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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Gateway cities for transnational higher education? Doha, Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah as regional amplifiers in networks of the 'global knowledge-based economy'

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Abstract

This paper investigates how the developmental ambitions of governments to attract university offshore campuses to Doha, Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah and these universities' internationalization strategies affect the three cities' positionalities. It links interdisciplinary literature on globally uneven geographies of higher education to geographical debates on the intermediating role of cities in regional and global economies. The paper conceptualizes the three cities as a triadic ensemble of gateways for transnational higher education (TNE), thereby contributing to further theorization of gateway cities. The paper shows that the three cities fulfil two crucial gateway functions. First, they connect internationalizing universities with particular student segments from their regional hinterlands seeking access to TNE. Second, they thereby amplify and disperse hegemonic regimes of the globalising knowledge-based economy in their regional hinterlands. While all three cities share similar functions and rationales, they also have distinct positionalities rooted in different strategies of the respective governments.

KEYWORDS

Arab Gulf, gateway cities, globalization, knowledge-based economy, transnational higher education

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INTRODUCTION

Universities and cities have become entangled with each other in (re)producing the networks through which capitalism is expanding its economic and social relations across space. As territorial and social nodes in these networks, cities mediate between regional and global economies. They provide not only 'enabling infrastructures' (Derudder & Taylor, 2020, p. 1832) in the physical sense but are also emitters for the more intangible ones, for example, in the form of standardization and other hegemonic regimes (Madanipour, 2011). Usually urban-anchored, universities have become important drivers of neoliberal capitalism under the imaginary of the global knowledge-based economy by producing its 'professional citizens' (Moisio & Kangas, 2016, p. 270) inscribed with the required social capital, skills and qualifications. As universities internationalize, their activities unfold across multiple scales, dispersing their hegemony reproducing activities globally. A particular global urban geography is produced by universities becoming transnationally mobile themselves when their leadership decides to establish brick-and-mortar offshore campuses abroad (Kosmützky, 2018). Where governments seek to attract large numbers of such offshore campuses as part of developmental ambitions, regional clusters emerged and they amass in several key cities, including in the Arab Gulf region (Kleibert et al., 2020). Here, Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah, both in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Doha, in Qatar, have become major hotspots for offshore campus development and are advertised as so-called 'international education hubs' (Knight, 2013).

Research on global geographies of higher education has shown how governments embed internationalising universities and transnational higher education (TNE) in urban strategies for a knowledge-based economy in manifold ways (Addie et al., 2014). TNE-providing institutions are assigned key roles in materially-cum-discursively reframing globalising cities (Olds, 2007) and reproducing powerful class formations (Hall, 2011). A broad range of scholarship has investigated the wider geographical patterns in the city–university nexus and how they materialize in various uneven geographies such as international university rankings (Jöns & Hoyle, 2013), student mobilities (Hou & Du, 2022; Waters & Brooks, 2021) and globally uneven development (Arshad-Ayaz & Naseem, 2017). Yet, with international education hubs emerging as a relatively new pattern in these geographies, scholars pointed out a lack of research on their wider systemic implications (Erfurth, 2022, p. 203). Finally, while there is very insightful research on offshore campus development in individual cities and countries in the Gulf region (Ewers, 2017; Koch, 2016; Miller-Idriss & Hanauer, 2011), we know little about the broader socioeconomic logics and spatialities that constitute this regional offshore campus cluster. By investigating offshore campus development in Doha, Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah, this paper aims to answer the question of how the converging interests and strategies of the respective local governments and internationalising universities affect the positionality of these cities in regional and global economic processes.

To theorize this relation, I turn to the gateway city debate in which urban and economic geographers explore how cities connect their regional hinterlands to global economic, political and cultural networks (Scholvin et al., 2019) and the various ways in which they 'embody, reflect and transmit processes of globalization' (Short et al., 2000, p. 325). So far, the dimension of TNE is missing in the gateway city debate, although it plays an important role in reproducing and spatially dispersing the global knowledge-based economy's discourses and producing its labour force (Moisio, 2018). Therefore, I conceptualize Doha, Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah as gateway cities for TNE that emerged from converging strategies of local governments and internationalising universities to position themselves in the global knowledge economy against the backdrop of internationalising labour markets, international student mobilities and the distinct (bio)political economy of the Gulf. Empirically drawing on 30 qualitative interviews with representatives from government organizations and offshore campus managers in Dubai, Ras al-Khaimah and Doha, and on supplementary data retrieved from desktop research and academic literature, I show how TNE gateway cities fulfil two key functions. First, these cities provide internationalising universities access to student populations in their regional hinterlands. Thereby, they connect these student populations to globalising economies. Second, they disperse and amplify the global hegemony of a Western type of higher education and thereby reproduce this knowledge regime of the global knowledge economy in their wider region. The analysis also reveals that the three cities not only form a complementary triadic

ensemble of TNE gateways in the Gulf region with each city sharing similar functions and rationales but also have distinct positionalities rooted in different strategies of their governments.

In the following, the paper first reviews the respective literature and develops its conceptual framework of cities as TNE gateways. The section thereafter elaborates the methodology. In the section 'Doha, Dubai, and Ras al-Khaimah as TNE gateway cities' the paper analyses the gateway function of the three cities empirically and the last section concludes with the main findings and implications.

