المجلس العالمي

EXPO 2020 DUBAI
WORLD MAJLIS

Sustainability through new eyes
Official Programme Launch

Summary
Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi, UAE
14 May 2018
THE WORLD MAJLIS
World Expos and Global Conversations

Since the first Great Exhibition held in London in 1851, World Expos have connected people and provided special spaces to spark dialogue amongst those who are curious about the future. With its mix of art and science, imagination and analysis, machines and ideas, nations and people, the Expo is a special place for convening inquisitive minds interested to ask questions about the future and, in so doing, learn more about each other. Expos have always been a mirror of their times.

Inspired by the format and values of the traditional majlis, the World Majlis is an original format for open, informed and measured conversations between diverse thought leaders and change-makers with the objective of helping us to explore and better understand areas of great significance for society from multiple points of view. The goal of these conversations is to generate new perspectives and incubate meaningful connections between people and new ideas.

The World Majlis will take place in the UAE and internationally in the lead-up to and during Expo 2020, with the goal of opening new horizons around the theme and the subthemes. Hosted in culturally significant locations, these conversations are committed to an inclusive and constructive dialogue of the highest quality in an environment that reflects the UAE’s tradition of welcome and respect... the Majlis.
By highlighting the lessons and achievements of the UAE’s Founding Father, His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, this World Majlis session reflected on how we can draw from traditional values as well as current thinking on sustainability to create a meaningful impact for Expo 2020 Dubai.

MAJOR QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE WORLD MAJLIS SESSIONS

- Are we developing and using technology that benefits humanity, the Earth and all of its lifeforms?
- How can we give young people the freedom to search for truth in knowledge and science?
- How can we design future products and systems that minimise or reduce waste and inefficiency (i.e., circular systems)?

“"The reason we have chosen sustainability as the topic is because... it’s always been so natural for people in this country to live in balance with nature. We need to regain that grounding.”

HE Reem Ebrahim Al Hashimy, UAE Minister of State for International Cooperation and Director General, Dubai Expo 2020 Bureau

“Sheikh Zayed is my eyes, my vision. This man, he dreamed that my country would be the world’s focus. Today there are 200 nationalities here – this was Sheikh Zayed’s dream. It is a UAE dream.”

Ramesh Shukla, Photographer
CONVERSATION HIGHLIGHTS

Truth and balance emerged as two strong ideas at the core of sustainability.

Having and making the right facts, information and knowledge freely available is essential to informing our choices and helping us develop technologies that can truly benefit humanity. The quest for sustainability is as much about the development of grassroots solutions as it is about our values and the institutions that promote and support them across generations.

Sustainability also requires balancing between lessons from the past and innovations of the future; between consumption and conservation; between knowledge and emotion; between economic growth and planetary boundaries, and between technology and authentic human contacts with each other and with the planet.

KEY MESSAGES:
- The past holds invaluable lessons for building human capital, connecting with the environment and reshaping consumption
- Trust is an essential building block in creating a sustainable future
- We may not need to give up consumption if we can find ways of redesigning it
- We need to design future technologies that serve humanity
- Institutions are essential to future sustainability because they enable us to trust that our actions will have a long-term impact
THE PAST IS ALSO THE FUTURE

The past holds invaluable lessons for building human capital, connecting with the environment and reshaping consumption.

The past holds very important lessons for the future of sustainability. These include how we build the foundations for future value and the need for deeper knowledge and connections with the environment, as well as circular modes of consumption.

Leveraging current resource wealth to benefit the future is the key to sustainability. This has long been the story of the UAE and, today, it is repeating itself with investments in renewables and sustainability. If we look at traditional industries through the lens of economic and social responsibility, we see that education and human capital are necessary building blocks for communities that continuously invest in the next generation of sustainable solutions.

The impact of new industries in sustainability is as much about pushing the boundaries of technology as it is about developing human capital capable of continuously shaping the future. Examples include the oil and gas industry in the UAE and the early days of telecommunications.

Environmental impact should be considered at an early stage in the development of any technology or industry. For instance, while focused on becoming a leader in the oil and gas sector, the UAE was the first country to explore an anti-flaring policy. As reported by Gulf News in 2012: “The UAE has succeeded in reducing flaring by 98 per cent since 1990 and the policy is now shifting from minimal flaring to zero-tolerance in five to seven years. Masdar of the UAE is becoming experienced in formulating policies and projects to reduce flaring here and in other countries. It became a partner in

Interestingly, the notion of gas flaring is a relevant industrial link to the circular economy, given that gas burnt during flaring could be used for power generation rather than being emitted in the atmosphere (zero routine flaring by 2030. Initiative by The World Bank).

