fiscal barriers to travel. For instance, the "Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report" of the World Economic Forum supported by Emirates Group, Etihad Airways and Jumeirah Hotels & Resorts finds the UAE to be not only the third most sustainable tourist industry on a worldwide scale (based on questioning stakeholders in the industry and ignoring the fact that the UAE is rated one of the most unsustainable economies in the world), but makes this nation the global winner when it comes to *"ease of hiring foreign labor"* (Blanke & Chiesa, 2011, p. 371). Hence it should be no surprise that Forstenlechner & Mellahi (2010) point out that the tourism sector in the UAE has a tendency not to employ nationals. This inclination however is symbolic for the situation in the GCC, albeit at different scale, and hence the apparent contribution to employment presented in the table is depending almost entirely on expatriates. In other words the alleged economic benefit of tourism is significantly reduced due to an excessive dependence on foreign intermediaries, labor and products (for instance imports of equipment for construction, food and consumer goods). This phenomenon known as leakage also includes the repatriation of returns by foreign investors, as well as the considerable role of transport, marketing, and other services based in the originating countries of the visitors. Other fundamental dynamics that will reduce the net balance of the tourism sector in the GCC are for instance the amortization of debt incurred in tourist development and the immense subsidization of energy, water, food and numerous other services in these welfare states. Bianchi's (2011) notion of the "*precariousness of an economic model built on the shifting sands of speculative real estate and tourism industries*" will clearly apply to the situation of tourism development in the GCC as well.

Nevertheless while certain short term economic benefits, including increased business activity or the insubstantial positive image, clearly arise from an expanding tourism industry in the Gulf economies, **its unsustainable rapid development has had detrimental environmental, socio-cultural and security impacts, particularly because this industry is dependent on and a major user of natural resources and habitually collides with the values, skills, and aspirations of GCC nationals.** Additionally, there is common consensus that not only uncontrolled tourism expansion is likely to lead to severe environmental degradation, but also that environmental degradation, in turn, poses a serious threat to tourism activities (see for instance Jones & Phillips, 2011). In light of this, Sheppard et al. (2010) examine the substantial changes that have taken place in marine habitats and resources of the Gulf over the past decade. They

conclude "*despite the many marine studies undertaken in the Gulf, collateral environmental damage from coastal development continues at an unprecedented and alarming scale. Effects of scores of individual environment impacts are clearly by far the greatest threat to the region. Extensive research, environmental assessments and alleged 'baseline surveys' have brought no guarantee of natural resource or coastal protection. Short-term and often ill-conceived investments continue to be big drivers of coastal use and allocation of beach frontage in the region*" (Sheppard et al., 2010, p. 33). In an equally alarming study, Al-Sulbi (2010) analyzed the environmental sustainability of King Abdullah Park in Damman and came to the conclusion that both in design and implementation all indicators of sustainability appear to have been ignored, while highlighting the clear negative environmental impacts of the project. He emphasizes the avoidance of all development intended to modify the Saudi coastline or alter its related natural interactions. Similarly Al-Shuwaikhat warned that the lack of transparency, public participation, unified standards and clear implementation procedures for environmental impact assessments prevent their success in the Kingdom. He notes that such assessments are not publicly available in Saudi Arabia, which hinders public awareness and prevents research work from contributing to the environmental discourse. He concludes that *"in Saudi Arabia, national policies and plans still remain immune to criticism"* (Al-Shuwaikhat, 2005, p. 312) and most certainly this inference is transferable to the entire GCC. Correspondingly, this does not represent the Habermasian ideal of institutions, which practice planning emphasizing widespread public participation, sharing of information, reaching consensus through public dialogue rather than exercise of power and avoiding privileging of technical experts and bureaucrats (Habermas, 1995). In general any meaningful development through tourism is established not only as a result of its human-made capital (infrastructure, transport, energy, etc.), or its natural capital (mountains, wadis, deserts, biological diversity, national parks, etc.), but as well by its human capital (professional skill, education & vocational training, individual & traditional knowledge, etc.) and social capital (subjects' ability to coordinate their own actions and choices in view of common goals). Ergo the type of institution-building needed for implementing the concept of sustainability, in and of itself, requires social capital (Fukuyama, 2002).

Ambitious unsustainable tourism development can have the additional negative effect of seriously disrupting the social fabric of the destination society, including the potential loss of language and identity, and can contribute to changes in moral behavior. In this respect, tourism has been associated with increases in prostitution, with the prime example of this effect being the regional sex tourism industry of Dubai. Uncontrolled tourism growth, next to the prevalence of millions of resident foreigners, has further been linked with increased crime and narcotic drug trade. A recent study by Robins (2011) showed that while prior to the 80ties domestic consumption in Dubai was modest and mainly limited to migrant workers, this trend has shifted and today Emirati citizens are more likely to be users while their drug of choice has shifted from hashish to heroin. There is common consensus among scholars that large scale tourism development can act as a facilitator for international crime. For instance Davidson (2009, p. 4) reports that *"for many years Dubai has attracted the attention of both international*

criminal and terrorist organizations, many of which have exploited the emirate's laissez-faire attitudes and impressive physical infrastructure to set up various smuggling, gunrunning, human trafficking, and money laundering operations". His observations were confirmed by a diversity of other assessments.

Irresponsible large corporate tourism expansion further has the potential to exacerbate existing problems of political instability or generate further violence. Especially where tourism development is primarily used as a tool for political or ideological goals and fails to benefit the local population, the resentment comes in many forms. These may include in a worst case scenario the direct targeting of tourists or foreigners, who come to be seen as agents of unwanted change. There should be no doubt that the tourism industry and the demographic disequilibrium as a result of the immense foreign presence that comes along with it will certainly play a significant role in the future GCC security dynamics and that rising income distortions, inflation and declining individual living standards will trigger frustrations and set off or extend potential challenges to regime legitimacy. In the absence of employment opportunities that suit the prevailing unrealistic demands of GCC nationals, other growing socio-economic strains and legal means for expression, conditions will be ripe for disaffection, growing dogmatic religiosity and eventually even a shift to the above mentioned radicalism. The plethora of tourist facilities in the region, such as golf courses or luxury resorts, add little to the quality of life for the majority of the local population and hence do not contribute to their long term public interest. Crowded and tremendously polluted cities, further environmental degradation, food insecurity, as well as the ongoing alienation of the local populace, especially in the UAE and Qatar, will unequivocally undermine the future human security in these oil economies. According to Ulrichsen (2009), if these new security challenges are ignored or inadequately tackled, they have the potential to strike at the heart of the social contract and redistributive mechanisms which currently define state-society relations, and will leave a legacy of fractured polities with a greater susceptibility to future external and global threats to security from issues such as food market volatility or climate change. Accordingly, large scale tourism development should conceivably best be seen as a 'threat multiplier' that intensifies existing problems and vulnerabilities. (Focus 1: Tourism and GCC Security Dynamics, p. 10)

On the other hand by its very nature, the tourism industry is at the leading edge of the globalization phenomenon. **In the promotion of intercultural dialogue, tourism can be a powerful approach for fostering mutual acquaintance and respect, if it is based on values rather than on consumer-driven services. Thus, the intermingling of different cultures can contribute to a better knowledge or image of a country, promote peace and understanding.**

Mounting economic reliance on tourism increases vulnerability to seasonal aspects of this volatile sector and to shocks, such as pandemics, regional conflicts, terrorism, piracy, political or economic instability (see Bahrain and Oman), global economic recession, oil price hikes, natural disasters, and other unexpected events such as ash clouds from volcanic eruptions. In addition, changes in consumer tastes and off-putting media coverage on for instance human rights violations, labor camps, human trafficking, or

simply decadent megalomaniac visions can produce drastic negative responses in certain segments of the source markets.

One response to these negative side effects of tourism development based on profit-maximization has been the concept of **sustainable tourism**, a somewhat contentious, all-encompassing term for practices based on responsible environmental policy and respect for people, culture and heritage. One of the earlier definitions came from Heukemes referring the term to *"all forms of tourism development, management and activity, which maintain the environmental, social and economic integrity and well-being of natural, built and cultural resources in perpetuity"* (Heukemes, 1993, p. 5). Nowadays, the reasons to nurture sustainability should be clear; the concept includes the need to address environmental degradation, climate change and to preserve the world's cultural diversity in the face of overwhelming forces pushing for global standardization. Best practice operations in specific sites throughout the world have shown that sustainable tourism can contribute to safeguard cultural heritage, preserving the environment, establishing global partnerships for development, empowering previously neglected social groups and alleviate poverty, perhaps more efficiently than any other industry. Consequently, sustainable tourism has become an important policy tool for community and regional development, which could also be utilized in the GCC. Nonetheless, there are still many practical and principal challenges to overcome in the relationship between political ideologies, tourism industry and development. Certainly the transition from what exists at present to what is required by ethics and social responsibility is going to be anything from easy. Yet it is the internalized mentality among Gulf nationals that needs to be urgently altered, since change will only transpire if ethical and normative standards are revived and respected. A perfect description of this contemporary mindset has been contributed by Niblock as: *"primarily living in a cocoon created by apparently unearned income, divorced from the problems facing other peoples, sets a population apart from the global community — creating attitudes and mentalities out of touch with international realities"* (Niblock, 2007, p. 1). This further created a condition of negative consent, resulting in a situation where nationals have a tendency to be submerged into a morass of individual interests at the expense of collective welfare (Noland & Pack, 2007). For this reason it would be about time to discontinue using foreign labor as a political tool to postpone painful domestic confrontations, but the task will surely be a minefield.

The very basic guidelines of sustainable tourism defined by the UNWTO are illustrated in Table 2. This represents a rather vague definition, but the concept should still be sufficiently clear. While sustainable development still emphasizes economic growth as a pillar of development, it promotes quality over the quantity, understanding that any system has **limits to its carrying capacity and the amount of growth viable**. Thus, growth should be **mindful of local priorities** and meet the needs of the people for respectful and fulfilling livelihood development, rather than just pursuing increased economic productivity for its own sake. Thus the UNWTO concludes that: *"Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as **strong political leadership** to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it*

requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary" (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005, p. 11).

Table 2 - According to the UNWTO sustainable tourism should:

1. Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.

2. Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.

3. Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.