CONCEPTUALISING GATEWAY CITIES THROUGH TNE

Reviewing the gateway city debate

As they are 'bounded territorial entities', Addie et al. (2014) 'expect universities, urban space and globalizing economic networks to unfurl in a rearticulated, complex, yet symbiotic relationship' (p. 33). Hence, the interrelationship between the production of (urban) space and transformations in higher education under globalising capitalism produces 'new territorial and topological urban structures' (Addie, 2017, p. 1091) that sometimes are congruent with and restorative of existing global city formation processes (Hall, 2011) but can also partly deviate and create new geographies (Jöns & Hoyler, 2013). Yet, we know little of the broader urban and regional patterns that are created by the internationalization of higher education and of their relationalities (Waters & Brooks, 2021). Therefore, I conceptualize a relatively new urban-regional pattern produced by the transnational mobility of universities: gateway cities for TNE.

Initially introduced by Grant and Nijman (2002), in earlier debates on world and global cities, scholars have developed the term 'gateway' as part of a critique of influential works such as Friedmann's (1986) and others. It was argued that the definitions of what constitutes a world city are based on too narrow criteria and that the city/globalization nexus warrants a deeper understanding. Urban and economic geography has set out to re-focus on 'secondary cities' (Chen & Kanna, 2012), on the material-cum-discursive (re)negotiation of globalization in cities outside the capitalist industrialized core (Roy & Ong, 2011), as well as on cities as centres in variegated economic and non-economic global networks (Breul, 2019; Toly et al., 2012). Consequently, the debates in global cities research have much diversified from their earlier focus on the handful of command-and-control centres of the global financial economy and advanced producer service industry (van Meeteren et al., 2016).

Short et al. (2000) took up the gateway notion as 'a shorthand term for the idea that many, if not all, cities act as transmission points for globalization and are the focal point for a whole nexus of globalization/localization relationships' (p. 337). While the underlying consideration of the gateway city concept also influenced further attempts at theorization with different terminology (e.g., Sigler, 2013), Scholvin et al. (2019) revisited the concept to clarify how cities interlink peripheral and global economies and how this influences regional development. The authors argue that gateway cities are 'world cities that serve as nodes in GPNs [global production networks]' (p. 1302). They connect their hinterlands, understood as more than just the immediate periphery surrounding a city but as a relatively large sphere of influence that transcends national borders (Hutchinson, 2021), to global economic networks. According to Scholvin et al. (2019), gateway cities thus enable strategic coupling through 'five essential features: logistics and transport, industrial processing, corporate control, service provision and knowledge generation' (p. 1292). Other scholars have shown how governments employ zone-based developmental technologies to create local gateways to the global knowledge-based economy (Mello et al., 2020). Yet, while Scholvin et al. (2019) recognize knowledge production as a crucial function of gateway cities, they mainly refer to corporate knowledge production. Moreover, while they acknowledge that not all five features must be present in each world city to the same extent, and that also non-world cities can fulfil some of their identified gateway functions, their article largely revolves around world cities. Despite recent research pointing to the diversity of gateway functions of cities that are not defined as world or global cities (Scholvin, 2020), more qualitative research is required to understand the many ways in which diverse gateway cities transmit processes of economic, political and cultural globalization. I argue that purposive TNE strategies of

governments converging with internationalization strategies of universities can confer a gateway role to cities in which they regionally reproduce the required types of knowledge and labour for globalising economies and that non-world cities also can assume such a role.

Converging global geographies of higher education and TNE strategies in the Gulf

Governments' TNE strategies in the Gulf build upon marketising and internationalising higher education systems in European and Anglo-American countries where universities are increasingly following neoliberal management paradigms and compete for students' tuition fees and third-party funding (Luke, 2005; Sam & van der Sijde, 2014). Attracting international fee-paying students has become a common strategy among universities also beyond the West, creating a global topology of 'international student hubs' (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014; Waters & Brooks, 2021). Some universities decide to tap into foreign student markets and other sources of funding by becoming mobile themselves and opening offshore campuses abroad, offering their degree programmes in situ. Kleibert (2021) argues that this is a 'territorial and symbolic' fix through which universities can temporarily overcome the pressures in their marketising home systems. Kleibert et al. (2020) have identified 487 offshore campuses operating in various forms and sizes worldwide, with most campuses being exported from the industrialized global North to Southeast Asia and the West Asia and North Africa (WANA) region. So far, the phenomenon has largely attracted scholarship from managerial and education studies (Kosmützky, 2018; Wilkins & Huisman, 2012) although some geographers have started to conceptualize its wider socio-spatial implications (Al-Saleh, 2022; Koch, 2016). More research is required on how such transnationally mobile universities are entangled with the positionalities of the cities they go to.

The ways in which governments in the Gulf incorporate TNE into their knowledge-based economy projects continues established policy strategies for regional and urban economic development linking universities to industries for producing commercialisable innovation and spin-off companies (Benneworth, 2020; Goddard et al., 2014). There is a broad range of literature on how internationalized types of higher education are mobilized to position certain cities as key nodes in the global knowledge-based economy (Atkinson & Easthope, 2008; May & Perry, 2011; Schulze and Kleibert, 2021; Yigitcanlar & Sarimin, 2011). Governments across the peninsula aim to 'leapfrog' (Ewers & Malecki, 2010) towards high-value-added knowledge-intensive industries via importing foreign knowledge-producing institutions and higher-skilled labour. Since the early 2000s, the governments of Doha, Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah have combined such rationales with the 'cluster thinking' (Schmidt et al., 2018) of regional development policies involving special economic zones. It resulted in the transnational education zones (TEZs; Kleibert et al., 2021) 'Education City' in Doha, 'Dubai International Academic City' and 'Knowledge Park' and 'Ras al-Khaimah Economic Zone – Academic Zone'. These dedicated infrastructures for TNE are designed to attract and spatially concentrate offshore campuses, international students and academics through financial incentives, pre-built facilities, cheap land, exemption from local regulatory regimes, cutting of red tape and preferential treatment by local authorities. The zones' territorial character as spaces of exception also enables the governments to contain the less-wanted political and social impact of their activities (Rottleb & Kleibert, 2022).

