

The Dynamics of International Education in Qatar: Exploring the Policy Drivers behind the Development of Education City

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This paper examines the main driving forces behind the creation of Education City (EC) in Qatar. A methodological triangulation was used and data was analyzed according to the principle of Grounded Theory in order to give a more detailed picture of the City. The findings suggest that five main drivers have been instrumental in the creation of the City: the region-specific tradition to import 'best practice', regional and global competition, local education reform and policies, national liberalization initiatives, and globalization, internationalization of education, and transnational education. These findings have possible implications for policymakers and for researchers of emerging trends in education policy as well as for countries that are planning to develop similar education model or establish themselves as a regional education hub. The analysis laid the foundation for much needed future evaluation studies on the country's education policies and their impacts. The treatment of this subject from a governmental policy angle has not received nearly enough attention among scholars. This paper fills this gap in the literature and highlights important issues specific to a relatively unexplored region undergoing rapid development.

Keywords: education city; globalization; liberalization; internationalization of higher education; transnational higher education; education policy and reform; regional competition

INTRODUCTION

Educational development and expansion have long been regarded as key factors for societal progress at all levels. Many Arab countries have been going through a process of reform of their education sector. Public expenditure per capita on education in the Arab world is the second highest in the world at 4.9 % of regional GDP not far behind governments in Western Europe and North America (UNESCO, 2009). The impetus for such reforms comes from the recognition of the inefficiency of the current education system combined with the desire of these countries to establish a sustainable economic development locally, gain a competitive edge regionally, and secure a better position internationally.

Qatar, one of the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), has undergone massive development during the past seven years. With a population of 350,000 natives and 800,000 expatriates, the reliance on non-national skilled workers, the large public sector employer, and the apparent deficiencies in the education system are problematic issues that required government attention. Along with the introduction of other major initiatives for political, administrative, and social reforms, education improvement initiatives have been placed high on the governmental agenda. These initiatives are critical given that recent studies

indicate that Qatar had an outdated, poorly performing, and rigid education system (Gonzalez et.al, 2008). Although the traditional form of learning in the Gulf region known as the *Kuttab* was replaced as early as the 1950s by the modern school system, the latter lacked the appropriate components of modernization such as technical and vocational training in addition to most of the important operational and managerial skills acquisition components (Bahgat, 1999). Realizing that these inadequacies have resulted from the lack of well-planned education policy, the government has undertaken major initiatives since the turn of the century. This paper briefly reviews these educational initiatives introduced as part of the national education reform. The purpose of this paper is neither to evaluate the impact of this reform, since it is still in its nascent stage, nor to present an analytical account of the different programs but rather to probe the underlying and implicit drivers behind Education City (EC) in Qatar. The City is considered a major facet of the country's ongoing institutional reforms of one key and contentious sector- that of higher education.

The study's findings would be helpful in later investigating whether EC is playing, or had played, a role in the country's reform. The findings are also to be considered as the starting point for a future study of education policy in the country and a much-needed

evaluation of its related programs, as well as a comprehensive analysis of the ongoing education reform in the GCC region. The author strongly believes that identifying the initial stated objectives of a program or policy is important before one can proceed to a thorough program evaluation or a formal policy analysis.

The author is not aware of any academic study that has examined EC especially within the context of the internationalization of higher education. The role that the City is playing in the education policy of the country and the region, let alone the motivations for establishing the City, has received little attention from policy scholars and education specialists.

METHODOLOGY

The data used for this investigation into EC was collected through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. In addition, a content analysis and a thorough review of relevant speeches of different stakeholders, related media material such as news reports and editorials, and several official documents constituted another important source of data. The author also gathered data through formal field observations and informal conversations during casual social gatherings as well as personal participation in conferences, workshops, and seminars in EC. The latter included Doha Debates, the lecture series of the Center for International and Regional Studies (CIRS), and meetings held by RAND- Qatar Policy Institute (RQPI) for the dissemination of findings of some of their conducted studies.

The case study of Education City is based on 63 semi-structured face-to-face in depth interviews most of which lasted between 30 minutes to one hour and 30 minutes. Subject de-identification was emphasized during the data collection phase to ensure key informants confidentiality. The majority of the interviews were recorded and the tapes were usually transcribed by the researcher within 24 hours. As Table 1 shows, the interviewees include: policy makers and analysts, education experts and professionals, school teachers and academicians, presidents, vice presidents, administrators and departmental deans, students, and several high ranking government officials. In addition to the interviews, 10 written questionnaires were distributed when a face-to-face meeting was not feasible.

Issues considered and discussed in both instruments include: professional and personal experience with the Qatari education system (both modern and traditional), the country’s educational needs, influence of social and economic conditions and changes, issues of economic sustainability as well as political and social liberalization initiatives in the country, the introduction and implementation of the

recent national education reform, the reform’s obstacles and barriers, the drivers behind the creation of EC, the role that the City is playing in the national education reform, the transnational and international aspects of the education provided in its universities, and its relation with globalization and regional competition.

