Dubai is an extreme example of speed. One of the fastest growing cities in the world today, it represents the epitome of sprawling, post-industrial and car-oriented urban culture. Within it, large numbers of transient populations are constantly in flux. Over the last twenty years, at a remarkable pace, Dubai has developed into a global crossroads, and this urban mirage continues to spread out vertically and horizontally without any signs of slowing down.

**Figures**

| Area (mq) | 1,588 |
| Population 2010 (million) | 2,262,000 |
| Density (sq m) | 1,057 |
| Number of districts | 15 |
Space planning, closely following administration
Polycentric patterns of development are not the obvious trait of Dubai. Governmental policies are the main factor of urban development in Dubai, despite the government’s attempts to secure private support. The issue is made present in the context of the managerial infrastructure of the government, considering the double position of business and administration held by many officials. Central administration is therefore intrinsically dependent on the tribal authority, the Islamic Sharjah and multinational companies.

The architectural aspect of the city reflects such tendencies in politics and governance, embodying an architecture of finance, thriving on consumerism, tourism and the concept of the contemporary. Conversely, the urban evolution of Dubai is largely based on economic globalization dynamics, including significant real estate projects, huge foreign investments, regional and international centres of multinational companies, and infrastructure at the service of globalization (international airport, large seaports, and shopping malls).

Population and government
The demographic reality of Dubai reflects this economic reality. Citizens constitute a distinct minority, with an overwhelming majority of foreigners. This discrepancy defines the role of each of these two different categories in public affairs and social stability. Citizens try not to dissolve in the waves of immigrants flowing into the city and seek to protect their social and cultural particularities. The social structure is a mosaic of social classes. Far from being a blended society, it is pyramidal with the governing class on the top, followed by a minority of national citizens, and thousands of different nationalities at the base. Dubai has heavily depended on expertise and labour from other countries.

Apart from the demographic and social implications, socio-cultural aspects of its diverse population will also need sensitive attention, especially aimed at augmenting the presently inadequate cultural spaces. Different types of urbanism converge in Dubai: a long and narrow strip of land along the coast, with the old traditional city flanking both sides of the Dubai Creek and the new, originally lineal city. As Dubai is at the mercy of real-estate developers, speculators and financial capital, the not-yet-settled urban form
is poly-centric and its architecture is impersonal. This holds true even as it changes its function over time, but only according to the dictates of the State, relocation of resources, flip-sides to economic prosperity and the pressures of capitalistic endeavours and their perpetual longing for surplus therein. In this type of city, the notions of centre and periphery have lost their validity.

CITIES believes Dubai makes for a valuable case study regarding polar social division and its representation in the form of the city. The latter is also represented by the socio-cultural spaces as a determinant of ‘quality-living’, especially in the context of the social separation. At the same time, Dubai presents a challenge to polycentric urban orthodoxy, particularly owing to the close connection between finance and governance and their joined influence on spatial patterns and population demographics. Although it may not follow the patterns of polycentricity closely, CITIES considers Dubai’s morphological growth as a direct effect of economic gateways and the decision function of various and integrated economic actors.

More info
1  http://www.dsc.gov.ae/Publication/Pop%20Eng1%202010.pdf
2  Status and prospects of the Arab City, report Economic and social commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), UN, 2009
3  Developing Dubai, http://www.rudi.net/node/16964