This is particularly important as universities are never just technocratic solutions to economic development challenges but deeply entangled with the (re)production of hegemonic power relations and uneven geographies (Holloway & Kirby, 2020). Therefore, we need to situate the strategies of governments and universities that create TNE gateway cities in a wider context. Scholars have shown how the global higher education landscape is characterized by a hegemony of European and Anglo-American systems (Jöns, 2015). The willingness of governments with comparatively weak higher education systems to base their developmental agendas on foreign providers opens opportunities for actors from the industrialized countries in the Global North to export their education models, which has been criticized for creating a 'bridgehead for the developed nations in the developing nations' (Arshad-Ayaz & Naseem, 2017, p. 57). Favoured by international university rankings (Hazelkorn, 2018), Western(ized) forms of higher education and degrees signal prestige, international mobility and career opportunities (Siltaoja et al., 2019). Although research

indicates that the quality of offshore campus graduates can be suboptimal (Ashour, 2020), labour markets in the Gulf give strong preference to people with Western degrees (Noori & Anderson, 2013).

Moreover, TNE gateway cities in the Gulf are simultaneously tied to the (bio)politics of labour migration (Hanieh et al., 2015), dynamics of contingent citizenship (Sidhu et al., 2016; Stephenson & Rajendram, 2019) and to universities' production of labour under the global knowledge-based economy (Jessop, 2017). The TNE gateway cities emerged from a long history of transnational mobility and the region's historical role as a connector in global networks (Khalili, 2021), with particularly Doha and Dubai being major regional intermediaries in various economic sectors (Derudder & Taylor, 2020). Many offshore campus students in the UAE and Qatar either migrated there from surrounding regions or are from resident migrant families (Rensimer et al., 2021). The latter study for an international degree because they are excluded from the domestic higher education systems but still seek higher-skilled job opportunities in the Gulf while also preparing to be forced to eventually migrate elsewhere (Sancho, 2022). Many offshore campuses offer students a technical type of higher education that is increasingly geared towards producing highly mobile 'professional citizens' that work in the global knowledge economy instead of forming a national elite (Moisio & Kangas, 2016).

TNE gateway cities are indicative of universities' multi-scalarity (Heffernan et al., 2018) and how their internationalization under globalising capitalism creates new geographies (Bobée & Kleibert, 2022; Thiem, 2009). These cities contribute to the production of a globally universalized and mobile labour force (Miller-Idriss & Hanauer, 2011) but are also '(re)producing a binary in which the academic metropole produces scholars while branch campuses focus on vocational training' (Vora, 2014, p. 2247). At the same time, new emerging centres of higher education and regional hubs point to a shift in existing core-periphery relations towards a more multi-polar landscape (Glass & Cruz, 2022; Kondakci et al., 2018). By analysing how offshore campus development in the three cities contributes to the spatial dispersal of capitalism's hegemonic knowledge regimes in the form of a particular type of higher education and qualifications, and to its reproduction of transnationally higher-skilled labour, this paper contributes to theorising the societal and regional economic implications of such new regional TNE clusters.

METHODOLOGY

Doha, Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah were selected as the empirical basis for conceptualising TNE gateway cities as they are among the main sites for offshore campus development globally and are the main importers in the overall WANA region (Kleibert et al., 2020). Their governments have adopted similar development strategies that, despite differing tactical approaches, aim to build a knowledge-based economy by attracting offshore campuses.

Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah are the capital cities of the respective emirates of the same name, which in turn are part of the federally organized country of the UAE. The political organization of the UAE grants the individual emirates relatively high degrees of autonomy in some policy areas including higher education, which is reinforced by the exceptional nature of the TEZs. Doha, on the other hand, is the main urban agglomeration of the small state of Qatar and its only large city. Thus, in Doha, the TNE infrastructure is funded by a national government, while in Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah, it is funded by local governments that compete with each other and with a national one. Despite how differently the three cities are embedded in ensembles of state power, in all three, a government is heavily drawing on them as vehicles for economic development,¹ and the following analysis will show that the respective strategies result in very similar TNE gateway city roles. To include all three cities in the analysis not only provides further insight into offshore campus development in the Gulf but also contributes to theorising the diversity of gateway cities beyond the global city category and shows how distinct positionalities can emerge within regional formations of specialized gateway cities.

