

## Strengthening sustainability in the Coffee Value Chain: Maintaining Hail's Specialty Coffee as a Culinary Destination in Saudi Arabia

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### Abstrak

Hail adalah salah satu kota tertua di Arab Saudi dan pusat perdagangan di semenanjung Arab sejak abad ke-18, menjadikannya kota warisan terkenal di Arab Saudi dan salah satu area perdagangan penting hingga sekarang. Beberapa pengunjung lokal dan internasional yang datang ke Hail selalu menjadikan situs warisan sebagai magnet yang juga membantu pertumbuhan ekonomi kreatif baru di wilayah utara Arab Saudi; kopi spesial. Kopi spesial adalah tren utama saat ini, pilihan yang banyak diminati oleh anak muda di seluruh dunia, tidak terkecuali Arab Saudi. Persoalannya di sini apakah bisnis ini akan berkelanjutan dengan persaingan dari bisnis kopi global yang juga bermain di kawasan. Akankah ekonomi kreatif lokal berkelanjutan dengan pangsa pasar kopi lokal dengan budaya minum kopi Arab yang berbeda? Penelitian kualitatif ini menggunakan wawancara dengan para pelaku dalam rantai nilai kopi dan observasi yang diolah dari analisis wawancara di Hail pada Juni 2022. Kreativitas komunitas kopi lokal diharapkan dapat bersinergi dengan komunitas kopi global melalui penelitian, pelatihan dan pengembangan regional.

**Kata Kunci:** *Kopi Spesial; Keahlian Memasak; Ekonomi Kreatif; Pengembangan Pariwisata.*

### Abstract

Hail is one of the oldest cities in Saudi Arabia and a hub for trade in the Arabian peninsula since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, making it a notable heritage city in Saudi Arabia and one of the essential trading areas until now. Several local and international visitors who come to Hail always make the heritage site a magnet which also helps the growth of a new creative economy in the northern region of Saudi Arabia; specialty coffee. Specialty coffee is a leading trend today, a choice in great demand by young people worldwide, and Saudi Arabia is no exception. The problem here is will this business be sustainable with the competition from the global coffee business that also plays in the region. Will the local creative economy be sustainable with a local coffee market share with different Arabic coffee-drinking cultures? This qualitative research uses interviews with actors in the coffee value chain and observations processed from interview analysis at Hail in June 2022. The local coffee community's creativity is expected to synergise with the global coffee community through regional research, training and development.

**Keywords:** *Specialty Coffee; Gastronomy; Creative Economy; Tourism Development.*

### INTRODUCTION

Specialty coffee in Saudi Arabia is considerably crowded after work and at home. Specialty coffee is not only a trend that is very attractive to young people but further a recent phenomenon in making coffee a significant investment in creating a creative economy in the region. This is not only because of Arab culture itself in history as the most extensive consumer culture as coffee connoisseurs with

traditional Arabic coffee but moreover with the coffee community from young people who use coffee to convey their ideas and creativity.

Hail is one of the old cities in Saudi Arabia, which has a long history not only because of its culture but also because Hail became one of the trading cities in the past that connected several other cities around the Abbasid Caliphate to the Ottoman Empire. This made Hail known as one of the most important cities on trading routes in the past because some of the most influential people made Hail a famous city in Saudi Arabia. Among them are famous Arabian poets; Hatim Al-Tai lived before the prophet Muhammad in the spread of Islam in the Arab world; he was also the father of his friends Adi bin Hatim and Safana bint Hatim. He is a Christian and comes from the Tayy Arabian tribe. Stories of his extraordinary generosity have made him an icon for Arabs today, as the saying goes, "more generous than Hatim". There is a hill overlooking the town of Hail, which has a reproduction of the bonfire he lit to welcome his guests, which is lit every night and can be seen from the city centre. He is the ruler of his tribe. After Hatim's death, his son Adi became the ruler of Tayy. He also became a Muslim in 628 after meeting the prophet Muhammad and became one of the Companions of Muhammad's time.