Table 1: List of organizations and the type/position and number of key informants

ORGANIZATION	TYPE OF KEY INFORMANTS: POSITION/TITLE	NUMBER OF KEY INFORMANTS	TOTAL NUMBER
Qatar Foundation (QF)	Administrators	1	5
	Consultants	2	
	Policy Analysts	2	
Education City (EC)	Individuals involved in creating EC	2	30
	Deans of Universities	6	
	Faculty Members	8	
	Administrators	3	
	Policy Analysts	3	
Qatar University (QU)	Students	8	12
	President	1	
	VP of Academic Affairs	1	
	Department Chairs and Heads	2	
	Faculty members	5	
Supreme Council of Education (SCE)	Students	3	4
	Department Heads	2	
Schools (Independent, private, and public)	High ranking officials	2	7
	Teachers	3	
	Administrators	1	
Others	Students	3	15
	Media specialists	3	
	Activists	3	
	Business sector managers	5	
	Public administrators	4	

Rather than having predetermined hypotheses that the findings would either support or reject, the data were analyzed according to the principle of Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The aim was to uncover major themes and map out the drivers in order to give a more detailed picture of the City from the standpoint of the internationalization of higher education, globalization, and transnational education on one hand, and of local policy choice as well as regional competition on the other hand.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical approach employed is a composite of several major academic perspectives on the internationalization of education and on transnational education in emerging countries and on regional

competition and globalization. However, due to the fact that Qatar does not fall under the typical developing country type due to its abundant financial resources, and because of its unique socio-political system, especially when it is compared to the countries of Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, these theoretical perspectives must be considered with caution. The development of a modified culture and context-specific theoretical model is thus needed to explain, describe, and analyze the types of trends in education as reflected in EC and the factors that led to its creation.

Healey (2008) argues that when demographic trends and high per capita growth rate surpass the capacity of domestic higher education sectors to accommodate the demand, the resultant unsatisfied demand for higher education results in an increase in the number of students flowing into Main English-Speaking Destination Countries (MESDC) universities growing strongly. This massification of higher education has changed “the relationship between higher education, on one hand, and society and economy on the other” (Chan, 2004, p.34). This in turn would drive the internationalization of higher education, as these universities will increasingly turn into ‘franchising’ and ‘joint/sole ventures’ to meet this ‘burgeoning/excess’ for higher education demand in the fast-growing developing countries (Healey, 2008).

Moreover, the internationalization of education, a process often initiated by government, is often regarded as a response to globalization (Wende, 2007). In the era of globalization, education is borderless as education is delivered across national boundaries. Globalization in higher education has led to a process of junction at all levels and in a mixture of resources, ideas, and people (Chan, 2004). It ultimately has often caused, in many developing countries undergoing education reform, the internationalization of higher education. One of the main objectives of the internationalization of education is to enhance the curriculum with international content and improve the academic standards and quality of education (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

Since the turn of the century, transnational education has become a central component of the internationalization of higher education in several countries (Huang, 2007) and is certainly not a new international phenomenon (Naidoo, 2009). The move from the license production in the form of franchised degrees with international partners towards foreign investment, as universities set up campuses in other countries, is unmistakable. Transnational higher education (TNHE) refers to arrangements in which programs leading to a degree, or even courses are delivered on line, or on site in a branch university, to

students in another country (Ziguras, 2003). There are different types of TNHE: branch campuses, franchises, articulation and twinning agreements, corporate programs, and distance education programs. The one in Qatar is the first where campuses are established by institutions in another country to provide their educational programs to students in that country (Tadjudin, 2000). TNHE can also lead to a set of collaborative training and research programs that can help to develop a relation with the main university academic community and “contribute to the international education policy and foster mutual understanding among nations” (Kennedy, 2007, p.232). This often is accompanied by competition between these nations.

The concept of regional and global competition is discussed under the framework of policy innovation and diffusion, as Education City is viewed by the author as a policy innovation. This theoretical framework was developed by Berry and Berry (1990, 1992) and was used to identify the determinants and explain variation in the adoption of specific policy innovations and programs across a large number of US states or localities and in some western countries. It incorporates two models: the internal determinants model and the diffusion model. While the internal determinants model excludes any diffusion effects, the diffusion model explains that the pressure to conform to internationally and regionally accepted standards is one reason to policy diffusion (Walker, 1969). It proposes that states do not only learn from each other, but they also compete with each other. States tend to “emulate policies to achieve an economic advantage over other states or avoid being disadvantaged” (Berry and Berry, 2007, p. 230). However, it is when policy adoptions are attempts to compete with other states that “the likelihood of regionally focused, rather than nationally based, diffusion seems greatest” (Berry and Berry, 2007, p.229). Other diffusion models include the Leader-Laggard and the Vertical Influence models. The Leader-Laggard models assume that certain states that pioneered adoption of policies or programs are perceived as leaders by other states. In the vertical influence model, the national government is the pioneer or leader state. States emulate vertically rather than horizontally (Berry & Berry, 2007).