The empirical analysis relies on 30 qualitative interviews conducted with senior government administrators and executive managers of offshore campuses in Doha (12), Dubai (15) and Ras al-Khaimah (3) during two field phases between 2019 and 2020. Due to the Coronavirus SARS-CoV2 pandemic, the second field phase could not be completed, which resulted in a relatively small number of interviews for Ras al-Khaimah. However, the existing interviews

TABLE 1 Key data on offshore campuses in Doha, Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah

	Doha	Dubai	Ras al-Khaimah
Total tertiary students	37,000	51,500	6200
Offshore campus students total	4500	25,300 (for 29 campuses)	1600
Domestic higher education providers	19	31	2
Offshore campuses total	14	30	8
Offshore campuses in TEZs	7	20	8
Largest offshore campuses with student numbers (where available)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - University of Aberdeen (600) - Qatar Finance and Business Academy - Northumbria University (600) - Texas A&M University (538) - University of Calgary (523) - Carnegie Mellon University (442) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Middlesex University (4535) - Heriot-Watt University (4138) - University of Wollongong (3639) - Manipal University (2131) - Amity University (1612) 	<i>All offshore campuses, no individual student numbers are available.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - University of Bolton - University of Stirling - University of West London - Bath Spa University - Birla Institute of Technology - Sarhad University of Science & Information Technology - SBS Swiss Business School - Emirates MCC University
Median tuition fees offshore campuses	\$27,000	\$18,000	\$7000

indicate very similar logics as in the other two cities and further data collected through campus visits, exploratory meetings and desktop research substantiates the findings. The administrators were asked to elaborate on their governments' TNE strategies, while the executive managers explained their universities' rationales and location choices for offshore campuses. From the interview data and drawing on the theoretical debates on gateway cities, I inductively developed the TNE gateway city concept, which I then further substantiated deductively through desktop research on key data of the respective offshore campus operations, summarized in Table 1. These data were collected from multiple sources such as official websites, university reports and government publications covering the years 2014–2022. Particularly the student numbers have to be understood as an approximation as the basis for these data is very fragmentary.

Source: The author, based on MOEHE (2022), KHDA (2017, 2022), Rensimer (2016), Dubai Statistics Center (n.d.), interviews with RAKEZ Academic Zone (in 2020), and respective university websites and reports, years 2014–2022.

DOHA, DUBAI AND RAS AL-KHAIMAH AS TNE GATEWAY CITIES

I argue that TNE gateway cities are produced by converging strategies of the respective governments and offshore campus developing universities. They fulfil two important functions in regionally amplifying globalising capitalism under the economic imaginary of the knowledge economy, each with two inter related subfunctions. First, they connect internationalising universities from outside the region with student markets in their regional hinterlands. Through strategic infrastructure developments and exceptional regulatory policies, their governments encourage internationalising universities, mostly from the West but not exclusively, to open offshore campuses and thereby

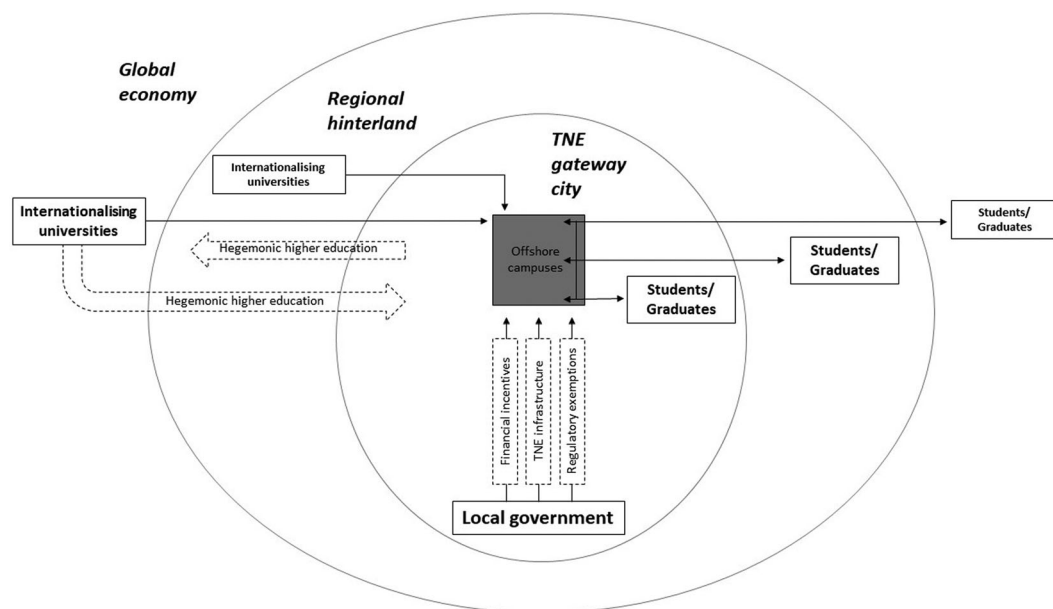


FIGURE 1 Conceptualising transnational higher education (TNE) gateway cities

provide international degree-seeking students access to TNE. Second, by doing so, these cities amplify the hegemony of a marketized Anglo-American higher education model and contribute to its diffusion in the regional hinterland. Thus, the cities (re)produce an internationally mobile higher-skilled labour force for the global economy and for internationalising parts of local and regional economies. While Doha, Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah share these key functions in general, they have also distinct positionalities produced by different TNE strategies. Figure 1 summarizes the conceptualization of TNE gateway cities.