Ha'il is a city in northwestern Saudi Arabia. It is the capital and largest city in the Ha'il Region, with approximately 605,930 (2018). Residents of Ha'il essentially had their previous income from agriculture, with grain, dates and fruit production very significant. Most of the kingdom's wheat production came from Ha'il Province, 60 to 100 km (37 to 62 mi); the northeast area consisted of irrigated gardens. Historically, Ha'il made his fortune from being on the Hajj camel caravan routes in the pre-kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which was previously the homeland of the previous Rashid royal family. Ha'il is renowned for the generosity of its people in Saudi Arabia and the Arab world, as it is the home of Hatim al-Tai.

## **METHOD**

The author conducted this research in Hail, Saudi Arabia. The research method is descriptive with a qualitative approach, examining the status of a group of people, an object, a set of conditions, a system of thought or a class of events in the present. Furthermore, descriptive research aims to make a systematic, factual and accurate description of the facts, characteristics and relationships between the phenomena studied. The primary data of this study were obtained from interviews with the coffee community from the coffee value chain in Hail, Saudi Arabia and direct observation of the researcher at the site in June 2022, interviewing some coffee entrepreneurs and baristas in Hail's coffeeshops with the open questionnaire, applying the discussion in coffee value chain's sustainability. The secondary data for this study were obtained from literary sources.

### **Tourism Development in Hail**

Like other cities in Saudi Arabia, Hail has an attractive attraction for tourism, both from nature to history and the modernisation of tourism that the government has developed since King Abdullah ibn Abdul Aziz Alu Saud. Hail has an exotic cultural heritage that makes many local tourists visit the city; Hail Rally was initiated in 2006 as the right place to do world-class car rallies. In addition, Jabal Samra is one of the landmarks of the city of Hail that can be seen from various parts of Hail and is one of the must-visit places for local and international tourists to visit Hail. Especially for families with resting places and play areas at the end of the highest site, there is the peak of Jabal Samra itself, which can be natural in the observation area at the height of the city of Hail.

In connection with the densest history of Al Qishlah Palace, which was built in 1943 by King Abdul Aziz Alu Saud and was used as a barrack which has 142 rooms in it and is located at a height in the city of Hail, which is currently one of the history of the third Saudi kingdom in the city of Hail. Not far from

there is Aarif Fort which was built in 1785 and still stands strong for the last 240 years, an area of defence in the past that is still maintained today. As for modern, family-friendly buildings, several malls such as Grand Mall and other plazas can be found; the breadth of gastronomy in Hail makes this city a competitive city for Buraidah in presenting food and beverages. Until now, Hail still has developments that will continue to be developed, especially in making interest points in local and global tourism. Likewise, with the development of gastronomy, such as third-wave coffee, which is currently a trend in Saudi Arabia.

### **Specialty Coffee as Gastronomy Growths in Hail Saudi Arabia**

Specialty coffee is given the development of the third wave of specialty coffee in Saudi Arabia, which has mushroomed since 2015 and entered the big cities in Saudi Arabia. Specialty coffee with a third-wave style has become a renewable reference from previous commercial coffees with traditional Arabic and Italian techniques (Maspul, 2022). When the coffee trend is busy, it becomes one of the culinary choices for artisans developing in several western countries. Specialty coffee is a term to describe the highest quality coffee, usually from specialty coffee plantations. The term was first used by Erna Knutsen in the Tea & Coffee Trade Journal in 1974, describing the best-tasting beans produced in a unique microclimate. According to SCAA - Specialty Coffee Association of America, coffee worth 80 or more on a 100-point scale is considered exceptional (specialty). Specialty coffee is the signature gourmet or premium coffee used in the global coffee community (Maspul, 2022a).

The specialty coffee is distinguished by its complete taste and having few or no defects; it is grown in an ideal climate of 800m – 2,100m above sea level. The unique flavour is a characteristic and a result of the composition of the coffee's soil. On the other hand, it is the fastest-growing segment of the coffee industry. Farmers, exporters, roasters, retailers, and equipment providers have formed several trade associations to promote and self-regulate this industry. These associations exist in coffee-consuming and producing countries. For example, specialty coffee has increased its market share in the United States from 1% to 20% in the last 25 years (Poltonieri & Rossi, 2016; Talbot, 1995).