Source: *UNEP & UNWTO, 2005. Making Tourism More Sustainable - A Guide for Policy Makers, p. 11.*

Regrettably, there is coherent scholarly evidence to suggest that tourism growth in the fragile ecosystems of the GCC may not be consistent with environmental sustainability principles and that these ecosystems are especially susceptible to human pressure. Yet, the explicit objective of tourist supranational organizations and GCC governments is often to increase tourist numbers based on some abstruse assumption that more tourists represent change for the better.

Nonetheless, critical to the ability of local decision makers to implement sustainable tourism development is the understanding that tourism net benefit is not only a function of tourist numbers but also tourist types. While tourist attitudes and behaviors are presumed to be a critical component in successfully developing tourism in a sustainable way, there is amazingly little research in what type of tourist is the most appropriate for a given destination and even less advice in this respect for governments and planners (Van Egmond, 2007). The question of preferred tourism type in a given destination and associated trade-offs is however associated with political choices and based on value systems. Hence all the GCC countries seem to know only one type of tourist, namely "very affluent" (sometimes also referred to quality, high-value, high-end or luxury) and who displays the same behavior patterns consistent with local trends characterized by hyper-consumption, the need to be entertained in man-made facilities (entertainment parks, shopping malls, etc.), requiring lots of highly professional service and with a predominant preference for major cities (refer to Focus 6: Regional or Domestic Tourism - Compatible with Sustainable Pathways?, p. 15). Nonetheless, their orientation towards high-spending market segments which is characterized by the highest resource use per capita (Gössling et al., 2002) does not take into consideration the immense environmental impact of this type of tourism development nor does it alleviate the systemic inequalities.

Apparently overlooked by GCC tourism planners, there is a **"new tourist"** (sometimes also referred to as 'alternative' or 'responsible' tourist) emerging and according to Chambers (2008) these trendsetters are likely to be well-educated elites and comfortable in culturally diverse situations. He argues that they will have an understanding of the consequences of global economic development, and will better realize that their participation in tourism comes with a cost to communities and environments through which they pass. **Consequently, they will appreciate tourism experiences that support principles of environmental sustainability, especially authentic heritage preservation and cultural diversity, as well as human equality.** It is likely that this segment expects travel experiences that have breadth as well as depth and that provide opportunities for self-improvement as well as leisure and entertainment. In general it is argued that this new tourist seeks understanding rather than feeling superior to the local context, seeks to establish meaningful exchanges with people from other countries or to acquire a different vantage point from which to view foreign policy. A general trend in this direction becomes more and more visible and that is what drives tourism to increased sustainability, by demanding new 'alternative' challenging experiences.

Increasingly recognized as a major consumer movement, the industry has unsurprisingly acknowledged "LOHAS" as a new social phenomenon that has emerged over the last decade. The acronym stands for "lifestyles of health and sustainability" and refers broadly to consumers interested in goods and services "focused on health, the environment, social justice, personal justice and sustainable living". Essentially, these are individuals who live and consume in an informed, aware and ethical manner, especially with regard to their own health and fitness, and to social and environmental issues. According to an analysis presented by the Schober Group *"They think global, are very mobile and open-minded. They are looking for a type of tourism that is ecologically sustainable and meets their standards of ethics and social justice."* But they are also critical consumers, especially of those 'greenwashing' marketing strategies that the Gulf economies seem to be particularly predisposed to and needless to say human rights violations. Estimates of the prevalence of these consumers in Western societies vary widely from 5 to 30 percent of the adult population, but there is no doubt that sustainable tourism is becoming increasingly popular as additional individuals, business and organizations are supporting responsible tourism and joining together with authorities and local communities to strengthen sustainable tourism standards as well as promoting environmental and responsible tourism products and services (IPK International, 2010). As a paradox, this 'alternative' tourism segment has undoubtedly been around for centuries (maybe the movement started with Alexander von Humboldt or could be blamed on the era of *romanticism* per se) only with somewhat less fancy descriptions.

Nonetheless, the concept of sustainability in general and especially when applied to tourism is either perceived in various ways or even **worse totally misunderstood by local stakeholders**. Indeed, the term has been bent into a variety of shapes and meanings and some major policy makers and so called "visions …" in the GCC seem to believe the term means **'business as usual'**.

**Synopsis of the Region's Tourism Development:
Short-term profit – long-term loss?**

Most likely representing the worst case scenario on a global scale when it comes to sustainable development in general and in respect to tourism in particular are the **United Arab Emirates (UAE),** notably Dubai. In terms of ecological footprint (EF), in other words comparing consumption and lifestyles, and checking them against nature's ability to cope, the UAE reveals a distressing score with an ecological deficit of 11 global hectares per capita (gha), while in comparison Saudi Arabia used 3.7 gha and Germany 2.8 gha for the same year. Moreover the country also scores highest (or among the highest depending on source) in per capita water use, which equals roughly four times that of Europe, waste generation and energy consumption. Data from the International Energy Agency report presents a disconcerting exposé of the growth of CO_2 emissions, their source, and their spatial distribution in the region. In world rankings, Qatar (58.01 tons CO_2/capita), UAE (29.91), Bahrain (28.23) and Kuwait (25.09) occupy the first four positions. In comparison, Saudi Arabia emits 14.79 tons CO_2/capita and Oman 13.79 (IEA, 2009, p. 90). Consequently when it comes to the general Environmental Performance Index 2010 the Emirates received the 152nd place out of 163 economies, while Saudi Arabia scored 99th, the United States 61st, Germany 17th and the United Kingdom 14th (Blanke & Chiesa, 2011). While in the past environmental impact assessments were commonly used to evaluate the consequences of tourism, which were later enhanced by using carrying capacity concepts (CCC) and the limits of acceptable change system (LAC) analysis, there is a visible trends toward footprint considerations as a means to incorporate the global consequences of travel (spearheaded by the WWF).

While security experts and hydrologists are continuously highlighting the fact that the UAE along with some other GCC nations is facing an 'extreme risk' of water shortages in the near future (while already being one of the most water scarce countries in the world) the irresponsible orientation toward short term profit maximization seems impervious to any change. The most striking example may be the abundance of water-intensive grass golf courses and the drive to host international golf sporting events to promote tourism (not to mention the hazardous fertilizers and pesticides used, again putting the UAE in the top world ranks for fertilizer usage per hectare). Based on a megalomaniac compulsion to develop something with so called 'international distinction', Dubai has received intensive criticism in the media and has recently been labeled as a *"serious challenge to common sense"* as its artificial façade slowly starts to deteriorate. Yet it is not only the West that views the developments in the UAE with increasing suspicion and in this context the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES), articulating the Islamic position on environmental protection based in London presents itself with an interesting question on its website: *"These [environmental] issues will affect us [Muslims] sooner rather than later, but it doesn't help when we are engrossed in dredging the sea to build silly little islands, which are then hired out to the very people we begrudge for invading our lands? What an irony!"* (IFEES, 2011).

What is certain is the fact that with the declared determination of Dubai to attract further assumed 'high-end' predominately Middle Eastern and South Asian visitors

"it must ceaselessly strive for visual and environmental excess" (Davis, 2006, p. 53). Nevertheless despite artificial islands, indoor ski slopes, refrigerated swimming pools, outdoor air conditioning and artificially cooled beaches, Dubai's ruling elite insisted in 2007 that it places "sustainability" at the heart of its plans for existing and future projects (Hickman, 2008).

Yet there are limitations to viewing the unsustainable tourism development in the UAE by only addressing its environmental impacts and ignoring the social dimensions. While the ongoing severe abuse and exploitation of migrant labor as well as the human trafficking component has also been well documented in both academic literature and the media, there is almost a complete void in respect to the social impacts of tourism development, the invasion of resident foreigners that come along with this industry and the envisioned 15 millions future tourists that certainly by and large do not belong to the "responsible" tourism segment on the already highly marginalized Emirati community. In this respect, Al-Suwaidi emphasized that foreigners constitute almost 90 percent of the resident population and accentuated this figure by saying *"sometimes we feel like strangers in our own country"* (Al-Mezel, 2007). Likewise, Al-Roken is deeply concerned about the ongoing alienation in the most contradiction laden society in the Middle East and enunciates that sensitivities of locals should be recognized (Shadid, 2007). While audacious enough to question one of the tacit social contracts underpinning the modern UAE that explicitly caters for foreigners at the expense of nationals to achieve maximum economic growth, he is trying to conceptualize how to safeguard Emirati identities from an overpowering encroachment of a globalized culture by recapitulating: *"We have exiled ourselves from our own land"* (Quarmby, 2008, p. 60). Similarly in an op-ed piece, Qatari national Al-Kuwari, describes the situation as a premeditated infringement of the rights of citizens and questions if the UAE government respects the rights of their peoples as citizens and human beings. In line with non politicized scholarly discourse, he highlights the construction expansion that spearheads the so-called development, as a nationally unjustified choice and *"the development of loss"*; the loss of precious native land, the disintegration of national communities, and endangerment of the livelihood of future generations (Al-Kuwari, 2008). Nevertheless, the economic diversification in the UAE requires a lack of political participation by citizens and hence the progressive alienation ought to be considered a specific and deliberate political tool fostered by the regime.

Dubai is now confronted with the need to implement recessionary measures to attract further all-inclusive mass tourism to one of the most water scarce countries in the world. When preparing this proposal package deals from 678€ (935 USD) to 995€ (1372 USD) were available for a two week vacation in a five star hotel of a well known international hotel chain including the flight, transfer, and breakfast or half-board respectively. In consideration of the real cost, including highly subsidized imported food and services, not to mention the air-conditioned pool this should be an example of a political agenda with obscure motives that would need further discussion. In a recent study analyzing the performance of hotel chains in the GCC Assaf and Barros (2011) concluded that hotels located in the UAE had experienced the highest drop in productivity (in

comparison Saudi Arabia maintained growth). The authors suggested that the country might thus need to focus on developing its mid-scale hotel market to improve its resilience and diversify its tourist base. Stephenson and Ali-Knight (2010) came to the same conclusion a year earlier. However they emphasized that the need to encourage people to travel to the destination in significant numbers could challenge any productive notion of a socially sustainable tourism environment and intensify prevailing social concerns. Odeh (2011) in a very audacious study specifically analyzed the local perceptions of tourism in Dubai and concluded that there were significant feelings of resentment.

