



CTBUH Research Paper

ctbuh.org/papers

Title: **Towering Aspirations in Dubai and Beyond**

Authors: Mohamed Ali Alabbar, Chairman, Emaar Properties
Daniel Safarik, Editor, CTBUH

Subjects: Architectural/Design
Property Ownership/Management
Urban Design

Keywords: Megatall
Supertall
Urban Planning
Urban Sprawl

Publication Date: 2018

Original Publication: CTBUH Journal 2018 Issue IV

Paper Type:

1. Book chapter/Part chapter
2. **Journal paper**
3. Conference proceeding
4. Unpublished conference paper
5. Magazine article
6. Unpublished

© Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat / Mohamed Ali Alabbar; Daniel Safarik

Towering Aspirations in Dubai and Beyond



His Excellency Mohamed Ali Alabbar

In 2008, CTBUH held its Eighth World Congress in Dubai, at which time the world's tallest building, the Burj Khalifa, was still under construction. His Excellency Mohamed Ali Alabbar, Chairman of Emaar Properties, took the stage to address the conference. Ten years later, CTBUH now returns to Dubai for its International Conference on the theme "Polycentric Cities." CTBUH Editor Daniel Safarik interviews Mr. Alabbar on the occasion of this anniversary.

Interviewee

His Excellency Mohamed Ali Alabbar, Chairman
Emaar Properties
1 Emaar Boulevard
P.O. Box 888888
Dubai, United Arab Emirates
t: +971 4 888 8813
f: +971 4 888 8799
e: info@emaar.ae
www.emaar.ae

His Excellency Mohamed Ali Alabbar is a global entrepreneur with active interests in real estate, retail, luxury hospitality and now e-commerce, technology, logistics and the food industry. Mohamed Alabbar is the Founder and Chairman of Emaar Properties, the leading developer of iconic assets such as Burj Khalifa. Holding a graduate degree in Finance and Business Administration from Seattle University, Alabbar also holds an Honorary Doctorate from the same university.

It has been 10 years since CTBUH held its last conference in Dubai. In this time, the Burj Khalifa has been constructed, and the number of buildings over 150 meters has grown, from 83 to 180 today, with 52 under construction. In your experience, what do you think are the main causes of this high-rise building spree?

Developers have their own individual perspectives on why they invest in high-rises – but for us, the reasoning is clear: our iconic towers add significant value to the destination, add to the nation's skyline, and serve as economic catalysts, supporting diverse sectors, including tourism, retail, and hospitality.

When we developed Burj Khalifa, we had a clearly articulated vision of not just delivering an icon that underlines the ambitions and spirit of global collaboration that defines Dubai, but also to maximize the value of the land by creating a truly "vertical city." Burj Khalifa is at the heart of Downtown Dubai, our 202-hectare megadevelopment, and it adds incremental value to the destination.

Today, we are developing Dubai Creek Tower in Dubai Creek Harbour, a six-square

kilometer waterfront destination (see Figure 1). Dubai Creek Tower has an entirely different concept and objective compared to Burj Khalifa. Designed by neo-futuristic Swiss-Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava, the tower will be a global icon and add to the skyline of the nation. It will feature multiple cutting-edge observation decks with 360-degree views of Dubai Creek Harbour and the metropolis beyond.

How would you describe the development strategy the Dubai Creek Tower and its surrounding development, Dubai Creek Harbour, as compared to that of Burj Khalifa and Downtown Dubai?

The development strategy for Burj Khalifa was to serve as an anchor point for Downtown Dubai. In fact, we had initially conceived Burj Khalifa as a 90-story structure, and we were inspired by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, UAE Vice President and Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, to push our boundaries. Our goal was not to be in a race to build the tallest – but to demonstrate to the world the can-do attitude of the UAE and to highlight the global collaborations that the city of over 200 nationalities promotes.



Figure 1. Dubai Creek Tower will anchor the Dubai Creek Harbour development. © Emaar Properties

For Dubai Creek Harbour too, we have a very holistic approach to the development. Dubai Creek Tower anchors the project, no doubt, but it has several spectacular features, such as the recently announced Dubai Square (see Figure 2) – the retail and lifestyle destination of the future – and the vibrant Creek Marina, among others. What we deliver is the destination with several spectacular features, and the iconic high-rises serve as economic catalysts.

In 2008, in your address to the CTBUH Conference before the Burj Khalifa was finished, you acknowledged that “someone would try to build something taller,” but added that they would also need to match the quality of design and respect for the human spirit that went into the Burj Khalifa. It is possible that the “someone” may turn out to be you? Why is it important to build what may become the world’s tallest structure for the second time, and what do you think you will have to do to outdo your earlier achievement – besides simply being taller?

We are not in a race to build higher and taller. We have a clear vision and concept for our mega-developments to which the iconic high-rises add significant value. With Burj Khalifa, we have pushed the boundaries of architecture, construction and engineering, and it will continue to serve as a reference point for any high-rise of the future. We are similarly challenging ourselves with Dubai Creek Tower, which will be a notch higher than Burj Khalifa.

Across the world, there are monuments that come to represent cities and their aspirations. In Dubai, we have Burj Khalifa – a powerful testament to the city’s industriousness. Dubai Creek Tower is an incomparable architectural feat that will symbolize our city’s positivity and energy. A US\$1 billion investment, it will welcome visitors from around the world and contribute to the tourism, retail and hospitality sectors, adding incremental value to the economy.