Education Reform in Qatar

Published in 2008, Qatar National Vision 2030 represents the government policy agenda aiming at transforming Qatar into an advanced country. One of its tenets is economic progress, part of which is human capital development. The Human Development Index (HDI) for Qatar rose by 0.64% annually and is now recorded at 0.910, which gives Qatar a rank of 33rd out of 182 countries (Human Development Report, 2009). According to the Arab Knowledge Report (2009), the literacy rate of the

country rose from 80.80 % in 2004 to 93.1% in 2009. The current enrollment in primary, secondary, and tertiary education is at 77.6% (UNDP, 2009). According to the latest figures in Qatar Permanent Population Committee Report (2009), the country per capita education expenditure rose from \$66 in 2004 to \$3460 in 2009. These figures not only reflect the recognition of Qatar's policymakers that education is a key factor in societal progress, but also that growth (more of something) and of development (betterment of something) are the results of a long process (Hanson, 2006).

The education reform known as Education for a New Era was initiated in 2002 to address the management and delivery of educational services, the curriculum, the quality of teachers, and the availability of pertinent resources. The reform is based on four pillars: autonomy, accountability, variety, and choice. It was followed by the establishment of specialized institutes under the Supreme Council of Education (SCE) such as the Higher Education Institute and the Education Institute, the establishment of more government-funded autonomous independent schools in 2003 and the introduction of school vouchers.

At the post secondary-level, the creation of a community college, seen as another much needed preparatory stage for Qatar's students to move to university, is considered part of the education reform. In addition, in 2003 the emir mandated major reforms at Qatar University (QU), the first and only public higher education institution in the country. Qatar Foundation (QF) was established in 1995 as an initiative to reform the country's higher education arts and sciences program. Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, a private non-profit organization, established Education City in 2003.

The Case of Education City

The City

Education City is considered a specialized city. The author defines a specialized city as a town that has a unique and main purpose: to implement policy innovations in selected areas such as the environment, health, economic, humanitarian, or education, in addition to being a new town. The City has been established to build a knowledge-based economy, produce a pool of well-trained graduates and lifelong learners, and ultimately make Qatar not only a hub for education in the region but also a knowledge-producing country with an economical sustainable system and a diversified economy. Sheikha Mozah, the third wife of the Emir and the founder of QF, states that the City's main objective is to build links between research and industry, academia, and enterprise all of which would contribute to bridging research and policy in the country and the region : "Education City is more important than any economic and industrial project."

In addition, through Qatar Science and Technology Park (QSTP) alignment with the branch universities and the Foundation's corporate-level approach to big companies such as GE, Rolls Royce, and Vodafone, a commercialized research is generated according to a corporate manager; this leads to economic development and more job opportunities.

All of this was to be accomplished by bringing in several highly regarded universities, mainly US institutions. The City, a billion dollar government-funded project located on 2,500 acres, is established as an economic free zone. The City is currently home to seven universities.¹ It also includes Qatar Academy, The Learning Center, Qatar Leadership Academy, and Academic Bridge Program as well as QSTP, Sidra Medical and Research Center, RAND-Qatar Policy Institute, and The Faculty of Islamic Studies. A teaching hospital associated with Weill Cornell Medical College is being established and there have been talks about opening The French École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr. All these schools have full autonomy in terms of their staffing procedures, admissions requirements, and curriculum. The degrees that are awarded at these universities are equivalent to those granted by the main campus. There is no interference on the part of the Foundation in the program curriculum or the school structure and organization, confirmed an administrator. So far, it appears to be a win-win situation; despite the fact that the precise financial arrangements are generally shrouded in secrecy, endowments and gifts to main campus are not kept undisclosed. Although there is no financial risk incurred, the reputation risk that these universities are taking was a major initial concern, said a key informant.

The Identified Drivers

It is important to emphasize that this study aimed at exploring the complex interplay of the driving factors behind EC without focusing on any particular justifications or effects. In essence, it is an attempt to describe 'what is', which logically precedes analyzing the impacts/outcomes or judging to which

¹ Virginia Commonwealth University was the first to launch its arts-and design program in 1997, then came Weill Cornell Medical College in 2002, Texas A&M Engineering program in 2003, Carnegie Mellon offering business administration, information systems, and computer science degrees was established in 2004, then Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in 2005, then in 2008 came Northwestern University offering bachelor degrees program in journalism and communication. HEC is the latest addition and first European Institute to join EC. Qatar Foundation and HEC Paris signed a partnership agreement on June 22, 2010 making HEC Paris the first member of the Qatar Foundation Management, Education and Research Center (QF-MERC), which will eventually be home to other elite Management Institutions. In addition, University College London in Qatar (UCL-Q) will begin to offer its Master's degrees in the areas of museum studies, conservation and archaeology in 2011.

observed results are different from the intended ones. What are the main drivers behind the creation of the City? How did these drivers determine the development of this project?

As the thematic analysis progressed, certain themes recurred with such frequency that they became the focus of/for the findings. The first is related to the region-specific tradition to import 'best practice'. The two constructs 'putting Qatar on the map' and 'making Qatar the Hub for education' are linked together by the author because of their symbiotic relationship and were put under the theme regional and global competition. Two more explanatory variables were referred to as local education reform and policies and national liberalization initiatives in higher education institutions. Finally, the fifth factor is related to the internationalization of higher education, transnational education, and globalization.

Tradition to Import 'Best Practice'

One of the main drivers behind the creation of EC is the region-specific tradition to import 'best practice'. In Qatar, the relative lack of financial constraints and the availability of state revenues have allowed for easily exporting 'best practice' from all around the world as a policy analyst argued. Even technical knowledge can be, and is purchased, so that policy proposals that are, or appear to be, difficult to implement can survive the selection process.

