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## Specialty Coffee in the United Arab Emirates: Challenges and Opportunities

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**Abstract:** *The UAE has potential and opportunities from all stakeholders to revitalise the country as a hub of specialty coffee in the Middle East. Nevertheless, with the agitating demand for coffee, where only 60% is met by global coffee supply from smallholders, besides five countries that limit the production of 72% of coffee in the world. In addition to the challenge of the world's demand for 25% of coffee in 2030, will specialty coffee be sustainable for future generations (WCR, 2021)? All stakeholders from leaders need challenges to embrace and cooperate; restore all chains from farmers' needs as the core of coffee itself. The UAE will become sustainable in every coffee value chain if UAE can overcome this challenge as early as possible. It is hoped that all opportunities will be able to create an absolute three bottom legs of sustainability in the coffee farm, which will support future needs.*

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### INTRODUCTION

The development of coffee in the United Arab Emirates has become one of the advancements in the Middle East as a hub for specialty coffee. In addition, the specialty coffee community also makes the UAE a Mecca for the Middle East for specialty coffee. In addition to the multi-diverse community who come to the UAE to look for work. The general perspective has also changed that the Middle East is not a region with gaps and intersections of race and nationality in its country's development (Maspul, 2021).

For five years, specialty coffee has become one of the developments of modernised local coffee. In contrast, the development of global coffee has positively affected the outcome of traditional coffee. The café is served in an Italian style for modern. It then adds to the traditional culture, such as Arabic coffee, which is one of the identities of coffee in Arabic itself. However, each region has its characteristics, which are usually distinguished by the colour of the roast. Besides, the ratio of the amount of coffee used with water mixtures in its preparation.

Coffee has become a thriving business in the UAE, especially with the traditional *Gahwa* drinking culture, which has become a more diverse and modern trend in the specialty concept. Commercial coffee adapts to other consumers looking for a sweet coffee drink or a coffee drink mixed with crema sugar syrup and different types of beverages that evoke sweet tastes, either cold or hot. As for visitors who love specialty coffee, expect the best flavours from the grade of coffee produced by each smallholder farm from various regions of the world in the tropics; Capricorn and

Cancer. In addition, consumers themselves have become more knowledgeable about coffee with experience in absorbing coffee-drinking cultures from various countries worldwide.

The modernisation of the culture that has long been the identity of the Middle East in general through coffee is unique to following its coffee journey. The development of traditional coffee from the *dallah* (the traditional Arabic coffee pot) is very symbolic of *gahwa Arabiya* (the classic Arabic coffee blend) into latte art combined through latte art in a pretty straightforward presentation unique in variety with free pouring that can depict tulips and swans. Moreover, specialty and traditional coffee shops are rapidly transforming into modern outlets with a particular emphasis on ambience and customised service offerings, driving interest in specialty coffee in the UAE. Global coffee industry leaders themselves believe that the potential for growth in the UAE coffee market will continue to grow and help mitigate the challenges in the local coffee market (Maspul, 2021a; Samoggia & Riedel, 2018).

Meanwhile, the large consumption of specialty coffee in the UAE covers much commercial coffee, which has long been known and visited by consumers. However, with the emergence of specialty coffee, the commodity from robusta is not as crowded as before; it has become a blend in several large commercial coffee shops in the UAE, such as Starbucks, Costa Coffee, Dunkin Donuts, and others. Arabica, the single origin of the coffee drinks offered, is included in the grading above 80+, which has become a characteristic of specialty coffee itself. Even with superior processing, they are often sold at prohibitive prices, such as Arabica with the type of geisha/gesha from Panama, Costa Rica, Colombia or Ethiopia itself.

