The idea of nation building is a continuous process. A visitor is struck by how intensely the UAE’s leaders are pursuing the creation of a progressive and open society, one where education is a paramount concern.
A fundamental premise of modern-day nation building is this: a country’s wealth, especially accruing from its natural resources, must be put in service of economic growth.

On the face of it, that premise seems to capture the obvious. What else would a country — in this case, the United Arab Emirates — do with its enormous revenues from pumping out 2.1 million barrels of crude oil a day, confident in the knowledge that its proven oil reserves of nearly 100 billion barrels should last, well, around 150 years. The UAE’s oil reserves constitute 10 percent of the world’s known supply. And natural gas? The country has some 60 percent of it.

By “country” one means, of course, the Emirate of Abu Dhabi — when it comes to oil and gas. It is by far the biggest oil producer in the UAE, controlling more than 85 percent of total oil-output capacity, and possessing more than 90 percent of its crude reserves. Nearly 92 percent of the country’s gas reserves are also located in Abu Dhabi and the Khuff reservoir beneath the oil fields of Umm Shaif and Abu al-Bukhoosh ranks among the largest single gas reservoirs in the world.

The aforementioned obviousness notwithstanding, the premise of contemporary nation building has an important predicate — which is that a country needs strong investment vehicles for channeling its wealth. And in this age of galloping globalization, it isn’t enough simply to invest. It is important to invest wisely. It is equally important to invest widely.
That is clearly what the emirate of Abu Dhabi is doing. One has only to look around. There are vast residential developments being raised. There are commercial plazas on the horizon. There are new shopping malls sprouting. There is Abu Al Shuoom island, the site of a proposed $10 billion project featuring homes, offices, parks and entertainment facilities.

And there are enormous areas of greenery all over the capital. Abu Dhabi is quite possibly the greenest city in the region. This is no accident or happenstance. City planners, taking their cue from Founding Father, the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, have sought to expand verdant zones.

They have also sought to expand Abu Dhabi’s cultural dimensions. Saadiyat Island will be home to the $400 million outpost of New York’s fabled Guggenheim Museum, the Los Angeles-based architect, Frank Gehry, is designing.

Also on Saadiyat Island, Zaha Hadid is creating the Abu Dhabi Performing Arts Center. It will be part of a five-structure complex, the others being the Guggenheim; the Classical Art Museum; the Maritime Museum; and the Sheikh Zayed National Museum.

Even the Louvre wants in. Negotiations are under way for the French icon to have a presence in Abu Dhabi.

It would be a safe bet that Abu Dhabi will be the cultural hub of the region, just as Dubai has become a financial and transportation hub. Abu Dhabi, after all, is the repository of a vast history — and history drives progress.