Another Gulf country that already has an overwhelming expatriate presence and likewise has the declared objective to bring in even more foreigners is **Qatar**. The initiation of a more ambitious tourism promotion in 2010 came along with an investment of roughly 20 billion USD in five years to promote the so called infrastructure that supports tourism. Qatar is vying with Abu Dhabi and Dubai to become the Gulf's transit hub with all three destinations boosting airport capacity. According to the Qatar Tourism Authority (QTA), room numbers are projected to grow to 30000 by the end of 2013, including hotels and furnished apartments mainly in the luxury segment (Walid, 2010). Conversely, the QTA said hotel occupancy rates fell by 6.3 percent in 2009 compared to the previous year, and the revenues earned by four and five-star hotels fell respectively. The authority's strategy focuses on business, cultural, sports, and educational tourism. Next to the proverbial "high-end" leisure tourist, Qatar is specifically also targeting the business segment. The question how useful both cultural (based mainly on imported culture) and sports tourism (based mainly on foreign athletes) in respect to sustainability principles is may be contentious, but to focus on meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) sounds like a reasonable comparative advantage in the absence of other unique endowments (refer to Focus 7: MICE Tourism: Reconciling Growth with Sustainable Development and Restrictive Policies. p. 17). This orientation also correlates with the quest to become a transport hub between Europe and Asia.

In 2004 **Kuwait** announced that a twenty year tourism masterplan was being developed and to be implemented in 2005. The main objective was to create employment for nationals and to develop and improve domestic tourism. As a second priority, Kuwait tries to position itself as an inbound GCC tourist destination with a strong emphasis on MICE and as a family holiday destination for GCC residents. As a first implementation step the country drastically improved immigration policies and provided incentives for foreign investment. The longer-term plans for Kuwait's tourism industry include the large-scale development of offshore islands, open areas, and current commercial locations. However, according to business elites the lack of a coherent tourism strategy by the Kuwaiti government has failed to deliver. By contrast, another source claims that low cost carriers such as Jazeera Airways and premium service airline Wataniya Airways are attracting a growing number of visitors to the country with its ever-increasing selection of luxury hotels and resorts (Nacheva, 2010). From a sustainable development point of view it might actually be a wise decision to not rush into tourism development to please the business elite and give priority to some more urgent domestic concerns. Once ready to invite a carefully

selected group of visitors into the country, who will respect local culture, urban heritage and enjoy the extreme hospitality as well as tranquility in Kuwait, the country could for instance benefit from cooperating with Saudi Arabia in promoting an alternative tourism experience (e.g. with travel literature covering the Kingdom and Kuwait).

Bahrain certainly can be considered the oldest regional mainstream tourism destination in the Gulf, which registered very excessive growth patterns since 1950 by being a key destination for Saudi visitors and especially by establishing an atmosphere of tolerance and freedom. While there has been no significant effort to promote the tiny archipelago as a destination for the past years, Bahrain saw some noteworthy innovative input since 2009. According to Aziz, Bahrain will try to benchmark itself as a weekend get-a-way as well as a MICE destination, for primarily "high-spending" regional visitors (comprising of both GCC nationals and foreigners residing in these countries). While there are indicators that Bahrain wants to distance itself from being a destination of vice, new initiatives to promote the islands historical treasures (for instance the Dilmun civilization) and urban heritage (by revitalizing old houses and addressing multiple uses of space) are in the pipeline. Most importantly, there are signs of at least the 'sincere commitment' to implement sustainable approaches and the commendable realization that tourism development in the past has not been sustainable (Aziz, 2009). If there will be a chance to overcome the immense political obstacles and to find feasible ways to incorporate those constructive programs for community-based tourism into Bahrain's branding strategies remains to be seen. However, the fact that there is already a scholarly analysis on how the indigenous craft sector could play a larger and more important role within the development of the Bahraini economy in general and the tourism sector in particular should be considered a step in the right direction (see Follad, 2006).

Likewise **Oman** has in general pursued more sustainable development pathways. Being the only GCC country next to Saudi Arabia with a serious long term sustainable tourism potential and global comparative advantage with its uniqueness and natural assets (with Oman's spectacular wadis just representing one of the country's treasures), the Sultanate should give priority to developing this sector responsibly and reversing some of those progressively evolving negative trends. In a comprehensive study entitled *"Prospects of mountain ecotourism in Oman: the example of As Sawjarah on Al Jabal al Akhdar"* Buerkert et al. carefully present the incoherence of GCC tourism policy in respect to sustainability principles (the paper will be distributed among session participants, including photos that reveal the unique and immaculate beauty of Oman's mountains). To date there is no better analysis available that puts that drive towards infrastructure development and private sector involvement into perspective with the reality of Gulf politics and values. Accordingly the authors note: *"In Oman's Al Jabal al Akhdar mountains, this development has already taken shape in the form of a three-lane access highway, several new hotels and paved roads to some of the more remote areas of the Sayq Plateau, where tourists can wander through the gardens and decaying houses of now abandoned settlements and sometimes leave nothing but their garbage behind"* (Buerkert et al., 2010, p. 105). Finally, the article presents ways in which the village of As Sawjarah might

serve as an important model case for a cautious but rigorous transformation of a traditional agro-pastoral mountain oasis into a cultural heritage site and ecotourism destination. Furthermore in another relevant study, all mangrove environments of Oman are considered of extremely high conservation value because of their relative scarcity. The author recommends that these habitats are to be granted full protection from future impacts by government legislation (McCue, 2005). A comprehensive study of the development of Oman's tourism industry since the seventies has been contributed by Winckler (2007). He examines the role of the tourism industry within Oman's overall macroeconomic development framework, explores the countries comparative advantages in relation to both regional and international markets, takes a closer look at the status quo of tourism policy as well as facilities development, and concludes with comparing Oman's potential with the barriers for future tourism growth.

Yet despite the fact that the long-term consequences of mass tourism for the fragile desert environment of Oman's mountains and coasts would need urgent attention, there are visible tendencies of maldevelopment. Oman's tourism plans envision 12 million inbound visitors annually by 2020, presenting an almost eightfold increase on the current level and thus an overexploitation of its carrying capacity. Large-scale construction projects include three new airports and an approved spending of around 8 billion USD on tourism-related property developments across the country. While an increasing sea cruise trade brought more than 120 cruise ships and 300000 passengers during the 2010-11 season, the focus is mainly on attracting intra-regional tourism (including India and Iran) as well as Russians. At the same time religious authorities in Oman voiced their concern against the government's efforts to boost mass tourism at the expense of cultural and Islamic values requesting to reintroduce a nationwide alcohol ban. While the Sultanate continuously claims that they are not seeking large scale tourism (Oxford Business Group, 2010), there is an obvious misconception on the principles of low-impact tourism and the general believe that establishing so called "environmentally friendly" resorts corresponds to "sustainable tourism".

Finally, **Saudi Arabia** presents itself as a very unique case study in development policy. While the official body responsible for tourism development in the Kingdom, namely the Saudi Commission for Tourism & Antiquities (SCTA), sets itself apart from the majority of Gulf institutions by being staffed with exceptional leadership, equipped with integrity, commitment, courage, endurance, incontestable environmental stewardship and a corresponding highly qualified educational background, these relentless efforts are embedded in a socio-cultural environment that is not conducive to the adaptation of the necessary far reaching and multisectoral approach to implement sustainable development pathways. **In short**: "Ideologies of *good governance* supplemented with 21st century *Romanticism* versus Saudi *Realpolitik*" (Spiess, 2011).

In general it can be said that those policy recommendations that have been strictly followed by SCTA's president over the past decade are conceptualized around Western-derived standards of conduct. In other words, the normative concepts of 'good governance' and 'sustainable

development' are assumed to be adopted by and applicable in non-Western politico-cultural contexts. Evidently policy makers, no matter how privileged, do not operate in a vacuum and thus the desired sustainable progress still faces formidable political, socio-cultural and institutional constraints. Besides multiplication, overlap and low level of integration of various state agencies, the political landscape in the Kingdom as elsewhere in the GCC is still characterized by an absence of effective coordination, administrative streamlining and participatory decision making processes, dysfunctional legal frameworks, poor levels of enforcement of existing legislation, ambiguity in regulations, bureaucratic clientelism, shortsighted planning, extremely low monitoring and data-gathering compliance, inefficient national research strategies as well as inadequate capacity building and enabled society. Further intractable hindrances constitute next to ad-hoc royal top down directives and interventions those "*unaccountable and seemingly immovable mid-level actors stalling decisions and pursuing their own agendas*" (Hertog, 2010, p. 185).

Despite these difficulties, the question remains if Saudi Arabia is ready for sustainable tourism. This answer is unequivocally yes! However, when it comes to the present manifestation of tourism development, which is based on massive construction, visible pollution, environmental degradation and bringing in even more foreign labor (illegally, facilitated by alleged 'religious tourism') that is currently pursued by certain interest groups in the Kingdom, the response will not be affirmative. In fact such irresponsible development can have detrimental effects on the future wellbeing and human security of Saudi society.

The Kingdom is literally blessed with everything that the 'alternative' traveler is seeking (with the exception of a feasible public transport system). Next to an abundance of spectacular landscapes (black and white volcanoes, extensive lava fields, limestone caves filled with speleothems, the Asir mountain range, the Rub' al Khali, the Al Wahba crater, Al-Hasa oasis, endless coastlines, some of the world's most spectacular dive sites and so forth – it is an endless list), Saudi Arabia has a tremendous amount of tangible and intangible heritage to offer (adobe architecture, historic urban & religious heritage, a diversity of folk music & traditional dances, poetry, crafts, delicious local cuisine, coffeehouses, the Jinadreeyah Cultural Festival, UNESCO World Heritage sites, etc. – another endless list), a diversity of cultures and even more important **generous as well as amazingly hospitable people**.

Ergo the Kingdom could in theory easily turn into a top secret pioneer destination and hence would appeal to the same type of traveler that can be found for instance in Torres del Paine National Park (Chile), the Salar de Uyuni (Bolivia) or in Agadez (Niger), seeking remoteness, extreme challenges and to curiously "*explore strange new worlds*", however in the real world foreign tourists are still not permitted to discover any of this and hence the motto "*to boldly go where no man has gone before*" (sometime in the distant future) fits perfectly. As a peace offering SCTA published a new picturesque English-language magazine entitled 'Saudi Voyager' to display the countries magnificent assets. However there is a catch, the exquisite source of information is only meant "*…. for all those living in the Kingdom*" (Hawari, 2010).