In the running of medium to large businesses from the coffee sector in the UAE, each has its uniqueness. Especially during the Covid-19 period until after that period. The resilience of one of the coffee value chains is improving to adapt to each other's circumstances during the business period. As a result, many have fallen out of business to close their shops. Some at the production level can still protect enterprises in their environment, where consumers change their behaviour from shoppers in stores to buyers at home. Moreover, a technology from various types of e-commerce has become a business fighter in the coffee sector from the production to the consumer level. The last question here is can coffee be sustainable with its trends throughout the world, especially in the UAE, which over the previous five years has become one of the coffee trends and has become a global hub for specialty coffee promotional activities (Maspul, 2021b).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The present study is a qualitative research based on coffee-related studies over the last five years in the UAE, assisted by some necessary literature related to the relevant discussion. Things are categorised based on the economy, strategy and innovation in each chain that combines value in the specialty coffee journey. It also simplifies the understanding of each composed category, and each is presented with challenges and opportunities. The analysis attempted in the presentation is through a review of data obtained from observations of the coffee market in the last five years, with adding some interviews if necessary.

Furthermore, to check the validity of the data by using triangulation; decrypting the data if needed to answer the issue formulation carried out by analytical descriptions. The design is developed from the categories found, looking for suggested relationships or emerging from the data. In addition, data reduction is an attempt to make an abstract of the topic under study, which includes a summary of the core, processes and relevant information following the objectives (Fossey et al., 2002).

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## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In explaining more deeply related to the development of coffee in the UAE, it is necessary to mention the story of coffee culture from its bustle over the last five years. It is reinforced by the Arab culture itself, which has become a coffee consumer in its development and colonialism history. In comparison, the story of coffee is more prosperous with the culture of each region that brought it from colonialism. The legacy of coffee colonialism itself is still felt today, where farmers are still affected by the price of coffee from farmers not improving and ending in a social catastrophe. The slump in global coffee prices to their lowest level in nearly 13 years has also raised questions about whether it is worth growing, such as coffee in some of the traditional coffee centres of Central America, Indonesia, Colombia and Ethiopia. It is worrying that farmers will leave the mass of his work, especially smallholders currently in demand in developing specialty coffee.

### UAE as Global Tourism Country

One of the most critical influences on the economy of the UAE is tourism which is one of the most considerable income per capita after oil. In this case, especially Dubai, which has strong potential in differentiation compared to several other cities in the Middle East, especially in 2021, where Dubai is one of the favourite cities for global travellers to visit. Each of them is unique in presenting its tourism, from the tallest building in the world to the beautiful Corniche in Abu Dhabi, which has become a unique identity in promoting the culture and modernisation of the UAE in the eyes of global visitors (Ryan, 2021).

In addition, the government's efforts are very initiative in promoting the UAE as the best world-class tourism destination. It is known that internet users worldwide reach billions, making it easier for online and sustainable advertisements. Where advertisements run in several countries through the emergence of Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, this will strengthen promotion through online advertising. Coffee consumers can realise it with the acceleration from local development to the opening of investment in brewing tourism in the UAE. At the same time, young people make the UAE a dream tourist destination from a futuristic concept that continues to attract and become a magnet for global tourists (Sadaqat, 2020).

Even though the UAE is not a world coffee producer, what is sustainable here is needed through the demand for coffee from locals and ex-pats who carry out activities in the UAE. Coffee consumption in the UAE has also become very large, representing 10% of coffee consumption and reaching a sell-in value of about 200 million dollars in the Middle East (Arun, 2020). In its role in coffee, the UAE also continues to explore attracting investors through the ease of doing business in the UAE. The concept of a café in the UAE is the leading destination for coffee connoisseurs. It's also made the UAE as the market value of specialty coffee shops was about 450 million U.S. dollars (Saleh, 2022).

### The Rapid Development of Café and Specialty Coffee Roasters

The role of specialty coffee being a sustainable level classy at the global level is unique. In this case, the concept of the coffee value chain, which is the source of coffee's journey from farm to cup, needs to be investigated further. Specialty coffee is the most critical selling point in promoting the coffee value chain, the primary needs of coffee consumers, and the flavours offered in its development. It depends on the type of Arabica, coffee processing at the farm, grading, storage, and roasting levels, making the aroma and taste develop better in coffee. Arabica is one of the sources used as a primary source of enjoying specialty coffee, where the grade of Arabica itself

is always required to have a level of 80+ (Traore et al., 2018; Quintão et al., 2017).