Gateway function one—Connecting internationalising universities and regional students

Access to new revenue streams for internationalising universities

As Figure 2 shows, the majority of offshore campuses in Doha, Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah stem from Western universities, in particular from countries in the Anglosphere, but there is also a sizable number of universities originating from the Gulf's regional hinterland directly, such as from India or Pakistan. Most universities operating an offshore campus in one of the three cities are driven by often fuzzily defined motivations to 'internationalize', reminiscent of firm strategies for tapping into markets abroad:

The [university] is one really good school and it wants to become a global brand. I would say like Coca-Cola. Coca-Cola is a consumer good, and we are not, but it wants to become a global brand such as Harvard. That's part of the international expansion. (Offshore campus manager in Doha)

TNE gateway cities feature varying combinations of incentives attracting internationalising universities that either result from governments' TNE policies or from the cities' existing positionalities. The former usually includes direct funding by the local host government and other forms of financial incentives. TEZs play a key role in moderating such government-provided incentives in all three cities. The zones allow universities to export their programmes largely

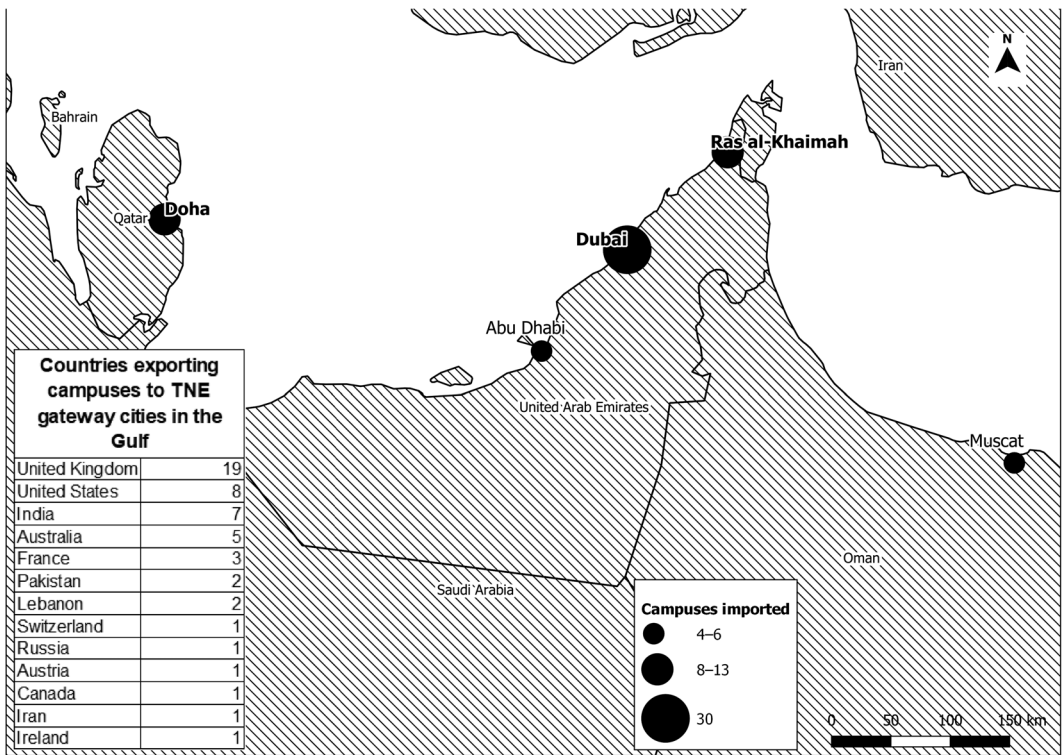


FIGURE 2 Offshore campus development in TNE gateway cities in the Gulf

unchanged and provide financial incentives in the form of tax exemptions as well as cheaper rents or land prices (Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah) or direct subsidies (Doha). For example, in 2015, it was reported that the six US offshore campuses in Doha's Education City together received \$320 million annually from the Qatari state. Moreover, my interviews showed that TEZs reinforce a geographic imaginary that guides the managers' perception of the respective cities as gateways between regional and global markets. Most managers were convinced that Gulf cities offer a degree of economic development and accessibility for foreign investors that other cities in the WANA region lack, with one offshore campus manager in Ras al-Khaimah pondering that 'there are not that many destinations where you can go'.

Besides the government-provided incentives, the cities' positionalities evoke university managements' expectations for access to local and regional student markets. In some cases, tuition fees generated by offshore campuses contribute a significant sum to the universities' overall revenue stream. For example, Herriot Watt University stated in its 2020/2021 annual report that its Dubai campus contributes 35% to its overall tuition fee income (Herriot-Watt, 2022). As most offshore campuses, especially in Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah, are not funded by a host government, interviewed managers explaining their universities' location choices described the respective cities as ideal access points into student markets of the region. Western universities in particular chose their offshore campus site not only for accessing local student markets but for the respective city's connection to other, non-local ones as a manager from a Dubai campus explained: 'Our strategic decision to go somewhere and open the campus has just little to do with the [local] market. We do not recruit too many people from Dubai'. The meaning of what defines these non-local markets differed among the managers and ranged from the country of the city they are located in, to the Arab Gulf, to the whole WANA region and for some managers also included South Asia and East Africa. The cities' connections to their immediate hinterland also play a role. Most managers in Doha described the Saudi and Emirati-led blockade of 2017–2021 of Qatar as a serious impediment to student recruitment, while Dubai's and Ras al-Khaimah's offshore campuses are heavily recruiting students from the other emirates. Ras al-Khaimah's offshore campuses, for example, operate

regular shuttle services for students across the country. For most managers, having an offshore campus in one of the three cities meant that their universities' 'market presence' in this broadly and vaguely defined regional hinterland is increased.