The notion of circular consumption has been a consideration for all societies dealing with scarce resources. Traditionally in the UAE, washing took place in the proximity of a plant or a tree that could benefit from the excess water. Everything was valued and the notion of waste was non-existent. Food was shared communally and leftovers fed to the animals.

The circular economy is a bold new concept that will require major transformations to implement. However, many of its aspects are already familiar to Emiratis because our forefathers lived in a world of limited resources and consumption.

“We knew from day one that oil and gas were not permanent resources, and that we needed to diversify our resources and invest in the education and training of our people. The contribution of the oil and gas industry to economic and social sustainability through investment in education and training has been a fundamental part of our story.”

HE Dr Nawal Al-Hosany, UAE Permanent Representative at the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) and Deputy Director General, Emirates Diplomatic Academy
“What struck me in 1968 was how sustainable life was here. Everything was really precious. Water was precious. Food was never wasted. I think we need to look back and relish what people in the past knew about sustainability.”

Isobel Abulhoul OBE, CEO and Trustee, Emirates Literature Foundation

“The oil sector set up training centres not only for the industry but for the country as a whole.”

David Heard CBE, Author

THE FREEDOM TO SEARCH FOR THE TRUTH

Trust is an essential building block in creating a sustainable future. Can technology help?

Fundamentally, sustainability is about trust in our scientific thinking. Today, we increasingly see facts, knowledge and science concerning our planet and our impact on the world being questioned.

The core of the scientific process is to offer new ideas and solutions based on the best knowledge available at a given time. Since scientific knowledge changes over time based on new information, we must build a society in which information is freely available to all, people are empowered to search for the truth and the scientific process maintains its integrity.

Real world connections will be critical in building the level of scientific and emotional understanding necessary to ensure sustainability is tangible. These connections will also help us to develop the level of empathy needed to make the right choices, which protect and preserve our environment for future generations.

In a world dominated by technology, our connections are increasingly mediated by screens and information. Information passes through many hands and by the time it reaches the final user, it may have become disconnected from real-life experience. How do we know that we are getting the right
knowledge? We must also remember that data and information are not the same as knowledge. The ability to develop and exercise critical thinking is becoming increasingly important in our society, especially as we are enticed to spend more time on digital platforms.

However, we also see positive signals of change and contributions from both media platforms and new technologies. Media can tell great stories that connect with their audience; stories that are human and positive, and which help us to exercise critical thinking. Alongside inspiring storytelling, technologies like virtual and augmented reality are advancing to the point of being able to replicate real world experiences.

It is not hard to imagine that in years to come, advanced technologies will be capable of replicating real world experiences that generate awareness and empathy, helping us to make sustainable choices for the future.

“When we talk about sustainability, it is important that we have the freedom to find the truth and the freedom to find information and make educated decisions to move forward. When we talk about sustainability, agriculture and policy, how do you decide the future? How do you pick one direction over another and understand that you are dealing with the right kind of information?”

*Sheikh Dr Majid Al Qassimi, Director of Animal Health and Development, UAE Ministry of Climate Change and Environment*

“When drawing on Nobel experience, we are seeing simple facts being questioned, knowledge being questioned, science being questioned. It is important that we build our societies so that people are free to search for the truth.”

*Dr Lars Heikensten, Executive Director, Nobel Foundation*

“Companies and governments need to provide appropriate data and education. Consumers are asking companies to disclose their information and are starting to make choices based on that.”

*Beatrice Lamonica, Strategy Principal Director, Sustainability Lead, Accenture*

“For young people, it is not going to be technology that touches them. It is going to be the experience.”

*Isobel Abulhoul OBE, CEO and Trustee, Emirates Literature Foundation*
DESIGNING CIRCULAR CONSUMPTION

We may not need to give up consumption if we can find ways of redesigning it.

According to Earth Overshoot Day, an initiative that measures our natural resource consumption, we are consuming the equivalent of almost 1.5 planets a year.

With a growing population and an increasing middle class across the world, consumption is likely to rise in the coming years, potentially creating significant pressure on resources and, in turn, economic growth. One solution would be to create an economic development path that does not depend on resource depletion e.g. a knowledge economy. This is the central tenet of the circular economy.

The design industry has a critical role to play in the transformation of our current linear model of ‘take, make and dispose’ to a circular model of ‘reuse, recycle and repurpose’, without limiting consumption. Redesigning consumption could include: transforming waste into a valuable resource; creating alternative consumption cycles through existing practices such as renting, borrowing and upcycling and; reusing raw materials to create new products. Redesign could also involve extending the lifecycle of products and components by repairing, upgrading and reselling them.