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia has been one of the specialty coffee pioneers in the Middle East and becoming a hub for global specialty coffee; This is naturally reinforced when many Saudi students accomplished their graduates abroad during the reign of King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Alu Saud. Saudi graduates who have returned bring a new culture of enjoying coffee and add to the acculturation of Arabic coffee drinking culture, which has become local wisdom for a long time. The third wave, the new generation of specialty coffee, has become one of the references in helping to strengthen the local and regional economy. With the advancement of super-sophisticated production equipment, Saudi Arabia has become a hub in developing local economies in the Middle East (Maspul, 2022; Al-Abdulkader *et al.*, 2018).

Furthermore, to understand more deeply about gastronomy, it is necessary to strengthen everything associated with the art, practice, and study of the selection, production, preparation, presentation, and enjoyment of various foods and beverages. In addition, gastronomy includes the origin and history of the food consumed and its supply sustainably (Scarpato, 2003). The connection with specialty coffee is that previously Arabs had a long history; Saudi Arabia has a wide variety of culinary and gastronomy that is quite large in the Middle East, one of which is coffee which has become a legend until its current development. So if managed properly, coffee can have a broad impact and even prosper the people of Saudi Arabia; influence other nations by strengthening its sustainability in the social economy and the environment. Especially with the coffee value chain that has a positive impact on the global coffee community, which has grown for generations with the presence of unique third-wave coffee from its history to date (Maspul, 2022a).

Gastronomy is a strategic soft power for Saudi Arabia in supporting the sustainable economy

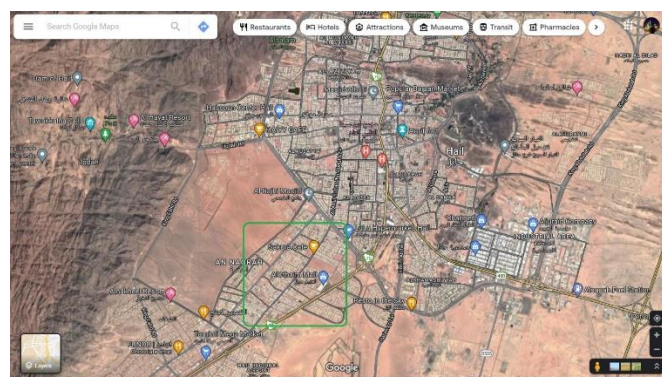
and food and beverage security. In addition, it considerably helps solve various kinds of national problems through culinary diplomacy, helps preserve the environment, and reduces the impact of climate change, especially in the sustainability of planting local foodstuffs, such as in the Jazan and Qassim regions (Lake *et al.*, 2012). This leads to eating habits, including culinary legends in gastronomy and how to handle and process them into food. Coffee has continued its Arab heritage as the primary source of coffee drinks in the historical Kaldi legend. Its acculturation with various commercial cultures and specialty coffees in Saudi Arabia is a new challenge in enhancing the creative economy and a sustainable economy with the national program of Saudi Coffee 2022, which is massively planted in the Jazan area and distributed locally to coffee value chains global. This will continue to be developed to achieve Saudi Vision 2030 (Maspul *et al.*, 2022).

At Hail itself, the bustle of gastronomy through the coffee value chain is very profound for its development. This is reinforced by the emergence of a new specialty coffee third-wave style in serving coffee and maintaining the sensation with the best taste and quality. Hail has a robust market related to this development, as seen from the many specialty coffee shops at various age levels during the day. It is coupled with several coffee shops with branches with a particular brand known in Hail. The role of social media is also very helpful in accelerating economic growth in the coffee sector, especially for the young generation who currently love coffee a lot as one of the latest trends to maintain their existence (Maspul, 2021a).