The following section analyses how this perceived connectivity translates into different student markets accessed through the cities.

Providing regional students access to international degrees

Both the general populations of Qatar and the UAE consist mainly of foreign nationals residing in the country, mostly from South Asia and other Arab countries. Against this backdrop, fragmentary data and differing definitions of what is an international student make it difficult to paint a precise picture of who exactly studies at offshore campuses in the three cities (Lane & Farrugia, 2022). Table 1 shows that while offshore campuses are large in number, also compared to the number of domestic universities, they service relatively few students individually. At the same time, they do account for significant shares of overall local student populations. There are three groups of students serviced by offshore campuses in the Gulf that we can broadly define along their geographical biographies: (1) students holding national citizenship, (2) non-citizen international students who migrated to the respective country for the purpose of studying and (3) non-citizen students from the contingent resident migrant communities (mostly from other Arab and South Asian countries) whose families already live and work in Qatar and the UAE.

The first group of Qatari and Emirati students is, despite some differences between the three cities, usually a minority at offshore campuses (Wilkins, 2011). The US campuses in Qatar's Education City are an exception. According to the managers, Qatari students comprise about a third of their overall student body, and the majority is female (see also al-Saleh, 2022). A government administrator explained that most influential families seek to place their children at these institutions to equip them with prestige and international exposure that reproduce their elite social rank without having to send them abroad. Their numbers tend to be lower at the more medium-tier campuses outside of the TEZ (Planning and Statistics Authority, 2021). In Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah, students of national citizenship very rarely study at offshore campuses as they usually prefer the free public higher education systems or more prestigious local private institutions. There are not only social and cultural barriers preventing Gulf nationals to study at an offshore campus, but the international degrees would oftentimes not provide these students with the necessary credentials required for the preferred career paths in the public administrations and state-owned companies (Stephenson & Rajendram, 2019).

Governments and foreign universities alike discursively position the three cities as 'international' education hubs, evoking the impression that the offshore campuses attract many international students. While none of the offshore campuses provides detailed breakdowns of their student populations' nationalities, most of their websites make similar claims such as Georgetown University Qatar, which boasts that its 'student population represents more than 50 different nationalities' (Georgetown University Qatar, 2022). Although in a global comparison, relatively few students migrate to Qatar and the UAE (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, n.d.), numbers stated during my interviews corroborate existing research indicating that internationally mobile students from the three cities' regional hinterlands, that is, from South Asia and other Arab states, do represent a significant share of overall tertiary students in Qatar and the UAE (Lane & Farrugia, 2022). For example, most internationally mobile students in Qatar come from Egypt, Yemen, Jordan, Palestine and India (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, n.d.). Both countries have very high inward mobility rates of students, in the UAE, for instance, it is at 49% (Lane & Farrugia, 2022, p. 21). According to a manager, most of them are seeking a Western degree in a place closer to their own home country than the campuses' main university and with lower costs involved. Many perceive the campuses as potential gateways to an international career although research on this effect remains inconclusive (Rensimer et al., 2021). For all the interviewed government administrators, attracting higher numbers of international students was an important goal because, for the governments, these students are supposed to contribute to a new higher-skilled labour force for their knowledge-based economy projects. So far,

they had only varying success. For example, in Dubai international students account for approximately 30% of the off-shore campuses' student population (Knowledge and Human Development Authority, 2017), while my respondents indicated that the ratio in Ras al-Khaimah is much lower.

The largest group of students serviced by offshore campuses in the three cities are non-citizen students from resident migrant communities. These are usually children of the non-Gulf Arab and South Asian families that constitute the middle-class labour force on which the Gulf countries' economies rest. They were essential for Qatar's and the UAE's economic development but are kept in a temporary status with little hope for naturalization and participation in the Gulf societies neopatrimonial welfare systems (AlShehabi, 2015). For the students from these marginalized transnational communities, studying for a TNE degree at an offshore campus can enhance their mobility by enabling them to seek opportunities in their families' home countries or elsewhere while at the same time allowing them to secure a job in the globalising parts of the local economy, thereby extending their contingent lives in the Gulf. Particularly, the offshore campuses of Pakistani and Indian origin like Amity University Dubai, as well as most offshore campuses in Ras al-Khaimah almost exclusively cater to this student population. For the universities, this student population represents a market segment they cannot attract to the home campus but that they can access through the infrastructures provided in the TNE gateway cities. Moreover, in the gateway cities, these universities face much less competition from more established higher education systems as they would in neighbouring countries and regions.

These observations on offshore campuses' student populations show overall similar tendencies between the three cities but also point to different positionalities. The different average tuition fees for offshore campuses (see Table 1) further indicate that each city services different student market segments. The most expensive degrees are in Doha's elite Education City, while offshore campuses in Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah overall provide more affordable options. The comparatively low costs in Ras al-Khaimah can be explained not only by cheaper operation costs in the northern emirate but also by the business strategies of the universities that aim to tap into a market segment of students that cannot afford the more expensive foreign degrees in Dubai.

The analysis so far showed how the strategies of local governments and internationalising universities come together in the urban spaces of Doha, Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah and produce gateway functions connecting universities and regional student markets. I now turn to the second gateway function showing that, despite the students' different nationalities and geographical biographies, their various motivations to study at an offshore campus complement the governments' motivations to produce a type of labour that national universities are too slow to develop and that are related to broader logics produced by the spatial dispersal of capitalism under the knowledge-based economy.