Moreover, there is another serious dilemma to be overcome with this modern von Humboldt tourist typology and their preferred mode of baggage (in consideration of the fact that most countries do not build three lane highways to make their mountains, ancient heritage sites and protected areas 'easily accessible', but have a preference to conserve their assets): 'Backpackers' are the Kingdoms worst nightmare and Saudi Arabia is not only searching for the proverbial high-end tourist, but there is a superlative in this particular case which translates into "very high-end". They did not yet decide on a minimum net worth, but it should be clear enough that the average professor or researcher will never qualify. Nevertheless, while this top-down dichotomous thinking among policy makers is 'hopefully' based on lack of information or false impressions, the average Saudi citizen is extremely welcoming to visitors and in adherence with Islamic values usually does not prejudge people based exclusively on their income.

Transforming cultures – especially such arcane approaches to deliberately discourage cross-cultural understanding and tourism as a vital force for peace - is with certainty not a challenge to be underestimated. Normally the task will require long term efforts in which selected cultural pioneers (usually those that studied abroad with the ability to sufficiently step out of their cultural realities to critically examine them) perform diligently to redirect those strategic culture shaping institutions. Saudi Arabia should realize the prospects that the authentic version of sustainable tourism development could bring, especially in respect to creating meaningful small scale entrepreneurship, community initiatives, national pride, and to provide those urgently needed employment and training opportunities for the youth. In consideration of the fact that the Kingdom already has a highly developed infrastructure, the country should depart from the perception that they must "build things" to stimulate tourism development. Moreover, the nation should reexamine its responsibility as both being the birthplace of Islam and as a G20 member state toward promoting peace, understanding and friendship through the direct, spontaneous and non-mediatized contacts delivered by alternative tourism and realize that policies of exclusion do not always provide the required outcomes for a better future.

One noteworthy point in the direction of a more sustainable tourism is that the tourist has to comply with the social conducts of Saudi Arabia. This recommendable policy shields the local population from being confronted with disrespectful foreigners and would automatically filter the tourism type of the currently still 'fictional' international leisure traveler in a more "responsible" direction.

Despite all the stupendous work that has been done to prepare Saudi Arabia for tourism (enough to fill almost 400 pages in the forthcoming book), the SCTA president is certainly still facing a minefield in consideration of the diluted implementation of broader-based policies that the success of tourism will depend upon and with certainty the mission will require a great amount of resilience. The situation reminds of a famous quote from cultural anthropologist, Margaret Mead: *"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has"* or maybe with a touch of romanticism from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *"Dream no small dreams for they have no power to move the hearts of men."*

Significance of Topic
to the Expansion of Gulf Studies

Despite the fact that tourism development represents a major policy component in GCC member states and that the pace of the current large scale tourism development should conceivably best be seen as a 'threat multiplier' that intensifies existing problems and vulnerabilities in the region, there is a dearth of studies that have deconstructed the efficacy of these policies, the power dynamics or the underlying political ideologies of tourism promotion in the Gulf.

When reviewing the broader literature, it can be said that the evaluation of tourism policy in general is extremely rare and that *"most studies of policy within the frame of tourism have been prescriptive studies of what governments should do rather than evaluations of what has happened and why"* (Gössling, 2008, p. 44). According to Bianchi political analysis of tourism have in common that they concentrate on external macro-structural processes and essentially ignore local socio-political and economic circumstances (Bianchi 2004: 271). Tisdell emphasized that the economics of any tourism destination should be considered carefully because an unprofitable destination is declared "sustainable" **only if it is subsidized by government interests** (Tisdell, 1998). Astleithner and Hamedinger (2003) opted for a multi-faceted examination and demonstrated that for example, the details and processes of governance, the relationships between political actors, and the institutions of the political culture provide the context in which the local concept of sustainability and its related indicators are understood.

Hazbun (2008) was the pioneer to offers a unique perspective on the political economy of the Middle East from a tourism perspective. He contextualizes how **government elites are using tourism to take part in globalization while, at the same time, crafting it to serve state interests and repress their societies**. The notion that the expansion of travel in the region has allowed states to encourage integration into the global economy while simultaneously expanding control over their society represents in his opinion a serious paradox.

Nevertheless, when it comes to the GCC member states, the available information consists of mainly descriptive or unsophisticated business/economic analysis and to date there has not been a single scholarly analysis that deals with the above mentioned questions. In fact the few authors from either tourism studies or related fields (however not political science) that have published noteworthy articles within their respective domains concerned with the GCC have been cited in this proposal. Unsurprisingly, there is not a single comprehensive scholarly book on either tourism development in the region or on each of the Gulf economies available. Albeit a small number of case studies, especially on Dubai, made their way into the mainstream tourism literature. However, while these authors obviously displayed a remarkable knowledge on the global tourism industry, predictably their understanding of the social and cultural tourism dysfunctions as well as the political ideologies in the GCC continue to be very limited. Concomitantly, available tourism analysis presents itself as non scholarly and has been provided by business intelligence services, such as for instance the Oxford Business Group or Euromonitor International. Paradoxically, the only forthcoming book

based on a multiyear analysis evaluating the concept of tourism development through the lens of human/national security, the negative externalities, power dynamics, political ideologies and the institutional deficiencies is concerned with Saudi Arabia – the only GCC member state that is not even open to international leisure travelers. Accordingly, there would be a much more urgent need to evaluate what is currently happening in the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman and Kuwait.

Moreover, as a result of the political dimension of tourism development in the GCC the sector is characterized by a general lack of data, and data which is often incomparable, inconsistent or not credible. Some of the urgently needed information tends to be confined to consultancy and government reports, which for reasons of perceived sensitivity and confidentiality, are unlikely to enter the public domain. **Hence lack of available data and knowledge, next to political will, presents itself as a key limitation to informed and appropriate decision making designed to realize the full social and economic potential of the tourism industry.** The void results in the inability to assess the sustainable tourism potential for any destination or tourism product, identifying its competitive position and defining the 'appropriate' markets and addressing them effectively.

Objectives and Scope

The session aims to fill the void in the available literature and to discuss the processes of tourism planning and policies in the GCC countries. In this context, we will explore questions concerned with achieving environmental, social and economic sustainability of tourism alongside the governance mechanisms needed to support sustainable tourism in the Gulf economies. We will further aim to develop new strategies to be employed to avoid the errors committed in the past and propose remedial actions to those currently unsustainable development pathways. In consideration of the fact that all types of tourism just like all other industries (e.g. agriculture) will have a negative impact on the fragile environments of the GCC, we will take a closer look at the net social benefit of tourism development, to encapsulate economic, social and environmental benefits and costs, and ask whether benefits outweigh costs overall. Such an approach will include non-monetary values and will allow the necessary trade-offs across economic, social and environmental domains. Concurrently, research indicates that in their aggressive pursuit of tourism development, Gulf governments either failed to address or deliberately ignored the critical question of local employment, ergo it is also crucial to assess the status quo, discuss why tourism has or has not been able to succeed with the set policy goals and especially elaborate the political rationale behind these deficiencies. Finally, since several studies confirmed the immense social impact of tourism on Gulf nationals, resulting in disapproving attitudes or in the case of Saudi Arabia an altogether false perception of tourism even preceding the advent of international leisure tourism. Paradoxically the proportion of Saudi nationals that do travel themselves is extremely high in comparison to other nationalities and the concept of travel especially to seek knowledge is accepted and encouraged both implicitly and explicitly by Islam. Since such resentments can impact future tourism development initiatives, we would like to highlight

the importance to put more emphasis on documenting and understanding the negative attitudes of GCC nationals. Consequently, structured community consultations and surveys should provide a truthful reflection of economic, social and environmental impacts in different GCC settings. Next to tourisms severe negative impacts on identity, the more responsible approach could also serve to promote a feeling of national pride, especially by conserving and promoting cultural heritage. **Therefore the session will encourage submissions that analyze new perspectives and approaches to heritage tourism, especially best practice examples to preserve archaeological sites and historic urban areas, including UNESCO World Heritage sites in the GCC.** (please do not forget that there is a policy dimension to this (!) and in order to maintain our holistic approach please try to consider the impact of climate change on heritage preservation). However empirical work and comparative studies, especially with neighboring countries (e.g. Jordan, Iran, Egypt) are also welcome, especially if they offer new insights and best practice guidance.

The session will adopt a **holistic multi-disciplinary approach** with the specific objective to foster greater understanding and collaboration between scholars from diverse disciplines, practitioners and - at least in theory (we plead guilty to being hopeless idealists) - policy makers.
In addition to the specific objectives, the panel intends to assist in the creation of new networks, put a special emphasis on encouraging scholarly work from young GCC nationals, promote new research as well as disseminate the gained knowledge and assessments by publishing an edited book which will not only include the proverbial synopsis for policy makers, but to provide feasible recommendations that can lead to a more equitable, resilient and sustainable future for Gulf nationals. (Only for Draft: with one of the convenors being directly involved in the policy making, we are quite serious about this!).

Finally the panel is based on the assumption that 'indigenous' human and social capital is a prerequisite for the development of sustainable tourism and while it's implementation could be possible in some of the GCC countries it would eventually require fundamental shifts in operations, systems, ethics and philosophies.

Possible Panel Themes / Questions

Please note: These suggestions are just meant to be '*thought provoking'* to encourage 'out of the box' thinking and challenge myopic approaches! Every topic that is relevant to the critical evaluation of tourism policy in the GCC is very welcome – there is no need to relate to any of these foci. The fact that some of theses themes are quite sensitive **was intentional to stimulate opposing views**

Focus 1: Tourism and GCC security dynamics

From a security perspective, contemporary **tourism development in the GCC should be discussed in terms of both human security and the established field of security studies,** and it should be emphasized that the probable associations are indirect and highly contingent on the future political decisions of Gulf regimes.

The prevalent characteristics of the current Gulf Arab reality which pose serious obstacles to sustainable progress and the widespread absence of human security as a prerequisite for noteworthy development have already been adequately discussed in several Arab Human Development Reports (UNDP/RBAS, 2002 to 2009). The latest assessment argues that the concept of human security is a useful lens for viewing challenges to and envisioning solutions for, sustainable human development in the region and should be used as an operational tool for policy formulation and implementation. In this respect, **contemporary tourism development in the GCC is intrinsically linked to those intense, extensive, prolonged and comprehensive threats to which nationals' lives and freedom are vulnerable**. These diverse challenges include for instance water scarcity, food security, pollution, desertification, (youth) unemployment, public health, poverty, oppression, inequity, demographic imbalances, loss of heritage/identity and so forth. Thus the human security paradigm provides an opportunity to identify threats, to avoid them when possible, and to mitigate their effects when they do occur.