In the early days of K-12 education reform, the best features of the American schooling system were chosen. These include: accountability system, parental choice, and the decentralization of decision-making. Then, later came the higher education reform initiatives and the best practices were sought again. The multi-university approach to EC was not the government's first choice, said an informant; the country tried to attract a single university that had top programs in many fields and disciplines. After scanning many American universities, the decision makers found that it is impossible to have top ten ranking in every program in a single university, so the solution was to use this cluster approach model that aims at "having the best in each field" and "bringing the best expertise from around the world" said one of the main founders of EC.

As it is widely known, QF was founded on the personal initiative of the emir. His wife, however, took the lead role for its development exclusively overseeing and directing most of its projects, including EC; however she is not the sole actor as she gets so many correspondences from around the world on what she needs to do. "I actually get forwarded mail to give my input and review the proposals", said a Dean. Ideas comes from anywhere, but the decision is made "up on the top", then "we bring the best people to do it" confirmed an administrator. Even

Qatar National Vision is described as the leadership vision for the country's policies based on "the guiding principle of the permanent Constitution and the directions of Their Highness the Emir, the Heir apparent and Sheikha Mozah, as well as on extensive consultation with government institutions and local and international experts"(Qatar National Vision 2030, 2008). When conferences with international speakers are held in the City, the keynote speaker is invited to meet with government officials and key decision makers the very next day, pointed an administrator.

As in most of similar projects in the region, expatriates are involved in both their establishment and development. In the case of QF, Saoud, a native of Egypt, participated in the development of EC and was engaged in the establishment of most of its branch universities. Several of the key positions' holders such as directors and vice presidents, not to mention the majority of the universities' Deans, are expatriates, and as one key informant puts it, "with a career long-focus" on educational innovations, "the best at what they do", and "known leaders and noted experts in their field." Consultation and collaboration with leading international institutes and organizations seems to be the norm. The foreign subject matter experts are instrumental not only in transferring policies and best practices from their home countries to the new environment but also in their implementation. The tradition of importing the best practices and foreign consultants does not form an end by itself; it is a mean to improve the capacity of the country to efficiently compete both regionally and globally.

Regional and Global Competition

The pressure to conform to internationally and regionally accepted standards as well as to make Qatari students more internationally competitive represent yet other determinants for the creation of the City. Related to it, there are certainly elements of grandiose and prestige. Several of the Arab Gulf countries seek not only to be perceived as the regional leader in certain policy innovations² but, also, to gain the first mover advantage in the region. The emergence of Qatar as a dynamic force in the Arab World is certainly evident. It has been referred to as the touchstone of the Gulf, "a laboratory to see what is going on in the Gulf, and perhaps as the key that can lock or unlock the future of the GCC" (Graz, 1993). On a global level, being in the limelight has certainly been Qatar's policy over the last few years. Starting with Al Jazeera news network, Qatar is on a mission to gain a stronger profile on the international

² Qatar seeking to establish itself as the education hub by creating Education City; Dubai Healthcare City places the city as the GCC Healthcare hub; Dubai City is seen as the economic hub of the UAE; and Masdar City makes Abu Dhabi the renewable energy center in the region.

scene and increase its public diplomacy (Seib, 2011). Indeed a local activist argued that Qatar is using education not only as a powerful competitive advantage, but also as a way to gain global attention. For instance, the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE), which is considered the Davos of Education, was held in December 2010 in Doha. Referred to as the exiles' capital and the region peacekeeper as well as being the first Middle Eastern country to host the Asian Games in 2006 and to win the bid for the 2022 Football World Cup, Qatar is seeking to have a global impact. Actually, on many policies, some related to human rights, the government introduced policies not necessarily because it is right thing to do, but rather because it makes the country look good.

Moreover, the evident expansion of higher education opportunities in GCC in general had an impact on the national level. The decision to create EC has been shaped both by internal and external factors. These internal factors include the political, economic, and social characteristics of the state as governments with financial resources and a high level of economic development have a greater probability to adopt new policies or programs. The external factors are mostly related to regional competition. The consequences of these dynamics has helped EC to attract students from the region³ and keeping the children of expatriates from seeking higher education elsewhere. With a total number of 1124 students, of which 51% are Qatari and 49% are international, attending classes in EC during the year 2007-2008 school year and from 70 different nationalities, the City is also attracting students from the countries of the GCC. These countries have special arrangements to share educational resources. This not only will promote healthy competition between educational regional facilities, but also help strengthen the regional ties. Nevertheless, gaining a competitive edge does not constitute the only driving factor as EC might be considered as one of the main policy outcomes of the education reform and policies.

Local Education Reform and Policies

Policymaking in most GCC countries is described as a centralized top-down process. Qatar is certainly no exception. Whereas, change or revolution comes from below as a result of the public outcry, in Qatar, as in most of the GCC member states, it is coming from above. While a public official described the leadership as revolutionary, a policy analyst argued that EC is a sign of bankruptcy of policy- the alternative to making a policy decision to reform QU

and working on enhancing higher education is the creation of EC.