#### **Al Naqrah Avenue and Its Coffee Culture**

One of the unique things about the city of Hail is that several main roads become magnets for specialty coffee lovers and visitors from outside Hail. Here what is known to residents is Al Naqrah avenue, where more than 50 restaurants, specialty coffee shops and coffee roasteries are found next to each other. Al Naqrah avenue, spoken by locals with Negrah, is one of the culinary avenues in great demand by residents. Many young people gather in the afternoon until dawn at Al Naqrah avenue, warming up the coffee shops here and have become one of the leading destinations not only for residents but also visitors who visit Hail as a destination. Moreover, several other areas, such as Khuzama, Muntazah Sharqi and others, are also filled with specialty coffee shops that are still busy with night and daily visitors. It is undeniable that Hail is a reinforcement that the city of Hail is a city known for coffee tourism, just like other cities such as Riyadh, Jeddah and Khobar.

This not only excels the local creative economy in Hail but moreover makes it one of the fertile drivers of the global coffee economy. By strengthening the coffee community and making the coffee value chain a choice for young people to enter an international business with a local identity. Many coffee shops have been acculturated to local culture, which used to be Arabic coffee but is now accompanied by third-wave specialty coffee in their presentation, connecting renewable and sustainable business concepts for the future through trends. Furthermore, it is strengthened by the coffee value chain cycle in making each part of its chain solid and resilient.



**Fig. 1, Al Naqrah Avenue in Hail (source: Google Maps)**

## Coffee Sustainability in Hail

As initiated through the UN SDGs, sustainability will not be separated from the three bottom legs; economy, society and environment. Sustainability is essential in making something sustainable that is enjoyed at this time and for future generations. Coffee has become one of the most critical consumptions for any nation since the legend of Kaldi until today, which is also supported by global trends. However, the most important thing to becoming a world concern is that each coffee value chain has the right to be considered by all stakeholders because not all are sustainable. This is evidenced by the increasing prices of the supply chain in the upstream coffee, several single origins imported from South America, Southeast Asia and Africa are becoming challenges for downstream managers in distributing coffee. Especially those rated above +80 as the standard rather than the specialty coffee from the Specialty Coffee Association (Pulvis *et al.*, 2019; Maspul, 2021).

Another concern at Hail is that specialty coffee is developing very quickly, but will it be sustainable in the long term because of the global coffee issue, which is also one of the obstacles to its development. Even though Saudi Arabia has minimised this challenge with a program initiated through the Public Investment Fund succeeded, the Saudi Coffee 2022 program at the Saudi Coffee Company. The planting of thousands of Khawlani coffee trees in Jazan, which have been harvested previously, is expected to be able to tackle global coffee demand. Although it is not permanent in helping global coffee needs, it is hoped that it can meet local needs in Saudi Arabia, one of the world's largest coffee consumers. Making coffee value chains each have a good cycle in meeting the needs of consumers produced locally, such as in other producing countries such as Indonesia and Colombia.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Evaluation of Discussion in Specialty Coffee and Its Sustainability

The evaluation in question is an assessment process for the achievement of goals and disclosure of performance problems from an activity carried out to providing feedback for improving the quality of the performance of the further discussion. So the evaluation of the implementation of the sustainability socialisation activity was carried out in June 2022. The assessment aims to obtain information and draw lessons from experience regarding sustainability in specialty coffee through managing a program (outputs, benefits, and impacts) which in this case is incorporated in Coffee Sustainability. Programs from the Global Specialty Coffee Association at the foundation level, both from newly completed programs and those already functioning, are feedback for decision-making for further program planning. The main focus of the evaluation of the coffee sustainability program is illustrated by the relationship between the core evaluation variables; impact evaluation, efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, and sustainability. The following is an explanation of the core evaluation variables:

1. The effectiveness of sustainability in the coffee value chain shows the extent to which planned outputs, expected effects, and intended impacts can be achieved.
2. The relevance of current sustainability in the coffee value chain, assessing the extent to which the program places the problem as a top priority, especially from stakeholders' perspective, especially beneficiaries.
3. The sustainability of the coffee value chain is the maintenance or additional effect of positive changes after the socialisation is completed.

Meanwhile, through this socialisation, the author is an Authorised Trainer from the Specialty Coffee Association for Coffee Skills and Coffee Sustainability Programs, where the author uses the benchmarks of coffee barista skills and sustainability; incorporated from the coffee value chain in the company in analysing and providing suggestions for establishments that related in the field.