Gateway function two—Diffusion of hegemonic knowledge regimes

Providing 'world-class' higher education in the regional hinterland

Explaining the role of offshore campuses in their governments' developmental strategies, the interviewed administrators in Doha and the UAE were greatly influenced by hegemonic considerations about Western(ized) higher education models, equating them with 'academic excellence', 'world class' and globality. They not only hope this type of higher education to produce an adequate labour force for their internationalising economies but also to create start-ups and innovation for their knowledge-based economy projects. Thereby, so the story goes, their cities would achieve similar results as the often-referenced archetypical 'success stories' of knowledge-based economic development in Singapore or the Silicon Valley.

The programmes offered by offshore campuses from the Anglosphere, but also other internationalized English language campuses, signal quality to governmental decision-makers and students alike. Administrators in Doha explained that their government decided to utilize its vast financial resources to attract the 'best' universities, which in their reasoning pertained to prestigious US universities. Not only they were convinced that solely developing Qatari institutions would be too slow and not produce the desired type of labour, but many campus managers were as well: 'I guess

I would say that, without trying to be too chauvinistic about it, we're the world's greatest research universities in the United States' (offshore campus manager in Doha). A government administrator in Dubai explained that it seemed like a natural choice for a 'cosmopolitan' city like Dubai to focus on attracting universities with an international profile instead of merely expanding the already existing Emirati higher education system. The latter would neither be able to meet the needs of the resident migrants nor attract the international students the government perceives as necessary for Dubai's desired economic development path that builds on globally connected industries. The hegemony of Anglo-phone academia is also recognized by competing for offshore campuses from non-English speaking countries: 'When you say, let's say, UK degree or US degree, or even an Australian degree, students are attracted to this because they know what it is [...]' (offshore campus manager in Doha).

University rankings play a crucial role in reproducing this hegemony as they influence the decision-making processes of the three cities' governments and allow them to frame their cities as places providing high-quality education. Comparing 2020's average QS World University Ranking scores² of the offshore campuses in each city with the three top-ranked domestic universities shows that the former sharply increase the average ranking within each city: 81.9 for Doha's offshore campuses, 64.9 for Dubai's and 37.4 for Ras al-Khaimah's versus 11.9, 0 and 0, respectively. For all interviewed administrators, international rankings signal a form of reputation that their domestic higher education institutions lack but that they seek.

The reputable framing of the universities is oftentimes notwithstanding the actual quality of their offshore campuses but gives them leeway in exporting them. Although all governments have some form of vetting process in place, only Dubai has established its own accreditation scheme for offshore campuses. It requires them to become accredited either under the Emirati federal accreditation scheme or, when located in one of its TEZs, under Dubai's own. Doha and Ras al-Khaimah lack such an institutionalized framework, and they usually accept offshore campuses' degrees by virtue of their national and institutional origin and license them based on agreements with the respective accreditation agencies in their home countries.

While the national reputation of the offshore campuses' higher education system convinces the governments to import them, the institutions' territorial mobility blurs the 'globality' of their institutional brand and it becomes more local in the perception of the students (Vora, 2014). Thus, similar to other gateway functions (Sigler, 2013), TNE gateway cities facilitate the spatial dispersal of these systems and regionally amplify them in a hybrid way. As the offshore campuses' programmes mostly stem from marketized and neoliberalized higher education systems, this hegemony also has implications for regional economic development by producing a particular type of labour.

Producing mobile higher-skilled labour for globalizing economies

This second subfunction relates to the type of programmes offered and the job qualifications created. Despite offshore campuses' framing as cornerstones of economic diversification, and while some have specialized programmes leading, for example, to degrees in medical science, most are tied to already existing globalized economic sectors. Over half of all offshore campus students in Dubai, for example, are enrolled in business-related programmes (Knowledge and Human Development Authority, 2017), feeding into the city's internationally coupled service and trade economy. There are similar tendencies in the other cities, for example, the relationship between Doha's Texas A&M campus and the transnationally organized oil and gas industry (Al-Saleh, 2022). Most university managers echoed the government administrators in their explanations of how their graduates are crucial for the international trajectory the governments have chosen for economic development: 'We supply people who are able to think critically across the board, who are numerate and literate, and who know how the world works, and how the local and regional fit to the global' (offshore campus manager in Doha).

Despite promising academic excellence, the education of offshore campuses is often more technical and geared towards producing higher-skilled workers equipped with an international skill set instead of scholars. By providing their brand of higher education to regional students who cannot or do not want to travel to the location of the home

campus, offshore campuses in Doha, Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah produce complex geographies of simultaneous student mobility and immobility. This particularly regards the resident migrant students as their offshore campus education provides them student status and prepares them to work in the globalising parts of the respective economies but also for further onward migration. Thus, offshore campuses extend migrants' contingent lives in the Gulf but also reproduce their separation. Producing this type of higher skilled but contingent labour was part of the initial rationales of the governments for attracting offshore campuses as they wanted to ensure '[...] that students did have that access to something that was accredited not just here but abroad so that when they went back to their home country, or they went somewhere else, they had a degree from somewhere that was accredited internationally' (government administrator in Ras al-Khaimah).