Nevertheless, to focus entirely on the human security approach and to be dismissive of traditional security concepts can be potentially ambiguous since the current irresponsible tourism development has the potential to exacerbate those existing problems of instability and generate acts of aggression. This scenario is especially true where trade-offs between positive and negative impacts are perceived to be too high by the national population per se or by different strata of this community. In the GCC context, it cannot be excluded that certain individuals or groups who support strong cultural and/or religious values and feel that these values are threatened by tourism to an extent that is increasingly unbearable, become gradually more radical in their approach and may even resort to terrorist attacks as an ultimate means to combat the 'perceived' threat. Hence the potential impacts of tourism need to be analyzed according to their probability to provoke such intense reactions from residents or even international extremist networks. The fact that *'Dubai is rapidly changing into a secular state'*, while tolerating the profound use of so called non-Islamic ways to excess has certainly not only raised the attention of religious hardliners, but also of critical thinkers from around the globe. Aziz (1999) notes that violence is a human reaction to irresponsible tourism development per se and that this cannot be linked to Islam or global terrorism (in fact no other scholar has thus far managed to establish a correlation). In fact, the amazing hospitality that is still found in some GCC states or was available in the past as part of the regional culture can at least partly be connected to Islam, which supports the duty of hospitality toward travelers regardless of race, nationality or religion. Aziz comes to the conclusion that instead of pointing a finger at the Muslim host communities alone, the atmosphere of rejection of tourism can directly be linked to the careless actions of the tourism industry, the governments, the developers and the tourists. Al-Hamarneh (2005) shares the views of numerous authors by emphasizing that face-to-face intercultural dialogue is the most promising way to prevent negative and violent developments in the tourism sector. However, the practiced concept to alienate foreigners by spatial isolation makes them and those working in the sector more vulnerable to insecurity, while at the same time impeding the potential for dialogue between different cultures. This phenomenon is especially visible in the UAE where contact between nationals and their culture is discouraged in numerous ways.

Yet from an objective point of view those behavior patterns incongruent with Islamic traditions cannot be attributed to the influx of Western tourists alone, but in fact can certainly to a great extend be ascribed to regional tourism as well. Undeniably excessive economic abundance among GCC nationals gave rise to a culture that attributed great social significance to symbols of material differentiation, resulting in a form of hyper-consumption (especially shopping) and the extreme display of extravagance that severely contradicts basic Islamic values. Moreover, the so called outbound 'tourism of vice' from Saudi Arabia to Bahrain and Dubai has been discussed in the media and even academic literature. The question why this special segment of Saudi society tends to behave much more extreme when confronted with what is often termed as 'openness' in comparison to the often well educated Saudi elites that spend their summer vacations in Southern Spain, France, Miami or California (evidently there are a few *enfants terribles* among those as well, but they certainly don't stand out from other nationalities) should make an interesting academic analysis, especially in respect to strategies targeting primarily regional and domestic tourists.

Religious tourism, especially in form of the annual hajj pilgrimage, presents another serious human as well as traditional security threat to the region and especially Saudi Arabia. Albeit this is a very sensitive topic and hence it is very difficult to have a reasonable discourse, there is still a need to discuss the impact of these threats (for instance illegal immigration, facilitation of international crime, epidemic events and pandemic spread) on the current and future well being of Saudi society (and these problems do not respect borders). Next to the immense burden on Saudi security forces, the current 'open door policy' is basically an invitation to criminal activity, especially for inbound visitors from less developed nations. Is the Kingdom really this naïve to believe that everyone is coming for religious purposes? Don't they know that the most corrupt institutions in some of the source countries are handling the so called 'pilgrimage travel'? Don't they realize that these are the channels for human trafficking, money laundering and prostitution into the country? On the other hand, do they know that many of these pilgrims cannot really afford this trip and hence are sacrificing their children's education, health, etc. and are borrowing the travel costs from impoverished relatives that may never be paid back? Since all of this is very unlikely, why doesn't anyone put an immediate end to these practices and thereby reduce the overcrowding? How much greed of a few can be acceptable for a country that is proud of its religious values and why does society still prefer to ignore these issues, while at the same time complaining that they are restricted to go to their religious sites as often as they wish?

These new emerging security threats need to be taken seriously and there is an urgent need to find a novel sustainable equilibrium between human security and traditional approaches. In this context, Ulrichsen (2009, p. 30) reminds us that a balance between *"competing visions of the national and regional security architecture, between incremental reforms to political and economic structures and the deeper systemic problems which undermine longterm solutions, and between rising demands for, and falling supplies of, natural resources"* must be found.

Focus 2: 2022 FIFA World Cup - Who will benefit?

Qatar's controversial success in taking the 2022 FIFA World Cup bid however has raised an avalanche of protests and the initial objective to bridge the gap between the Arab World and the West can already be considered a complete branding failure. Next to disappointed soccer fans and the possibility that decision might still be reinvestigated, a multitude of organizations are already highlighting the "darker side" of infrastructure development in Qatar, a phenomenon that was previously by and large associated with the UAE. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has just launched a new multimedia report in Brussels to bring attention to the few rights and inhuman living conditions of migrant laborers in Doha and Dubai with the declared intent "to put pressure on FIFA, Qatar, and the rest of the region, to improve labor standards" (IUTC, 2011). Transparency International has also just released a new publication which is clearly asking for an independent investigation to clear up the corruption allegations related to the selection of World Cup host countries (Schenk, 2011). Documentaries to enlighten the general public will undeniable reveal some of those topics – for instance human trafficking and the abuse of domestic labor – **that will certainly not shed a positive image on the entire region and may even lead to further hostilities against Arabs and the Islamic world in general**.

On the other hand, Qatari nationals will be confronted with an influx of foreigners who beyond doubt will have very little respect for the cultural sensitivities of the host nation in both the process of preparing the World Cup and especially during the event. The notion of "offensive behavior" in the form of fanatic fans, partying almost nude under the influence of alcohol has certainly raised reasonable criticism among the more conservative Gulf population.

Will any of this lead to a sustainable form of tourism, which is meant to promote cross-cultural awareness and should enhance the understanding of the Gulf Arab and Islamic world, especially among Westerners? Skeptics believe that numerous concepts presented by Qatar (based entirely on foreign expertise – Germany certainly being among the countries to profit most from this) are not feasible, while numerous issues in respect to environmental degradation have so far been totally ignored. In this respect, Scharfenort is asking the million dollar question that is currently being raised by many scholars in respect the some of the GCC projects: "*Still not exactly clear is the aim of hosting the FIFA World Cup: is it for marketing purposes only to rise from the ashes next to famous Dubai that has fallen into disgrace or is Qatar honestly interested to establish itself as a number one sporting destination*" (Scharfenort, 2011). She concludes that with Islamic values exceptionally influencing socio-cultural norms and policies in Qatar, a balance between tourism development, tourist influx and traditional culture of local residents will be difficult.

The real question is how will such an event seriously benefit the future wellbeing of Qatari nationals and the sustainable development of their society?

Focus 3: Tourism development - Will it really be a cure for national unemployment?

Policy makers in the Gulf economies often promote their surge for tourism development as a means to create employment opportunities for their citizens, especially since investments in this sector tend to generate a larger and more rapid increase in employment than equal investment in other economic activities. The International Labor Organization estimates that on average one direct job within the tourism industry induces around one and a half additional indirect jobs related to the tourism economy (ILO, 2002). Since tourism creates a variety of jobs requiring different employee profiles with the majority having lower formal qualification requirements, it would be the most suitable policy approach to cater to the dearth of skills among nationals in the Gulf economies. Moreover the sector has a tendency to employ younger people and those who prefer to work part-time (notably women) or temporary (for instance students during vacation time). At the same time, available research suggests that most workers in the tourism sector tend to earn less than workers in socially comparable occupations.

Conversely, despite the recurrent rhetoric of policy makers, a fundamental gap still exists between the available national human resources and the needs of the labor market in general. When looking at the status quo, the attempts to "nationalize" the workforce should be considered, at best, incomplete successes and at worst absolute failures. At the same time unemployment especially among the youth is on the rise in all of the GCC states and the vast majority of the young unemployed never held a job before. Prevailing patriarchal structures and the redistributive policies in the region, permit youth to spend extended periods of time searching or waiting for a preferred civil service and public-sector enterprises job (Yousef, 2003). Hence, unemployment appears to be still largely 'by choice' due to unmet expectations on salaries and working conditions. Consequently, it is unlikely to assume that with the current structural deficiencies GCC nationals will be willing to work in the tourism sector, where they will not encounter customarily high wages, job security, generous social allowances and retirement benefits, short working hours and the ability to display a lack of work discipline.

So at least in theory, a shift to sustainable tourism concepts could alleviate some of the difficulties currently associated with the employment of nationals in the globalized GCC tourism industry since it offers small-scale opportunities that require less skills (e.g. language skills). For instance the 'alternative' tourist that goes hiking in Bolivia, does certainly not expect the local family business that rents out rooms in a mountain village to speak any English. In this context, tour guides, bicycle, horse or camel rentals, running minibuses or local restaurants do not require many years of vocational training and still seem to provide quite adequate services to millions of 'alternative' travelers in all corners of the globe. Achieving these aspirations however requires a good fit between the types of service which tourists demand and those which locals are willing to provide. Policies which prevent or discourage independent travelers are reducing exactly these opportunities for local small scale entrepreneurs, who tend to choose employment models which complement their existing livelihood strategies and thus maximize their returns.

Since this is the case in most GCC countries, is the rhetoric about creating meaningful employment opportunities sincere? From both a security and sustainable development point of view, to develop a tourism industry that is dependent on foreign expertise and labor is unacceptable and should be considered a 'development of loss' that uses up the resources required for future generations. Hence every effort should be made to implant those nationalization policies and create the necessary awareness for the urgency of these policies.

