The Gulf region ranks among the most urbanized in the world, with an average of 84% percent of the population living in urban areas (this figure increases to 91% excluding Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Iran). Furthermore, the cities of the Arab Gulf coast - though not normally counted among the world’s major metropolises in terms of population size - are currently setting global benchmarks in urban growth rates and city development projects. The region’s distinctly urban identity is hardly a new phenomenon. For centuries before the advent of oil the coasts of both sides of the Gulf waters were dotted with prosperous port cities that served as vital entrepôt and transnational hubs within the Indian Ocean trading network. These ports were cosmopolitan centers of human contact and cultural exchange, much like the Gulf’s skyscraper cities of the 21st century.

And yet, academic studies on Gulf urbanism and urbanization are relatively new to the literature of both Gulf studies and worldwide urban studies. Gulf cities have only recently started attracting the scholarly attention of historians, anthropologists, geographers, political scientists, architects, and others, just as they have been capturing the imagination and interest of the world at large - from investors and real estate developers to tourists, consumers, and sports enthusiasts. While spatial contexts and dynamics are increasingly incorporated into analyses of transnationalism, globalization, migration, and national and cultural identity formation in the region, the Gulf city itself is also becoming a subject of scholarly interest, with topics like city formation, the political economy of urban development, spatial politics, spectacular architecture, heritage production, and city branding becoming popular subjects of inquiry.

The objective of AUK’s inaugural Gulf Studies Symposium is to draw attention to this new, exciting, and varied research on Gulf cities, and to cultivate an inter-disciplinary dialogue on diverse issues related to urbanism and urbanization in the Gulf and Arabian peninsula (including the GCC states, Iran, Iraq, and Yemen). This three-day symposium brings together leading local, regional, and international scholars presenting current and innovative research on the space, society, and culture of Gulf cities.

The Gulf Studies Symposium is open to the public, though you must register in advance to attend as seating is limited. To register, please go to: www.auk.edu.kw/cgs/gss

The GSS will take place in the AUK Auditorium (Liberal Arts Building).
DAY 1: FRIDAY, MARCH 22

9:30-10:30 am: Keynote Speech: Dr. Nelida Fuccaro (School of Oriental and African Studies)

SESSION 1: GULF CITIES

10:30 am-12:30 pm: Gulf Cities in History

This panel highlights the international significance of Gulf port cities before oil by examining their historic position within regional and global trading networks, labor and property markets, and transnational migration flows, offering a unique longue durée perspective to Gulf urbanism.

Chair: Mark Speece (AUK) / Discussant: Gholamreza Vatandoust (AUK)

- Lawrence Potter (Columbia University), “The Rise and Fall of Port Cities in the Persian Gulf”
- Isa Blumi (Georgia State University), “A Relational History and the Emergence of Modern Gulf Urban Politics, 1855-1907”
- Matthew Hopper (California Polytechnic State University), “Globalization, Trade, and Labor in Nineteenth Century Muscat and Basra”
- Fahad Bishara (Harvard University), “Where the Land Met the Sea: Debt, Capitalism, and the Transformation of the Gulf and Indian Ocean, c. 1800-1900”

12:30-1:30 pm: Lunch

1:30-2 pm: Special presentation by Rob Carter (University College London, Qatar), “The Origins of the Gulf Towns”

2-3:30 pm: The Politics of Urban Development

This panel analyzes the various political and economic structures, agents, and technologies of power that have underpinned the planning and development of Gulf cities from the advent of oil until today, making new theoretical interventions in the bourgeoning discourse of Gulf urbanization.

Chair: Nizar Hamzeh (AUK) / Discussant: Farah Al-Nakib (AUK)

- Michael Herb (Georgia State University), “The Urban Growth Machine in Gulf Cities”
- Ala Al-Hamarneh (University of Mainz), “Corporate Transit City? Re-Thinking Urban Governmentality in Gulf Cities”
- Omar AlShehabi (GUST, Kuwait), “Rootless Cities: Migration, Citizenship and Urban Commodification in the GCC”

3:30-3:45 pm: Coffee Break

3:45-5:15 pm: The “Other” City

This panel considers the experiences of Gulf cities that were relatively excluded (in some cases until only recently) from major state-led oil modernization processes, and examines these cities’ more recent transformations alongside their changing relationships with neighboring cities.