Nevertheless, the creation of QF was an initiative aimed at reforming Qatar's higher education arts and sciences program and improving human capital. The Dean of VCU argued that the program his university offers is needed in the labor market and that this all reflects the direction of education policy not to mention the impact of having this design and art school on the creation of Qatar's Islamic Art Museum that opened in 2009. A major part of the education reform was introduced in the first place to address one of the major challenges that Qatar faces in terms of the composition of its workforce. The reliance of non-national skilled workers and the large public-sector employer, as the two main human resource challenges, are considered motivators to the establishment of the City. Qatarization is another policy for local capacity building. Although Qatarization is mostly seen as an initiative taken by the country's leadership in collaboration with the College of the North Atlantic (CAN-Q), the impact that the creation of EC on this policy was evident throughout many of the conducted interviews. Qatarization policy aims to increase the number of nationals in the workforce both in the private and public sectors. QF has launched its Qatarization Program and policy with 15 new positions across a broad spectrum of departments in EC to be offered for nationals only, said an administrator.

Moreover, the important role that EC is playing in the reform is evident. Its establishment has had major implications on education policies in Qatar and the improvement of the general education system. In the most recent Assimilation of Information Index, Qatar ranked first in the Arab World and 30th in general (Arab Knowledge Report, 2009). Although the City is a project driven by QF not any other state actors, it is considered a government-funded project. The relationship that the City had established with both governmental and non-governmental entities in the education sector made it one of the main pillars of the national education reform. There is evidence of a strong collaboration with other higher education facilities, mainly QU. Also, the Qatar National Research Fund (QNRF) established by QF in 2006, ensures a linkage of EC with other research institutes by providing support to researchers, administering funding for original research, and fostering collaborations within academia and through public/private partnerships. In addition, the role that the SCE played in the establishment of EC was widely recognized by many key informants. These interactions with governmental institutions are not only leading to changes in education policies but also are an attestation of the fact that the City's creation is an output of the reform, observed a government official.

³ The latest available figures show particularly strong increases in enrollments of students from Qatar (up 43% to 663), UAE (up 36% to 1,653), Iran (up 34% to 4,731), Saudi Arabia (up 25% to 15,810), and Kuwait (up 20% to 2,442) (Updates on Global Higher Education, 2009).

A plethora of policy outcomes were initially expected from this education model. The data in this study reveals that one of the main policy objectives of establishing EC is building a knowledge-based economy for the nation. Many of the informants, when asked about economic sustainability issues, mentioned that the ultimate policy objective is to convert Qatar's oil and gas revenues into something more sustainable. An economic advisor in QF argued that if the world-class universities on campus contribute to improving the education level in Qatari society, this might also have a positive economic benefit from a more holistic perspective in the long term.

Furthermore, not only do students come to EC to take classes in different universities by walking across the street, but also having these universities locally would result in reducing the traditional tendency of the Qataris, mostly young males, to travel to the US for higher education, and in reversing the brain drain, by becoming a brain magnet (Hanley, 2007). Lien (2008, p.149) argues that one of the common solutions presented to "curb brain drain is to increase the capacity and productivity of domestic higher education institutes". With EC, Qatar is trying "to stem that brain drain" concluded a policy analyst. The creation of VCU aimed at offering more careers options to the high school graduates in Qatar, observed a high ranking official. Actually, an important explanatory factor is related to supply and demand-side drivers. One informant observed that the demand for higher education has resulted in an increase in the number of students flowing into Main English-Speaking Destination Countries (MESDC). This has in turn lead to the move towards the internationalization of higher education reflected in the establishment of branches of these universities in Qatar to meet this increasing demand. On a regional level, nevertheless, the tremendous growth that the region had witnessed over the last decade, namely the United Arab Emirates (UAE), had brought with it another type of challenge that City is facing. One respondent argued that the overcapacities of American universities in the Gulf region is leading to a decrease in the pool of students; "The fixed pool of qualified students is now divided". It is expected that demand would not be proportional to the supply in the next few years, as supply would exceed demand, predicted a policy analyst.

Another important intended policy output is to improve women access to higher education and increase their percentage at the post secondary level. A leading women rights' activist argued that the City was built to improve women status in Qatar and the region in terms of both education and labor force participation. EC has increased access to women and for the first time in Qatar, women can compete with

men in higher education. While the gender ratio of the student body in QU is 2:1 where female outnumbered the male, the enrollment in EC is also predominantly women (around 70 percent).

National Liberalization Initiatives

Education is often regarded to be a gateway to stronger political future and universities are considered institutions of democracy. The education reform and its associated policies were accompanied with a set of local liberalization initiatives across all sectors. EC was the ideal venue to experiment with such initiatives. The analysis of the data reveals that the national liberalization initiatives represent yet another determinant of the decision to create the City. Qatar has the reputation of being a progressive country and is regarded as among the modern Gulf countries. The micro-petromonarchy is being led towards a reform, a process from above with a specific character, by both external and internal factors. The direction of this reform has been influenced by a group of policy actors who have entered the game such as Westerns academics, consultants, and investors who have been involved in establishing a variety of liberal institutions. Many faculty members in the City see EC as part of the democratization process and of the ongoing education reform. Sheikha Mozah has publicly expressed on many occasions her belief in the power of education, higher education institutions in particular, to produce true democracy as she considers it is a pillar of democracy. One faculty member argued that the establishment of some programs at these universities would promote capacity building for citizenry. The student-led organization/club, Education City 'Majliss'⁴, aims at creating a forum where students can discuss issues and share innovative ideas and collaborate.