A sector-focused approach to sustainable tourism has recently been identified in the development of self-regulatory codes of conduct and practice. While encouraging participating members to both take a leadership role in managing sustainability issues and to build a collective identity of responsibility, the system functions by means of peer pressure and status determinants, the threat of government regulation and social perceptions. One of these codes in the GCC member states could be to advertise their businesses as "nationalization compliant", based on relevant government media campaigns and the necessary framework conditions (labor/immigration/education). While prospects for widely-based adoption of sustainability standards in society and the private sector are expected to be dim, this approach certainly has advantages and reduced costs compared to forced compliance or litigation. Is this a feasible step in the right direction? How can the Gulf economies overcome their structural differences? When it comes to vocational training required for the tourism sector the situation looks even worse, since only Oman has so far managed to implement somewhat sustainable training. How can the private sector be involved in developing these urgently needed skills based on the German model? What if the protection of the system continues to take the upper hand over promoting capacities and skills?

Focus 4: Agro-ecotourism for GCC Food Security - A feasible way to sustain socially responsible and sustainable agriculture in rural areas

One feasible option to sustain rural areas is to introduce and promote agro-ecotourism. This form of niche tourism is considered to have the potential to not only assist rural communities with feasible solutions to help diversify their economic base, but it would also facilitate increasingly urban GCC populations to understand the important role that rural life played in their history.

While ecotourism is nature-based and agro-tourism is farm-based, the neologism agro-ecotourism presents itself as a best practice combination of both concepts. The rural landscape, usually a combination of peripheral areas and agro-ecosystems, is the most important resource for sustainable low impact tourism development, while possessing a greater aesthetic and recreational potential over uniform, degraded and/or polluted agricultural areas. In this respect the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in its fifth meeting in Nairobi came to the conclusion that *"in some areas, low-input and small-scale agricultural activities that result in both an attractive environment and the maintenance of high levels of biological diversity can also offer an opportunity for tourism.*

Sale of products (souvenirs, crafts and arts) derived from sustainably harvested natural resources may also provide significant opportunities for income-generation and employment" (CBD, 2000: Decision V/25, 12 e). Thus the symbiotic relationship between rural hospitality and agriculture (including livestock) offers new employment and income generating opportunities for rural populations, together with the expression and cultural exchange of agricultural traditions, craftsmanship, development of new value-added products (for instance jam or sweets from dates), or even culinary heritage. Cavaliere (2006) conceptualizes that agro-ecotourism will be characterized by eco-agriculture, ecotourism, and community-based initiatives. Moreover this novel form of tourism can also create incentives to shift to the urgently needed organic agriculture since people can increase their confidence in organic products through better awareness. Eco-organic agricultural practices which benefit the environment while at the same time financially gratifying farmers include the accommodation in buildings renovated or built according to ecological architecture (natural materials such as adobe, bioclimatic criteria, energy saving and waste management, landscape planning, etc.); naturalistic and didactic activities (e.g. organic gardening, compost making); on-farm consumption or selling of organic foodstuffs, and sensitizing guests on rational use of natural resources (e.g. in-house solar energy but also in greenhouses or for processing, water reuse and recycling). In this context, organic agriculture is considered to be one important approach to environmentally sustainable food production and can generate several positive impacts to rural society. Community-based participation however must first determine the extent to which rural societies are comfortable interacting with the various types of people that may visit their farm.

Above all date production in the GCC (especially in Saudi Arabia) could benefit from a shift toward introducing sustainability standards and organic agriculture (best practice examples to be found in Tunisia, Egypt and California). One obvious beneficiary would be the seriously threatened - as a result of overexploitation - natural marvel of Al-Hasa (Al-Ahsa) oasis. Another example can be traced to the Asir Mountains where crops were traditionally cultivated on steeply terraced mountainsides, a practice which is slowly being abandoned due to lack of terrace maintenance and the non-availability of labor partly as a result of rural-urban migration. At the same time these old environmentally suitable traditions are being replaced by unsustainable intensive agriculture which is encroaching into the fragile environment of higher altitudes and is responsible for diverting water for irrigation from wadis by installing dams.

While responsible and sustainable tourism development could help to reduce such devastating practices, this would require a dramatic shift in values and sincere regulations from the leadership. There are indeed more examples scattered over the Gulf, but unfortunately hitherto the potential of tourism development was never linked with more sustainable agricultural production systems in the region (in Saudi Arabia only with large scale agriculture, not with a shift to sustainable production or organic farming).

Another form of tourism that could have a positive impact on sustainable development in the Gulf economies and serve as a remedy to the regions loss of identity is heritage tourism. As with all the other forms of niche tourism there is a multitude of definitions, but at least one useful working interpretation can be found on the website of The National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States. The private, nonprofit organization includes cultural, historic and natural resources and defines 'cultural heritage tourism' as "traveling to experience the places, artifacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present" (National Trust, 2011). What makes it even more problematic is the fact that the concept includes the term 'culture', thus encompassing everything that defines a community from its way of life to tangible and intangible elements. Because of the diversity of encounters and products that constitute it, cultural heritage tourism can be further segmented into smaller, more specific subcategories which for instance include the very important regional and international experience of **pilgrimage/religious tourism** (Hajj/Umrah) to Saudi Arabia.

Timothy & Boyd (2003) distinguish between 'passive' and 'serious' heritage tourists, a classification which would help to define the difference between the mainstream organized tour consumer or the 'responsible' new independent tourist that looks for the educational encounter and seeks a specific heritage experience of one kind. This special learning component was also applied by Acott, LaTrobe and Howard (1998) to differentiate 'shallow' tourists from their 'deep' counterparts when it comes to nature-based tourism. The later being "ecocentric" and/or "allocentric", in particular in search of intrinsic value, small-scale development, authentic community identity as well as participation and the notion that materialism for its own sake is intolerable. On the other hand, the 'shallow' or anthropocentric tourist has a business as-usual attitude, where nature and everything in it is seen as a resource to be exploited in maximizing profits and human benefits, while management decisions are based on utilitarian reasoning and sustainability is viewed from a very weak perspective. When it comes to the 'serious' or 'deep' type, studies have consistently shown that heritage travelers stay longer, are extremely well educated, more likely to be female and have a preference for locales off the beaten track. As a paradox this form of travel often tends to be a special subdivision of the often maligned backpacker travel (in the US often referred to hiking, trekking or adventure tourism). However this is most likely one of the most misunderstood concepts by developing countries policy makers and it should reflect the absence of knowledge of tourism types and markets, since for many using a backpack (considering the fact that a quality trekking backpack for the determined outdoor tourist that will not have a negative impact on the owners health will start from 300 USD) is simply the most comfortable form of carrying around your belongings when heading for less developed destinations and remote areas. Consequently, Scheyvens (2002) as well as numerous other authors calls for holistic socio-cultural research on the characteristics of contemporary backpackers and their potential to assist the sustainable development of destinations. Nevertheless, according to Van Egmond (2007), the 'serious', 'deep' or as some authors call them 'dedicated'

(insert 'responsible', 'alternative', 'purposeful', etc.) tourist is much more difficult to manage, since they are more demanding in their interaction with locals and when authenticity issues are concerned. For instance, this type of tourist engaging in the religious pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia would care if the faith-based souvenirs on sale are imported from China or if they represent local craftsmanship.

Yet the **concept of natural and cultural heritage preservation and tourism** (just like many other concepts in development policy) **is entirely based on Western constructs**, which are deeply embedded in European cultural, economic, and political processes. In this context, a so called heritage consciousness first transpired with the Enlightenment philosophy of 18th century Europe (Lowenthall, 1985). During this period intellectuals sought to mobilize the power of reason in order to reform society, advance knowledge, and oppose intolerance as well as abuses by the religious authorities. They reflected upon Greek and Roman antiquity for examples of intellectual progress, aesthetics in the arts, advanced architecture and philosophy. Consequently, this specific era was characterized by tremendous economic, political, and social change as countries made the transition from trade-based mercantile economies to industrial ones, while at the same time shifting from oligarchic political control to broader-based liberal democratic relations of authority. Thus the concept of the nation state was born and with it came novel challenges that needed to be resolved. When society ceased to be constrained by the absolute authority of the elites and the church, it embraced novel social ideals, especially the **Enlightenment** notions of individualism, liberty, and social justice, resulting in many governments struggling with social control and allegiance of the populace. Consequently, these states had to devise a way to bond people and regions, dissimilar in their class interests, geographical locales, and sometimes in their religious and ethnic backgrounds, to the highly abstract notion of the state, where inhabitants were connected to imagined 'homelands' through the new concept of citizenship.

Subsequent to this period of drastic change, another intellectual movement was conceived in Europe that originated in the second half of the 18th century, which could be considered partly an escape from modern realities as well as Enlightenment rationalism embodied especially in the scientific rationalization of nature. Next to the emergence of poetic mystery, the zeitgeist of the era had a strong recourse to historical and natural inevitability in the representation of its ideas. The shift to **Romanticism** induced an emphasis upon solitude, privacy and a personal, semi-spiritual relationship with the sublimity of untamed nature and its picturesque qualities. According to Urry (2002) *"individual pleasures were to be derived from an appreciation of impressive physical sights"*. Exemplary objects of these ideals would be the scenery and landscapes of the Alps or magnificent stretches of coastline, but also the remoteness of historical buildings or alien cultures. Nevertheless, besides being the cradle of eco-tourism in its celebration of nature as object of extreme emotion, one of Romanticism's fundamental ideologies and enduring legacies of its political philosophy is the assertion of the concept of nationalism. Strongly inspired by the works of Rousseau and von Herder, the movement had inter alia a focus on the development of national languages and folklore, and the importance of local customs and traditions. By contrast, the contemporary

natural and cultural heritage industry on a global scale may serve less for nationalism and identity than as a palliative for rapid social change and the increasing uncertainties of our times as well as to shield us from the seemingly rootless and transient after-effects of modernity and globalization (Chambers, 2006).

When it comes to cultural heritage tourism, the Gulf economies seem to put an emphasis on the built heritage with a preference for using the idiom 'Build Environment' (a differentiation that already foreshadows some of the challenges). The term was defined as *"….the identity of a community or of a country. Indeed, the built environment is the reflection of a lifestyle, of a social organization, of artistic practices, and of the architectural adaptation to climatic, geographical, cultural and religious factors"* by the Built Environments for Sustainable Tourism (BEST) conference that was held in Muscat in 2005. When reading this definition, the question that instantly comes into one's mind is what the foreign designed, foreign build and most unsuitable to climatic, geographical, cultural as well as religious factors skyline of Dubai has to do with the identity of the UAE and its citizens? How does this drive toward 'elusive bought development' in the form of foreign iconic copy & paste architecture lead to the construction of a 'sense of place', a sense which enables nationals to feel that they 'belong' to a place, or that a place 'belongs' to them? A very similar question could be asked, when taking a critical look at the infrastructure developments in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. In this particular case it should be up to Muslims and especially Saudis to decide if somewhere in between Burger King, Dunkin Donuts, massive concrete international hotel chains or Starbucks close to the Prophet's burial site is the heritage, identity or architectural adaptation to cultural and religious factors that they wish to present to the world as the most sacred place of Islam. Moreover, there is the question of what those responsible for this devastating development wish to leave behind for future generations and humanity in general?

