



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge

Knowledge for All

Workshop 5
GRM 2022

Women in the GCC Socio-economic Contributions to the Urbanisation of Gulf Countries: Status, Challenges, Aspirations.

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Abstract

In light of achieving the UN SDGs¹, the global quest on accelerating gender parity in the workplace and at the same time the longing for nationalisation in the workforce in the GCC, this workshop aims at investigating the role of women and their socio-economic contributions to urbanisation across time.

The increasing demand in urban development and construction activities in the Gulf Region, especially in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, promise new opportunities for integrated work cultures. However, women account for 11% of employees in architecture and engineering job families, a lower share than other related STEM industries.² In the Arab region the gender gaps in the labor force are

¹ United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

² WEF (2017) Accelerating Gender Parity in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

considerably larger³.

Historically women have been the “building masters” of desert habitations, such as the *Bait*⁴. Made of intricate sustainable material choices (animal fibres) and traditional weaving techniques such as *Al Sadu*⁵ (in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and UAE) the work of the Bedouin women is now recognised as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The unprecedented level of urbanisation and settlement in the Gulf region necessitates an examination of the many variables that must be addressed to create inclusive urban desert cultures in the future. Learning from the active role of women in Desert Cultures of the past could inspire solutions for increasing future challenges and opportunities for and through women to combat climate change through meaningful socio-culturally and ecologically sound economic contribution to secure future sustainable development in the Gulf region.

To achieve the desired net-zero urbanisation in deserts and drylands of the GCC according to many Gulf countries^{6,7} strategic development plans, this workshop will take SDG11 (sustainable cities and communities) and the SDG5 (equity integration of women into the workforce) as a focus to discuss the status, challenges, and aspirations for integrated future urbanisation of desert cultures in the GCC.

Stakeholders from various disciplines (urban planning, architecture, design, engineering, operation, risk management, insurance, sociology, policy making, culture, education, etc.) are invited to investigate opportunities how genuinely inclusive and integrated urban practices may be possible under aspects of:

- Workforce and Employment
- Entrepreneurship and Innovation
- Arts and Culture
- Values
- Education and Skills

Overall we will be investigating women’s socio-economic contributions through the lenses of academia, industry and governance on how to implement the existing and develop the next generation of women in sustainable urban development for future cities in desert cultures.

Description and Rationale

³ World Bank (2017)

⁴ In Arabic the meanings of *bait* include “house”, “tent”, “chamber”, “apartment”, “toilet”, “sanctuary”, “ark”, “container”, and “palace”. From the semitic noun *byt*. Gzella, H. (2018).

⁵ <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/traditional-weaving-of-al-sadu-01586>

⁶ KSA net zero strategy by 2060 <https://www.saudigreeninitiative.org/>

⁷ UAE net zero strategy by 2050

<https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/environment-and-energy/climate-change/>

Objectives and Scope of Workshop

Objectives:

Why does the Arab world need more women in and for sustainable urban development?

For the first time in human history do cities house more than half of the global population. By 2050, city dwellers are predicted to account for 66 percent of the worldwide population. This is a significant demographic shift that presents both opportunities and challenges for local governments.

Women account for 11% of employees in architecture and engineering job families, a lower share than other related STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) industries including 23% of those related to ICT and mathematics, and for less than 30% of world's science researchers according to WEF (2017) on "Accelerating Gender Parity in the Fourth Industrial Revolution". Considering historical developments, women played a key role in the development of the built environment, from the role as the "building masters" of the *Bait*⁸, to leading communities and families while men were out on sea during the pearling season to commissioning prominent buildings, women have contributed not only socially but also economically to the urbanisation of the Gulf countries.

Today, 80% of the population in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) lives in urban areas, a figure that rises to 98% in the case of Kuwait and 99% in the case of Qatar.⁹ This is a significant demographic shift that presents both opportunities and challenges for local governments. There is a hidden aspect to this urbanisation: according to certain estimates, women – particularly young women – account for the bulk of those relocating to cities. There is evidence that urbanisation can help women grow in terms of gender equality, such as greater legal protections, increased tertiary education enrollment, more formal profession possibilities, and a relaxation of gendered societal norms. Despite this, women continue to be excluded from key discussions and decisions regarding how cities are run.

Women's perspectives are too often disregarded in policy development, implementation, and accountability systems as in many cases they are underrepresented in local government. In the UAE however, more than 66% of governmental workforce are women¹⁰, while around the world, women account for less than 5% of mayors and 20% of city councillors.¹¹

⁸ In Arabic the meanings of *bait* include "house", "tent", "chamber", "apartment", "toilet", "sanctuary", "ark", "container", and "palace". From the semitic noun *byt*. Gzella, H. (2018).

⁹ Dumortier, B. (2016). The Gulf Cities: A Composite and Evolving Urban Model. IEMed: Mediterranean yearbook, (2016), 51

¹⁰ <https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/social-affairs/women>

¹¹ Women and the city – Women deliver. (2019, March 10). Women Deliver. <https://womendeliver.org/2019/women-and-the-city/>

The unprecedented level of urbanisation and settlement in the Gulf region necessitates an examination of the many variables that must be addressed to create inclusive urban desert cultures in the future. Learning from the active role of women in Desert Cultures of the past could inspire solutions for increasing future challenges and opportunities for and through women to combat climate change through meaningful socio-culturally and ecologically sound economic contribution to secure future sustainable development of the Gulf region.

Overall we will be investigating socio-economic contributions through the lenses of academia, industry and governance on how to implement the existing and develop the next generation of women in sustainable urban development for future cities in desert cultures?