Other platforms for policy discussions and debates form an essential part of the City such CIRS at Georgetown University that regularly invites known international speakers to give talks on significant regional and international issues. One administrator in QF pointed out that the establishment of the City aims at increasing students' involvement in policy issues through several events and activities, including the Doha Debates modeled on the Oxford Union Debates. These debates that focus on a controversial issue enjoy editorial independence and are considered part of the democratization of the country, as they would help with the development of civil society in the region. An administrator noted the cultural-change noticed in the university, the kind that for example one sees in the students' societies work to try to get money and resources to support a certain program:" it is philanthropy".

⁴ The term in Arabic means a place of sitting and is used to describe various types of traditional gatherings in the Gulf.

A change in the culture is certainly another key factor as one of the aims is that EC would foster the creation of what many refer to as a pro-innovation culture. “They want us to have an impact on the culture”, said an administrator. The introduction of value-laden activities through the different programs is a testimony to what the foundation wants to do. However, changing the certain aspects of the culture while preserving of cultural traditions is a challenge. A dean acknowledges that adhering to the culture and heritage of the country while bringing changes and getting people to accept these changes are certainly not easy tasks to accomplish.

The City was also aimed to introduce to the Qatari society innovative ideas about freedom of expression. Despite the relative freedom of Al-Jazeera, Freedom House ranks the media in Qatar as ‘not free’ and Qatari press laws are both “obsolete and repressive” according to Robert Menard founder of the Doha Centre for Media Freedom. The addition in 2009 of Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism and School of Communication reflects the country’s commitment to progressive change, said one news correspondent. In his welcome speech, the emir of Qatar stated that “a vibrant, healthy media scene will bring about greater transparency and accountability, and all these are hallmarks of successful, participative societies”. The school’s Dean described it as an opportunity to make a difference in two significant areas communication and journalism. “We are influencing the press, our students and faculties are already being seen as people with special authority, their opinion is being sought on various issues concerning journalism”. There is a growing initiative to hold conferences and training workshops for journalists. QF “expects us to have an impact beyond the City and collaborate with other institutions and even outreach to secondary schools; “it is very clear that the Foundation envisions us as a catalyst agent...this is not an island, the Foundation expect us to be venturing outside” said one faculty member.

Another major component of any liberalization initiative is associated with women issues and rights. Activating the role of women in social revitalization and in educational reform has become one of the most raised policy issues in Qatar and in the Arab world in general. EC has played an important role in creating women leaders in many realms of society. Actually, its first university, VCU, was an all-female institution. Its main goal was to be a professional school that would encourage women to have careers-considering that young women were hardly allowed to seek higher education abroad⁵.

⁵ Although the university became a co-education school, Qatari female students are still not allowed to take part of the exchange program in the US without a chaperone.

The promotion of religious tolerance and cultural diversity could be considered yet another stimulus of the educational reform as reflected in EC. According to many stakeholders, a positive side effect of this specialized city is the fact that its existence links the Arab Gulf countries to the western world. The existence of the foreign universities on campus and the several exchange programs available to their students, would potentially lead to “meeting other civilizations”, “promote dialogue” and eventually advance “cross cultural understanding” and “introduce allowable changes in the present culture of the Qatari society” remarked a local activist. The international experience of both local and expatriates faculty members and students is valuable in strengthening their global outlook (Hamza, 2010). Instead of what Huntington (1993) refers to as a ‘clash of civilization’ as the latest phase in the evolution in the modern world, the City’s collaboration with both American and Western institutions is ultimately a contribution to a culture of cooperation and part of the trend toward globalization.

Globalization, Internationalization of Education, Transnational Higher Education

Education City represents the next step in the globalization of higher education (Asquith, 2006). As forces of globalization accelerated in the last decade of the 20th century (Held & McGrew, 2007), the members of the GCC entered the 21st century with pressure on their traditional systems and institutions. The globalization movement toward greater integration, interaction, and interdependence among individuals and institutions across national boundaries became vital to the region and across all sectors. As a result, governments have acknowledged, though gradually, that their existing educational models need to adapt to a globalized world. To cope with these new challenges, several education cities were established in the GCC: Dubai International Academic City in 2006, Dubai International Academic City in 2006, and Education City. These cities were created as the result of the alignment of other factors rather than a single inevitable trend toward globalization. This massification of the higher education sector in the past few years resulted in a rapid increase in the number of academics and other university-related staff in the UAE in particular and the Gulf in general⁶ (Davidson, 2005). Qatar became a good market for international education whether it is transnational or the recruitment of students to study abroad. The branch universities in EC serve as international

⁶ More examples include the expansion of the dual-campus of Zayed University, the opening of the new Abu Dhabi University, the forthcoming launch of the British University of Dubai and King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) in Saudi Arabia. The latter is a Saudi university collaborating with international universities.

institutions of contemporary transnational education systems.