Furthermore, from the author's visit to Hail on 16 – 18 June 2022, the author prioritises time to visit coffee shops and meet the owner and baristas. It is also deeper in discussing the development of specialty coffee at Hail, where specialty coffee itself has become a promising creative business for young economic actors. It is reinforced by the current trend that has not ended in the last seven years, where coffee has become not only the largest commodity in the world but also a trend for young people to make the place a gathering place anywhere and anytime.

During the visit, the author discussed with baristas about coffee sustainability in four coffee shops, namely two branches at Sakura Café, Haiyy Café, and Damma Café. In addition, the author also discusses coffee sustainability with two cafe owners, Sendyan Café, who have been in local business activities for a long time and are one of the pioneers of specialty coffee in Hail, bringing the total respondents to twelve people. The intersectionality among the respondents, from the owners to baristas, is only the nationality and languages since all respondents are male. Most baristas come from overseas; they're getting the Arabic course before they go and position as a barista; here is quite critical since most of the Saudi community in Hail still sticks to Arabic as the national language and letting the overseas community who work in Hail learn and practice their Arabic language with the local.



**Fig. 2, Sendyan Café (Author Photo);**



**Fig. 3, Haiyy Café (Author Photo);**



**Fig. 4, Sakura Café (Author Photo)**

Baristas are the most critical actors in representing coffee in the coffee value chain; their role is to become the face of the creative economy itself. Some of the establishments that have been visited have two groups that play this vital role, including Saudi citizens as local residents who are participative in advancing the creative economy in Hail. Then the following groups are foreigners/expats brought in and given a role as a barista presenting gastronomy at the bar. The Baristas of the Saudi group, the creative economic actors in the area who have been invited to their discussion, explained that being a barista is one of the unique skills they want to fill their activities. At the same time, they are Saudi students or students. Some work six hours part-time and eight hours full-time, filling this void, depending on the contract they signed at the beginning. The expat baristas in this discussion are eight people from Uganda and two from the Philippines; they want jobs supporting their families in their country. They are also interested in working in Saudi Arabia because the name of this country has been included in the list for their community who work abroad to get the best income.

In the subsequent discussion, the author asked about the strength of the specialty coffee market in Hail, and each said that the power of the specialty coffee market is undeniable. It's not even stranger for the night to be a rendezvous that is heavily visited by locals of all ages, and at least they say they will spend half an hour to two hours in the place depending on the activity they are involved in. Even at Haiyy Café, a booking is required to enjoy coffee with a reserved table in advance; it continues from five in the afternoon until three in the morning.

It has become a habit that the night for people in Saudi Arabia is a time to gather with friends, relatives and family. Generally, they spend the night outside to enjoy time outside of busy work. A barista from Uganda said that consumers of morning coffee come before work time and then return with friends or family in the evening, so this illustrates that consumers are very active in consuming caffeine daily in Hail. Then he also explained that the potential of coffee in Hail is powerful and not only makes it a necessity for its consumers but also becomes a local community, especially on Al Naqrah street, which is very well known for its gastronomy both from food and café, making it the face of Hail's gastronomy. In addition, the development of the coffee community, which is expanding with the help of social media such as Snapchat, Instagram and Tiktok, has made coffee the best label in sustainable marketing consumed by the Hail and Saudi people in general. As also explained by the Ugandan Barista who has worked at Sakura Café for the last two years, he said that social media has become a significant need for friendship in coffee, such as the Swarm application, which explains the existence of its users who have consumed the coffee trend today.

Apart from that, the author invites discussion related to the sustainability of the social economy and the environment of coffee itself, seeking a more profound understanding of the importance of each role rather than the coffee value chain itself. Baristas from the Filipinos say they put workers first for their welfare and can bring their families to support them working at Hail. Several Baristas from Uganda said it was essential to appreciate the coffee itself to understand the taste of every single-origin brewed through a coffee filter generally requested by consumers in Hail. Another barista added that it is crucial to help coffee farmers, where now they can enjoy coffee with the money they spend daily on specialty coffee needs. He added that giving a percentage of the sales proceeds to the coffee farmers would be better.