Within the context of policy planning, a dichotomy exists between preserving the past for its intrinsic value and the call for development in response to changing societal values. This paradox has been profound in the GCC, where we witnessed heritage destruction at an unprecedented scale in some member states. Sadi and Henderson (2005) observed that in Saudi Arabia, numerous well known landmarks have given way to development projects as part of the nation's drive towards modernization, thereby reducing its attractiveness as a tourism destination. Numerous other important heritage sites in the Kingdom are still under threat. Hence it should be no surprise that the International Conference for Urban Heritage in the Islamic Countries, which was held in Riyadh in May 2010, designed a comprehensive roadmap to preserve architectural heritage and recommended *"to lay and execute plans to ensure balance between urban heritage preservation and requirements of contemporary development"* as well as "*to enact binding controls to preserve mosques and religious facilities"* (SCTA, 2010). In theory, the development of sustainable heritage tourism would play a significant role in providing a native self-image and could serve as a source of dominant visual representations of the nation, but will this concept be feasible in the Gulf economies? For instance, according to a working paper presented by Al-Ghabban there are 1985 identified urban heritage sites in Saudi

Arabia, hence how can sustainable tourism contribute to preserve these valuable assets? Islamic urban heritage, with its elegance, simplicity and being based on complex mathematical computations for design, bears testimony to the knowledge and scientific advancement of Islamic civilization and is being admired by millions of international tourists around the world (for instance in Istanbul). What needs to be done to root the value of natural and urban heritage in Gulf societies' minds and to promote the understanding of the need to share this heritage with the rest of the world especially in Saudi Arabia? What will prevent the illusion that they must continuously invest in construction to promote tourism in both Oman and Saudi Arabia? Instead of trying to replicate those unsustainable "tourist" attractions, they should focus on the natural abundance that they already have. Well-presented rural villages and towns can have sufficient charm (see Austria, Canada or US for instance) and may contribute to community pride. Accommodations made out of adobe have an aesthetic traditional appeal and provide perfect insulation from both the heat and freezing temperatures during winter, while well-maintained heritage facilities (does not mean newly constructed, but for instance being clean) assure that visitors feel welcome. For instance restoring the historic Hijaz railway and its stations authentically – preferably without visible pollution - would be another invaluable asset for Saudi Arabia. What will prevent the relentless commodification or outright replacement of cultural practices (Russian belly dancers in the UAE), heritage and landscape resources?

Focus 6: Regional or Domestic Tourism - Compatible with Sustainable Pathways?

Almost paradoxically Gulf economies see the regional or domestic tourism market as a prime target for their initiatives. The logic or political strategy behind this shall be an interesting topic for discussion during the conference. From an economic perspective, domestic tourism basically involves a regional redistribution of national income, and hence most countries tend to give priority to international tourism to earn foreign exchange. Moreover, on a regional basis - as already mentioned above - this market segment is based on excessive consumption, hence entirely dependent on foreign inputs, so the leakage is even greater while sustainability approaches will tend to be nearly impossible.

Some proponents in Saudi Arabia claim that their citizens are in their words 'big spenders' and that there is an urgent need to keep those revenues within the country. Such assumptions are only partly true and do not reveal the realities of contemporary Saudi society. First of all, those statistics include all types of tourism, including official, business or medical travel which is usually paid for very generously by the Saudi government or companies. Since government officials routinely stay in five star hotels in London, Paris or New York, this will noticeably influence the per capita expenditure. Moreover, one needs to consider that there is a small proportion of Saudi and other GCC elites, who will undeniably classify as 'big spenders' while vacationing abroad and Google is quite willing to surrender detailed information on this. For instance the search words 'big spenders' plus 'Saudi Arabia' will instantly produce this headline *"Hopscotching from Saudi Arabia to Switzerland, … fashion lovers can drop six figures in a single spree"*.

There should be no need to highlight that such consumption patterns are seriously distorting the statistics. Conversely, when the average Gulf tourist is spending 3.5 times more than the average tourist in the UK and more than 1000 € (1380 USD) per day in Germany we should question such figures and consider the distribution.

When it comes to outbound GCC leisure tourism, we can also see very distinctive trends. An article in Arab News reported that the average cost for a Saudi couple traveling to a European destination including tickets and hotel is 20000 Saudi Riyals (equivalent to app. 5332 USD or 3911 EUR) for a period of 15 days (Al-Jassem, 2011). While the amount spend seems way above average in comparison to the offers available in Europe, the article claims that spending vacations in Europe is becoming *"a necessity for some families, not only because of the revolutions elsewhere, but also because of its ostensible prestige and the cool weather"*. (Obviously no one has yet noticed that the weather is not all that fresh in many parts of Europe during summer and especially that not everything is air-conditioned – London underground can certainly be an alternative sauna). Nevertheless, since most Saudi families cannot afford the amount of money that is required to apparently spend *"a good time in Europe"* they are inclined to get a loan from the bank or borrow the required sum from friends or relatives, often as a last resort for demoralized males suffering from extensively nagging wives. As unsophisticated as such articles may be, they do reveal certain trends that are relevant. As a result of their consumption pattern, GCC nationals have a preference to head to major cities, instead of opting for the much cheaper farm/hiking vacation in a scenic village in for instance Austria or Spain. The second trend is in respect to motivation, since satisfying the need for 'prestige' does not lead to someone being interested in the destination or in the host community. Both these trends have been confirmed by available statistics published in the UK and in Germany. A new report from Visit Britain revealed that the number of tourists visiting Britain from the Gulf economies has increased by almost 10 percent in 2010, with most tourists coming to London and with shopping being the predominant interest. While the British might be a bit disappointed that all those efforts to promote their remarkable heritage got ignored, Germany is suffering from exactly the same inclination. While Germany also displays continuous increases of visitors from the Gulf economies, recording almost a million overnight stays with over 50 percent of these coming from Saudi Arabia alone, shopping and medical purposes constitute their main interests (Statistisches Bundesamt 2011). Specific data for Hamburg, the second most preferred destination after Munich, reveals that shopping and entertainment (… strangely we are only really famous for one specific type of entertainment???) are of relevance. In comparison, almost all other inbound leisure tourists come to Germany for its natural and cultural heritage – what a relive for Neuschwanstein Castle where 1.3 million visitors per year squeeze in search of Romanticism. Across the Atlantic, the US reports the same trends for GCC nationals – shopping and entertainment (amusement parks, etc.) are the predominant interests. In a way these facts would be more comprehensible, if there wouldn't be those mega size shopping malls with exactly the same shops to be found in abundance across the GCC! The last implication is that Gulf nationals like to travel and that especially Saudis seem to have an urge to leave their home turf quite frequently. Despite all the efforts to tempt its

citizens to spend their vacations in the Kingdom, even the latest statistics from Saudi Arabia's Tourism Information and Research Center confirm that Saudis increasingly traveled abroad. While domestic tourism fell more than 28 percent in 2010, there was an almost 17 percent increase in outbound tourism and a 62.9 percent increase in the number of nights they spent outside the country.

These figures only substantiate what most independent experts already projected, a significant number of Saudis and especially those **that are responsible for the high expenditure** will always prefer to travel abroad. Those that can afford it will continue to spend their summers in Florida, California, Marbella, Côte d'Azur or elsewhere where you can go for a sunset walk on the beach of an authentic (non-artificial) island and everyone else will be lured by cheap prices to Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia, UAE, Bahrain along with a few other destinations. However, decreasing per capita incomes, immense population pressure resulting in progressive youth unemployment may force some segment of society to eventually involuntarily to stay at home (with projections of temperature increases as a result of climate change it might be an unpleasant stay) which could lead to a new set of challenges.

Additionally, some experts assert that GCC governments could use national or domestic tourism to enhance national integration and identity, but according to Hazbun so far we have seen very little of this. In an interview with Gulf News, he notes that sites remain too commercial with shopping malls and entertainment parks while archeological ruins have tendency to mostly appeal to Western tourists. The lack of interest for cultural heritage was confirmed by Aluwaisheg by explaining that *"when a family from the Gulf region travels abroad, for France as an example, they visit Euro Disney. Very few would watch a play in a theatre"* (Al Tamimi, 2008). The question really is how successful will the promotion of heritage tourism and the urgently needed preservation of the same be, if GCC countries continue with their preference for domestic/regional tourism? Is there not a mismatch between policies and the market? Can the preservation of natural heritage have a future, if those that are meant to use it prefer shopping and entertainment based on massive infrastructure? Can wildlife protection and preservation really work, if society does not yet have the educational foundation to appreciate such ambitious endeavors? Or in the case of Saudi Arabia show an outright lack of interest to watch the TV programs prepared by the National Commission for Wildlife Conversation and Development (AL-Shayaa, 2007)? Another example would be the displeased reaction of citizens in Ta'if, a town located on the slopes of the Al-Sarawat mountains in Mecca Province, when the SCTA decided to choose a 'Sacred Baboon' as the city's tourism emblem (they must have changed it to a rose?). While the hamadryas baboon (papio hamadryas) was a sacred animal to the ancient Egyptians, seems to be a serious Saudi tourist attraction (represented in countless photos on the web and unfortunately sitting in between lots of garbage) and in general baboons can easily live in harmony with humans with a little applied common sense of the latter, there are yet numerous challenges to be overcome on this very disturbed human-animal relationship. A study found out that "the most important cause of the low level of awareness about the importance of wildlife among the study population is the lack of emphasis on the importance of wildlife in the socialization process of the

young generations" (AL-Shayaa, 2007). On the other hand, regional travel in the GCC is meant to be so called "family-oriented" tourism, so why can this not happen while hiking in undisturbed nature with the so far missing educational component delivered by parents? If this is not possible, since maybe the parents do not have the necessary knowledge either, it would be about time to restructure education in general instead of investing into even more superficial entertainment (more shopping malls, more theme parks, etc.), since tourism development cannot fix those structural socio-cultural deficiencies. Yet while obesity rates, especially among women and children are reaching dramatic proportions, everything has to be made 'even more accessible'.