Transnational higher education (TNHE) has become a central component of the internationalization of higher education in several countries. This cross-border movement of programs also encompasses, not only that of staff and faculty members, but also even the transnational transfer of materials, said one administrator. As mentioned earlier, one of the main drivers behind EC is to develop students who are prepared to work in a global economy and an interconnected world. As a result, it became imperative that the educational system becomes more open to comprise transnational education, as one education policy analyst noted. A faculty member in EC argued that by bringing these prestigious universities, the City would be able to provide the new generation of graduates with international perspectives in a faster and certainly more effective and efficient way. There is yet another education policy objective as one of the main motivations for internationalization that of enhancing of the curriculum with international content. Improving the academic standards and quality of higher education in Qatar was “our main goal when we planned for the EC”, noted one administrator in QF who was involved in the initial policy discussions.

In addition, one of the city’s main objectives as pointed out by an informant is to encourage collaborative research on a regional and global level. This type of transnational educational model can lead to such outcome. It also can create mutual understandings that result in tolerance and peaceful solutions to conflicting problems, observed one policy analyst. There has been a tremendous growth in the number of students studying in the region because more and more US students have come to know about the growing importance of this region and have recognized the need to understand its changing dynamics. The City helps improve public diplomacy through the soft power of citizen diplomacy that “uses cultural and political values to make America look more attractive” an academician argued. The growing educational exchanges between the international community and Qatar promote closer relations and dialogue between the different countries.

DISCUSSION

This exploratory study reveals that EC reflects a new paradigm for higher education in Qatar. The rigorous case study analysis based on in-depth interviews with key stakeholders was used to identify the policy drivers and the rationale behind the choice of this educational model. The City was developed as a result of several driving factors: 1) *the region-specific tradition to import ‘best practice’*; 2) *regional and global competition*; 3) *local education reform and*

policies; 4) *national liberalization initiatives*; and 5) *globalization, internationalization of education, and transnational education*. These factors are often interrelated and might even overlap. For example, some of the local policies that were discussed are connected to the national liberalization initiatives. In addition, best practices are frequently imported in order to gain a competitive edge both regionally and globally. Moreover, the internationalization of education and the transnational education are linked to the ongoing education reform in the country. These findings are summarized in Table 2 below as well as the related subthemes that have emerged. The results of the content analysis of secondary documents such as newspapers articles, speeches of individuals connected to the City, and official documents are also incorporated in the table. These were mostly used to confirm the data generated from the interviews and questionnaires.

Main Drivers	Themes/Subthemes
Local Reform and Policies	Education reform
	Capacity building
	Brain drain
	Knowledge-based economy
	Islamic extremism
	Qatarization
	Gender equity in education
	Supply-demand
	Transformative learning
	Cross cultural understanding
National Liberalization Initiatives	Soft institutions liberalization
	Democracy
	Civil society
	Pro-innovation culture
	Citizenry
	Freedom of expression
	Role of women
Regional and Global Competition	Put Qatar on the global map
	Regional hub of education
	Regional leader
	Policy Diffusion
	Public Diplomacy
	First mover advantage
	International conferences & events
Tradition to Import ‘Best Practice’	Branding
	International experts
	Consultants and advisors
	Globalization trends:
Globalization, Internationalization, and Transnational Education	• Massification of higher education
	• Marketisation of higher education
	• Inter-university collaboration
	• International university cooperation in teaching and research
	Internationalization of education
Type of transnational higher education	

The research found that the tradition to import ‘best practice’ is one of the most influential factors in the creation of EC. Strategically collecting brand names in all sectors and seeking international technical knowledge and expertise have become the norm in the country. In addition to coping with the forces of globalization, gaining a competitive edge both

nationally and internationally is found to be another significant driver that have influenced the creation of the City. By, claiming a place at the top table of different international events and being able to attract high-ranking international institutions and organizations, Qatar is becoming a different kind of super power. The origin of this development is also the result of a general national liberalization movement on one hand and of national education reform on the other. There is no doubt that, especially post Arab uprisings, the Arab Gulf area is in a period of transition, socially and politically, and most governments in the GCC recently become advocates of education reform.

Actually, EC addresses a number of inter-related issues that the Qatari government wanted to address. These include: improvement of the general education system and of human capital; building a knowledge-based society and a sustainable economy; increasing women access to education as well as the percentage of women in higher education; speeding up the liberalization movement by initiating policy discussion and debates through academic institutions; and creating a culture of research. The data also suggests that EC might have a broader impact on Qatar and the region. Some observers have even argued that although the founding of these US and foreign academic institutions was not intended to reduce threats of Islamism, it might serve as a force in combating or at least slowing down the growth of Islamic extremism, not only locally, but also regionally. In fact, it is said that the 2005 attack on a school theater in Doha had prompted the government to initiate certain reform in their education policies as a means of deference against future attacks. "With increased fulfillment from their success in school and subsequent financial prosperity, students avoid the clutches of extremists groups" (Erman, 2007, p.12). Several informants believe that one of the City's anticipated outcomes is building bridges between world cultures in general. Others have argued that the incentive for these universities to join the City is not solely financial, but rather an urge to spread their academic and social values. This leads us to think whether the City is contributing to the process 'transformative learning' of a new generation of both students and faculty, especially women as they engage more in the different learning opportunities that the City is providing (Hamza, 2010). It is expected that the City would have policy influences in all sectors of the society, not only in education, but also in the political, economic, social, technological, communication, and demographic structures of Qatar. As having two related concepts- a physical space and a social space, the City ultimately has the potential to change the Qatari urban environment even religiously and ethically. On one hand, one could argue that the nation-changing process has translated into an urban open democratic campus. On the other hand, a

cynical observer might see it as part of a neo-colonialism process or even as a profit-oriented entity- not exclusively financially. Despite the different interpretations, if one looks critically at the City, it certainly has both a somewhat hidden agenda as well as a clear future ambitious plan. This paper uncovered the first and described the second.