The third wave of specialty coffee in the UAE has influenced consumer behaviour regarding how to serve and enjoy coffee in the community. The development of specialty coffee has also become the primary trend, making the needs of each individual meet daily caffeine. Commercial coffee is still a basic need, but coffee lovers need more caffeine with a better sensory level and taste than cafes generally labelled with specialty coffee, even with the development of the number of restaurants that have opened in the UAE, from small businesses to become famous automatically as specialty cafes/coffees (Boaventura et al., 2018; Rindova & Fombrun, 2001)

Meanwhile, the large number of coffee roasters operating, up to 50 coffee roasters; micro and commercial, helps develop specialty coffee to become strong in the UAE and become one of the sources for specialty coffee production in the Middle East. Offering variants of single origins from various producing countries and creating unique blends that fit on-demand to B2B and B2C. In the last five years, the core of coffee sales, which is quite large, is in the production section, which is necessary for new cafes that appear every month. Each café gives a unique impression of growing specialty coffee in the Middle East, sustainable decorative designs, combining traditionalist designs with modernist interior decor, or maintaining the simplicity of the uniqueness of specialty coffee itself (Maspul, 2022).

A cafe is a place to socialise between professionals or students, another option also for people who needs just for caffeine needs every morning where there are generally cafes in the UAE. With the offer of products from specialty coffee itself, such as various kinds of milk, they offer fresh milk and other vegan milk choices that follow the needs of local consumers who see the sustainability of the consumption of vegan milk. In addition, to make cafes co-work spaces that freelancers typically use in their daily activities, co-work spaces cafes can find these places in several areas, such as the Al Qouz and Jumeira Dubai areas.

### **The Coffee Premier Training Campus for Coffee Professionals**

Several coffee roasteries in the UAE are home to in-depth courses on coffee knowledge managed by Authorized Coffee Trainers. In this case, there are several licenses given to professionals who can hold a license to teach existing modules through programs offered by the world coffee organisation. The world organisations that provide root coffee knowledge are the Specialty Coffee Association and the Coffee Quality Institute. In addition, several other coffee companies offer to teach coffee skills to professionals. Still, other coffee professionals already know courses that can be followed through SCA and CQI with standards that have been run by both organisations globally (SCA, 2021).

Specialty Coffee Association is one of the leading coffee sources as a non-profit organisation with members from enthusiastic to professional who can teach coffee skills programs, coffee sustainability programs, and coffee technician programs at a global level. Teaching protocols are also regular and managed through a guaranteed curriculum to make coffee professionals understand the right skills as baristas, coffee roasters or coffee testers and processors. Likewise, the Coffee Quality Institute uses the SCA curriculum in several modules to assess coffee quality through sensory skills. CQI provides certification for Q graders for Arabica assessors and R graders for Robusta assessors in knowing the quality of coffee from processing to serving the coffee itself (Barbosa et al., 2020).

With organisations that have spawned many coffee professionals in the UAE, the UAE is one of the options for learning coffee knowledge and skills on a global scale. Currently, there are

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no less than 35 people who are licensed to teach the SCA curriculum through the coffee skills and sustainability program modules, making them a magnet for world coffee professionals.

### **DMCC as Value Chain Coffee Promoter in the Middle East**

The Middle East is playing a role in meeting the needs of the national market in particular and the Middle East in general. In helping to trigger the coffee market in the Middle East, connecting the fast-moving high-income consumer market in the Middle East and other countries to some of the world's major coffee-producing countries, the semi-government DMCC Coffee and Tea Center has revitalised the area in Jebel Ali as a coffee centre. In the UAE, they are taking up a place of 7,500 square meters in the Dubai Multi Commodity Center (DMCC). This strategic initiative is critical to highlighting the growing importance of beverages in the UAE (DMCC, 2022).

The DMCC Coffee Tea Center itself has been built in the warehouses area in Jebel Ali by owning all the value chains in coffee production. The machines used are sophisticated enough to keep up with the development standards of global coffee trends and are accompanied by the capacity to accommodate international coffee learning activities. Each has the task of connecting coffee opportunities from Dubai to the world. Besides that, DMCC also accommodates in making their area storing green coffee with adjusted standards to make it easier to link coffee commodities so that the global coffee market can access sales in the UAE and vice versa.