Chair: George Irani (AUK) / Discussant: Hesham Al-Awadi (AUK)

- Sebastian Maisel (Grand Valley State University), “The Limits of Urban Development in Qatif”
- Marc Valeri (University of Exeter), “The Sohar Paradox and the ‘Omani Spring’: The Transformation of a Provincial Town into an Industrial Hub”
- Victoria Hightower (North Georgia College and State University) “The Rhetorical Relationship of Abu Dhabi and Al-Ain, UAE”
SESSION 2: SPACE

9-10 am: Spaces of Higher Education

This panel contributes an interesting spatial analysis to the increasingly popular scholarly subject of higher education in the Gulf by examining the role of the college campus as both a social space of everyday experience and as a globalized space of transnational labor migration.

Chair: Kathryn Kleypas (AUK) / Discussant: Christopher Ohan (AUK)

- Mary Ann Tétreault (Trinity University), “Leaving Home? University Education in the Gulf”
- Neha Vora (Lafayette College), “Knowledge Economies as ‘Expert Camps’: Toward a New Ethnography of Labor Migration in the Gulf”

10-11 am: Making and Using Public Space

This panel examines the creation, use, and management of urban spaces regularly considered “public”—namely parks, streets, and squares—and their historic and contemporary place in the Gulf city as expressions of nature, celebration, and (on occasion) violence.

Chair: Rafiq Bhuyan (AUK) / Discussant: Pellegrino Luciano (AUK)

- Asseel Al-Ragam (Kuwait University) and Sandra Al-Saleh (Equilibrium, Kuwait), “Dis-Located Expressions of Nature: Kuwait and its Public Parks”

11-11:15 am: Coffee Break

11:15-1:15 pm: Rethinking Residential Spaces

This panel takes a multi-disciplinary approach to re-examining residential spaces in Gulf cities and the social experiences and relationships engendered by the architecture, planning, and governance of neighborhoods (historic inner-city districts, modern suburbs, and gated compounds).

Chair: Mohammed Satti (AUK) / Discussant: Rawda Awwad (AUK)

- Muhannad Albaqshi (Kuwait University), “Alternatives to Kuwait’s Suburban Life”
- Marike Bontenbal (German University of Technology in Oman), “Residential Satisfaction and Place Identity in Gulf Cities’ Traditional Neighborhoods: The Case of Mutrah, Oman”
- Stefan Tobias Maneval (Freie Universität, Berlin), “The Architecture of Private Space in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia”
- Zia Salim (San Diego State University), “Spaces for Transnationals: Housing Compounds in Bahrain”

1:15-2:15 pm: Lunch

SESSION 3: SOCIETY

2:15-4:15 pm: Strategies of Urban Control

This panel investigates the use of space in state strategies aimed at governing and controlling urban populations, including the construction of physical boundaries, the creation of spatial representations of
rule, and the militarization of space. The papers also address the social relations and everyday experiences produced and reproduced by these spatial tactics.

Chair: Raymond Farrin (AUK) / Discussant: Nelida Fuccaro (SOAS)

- Arbella Bet-Shlimon (Harvard University), “Space and Control in a Contested Gulf City: The Fight for Kirkuk since the 1950s”
- Ahmed Kanna (University of the Pacific), “A Toxic Mixture: Militarized and Ethnocratic Urbanism at the Intersection of Neoliberalism and the War on Terror”
- Mona Damluji (University of California, Berkley), “The Walls of Baghdad: The Spatial Normalization of Sectarian-Based Segregation”

4:15-4:30 pm: Coffee break

4:30-6:30 pm: Artistic Practices in the City

This panel analyzes how artistic practices in the city counteract prominent narratives of sectarianism in Gulf societies, reconfigure transnational migratory practices, and express political dissent. It also examines how states incorporate works of art into official strategies of urban reconstruction.