In an article in Asharq Alawsat, Zahi Hawass, a world-renowned Egyptian archaeologist, expressed his worries about the initiation of projects to pave the roads within the historical town of Al-Diriyyah in order to facilitate tourism or even more lucrative contracts to construction companies. The UNESCO World Heritage site Turaif, being considered a unique model of Najdi architecture, represents a small quarter within the historical town situated on the edges of Wadi Hanifa with large areas of palm groves. Instead of making the precious area accessible by walking and preventing destructive traffic, this is yet another example of unsustainable development which should provide enough substance for further discourse. Is it really sustainable to destroy your authentic heritage to make it accessible to 'shallow' tourists, but at the same time loosing it for those who would have a preference for a 'responsible' approach? Just imagine they would have built an asphalt paved road to Machu Picchu in Peru or destroyed the scenic jewel-green peaks with building that intended cable car. The GCC could learn from the fact that in 2008 alone 141000 Inca trail hikers embarked upon that seriously 'not all that easy' multi day trek to the 'Lost City of the Incas' struggling for oxygen somewhere in between 3000 and 4200 m above sea level – without basically any infrastructure whatsoever (except the backpacker train and a few restrooms). In fact the number of those interested was so great that the Peruvian government had to issue quotas (500 hikers per day) to restrict access. Saudi Arabia has the Frankincense trail, but the question is – will they destroy that asset by building massive infrastructure to promote domestic tourism or will they depart from their xenophobic policies and take advantage of those natural endowments by promoting sustainable low-impact tourism? On the other hand will sustainable tourism in the GCC be feasible, when the intended market segment is not interested? Wouldn't sustainable tourism formats, especially low-impact outdoor activities practiced by foreign travelers (especially hiking), have a trickle down effect and eventually attract the curious youthful Saudi population? Is it reasonable to assume that especially this youthful population will be interested in heritage tourism, while this segment is usually more of interest on a global scale to middle-aged and older travelers? Next to sports, youth cultures tend to involve having 'lots of fun' (even if this fun is as innocent as just watching others having fun) – is there really enough of that available in the Kingdom to cater to this huge young generation? Finally, is it healthy for a country to at least attempt to isolate its citizens from the rest of the world (obviously that does not work anymore anyhow – tourism or not) and thus foster frustrations?

Another visible trend in the GCC is the development of the so called MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions) or simply business tourism representing another high-spending segment of the industry. However, while this sector is one of the more rapidly growing market segments of GCC tourism simply as a result of the current pace of economic growth, its promotion requires considerable investment and policy planning. For instance Oman has just commenced construction of a new $1 billion Oman Conference and Exhibition Centre in Muscat scheduled to be completed in 2014 with the premises to transform Oman into a key destination for major business events in the region. However, with heightened levels of competition for the conference and exhibition market at national, regional and international level, a sense of uncertainty surrounds the long-term prospects of many of these facilities. Further there are a number of key challenges on the supply side which must be first addressed in the Gulf economies. When it comes to sustainability principles, there will obviously be a number of trade-offs and compromises in this sector. Unlike the 'alternative' leisure tourists, business travel demands a high degree of elegance, efficiency and safety. Hence sustainability can only be achieved as a result of technical improvements (e.g. carbon neutral facilities, water saving measures, etc.) and reasonable planning (no Golf courses and air-conditioned swimming pools). However, there are obviously a number of services that the MICE sector will not be able to do without: adequate provision of business related amenities, convenient transportation connections and high-quality dining facilities. Since business trips are much more restricted in terms of choice and normally determined by business opportunities and involvement of the traveler with organizations at the destination, they provide opportunities of much higher revenues, especially as consumers are willing to pay more to suits their inflexible schedules. Yet when it comes to non-compulsory events, such as congresses, conferences, exhibitions, etc. the question will be if the exclusion of certain nationalities, the prohibition of alcohol and in the case of Saudi Arabia segregation of women and strict dress codes may just deter some potential, in particular female, clients. How could this obvious problem be solved? Would it be feasible to create KAUST like enclaves where there is no segregation and women can wear their normal business ensembles? While you can expect that leisure tourists strictly adhere to the host countries norms and values (after all they came there voluntarily), can you really expect the same from business travel and believe that you have a competitive destination to host for instance an international medical congress?

To maintain a competitive business travel sector, while adhering to sustainability principles, a country would need a trained workforce capable of delivering the desired high-quality product. Are the Gulf economies ready for this? What would urgently need to be done to improve the situation? Obviously, a MICE industry that depends on foreigners is not conducive to sustainable development pathways, since in the absence of meaningful employment opportunities the environmental trade offs would be far too great. While inadequate English and other foreign language skills among guest-contact staff is a recurrent theme in

nationalization discourses, languages such as Mandarin Chinese, Japanese or Russian are also becoming increasingly important in the business travel world. Further, while it is possible to outsource some tasks in this sector to international IT centers, local knowledge of the destination is still needed to ensure accurate and timely information. In view of the current situation in the GCC, what will be the chances of success for this industry?

Short Bio(s)

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Andy Spiess is the founder president of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Network for Drylands Research and Development (NDRD), a regional scientific organization with the core objective to establish a science-policy interface to increase response capacity and mitigate environmental change in the Arab Gulf states. Besides this honorary position, Andy's research in pursuit of a cumulative habilitation (full professorship in Germany) is analyzing the state of human security in the GCC member states (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates) from multiple perspectives and in particular on the future implications of the environment-security nexus. This transdisciplinary approach is based on the hypothesis that declining ecosystem services will act as a driver of social destabilization and already prevailing threats to security will be further amplified. Some of Andy's recent publications include: "Environmental Degradation, Climate Uncertainties and Human Vulnerabilities - Realm of Possible Actions toward a Shifting Security Paradigm in the Arab Gulf Monarchies", in: Scheffran, J., Brzoska, M., Brauch, H.G., Link, P. M., Schilling, J.. Climate Change, Human Security and Violent Conflict - Challenges to Societal Stability. Hexagon Series on Human and Environmental Security and Peace. Berlin: Springer, 2012, p. 387 – p. 408; "Food Security in the GCC", in Ramady, M. A. The GCC Economies: Stepping Up To Future Challenges, Springer, 2012; "Demographic Transitions and Imbalances in the GCC: Security Risks, Constraints and Policy Challenges" (2012); "Developing Adaptive Capacity for Responding to Environmental Change in the Arab Gulf States: Uncertainties to Linking Ecosystem Conservation, Sustainable Development and Society in Authoritarian Rentier Economies" in: Global and Planetary Change, Volume 64, Issues 3-4, December 2008, Pages 244-252 [Climate Change and Desertification]; "Marginalizing the Self: Social Cohesion, Human Agency and Development in the United Arab Emirates" (forthcoming 2013)
"Youth Unemployment, Tertiary Education and Labor Market Needs in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Member States: Bridging the Gap" (forthcoming 2013)

While currently concentrating on a second monograph evaluating the concept of tourism development through the lens of human security in Saudi Arabia, Andy has authored numerous scholarly articles, has a long record of voluntary academic service and serves as a reviewer in several peer-reviewed journals.

Please Note: This thought piece is a working paper for the introduction of our **forthcoming edited volume**, which will be published with Springer (New York) in 2012.
The book will be edited by **Andy Spiess, Faisal Al-Mubarak and Alan S. Weber**

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Prof. Dr. Faisal Al Mubarak, provost of academic affairs and chief academic advisor, has a rich background in higher education, public policy, urban planning and architecture, as well as tourism, and has served on many national committees and as an advisor to national and international agencies in areas of his expertise. He completed his Ph.D. in Urban Design and Planning at the University of Washington, Seattle (1992), his Masters degree in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Southern California, Los Angeles (1986), and his Bachelor degree of Architecture from the College of Engineering, King Saud University (1981). He has served on the faculty of King Saud University, (18 years), teaching urban design, urban policy and theory as well as urban history and became a full professor in 2005. As the president's advisor to Prince Sultan bin Salman al Saud at the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, Dr. Faisal Al Mubarak headed the department for strategic planning and monitoring and was the executive director of the First International Conference on Urban Heritage in Islamic Countries, UHIC, (May 2010), one of the largest, most well attended international conferences hosted in the Kingdom to date. Professor Al Mubarak has been an advisor to several national committees and ministries including the Ministry of Higher Education, the High Commission for the Development of Arriyadh (HCDA), and the National Environment Council. He has also served as a committee member on the board of the World Tourism Organization (representing the Middle East Region). His planning expertise was well utilized as the Deputy Mayor of Riyadh for Projects and Development, and as a Member of the HCDA Council, Chaired by HRH Prince Salman bin Abdul Aziz al Saud, Governor of the Riyadh Region. He has published and authored numerous articles and reports, in academia as well as media, and has authored a book on policy and urban strategic planning and infrastructural development in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and he has also translated into Arabic a text book on urban theory. Dr. Al Mubarak has authored and participated in the preparation of executive advisory reports to Provincial Governors, Ministers and other leading officials in government agencies including, the Shura Council, municipal administrations and served on high level national and international task forces of strategic and technical importance. Professor Al Mubarak has given speeches and lectures in many public and private symposia and conferences on issues of urban development, higher education, and socio-cultural development issues in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and abroad.

Source: Al-Faisal University Website (2012)

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Alan S. Weber received his doctorate in English in 1996 from the State University of New York and has taught in the Premedical Program at the Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar since 2006. He is the author and editor of several books, including an historical reader entitled *Nineteenth Century Science*, and an edition of English Renaissance medical texts written by women. He has taught literature, writing and the history of science and medicine at The Pennsylvania State University, Elmira College, and Cornell University. His current research interests related to the Arabian Gulf include the sociology and history of medicine, e-learning, and Bedouin culture. Some of his recent publications include: Folk Medicine in Oman (*International Journal of Arts and Science,* 2011*),* Bedouin Memory Between City and Desert (*Memory Connection*, 2011*), The Development and Current Status of Web-Based Learning in Qatar and the GCC States* (CIRS, 2010), and Patient Opinion of the Doctor-Patient Relationship in a Public Hospital in Qatar (*Saudi Medical Journal,* 2010*).*

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