Scope

Through contributions from Academia, Industry and Governance this workshop shall gather a multi-focal perspective on aspects associated with closing the parity gap as well as discussing inclusive work practices for women in future urbanisation processes of the GCC. The following aspects and sub-aspects shall we discussed, but are not limited to:

Workforce and Employment

- Gender balance, Contribution to organisation leadership, non traditional work models, digitisation of workplaces, rural and urban community connection;

Entrepreneurship and Innovation

- Sustainable development, Creative economy support, digitisation How to develop the next generation of women sustainable development and city leaders?

Arts and Culture

- Cultural programming, Cross cultural exchange, best practises of inclusive desert cultures, contextualisation, from the local to the global, place making, culturally relevant education program;

Values, Education and Skills

- Public sector as role model in shifting norms, gender sensitive communication, connecting education to creative industry, practise based approaches in education.

Contribution the Workshop will Make to the Field of Gulf Studies

This workshop has the potential to take Gulf Studies in exciting new areas, especially in terms of women's engagement in the future Gulf workforce. It addresses a pressing regional development issue and provides a timely forum for discussion of the issue's ongoing challenges and implications, bringing together researchers from a wide range of disciplines, including culture, contemporary architecture and design, planning, economics, government and political studies, and gender and cultural studies.

As exemplified in a previous pilot symposium on “Inclusive Urban Ingenuity”¹² at EXPO2020 (Dubai) , the workshop's dynamism and interdisciplinary nature will be further enhanced by a major focus on highlighting past knowledge on women's contributions to the urbanisation of desert cultures, as well as current professional case study presentations, in order to encourage a dialogue across a diverse range of positions and paradigms, from academic researcher to speakers from the cultural infrastructure industries, as well as built environment industry representatives, government officials, and other disciplines involved.

Furthermore, this will be the first time at the GRM that a workshop solely focused on this topic will be offered (although there have been a small number of related workshops, including a workshop in 2011 on the role of business women, 2016 a workshop focused on the science and technology development in the Gulf and a 2017 workshop focused on women in migration workplaces more generally). The workshop is also pertinent, given recent transformations in cultural and urban production as a result of shifting regional connections, such as Saudi Arabia's recent massive investment in urban construction projects. As a result, it is expected that the proposed workshop will introduce a new set of speakers and research interests to the GRM's remit.

Draft of Workshop Agenda with Potential Paper Topics

List of expected paper topics

Critical interventions are among the kinds of papers that the workshop directors like to attract.

Learning from the past, listing status and challenges of the present, and looking to future aspirations, the workshop aims at assessing the following chronological themes, among others in the following fields of implementation (Academia, Governance, Industry):

- I. Urban Desert Culture, Innovation and Entrepreneurship
 - Vernacular Ingenuity: Cultural practice of women contributing to sustainable urban development, placemaking and built environments.
 - Global/National/Cultural and other forms of the identity of urban desert culture formations in the Gulf under aspects of female contributions.
 - Critical traditional analytical paradigms, including postcolonialism, cultural globalisation, cultural imperialism, and the centre-periphery thesis on women in desert cultures.
 - Ingenuity for Future Cities: Ideas from/about and/ OR with ingenious women in sustainable urban development

- II. Urbanisation Processes: Planning, Design and Management
 - Status Quo of female integration in the workplace in the AEC industries

¹² The Inclusive Urban Ingenuity Symposium acts as a catalysing platform for supporters of inclusivity in architecture, engineering, construction, urban planning, sustainable design and building, design, and allied professions. The symposium will bring together experts from academia, industry and government discussing various views on the topic and explore experiences and opportunities for further development to achieve ingenious Urban Inclusivity. The activities take place at the Australian Pavilion, the Saudi Arabia Pavilion and the Youth Pavilion during Expo 2020 Urban & Rural Development Week and address the theme week question 'How do we live and grow in harmony with our planet?'

- Challenges and opportunities of STEM graduate pathways into the workplace
- The realities and challenges of developing regional global urban projects
- Inclusive Gulf architecture and urbanism
- Theories of inclusion and exclusion in globalised urban space
- The lived experience – anthropological/ethnographic explorations of contemporary
- Gulf reality alongside and within these cultural projects
- Improvement assessment in governance and industry to achieve Sustainable
- Development Goal SDG11 combined with SDG5

III. Urban Policy, Governance and Education

- Future agenda and topics to be solved on various stakeholder levels: policy, government, industry, tertiary education.
- New and emerging models of public/private partnership underpinning culture of urban supra- and infrastructure development in the Gulf
- Educational reforms to be carried out: curricula change needed?
- Future needs of the labour markets in the built environment: fit for women?
- Employability of graduates given the changing nature of jobs?
- Design of scholarships and mentoring programmes for “women in future desert culture cities”?
- Future diversification of the labour market and equity planning in the workplace needed?

Publication Plan

Edited Volume

The workshop directors are planning to compile an edited monograph containing contributions of the GRM meeting 2022 “Women in the GCC” and the previously held symposium on “Inclusive Urban Ingenuity” in 2021. The symposium was brought together through the Saudi Arabia Pavilion, The UAE Youth Pavilion, and the Australian Pavilion at the Expo 2020 along with collaborating academic institutions such as Effat University, Saudi Arabia, Zayed University, UAE and Griffith and Bond University, Australia.

An edited volume is envisioned with *Springer Publishers*, or an equivalent publisher, accompanied by a website and online collection of case studies and contributions.

Acknowledgment of and Agreement with the Workshop Director and Publication Guidelines

We acknowledge and agree to the workshop Director and Publication Guidelines:
Adina Hempel, Riyadh 29 Nov 2021

Daniela Ottmann, Gold Coast on Kombumerri Country 29 Nov 2021

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