Many offshore campus managers I interviewed similarly described their respective host cities as gateways between the regional and the global in their graduates' career paths. One manager, for example, explained how students originating from Dubai's regional hinterland move through the transnational campus network of their university, and thus receive access to an international job market. While most offshore campuses are not part of such a multi-campus network, they similarly promise their students international career mobility. A survey by Rensimer et al. (2021) recently found that students chose UK offshore campuses in the Gulf because they are aware of their own temporary status and, hoping for a career in a different country, expect their international degrees to provide them with higher degrees of mobility and thus job chances than universities originating from the region would.

Yet, producing these 'transnational subjects' (Vora, 2015) also creates contradictions. The offshore campus graduates' global orientation and qualification can have adverse effects on local economic development, as their alumni are often overqualified for the local job markets and rather prefer to pursue a career in a third country. One government administrator in Doha complained: 'They would rather go and do an internship in either Germany or Hopkins because of the career path that they have to go'. Similarly, a manager of an IT-focused Western offshore campus in Dubai explained that most graduates who want to focus on research and development leave for jobs abroad as Dubai is still a 'market of sales and marketing'. Moreover, the exceptional nature of higher education in offshore campuses, that is, teaching in English, lack of local accreditation, foreign socialization and creation of different social networks, provides graduates with the credentials to work in globalising parts of the local economies but creates a barrier to public sector employment and further socio-political integration.

CONCLUSION

The empirical analysis of this paper showed that in Doha, Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah, developmental strategies of governments converge with the internationalization strategies of universities and international degree-seeking students. As a result, the three cities emerged as TNE gateways with two interrelated functions and complementary positionalities. Guided by hegemonic perceptions of Anglophone higher education, the governments' strategies, resulting infrastructures and associated regulatory regimes encourage internationalising universities to open offshore campuses locally. Thereby, these cities connect regional students seeking international degrees to the respective higher education systems of the campuses. In a global comparison, TNE gateway cities in the Gulf are not major international student hubs in quantitative terms, but they enable the mobility of specific segments of regional student populations that would otherwise not have access to this type of higher education. Thereby, they amplify hegemonic higher education and labour qualification regimes and disperse them regionally. In doing so, the three cities play a crucial auxiliary role in embedding the regional hinterland in hegemonic knowledge systems and higher-skilled job markets.

The cities' TNE gateway functions as well as their concrete positionalities did not grow in a vacuum but are tied to already existing intermediary roles, decision-makers' perceptions of the cities' positionality and different TNE strategies—all of which arranged the three cities in a triadic ensemble. Doha is the most prestigious TNE gateway city with the highest ranked but also the most expensive programmes offered in Education City. Dubai, on the other hand, provides a larger range of more affordable TNE degrees, but in general mostly from mid-tier universities. Both

cities have significant numbers of internationally mobile students. While Doha's elite campuses also service a stable number of Qatari students, Dubai's campuses largely focus on international and resident migrant students. Ras al-Khaimah positions itself as the more affordable alternative to Dubai and almost exclusively services the resident migrant community in the UAE.

The paper contributes to the literature on gateway cities by conceptualising a particular type of gateway. As TNE gateway cities have become connectors of internationalising universities from hegemonic higher education systems and regional student markets, their functions are situated between the spheres of regional economic policies, globally uneven development, and the transnationalization of labour. Although Doha's, Dubai's and Ras al-Khaimah's TNE gateway functions are not immediately tied to specific global production networks, they interact with the cities' strategic connectedness to regional economic and transport networks. The TNE gateway functions are complementary to other economic gateway functions by connecting graduates to internationalising parts of their economies. Thus, TNE gateway cities in the Gulf should not be understood as regional centres of the knowledge-based economy but more as regional amplifiers that increase the strength of particular dimensions of globalising capitalism. In gateway cities for TNE, the tendencies of an emerging global higher education space and local governments' strategies to position themselves in the knowledge-based economy converge.

It is not possible to exhaustively conclude whether the positionality as TNE gateways was initially envisioned by the governments, or whether advertising themselves as international education hubs is a retrofitted strategy. Yet, these positionalities fit neatly into the geopolitical ambitions of the Gulf monarchies to increase their influence in the subregions of the Indian Ocean (Grare & Samaan, 2022). More research could investigate the political geographies in which the TNE gateways are embedded.

Moreover, more empirical research is required on the actual career trajectories of offshore campuses' alumni and the campuses' economic impact such as knowledge output or income effects. Such research could investigate the effect of TNE gateway cities on local and regional economies and how their TNE functions are tied to specific industry sectors and global production networks. Related to this, more fine-grained data are required on the nationalities of offshore campus students.

Finally, as both countries are stepping up their purported strategic objectives to 'Qatarize' and 'Emiratize' their higher-skilled workforces and higher education landscapes, the future of the cities' TNE gateway role is unclear. Recent developments such as the hitherto largest offshore campus in Doha, the College of the North Atlantic Qatar, rebranding and transforming into a Qatari institution (Kamel, 2022) are reflective of more long-term ambitions by the respective governments. So far, it remains an open question of how long these cities will continue their TNE gateway roles when offshore campuses turn into local institutions whose degrees are no longer accredited by Western universities. At the same time, we could well be witnessing a new regional centre emerging that operates more independently from a declining Western hegemony.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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ENDNOTES

¹See Hanieh (2018) for an in-depth analysis of the complex scalarity of political rule and government in the Arab Gulf countries.

²Often referred to, the QS World University Ranking annually ranks universities across the globe according to a specific scoring system.

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