The author then also discussed with the owners of Sendyan Café, where they explained that the interest of the people of Hail in enjoying specialty coffee was beneficial to the resilience of their café. And right now, they are thinking about how they can cut the coffee supply chain by opening their production and, at the same time, helping supply production for specialty coffee shops in Hail. As they explained, specialty cafes in Hail generally hold coffee supplies from coffee roastery production in Riyadh, Khobar and Jeddah. These three big cities are pioneers in the massive production of specialty coffee in Saudi Arabia.

Each of the respondents wanted the sustainability of specialty coffee in Hail, where they hoped they would be able to compete with specialty coffee in other big cities in the Middle East. So here, the barista is expected to provide the correct information in conveying what specialty coffee is and how specialty coffee can be sustainable in the future for the consumption of the world's crowded coffee community. One of the baristas also thinks that the government's assistance in promoting exceptional specialty coffee in Saudi Arabia through the Saudi Coffee 2022 program can stimulate the curiosity of people who still don't understand specialty coffee.

### **Sustaining the Specialty Coffee in Hail**

As described briefly through several discussions that the author considers essential to be presented here and delivered to beneficiaries through the conversation and observation, in taking a

solution in conveying sustainability which is incorporated in the three bottom legs (economic, social and environmental) in the Hail coffee value chain, it is necessary to take the following points:

1. Making the Coffee Value Chain Interlinked and Sustainable

In strengthening a sustainable economy from the coffee economic cycle, a strong and sustainable chain is needed that focuses on the journey of coffee from farm to cup. In this case, Hail has a limited number of coffee roasters that are the core of coffee production. So many specialty coffee shops still take coffee roasters from outside Hail. In addition, specialty coffee at Hail can also collaborate directly with farmers in making sustainable farming apart from cultivating their own coffee but also supporting the welfare of farmers; furthermore, it will be a tremendous impact in bringing the name of farmers to the specialty coffee market in Hail directly. In addition, benchmarking roasting production at Hail can reject quality measures that are branding for local roasters, not only distributed in Saudi but will also bring the name of the production benchmark in roasting to a global level.

2. Making a sustainable Hail community in Specialty Coffee Skills and Knowledge

With so many specialty coffee communities in Hail, it is possible to open a knowledge market through selling skills and knowledge from specialty coffee itself. This can be strengthened by the existence of a coffee academy that can be continued with the Global Specialty Coffee Association (SCA) and the Coffee Quality Institute (CQI) as the fundamental basis for developing in-person barista techniques, roasters and other sustainable coffee knowledge. In addition, it can be enlivened with specialty coffee competitions such as coffee roasting, barista skills and brewing through friendly competitions from and within the local specialty coffee community in Hail, which will foster early and sustainable social activities for coffee.

3. Empowering Jazan Coffee as Local Wisdom

The Khawlani farm in Jazan can be used as a magnet for the development and enhancement of specialty coffee in Hail because apart from having an attractive tourist destination where specialty coffee also will have a future sustainable movement in the development of local wisdom in Hail. Through the Saudi Coffee 2022 program, Hail should be able to work with his community in bringing Jazan coffee to be lively produced in Hail and its surroundings. Empowering specialty coffee grown in the form of Al Khawlani's Arabica in Jazan makes it possible to take on stakeholders from upstream farms through farmers to specialty cups at consumers' hands in Hail.



Fig. 6, The three bottom-legs interconnection in sustaining the specialty coffee in Hail

## CONCLUSION

Hail in particular and in Saudi Arabia in general. Looking at the hectic development of specialty coffee in Hail, where it is not impossible in the future, Hail can become one of the meccas for specialty coffee in Saudi Arabia. This is by seeing the enormous potential and support from local communities



coupled with the Saudi government's program to revive Saudi Coffee 2022. However, it needs to be strengthened in every part of the coffee value chain to be sustainable and play an active role in making specialty coffee sustainable in the community. This is done by strengthening the three core elements of sustainability; social and environmental economics, where the leading player is the owner as a strategic plan influencer for business development and sustainability in specialty coffee products which are the core. In addition, the barista represents the products developed in the community in Hail itself. Need knowledge and skills that are constantly honed and motivated so that the sustainability cycle in this coffee value chain continues to be developed and sustainable.

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