The findings of this have possible implications for policymakers, nationals and expatriates, who are involved in the managing of the City's project and for the researchers of emerging trends in education policy, both regionally and internationally. Although, the findings of this study have implications for countries that are planning similar education developments or are thriving to establish themselves as education hub in regionally, they are mostly useful for other resource-rich countries or those with comparable level of development.

Implications for Future Research

The role that the City is playing in the national education reform and the international aspects of the education provided in the City's branch universities are interesting areas that require further research. The present study suggests the need for future studies in the management of transnational higher education, as reflected in EC, especially in terms of its cross-cultural context research in the GCC context from different theoretical perspectives must be conducted. This type of research would provide further depth and breadth to understand not only the complexities of managing TNHE delivered in these rapidly proliferating international universities in the region, but also to provide policy recommendations for local and international stakeholders. There is also a need to examine the City as an organizational system both formal and informal. While this paper explored the goals, intentions, and expectations behind the City, one should focus on other components. These include: the processes, programs, and policies in place to achieve the goals as documented and as perceived by the decision makers; the City's governance structure (mainly the task and authority distribution); its overall organizational culture (assumptions, values, and practices); and the parts of the external environment that are connected to the City (universities, funders, governmental educational institutions). To what extent does Education City contribute to the development of the country? What are the universities on campus doing to help with reform at the national level? And to what extent is this model sustainable⁷? These questions require further investigating. Indeed, the sustainability, this

⁷ Based on the literature, Garcia (2005) states that that limited examples of large-scale educational reforms that have sustained do actually exist. This is mostly due to the fact that most of these reforms do not last. (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) or that their associated initiatives "still focus on the same flawed assumptions that have undermined education reforms for years" (Hatch 2009, p.1)

question is referring to, should not stop at the gates of the City, especially when it is considered part of the general education reform framework in the country. A checklist of the prerequisites for sustainability needs to be drawn on and used to evaluate the real opportunities for the continuity of this model and that of the general education reform.

CONCLUSION

As a knowledge aspiring society, Qatar has made significant progress in most areas. Although the country has invested a considerable amount of resources in educational initiatives since the mid-1990s, EC being one of these, there remain significant challenges. The inadequacies of Qatar's K-12 education system means that a large number of students are not qualified to enter the prestigious universities in the City. "The creation of the City was considered premature by many while others questioned whether the education system is build too quickly in the country and whether the present infrastructure of the Foundation is, big enough to support its many initiatives. Notwithstanding, Education City could be seen as one of the world's most diverse campus and could represent a unique approach to education. While many education cities worldwide⁸ have been established prior than EC, most of the education cities were founded at a later date. Whether EC is having implications on education policy in Qatar, or whether it is one of the policy outputs of the ongoing general education reform in the country, remain to be seen. Created as an urban enclave of educational promise, there is little doubt that the City is a development that pledges to bring major changes locally and regionally. Despite the obvious aspirations, some observers have been skeptical about these changes and their future outcomes and have described them as superficial-putting form over substance. Eisendrath (2010) argues that erecting the buildings are the easiest part, creating a culture of research that is inquisitive, critical and free will be the harder part. Others have described these cities as Western institutions without any indigenous roots that will produce a generation of people who cannot talk to their parents (Krieger, 2008). Actually, Thomas (2010) reflects on the education cities/zones in general, and questions whether these projects will change the way learning is delivered as many of these purpose-built establishments are distant from the communities they claim to serve. "Without a reciprocal relationship that taps into the host society's needs, education cities could become ivory towers"(p.13). Referred to as an engine of growth and change for the nation, an American island in an Islamic environment, and the

beginning of a new Arab renaissance, Education City is potentially an innovative concept in education policy. The entities that comprise the City are certainly not unique; however, what makes this project unique is the fact that these entities are all in one location and are striving to utilize a different, yet integrated, approach to teaching and learning. If these branch universities as well to the other institutions on campus deliver what they promise, the City might shape the current directions and development in the national Qatari education system- especially if EC does indeed function as complementary addition to the national education system rather than a separate competitive initiative.

Last, but not least, the creation of an education city of this scope is certainly a pioneering project with no true identical previous map to follow. However, its observed preliminary outcomes and its initial intended objectives make the City a possible exemplar for other countries that are planning to develop themselves as an education hub or establish a similar model of higher education institutions.

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8 Such as in Hamilton in Canada, South Yorkshire in England, and Perth in Western Australia, Clark Education City in the Philippines where The Site Education Australia registered courses are delivered and the University City (UC) in West Philadelphia in Pennsylvania.

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