The fashion industry represents one of the greatest opportunities to implement and promote the concepts of circular economy and design as the keys to future lifestyles. It is the third largest industry in the world and has one of the largest footprints in terms of pollution and water usage. By virtue of its appeal, its creativity and its design-centric nature, fashion could help us shift from a culture of consumption and disposability to one of value – the value of combining knowledge, information, education and conscience through a design thinking process.

“The fashion industry presents an incredible opportunity to change how we do business and how we consume. How can we see waste as a resource, how do we utilise it as something of value?”

Sass Brown, Founding Dean, Dubai Institute of Design and Innovation

“The way we consume needs to become smarter, greener and lower as our population grows. We need to teach our children to tackle this challenge head on, and discover the roots of knowledge and what is valuable in consumption.”

Sebastián Caro, Student, NYU Abu Dhabi
Expo Live University Innovation Programme Grantee
DESIGNING TECHNOLOGIES THAT MATTER

Do we design advanced technologies because we can or because we need them to serve humanity?

There is an increasing polarity between those who believe technology distracts us from sustainability and those who think it is the solution. There are many arguments that suggest technology is eroding our values and our humanity, and taking our focus away from what really matters.

These conversations highlight the importance of always interrogating our technologies in terms of their ability to improve lives. Indeed, technology is not an end in itself but an enabler. It is not the master of humanity but a tool that embeds and reflects our values. Today, we are still learning how to deal with the transformations in technology that are taking place. We need to work with technology and ask how it can complement and serve humanity.

With recent developments in robotics and artificial intelligence, we need to explore how we can couple the development of human beings with that of machines. Automation eliminates the need for humans to complete repetitive tasks, allowing us to focus on what we do best and, even more so, on developing the values that will guide future technological development.

It is important to recognise that technology does change society and people. Today’s technology is increasingly about speed and short-term perspectives, which in turn accelerate short-term focuses and behaviours that are inconsistent with the long-term requirements of sustainability.

Technologies need to help solve problems caused today as well as in the future. We need to apply them in areas where they can help maximise crop yields, save water and enhance our lives, for example.

We must also acknowledge that technology can have a positive or negative impact depending on how it is used. For instance, blockchain has the potential to make our banking transactions easier, our information more reliable, and our products and resources more traceable, but its focus on speculative currencies presents a certain level of risk.
“Technology does not have to be passive about consumption. At its best, technology is about eliminating redundancies and freeing us to design more creative and hands-on solutions that invest our values into our jobs and our future.”

Beatrice Lamonica, Strategy Principal Director, Sustainability Lead, Accenture

“Often, we have the impression that technology is rushing away from what humanity truly needs. But who is judging? Do we need algorithms to know everything about everybody? Is that essential for human life?”

Dr Frauke Heard-Bey, Historian and Political Scientist

“Technological advancements will replace a lot of physical interactions... It is not about pushing back the technology, but how to couple human development with the machines.”

Khalifa Hassan Al Forah Alshamsi, Group Chief Corporate Strategy and Governance Officer, Etisalat Group

“The question is not just about the sustainability of the economy... it is about sustainability of our values. We need to continue caring.”

Najeeb Mohammed Al-Ali, Executive Director, Dubai Expo 2020 Bureau

“We need to know where technology is leading us. This is where the government has a role – to make sure we go in the right direction with technology.”

Julius Gruener, Student, NYU Abu Dhabi Expo Live University Innovation Programme Grantee

“Some estimates say that ICT can support a 20 per cent cross-industry reduction in CO2 emissions”

Beatrice Lamonica, Strategy Principal Director, Sustainability Lead, Accenture

“Rain enhancement technology is going to be one of the main enablers of solutions and advancements in water and energy. Technology will help us to develop a greater awareness of sustainability.”

HE Dr Nawal Al-Hosany, UAE Permanent Representative at the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) and Deputy Director General of the Emirates Diplomatic Academy
The World Majlis programme focuses on topics that matter to all of us because they can hugely impact our future and that of the next generation. All of the World Majlis conversations are connected by the common thread of legacy that puts humanity at the heart of how we design the future. We have identified four areas that resonate with Expo 2020 theme, the UAE vision as well as the major global transformations that we are experiencing today in an unprecedented scale and scope.
THE WAY FORWARD

Expo 2020 Dubai will integrate the knowledge and outcomes of this World Majlis to inform sustainability initiatives and further conversations before and during the next World Expo.
We thank all participants and students who joined the conversation and shared their knowledge and thoughts on Sustainability.

**Host**

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UAE Minister of State for International Cooperation and Director General, Dubai Expo 2020 Bureau

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