### **World Coffee Event and Coffee Competition in the UAE**

Apart from learning activities related to specialty coffee in the UAE, world coffee events are also a trigger in making coffee opportunities in the Middle East continue to grow. Competitors from the UAE have sprung up a lot with the holding of the world brewers cup championship at Gulfood at the world trade centre Dubai 2021, which is enlivened by world coffee events, part of the specialty coffee association. It has brought global coffee professionals to come and participate in revitalising coffee in the UAE. In addition, the coffee competition activities in Abu Dhabi through SIAL Middle East, which is an annual event under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan. It is held at the Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Center (ADNEC), so it has become one of the event houses where coffee is kept in competitions.

From the two events, both in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, it is fertilisation than competitors who won events in world coffee events to be included in global coffee competition competitions. With the competition held in the UAE, it is hoped that it will be able to raise the name of coffee in the UAE with a diverse coffee community and deepen the local community's interest in learning the art of coffee in synergy.

### **Coffee through the Expo 2020**

Since World Expo chose Dubai to host the World Expo 2020, Dubai has become very popular with tourists to visit. The general assembly of the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE) in Paris designated Dubai as the host on November 27 2013. The World Expo, which Dubai is currently hosting in the United Arab Emirates from October 1 2021 to March 31 2022, was initially scheduled for October 20 2020, to April 10, 2021. Then due to Covid 19 considerations, it was postponed. But even so, the organisers still maintain the name Expo 2020 for marketing and branding purposes.

Expo 2020 will open the door for visitors as a global tourist spot for a certain period and as an introduction to the world about each country that has introduced its progress over the last five

years. Moreover, it is no exception in terms of business and connectivity to the strategic steps of each country in facing global challenges through the SDGs. Coffee opportunity through Country's Pavilion at the Expo 2020, where the Expo 2020 makes it easier for connectivity and information related to the supply chain from the coffee itself. It is reinforced by the world countries participating in Expo 2020, such as El Salvador, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Rwanda, etc. Each country that produces coffee also opens an information centre related to the coffee supply chain (NAEB, 2022; Setkab, 2022).

### **World of Coffee Dubai**

World of Coffee (WOC) is one of the product exhibitions at SCA (Specialty Coffee Association) Europe and is held in European cities once a year; in 2022 January, it was held for the first time in the Middle East. After the national competition through the world brewers cup championship, held in February 2021, through SCA UAE, an international event was held again. Dubai is hosting this global event by taking advantage of the momentum from Expo 2020, which is still running from October 2021 to March 2022.

WOC Dubai was held from 12 – 14 January 2022, attended by 98 coffee & tea accessories exhibitors. That includes the coffee & tea brewing equipment, espresso machines, roasting equipment, café décor, art & furniture, coffee roasters and roasted bean suppliers, coffee traders, suppliers and exporters, dairy & alternate milk manufacturers & suppliers, confectionery and bakery products, flavours and syrups, franchising opportunities, beverage packaging equipment, specialty cafes, industry trade publications, shipping companies, water filtration systems and bottled water suppliers (WOC Dubai, 2022).

Where in this international event, the world champion in coffee also gathers, making this event a gathering place for all coffee professionals from coffee value chains in the world (WOC Dubai, 2022). The visitors from the coffee value chain consist of; café owners, retailers, coffee roasters, baristas, green coffee importers & exporters, coffee & tea growers & producers, procurement from hospitality, restaurants & catering, and coffee enthusiast. Exhibitors from 44 countries consist of 29% roastery, 22% coffee bar/cafe, 19% coffee enthusiasts, 13% traders, and 8% grower NGO-not for-profit agencies. Muhammad Rashid Al Maktoum, as Prime Minister of the UAE, also attended WOC Dubai, SCA UAE Chapter Khalid Al Mulla accompanied.