Chair: Sharon Lawrence (AUK) / Discussant: George Bauer (AUK)

- Caecilia Pieri (Institut Français du Proche-Orient, Beirut), “The Painted Blast Walls of Baghdad: Between Art and Alienation”
- Anahi Alviso-Marino (Université Paris 1-Sorbonne), “When Walls Talk: Political Dissent through Street Art in San’a, Yemen”
- Amin Mughadam (Université Lyon 2), “Iranian New Migratory and Transnational Trends in Dubai: The Case of Iranian Artistic Practices”
- Kristin Soraya Batmanghelichi (Columbia University), “Naked Modesty and the Reformation of Statues in Post-Revolutionary Iran”

DAY 3: SUNDAY, MARCH 24

SESSION 4: CULTURE

9-10:30 am: Cultural Strategies of Urban Development

This panel examines the “Bilbao effect” on Gulf cities—that is, the production of cultural projects like museums, theaters, and art galleries designed by “starchitects” targeting global audiences—and its implications for local societies and regional dynamics.

Chair: Hala Al-Najjar (AUK) / Discussant: William Anderson (AUK)

- Yasser Elsheshatwawy (United Arab Emirates University), “Urban Development and Culture: The Case of Abu Dhabi”
- Katherine Hennessy (American Institute for Yemeni Studies, San’a), “All the World’s a Stage Designed by Zaha Hadid: The Architecture, Economics, and Cultural Implications of the GCC’s New Performance Spaces”
- Andreas Jozwiak (Trinity University), “Urban Development in Doha: The Museum of Islamic Art and the Msheireb Development Scheme”

10:30-10:45 am: Coffee Break
10:45-12:15 pm: **Official vs. Popular Identity Construction in Heritage**

This panel explores the tensions between dominant/state constructions of national identity and tradition as expressed in (often globalized) museums and sites of cultural heritage, on the one hand, and more popular and multi-faceted experiences and interpretations of social belonging/exclusion, on the other.

*Chair: Lisa Urkevich (AUK) / Discussant: Ildiko Kaposi (AUK)*

- Sarina Wakefield (Open University), “Abu Dhabi and Cosmopolitan Heritage”
- Kathryn King (Georgetown University, Qatar), “The Heart of Doha? The Narrative of Qatari National Identity Offered by the Msheireb Urban Development Project”
- Thomas DeGeorges (American University of Sharjah), “Challenging Sanctity: The Visitor’s Quandary at Kuwaiti Museums Dedicated to the Iraqi Invasion and its Aftermath”

12:15-12:45 pm: Special presentation by **Marjorie Kelly** (American University of Kuwait), “Public Art in the Gulf”

12:45-1:45 pm: Lunch

**SESSION 5: ROUNDTABLES**

1:45-2 pm: **Film Screening - “These are the Trucial States” (1958)**

2-3:30 pm: **Roundtable 1 - The “Image-ability” of Gulf Cities**

This roundtable discussion addresses the role of the “image” in the making of modern Gulf cities. The presentations will explore two specific examples of image-making in particular geographic and temporal contexts (the UAE in the early oil period and Kuwait today), after which all participants will be invited to discuss and debate current themes related to the “image-ability” of Gulf cities such as identity formation, branding, and spectacular architecture.

*Moderator: Caterina Sabbatini (Sciences Po/AUK)*

- Todd Reisz (Yale University), “Project Trucial States: Foundational Images of the UAE”

3:30-5 pm: **Roundtable 2 - Exporting the Gulf Urban Model**

This roundtable discussion addresses the diffusion of Gulf urbanity (commonly known as the “Dubai model” or “Dubai effect”) on other Arab and global cities. After presentations on this topic in relation to Egypt and Yemen, the floor will be open to all participants to discuss whether there is an “exportable” Gulf urban model, and the effects of both direct intervention and indirect influence on the receiving cities and their societies.

*Moderator: Ali Alraouf (Qatar University)*

- Khaled Adham (United Arab Emirates University), “Modes of Urban Diffusion: The Gulf in Egypt”

5-5:15 pm: Closing Remarks: **Farah Al-Nakib** (AUK)

The photo exhibition “Public Art in the Gulf” by Marjorie Kelly (AUK, photographer and curator) and Marcella Kulchitsky (AUK, exhibition designer) will run from 22-24 March in the Liberal Arts Building lobby.