SEMINAR

SORBONNE UNIVERSITY ABU DHABI

URBIS

Integrated Socioeconomic, Political, Environmental, and Urban Dimensions of Al Hudayriat Island's Development, Abu Dhabi



DATE

8 October 2026

1:30 pm - 6:45pm

VENUE

Robert de Sorbon Amphitheatre

SUAD Campus, Al Reem Island

ABOUT THE SEMINAR

Abstract

This multidisciplinary seminar explores the integrated socioeconomic, sporting, environmental, political, and urban dimensions shaping the development of Al Hudayriat Island, bringing together institutional actors, academic researchers, planners, environmental experts, and international partners. Al Hudayriat Island presents a unique opportunity to redefine the relationship between urban development, ecological integrity, and cultural identity in Abu Dhabi, constituting a new urban laboratory that can contribute to a more resilient, lively, and future-oriented development model for Abu Dhabi. The region is a strategic ecosystem, with over 3,000 hectares of prime coastal land, combining sports and tourism perspectives with landscape and well-being-based approaches to urban planning and climate adaptation. Through two thematic sessions, the seminar aims to promote dialogue on strategic objectives, environmental impacts, sociological profiles of users and visitors, integration of sports and tourism infrastructure, and the dynamics of mobility and spatial flows that shape the site.

PARTNERS

PROGRAMME

Session 1

Sport, Tourism and Socioeconomic Development: Building Al Hudayriat's Identity

The first session explores Al Hudayriat Island through its emerging identity as a major destination for sport, leisure and tourism in Abu Dhabi. Bringing together local institutions and international academic perspectives, the session examines users and visitors, sporting practices and events, tourism development, territorial identity and the socioeconomic opportunities and challenges associated with the transformation of the island.

14h -14h15	**Opening**
14h15 - 14h35	**Al Hudayriyat within Abu Dhabi's Culture and Tourism Strategy** **Dr. Zaki Aslan Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi** This presentation address the island's place within Abu Dhabi's wider cultural and tourism landscape, including its heritage, evolving identity, destination development and opportunities for community engagement and socioeconomic development.
14:35–14:50	**Surf Territories: Social Practices and International Perspectives** **Prof. Christophe Guibert – University of Angers (online)** Socio-spatial practices associated with surfing, user profiles, appropriation and comparative perspectives from European and international contexts.
14:50–15:05	**Surf Parks and Surf Territories** **Researcher Jules Raimondo – University of Angers (online)** Socio-spatial practices associated with surfing and surf parks, user profiles, appropriation and comparative perspectives from European and international contexts.
15:05–15:20	**Sport, Tourism and Sustainable Territorial Development: International Experiences** **Dr. Stéphanie Crabeck – Lab-réseau ULYSSE / HEPH Condorcet** Sport, events, tourism itineraries and territorial development, drawing on international experiences and research on sustainable tourism territories
15:20–15:35	**Tourism, Place-Making and Local Development: Experiences from Colombia** **Luis Miguel Merlano Hoyos – Former Ambassador of Colombia to the UAE / URBIS Master Student** Selected Colombian experiences illustrating the relationship between tourism development, place-making, local identity and territorial transformation.

PROGRAMME

Session 1

15:35 - 16:05

Round Table

Who is Al Hudayriat for? Sport, Tourism, Identity and Socioeconomic Development
Moderator: Dr. Clio Chaveneau

Discussion addressing the island's current and future users, tourism potential, social practices, events, accessibility, identity and the socioeconomic implications of its transformation into both a major leisure destination and a new residential environment.

16:05 – 16:35 Coffee break

Session 2

Planning Al Hudayriat: Environment, Climate Adaptation, Smart Cities and Urban Governance

The second session examines Al Hudayriat as an urban and environmental planning challenge. Structured around three complementary perspectives — understanding the territory, planning its transformation, and governing its future development — the session brings together environmental expertise, urban development and public planning perspectives, academic research, smart-city approaches and a critical assessment developed by URBIS students.

I. Understanding the Territory

16:45–17:00

Artificial Islands, Coastal Transformation and Climate-Related Risks

PhD Walid Mekni / Researcher – Sorbonne University
A geographical and scientific perspective on artificial islands, coastal transformation, environmental impacts and climate-related vulnerabilities.

II. Planning the Territory

17:00–17:15

Urban Planning, Liveability and Climate Adaptation: Abu Dhabi's Strategic Perspective

Olivia Duncan – Department of Municipalities and Transport Abu Dhabi
The role of urban planning, liveability, landscape and climate adaptation in guiding new urban developments within Abu Dhabi's broader strategic framework.

17:15–17:35

Assessing Al Hudayriat Master Plan: Landscape, Climate Adaptation and Social Inclusion

URBIS Master Students – Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi
Ana Paola Stumpf and Muna Alharbi
Studio Sustainable Landscape + Urban Planning, Climate Adaptation and Social Inclusion

III. Smart Cities, Innovation and Urban Governance

17:35–18:05

Digital Innovation, Heritage and Smart Governance for Sustainable Urban Development

Dr. Imane Bennani & Dr. Youssef El Ganadi– International University of Rabat (UIR)
Urban strategic decisions – Cases of Moroccan governance and planning;
Smart cities, BIM/CIM and Digital Twins

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Session 2

8:05–18:40	**Extended Round Table** How Should Al Hudayriat Grow? Balancing Development, Environmental Limits, Climate Adaptation and Smart Governance Moderator: Benjamin MotteBaumVol
18:40–18:45	**Closing Remarks**

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

We look forward to welcoming you

VENUE	Robert de Sorbon Amphitheatre, Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi, Al Reem Island, Abu Dhabi
REGISTRATION	Free entry, registration required · sorbonne.ae/events
ORGANISERS	Dr Simone Safe, Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi
LANGUAGE	Event in English · Open to the public

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