With the existence of World of Coffee Dubai, Dubai has become the world's specialty coffee trend in the Middle East. With the participation of the CEO of the Specialty Coffee Association in Dubai, a global coffee event like this has become the most important event during the Covid-19 recovery period. Including the Expo 2020, which brought in up to 23 million visitors, Dubai has become a trigger for the success of the tourism sector and all sectors related to science and global community development. The trend of coffee at the same time, where the coffee value chain is an integral part of this event. The success of the leadership of the head of the SCA UAE chapter has made a significant impact on the local specialty coffee community and globally. The event attended by the global coffee community has also offered an excellent opportunity to mitigate the challenges that exist in the UAE and the Middle East in general.

### **Will the UAE Empower Coffee Sustainability?**

Meanwhile, it will be a big question mark in building the concept of resilience in the coffee value chain. In resilience, what is meant is whether there is the empowerment of coffee sustainability in the upstream sector of coffee, where here farmers need the role of coffee value

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chain stakeholders in the global coffee industry (Raynolds et al., 2007; Vaast et al., 2005). In the economic sector, the UAE can build a solid and extensive network in carrying out all interests in the coffee sector with the essence of global activity. Social, which was initiated in making the UAE a Mecca of all types of world coffee production, is the key in the hub that combines coffee professionals through the coffee trend in the Middle East. Up to the environment through green coffee businesses continued with the effectiveness and efficiency of coffee roasting production and coffee sales (Maspul, 2021; Giovannucci & Ponte, 2005).

Here we need support for sustainability in the farm sector, where the demand for coffee will always increase globally, but maintaining resilience in the upstream coffee sector is very important. The legacy of colonialism in agricultural coffee will always live together (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006; McManus, 2007). Still, collaboration and partnerships between all stakeholders are needed in bringing this issue up so that all stakeholders can embrace it in supporting the needs of coffee farmers and making the existence of farmer resilience maintained for a long and sustainable period for the next generation. It will include paying attention to the principles of global climate change that affect coffee production, where collaboration around climate adaptation in the coffee sector is needed. As the SDGs provides a vital framework and some general targets to impact the coffee industry in covering the lack of leaders from each relevant stakeholder to encourage research of strategy, adaptation and evaluation (Maspul, 2021; Bager & Lambin, 2020).

Building a foundation in a sustainable way of thinking is fundamental, especially for all related coffee value chains; traders, coffee roasters and baristas to coffee consumers. It is to awaken farmers and maintain the strength of resilience coffee from all its value chains (Linton, 2008). The coffee professionals and coffee community are highly expected to be an agent of change in voicing the sustainability of all sectors related to coffee. Several sustainability certifications such as Fairtrade, Organic, UTZ, and Rainforest attempt to build sustainability in the farm sector, but from a political, economic and social perspective, more prominent voices and actions are needed than the demand for the coffee market itself in building a strong and sustainable foundation (Van der Hossen, 2005; Reinecke et al., 2012).

## **CONCLUSION**

In explaining the challenges and opportunities of coffee in the UAE, it has become a fact of issue that the UAE is a country that does not produce coffee. Regardless of coffee production originating from Africa, Southeast Asia, and South America. However, it is the same with countries in Europe where they make coffee remains a crucial commodity in its consumption based on the needs of national citizens or visitors who want to experience the culture of enjoying coffee in that country. The UAE has become one of the most critical countries in developing the potential of the coffee business economically and socially, with ease of business development from every layer of stakeholders in the coffee value chain. Coffee will continue to develop through its own unique coffee consumer behaviour, but it is hoped that with all its potential, it will be able to carry out the challenges of one of the essential coffee supply chains; farmers.

The importance of maintaining the productivity of coffee farmers will have a significant impact in the future for both producers and consumers of coffee itself. The development of specialty coffee in the UAE is supposed to be sustainable through its sales and how it can be a stakeholder in helping sustainability in the upstream coffee sector. Regardless of the coffee business challenge in the UAE, completing the three bottom legs of sustainability requires stakeholders from policymakers to the coffee community in the UAE to support sustainability in

the upstream sector to make coffee sustainable for consumption in the successive waves of generations.

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