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When the Wells Run Dry: Visions for the Gulf

Persian Gulf states have been reaping profits from their oil since the 1960s. It has brought rapid development to the region. The United Arab Emirates – created in the early 1970s through the union of seven emirates – and Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait and Qatar all generate most of their GDP with oil. The profits are used to finance refineries and industrial plants – but also projects aimed at preparing for the time after the reserves run out.

01 Ecological Oasis

Masdar, Arabic for “source”, is the name of an ambitious project to build a virtually emissions and garbage-free city in the desert of Abu Dhabi. The Emirates plan to invest 22 billion euros in their city of the future. The project foresees Masdar as a carbon-neutral city using much less energy and water than comparable cities. Energy is provided by solar cells on rooftops or biogas from garbage processing. Water comes from desalination plants powered by solar electricity. Computerized pods running on subterranean routes will take people from A to B. Masdar – an ecotopia in the desert sands.

02 Tapping into Learning Power

Gulf states have another 30 years before the oil fields start drying up. The rush to prepare young people in the region for the changes this will inflict on society has already begun. In Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Kuwait and Oman the children of today will have to get creative in the very near future. And the raw material they will need to draw on is knowledge. Sciences and technical subjects are especially popular right now among students. They know they are standing on the brink of a new era, and say: “We have nothing to lose, but everything to gain.” The future of the Gulf states in the post-oil period will be decided primarily in the classroom and lecture theater.

03 Sports and Games

Dubai wants to host the 2020 Olympic Games, and Qatar the 2022 Soccer World Cup. Unprecedented large-scale projects are already underway to prepare for major sporting events such as these – long before the IOC or FIFA makes any decisions about venues. This early commitment reflects just how much importance is being attached to their bids: They are nothing less than a bold experiment in endeavors to secure long-term survival in the post-oil era. Enhancing the international reputation of Arab states through global sporting events of this nature is all part of the strategy.

04 Cultural Development

Oil wealth has brought dramatic changes to the United Arab Emirates in just a few decades. The influx of millions of people from all over the world has transformed the traditional Islamic sheikhdoms into a cultural melting pot. It’s a place where Arab, Asian and western traditions meet and mingle. These interactions seem set to contribute to the emergence of a new, more open attitude to culture in the Gulf region.