Figure 2. Dubai Square is a massive shopping mall at the core of Dubai Creek Harbour. © Emaar Properties

Dubai Creek Tower has been designed by Santiago Calatrava. What led you to select Calatrava, and can you describe the selection process?

The design for Dubai Creek Tower was selected after an intense competitive pitch. Calatrava’s design was perfectly aligned to the vision we had – a compelling structure that will enhance the value of the megadevelopment.

He is a master architect with spectacular projects such as the World Trade Center Transportation Hub in New York, Calgary Peace Bridge, the Olympic Sports Complex in Athens, and the Turning Torso Tower in Malmö, among others. Calatrava’s design is not just futuristic – it is rooted in our history and culture and is a strong statement on our ambitions.

The tower derives design inspiration from the lily and the minarets that are part of Islamic culture. With its spectacular design and magnificent illumination, it will create a brand-new skyline for our nation.

Further, at the foot of Dubai Creek Tower is an exciting experiential destination - Dubai Creek Plaza, a clock-shaped haven of landscaping, palm trees and water features sprawling across half a kilometer of land – the length of ten Olympic-sized swimming pools (see Figure 3). It is connected to Dubai Square through a cutting-edge underground extension.

What’s different about the economic, cultural, and construction technology conditions for developing/building the Burj Khalifa + Downtown Dubai development, versus the Dubai Creek Tower/Dubai Creek Harbour development today?

The most significant game changer is the change in the lifestyle aspirations of a new generation of tech-savvy youth. They demand a connected, networked, social destination that calls for a comprehensive review of how we design and build our cities and master-planned communities. While Downtown Dubai has served as an economic catalyst for Dubai, with Dubai Creek Harbour and Dubai Creek Tower, we

“The lifestyle aspirations of a new generation of tech-savvy youth demand a connected, networked, social destination that calls for a comprehensive review of how we design and build our cities.”



Figure 3. Dubai Creek Plaza, at the foot of Dubai Creek Tower, will feature landscaping, palm trees, and water features sprawling across half a kilometer of land. © Emaar Properties

are marking the bold new vision of the company for the city.

A destination of great vision, innovation and construction excellence, it will add to Dubai's magnificent skyline and further elevate the city's position as a world-leading metropolis of the future. This is highlighted further in Dubai Square, a new retail destination in Dubai Creek Harbour, which pushes the boundaries of modern retail and leisure by drawing on next-generation technology.

Blurring the boundaries of online and in-mall shopping, integrating indoor and outdoor, and delivering a social experience like none other, the all-new Dubai Square is designed for the new era of customers, setting a benchmark for retail experiences in the 21st century.

Adjacent to Dubai Creek Tower, Dubai Square – in its totality – represents a 2.6-million square-meter retail, hospitality and residential district for the future.

What does the concept of a “polycentric” city mean to you, and do you think that there is a limit to how many “polycenters” Dubai can support?

Let us look at the bigger picture: America with a population of some 300 million people has at least five key hubs, including New York, Washington, Los Angeles, Chicago,

Dallas, and Miami. Dubai is that key hub in the Middle East region – serving a catchment area of over 2.5 billion people from Casablanca to Shanghai, and Mumbai to Lagos.

To me, Dubai is an ideal polycentric city – a central hub – but we have the potential to develop several such hubs in the region, from Abu Dhabi to Jeddah to Cairo. With Dubai being the fourth-most-visited destination in the world, and with a population of over three million, in addition to 13 million unique transit passengers to Dubai, the city has the bandwidth to have such polycenters as Downtown Dubai and Dubai Creek Harbour that drive economic growth.

What kinds of occupiers and buyers are being targeted in sales for Dubai Marina, Downtown Dubai, and Dubai Creek Harbour? What does the demand profile look like for these developments?

Across all our developments, we see significant demand from high-net-worth individuals and professionals who seek a world-class living environment. In addition to robust demand from within the UAE, we also see significant international investor interest. All our megadevelopments offer exceptional lifestyle choices for residents – be it the city-resort lifestyle in Downtown Dubai, which offers several attractions such

as The Dubai Mall, The Dubai Fountain, and Dubai Opera, or the waterfront lifestyle choice at Dubai Marina. With Dubai Creek Harbour, we are creating a one-of-a-kind destination; it is located along the historic Dubai Creek in the heart of the city and is only 10 minutes from the Dubai International Airport and Downtown Dubai. Dubai Creek Harbour is also next to the Ras Al Khor Wildlife Sanctuary, which is protected under the UNESCO Ramsar Convention, and is a biologically diverse wetland reserve, home to migratory birds including pink flamingos and over 450 animal species, as well as rich mangroves.

Emaar has developed more than 100 projects in Dubai, and a select few in Istanbul. What drew you to Istanbul, and do you plan to do high-rise developments in other cities around the world?

We have had a strong presence in Turkey since 2006. We launched integrated master-planned communities in the country including Tuscan Valley – now a fully-established neighborhood – and Emaar Square, which features a world-class Address hotel and serviced residences, as well as one of the largest malls in Turkey, Emaar Square Mall.

Inspired by Tuscan architecture and enriched with magnificent views of Büyükçekmece Lake and the Marmara Sea, Tuscan Valley is home to 493 luxury villas, apartments and townhouses. Emaar Square takes inspiration from the rich cultural heritage and spirit of Istanbul, and will have over 1,000 luxury homes in addition to the mall and hotel. Turkey offers strong growth potential for us, as is underlined by the success of our developments.

We will continue to explore new opportunities in key cities across the world, with the choice of high-rises within any new development to be decided based on the requirements of the respective market and the value they can deliver. ■