

Estidama and Abu Dhabi 2030: social and cultural sustainability?

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Abstract:

This research will discuss findings of the final project assigned to students of Zayed University enrolled in the course *Gulf Cities: Fragmented, Polycentric, Sustainable*. We will attempt to fill a gap in the current literature on Gulf cities, by exploring the relation between Abu Dhabi's residents, their rapport to the city's ever changing built environment and the feasibility of implementing the social and cultural goals of *Estidama* or sustainability. *Estidama* and its four pillars: economic, environmental, social and cultural were introduced as part of Abu Dhabi's Urban Plan 2030. While the economic and cultural goals of sustainability have been specifically addressed in the Plan, the social and cultural goals, we consider, call for further investigation. We argue that if Abu Dhabi's population experiences the same tensions documented in other Gulf cities, specifically the conflict between residents' culture and traditions vis-à-vis their westernized built environments, then the implementation of *Estidama's* cultural and social goals might prove challenging. The project attempts to answer the following questions: *Do residents of the city experience the same apprehension towards modernization encountered elsewhere in the Gulf? How can Abu Dhabi attain cultural sustainability taking into account the overwhelming western influence and the consequent risk of westernization of this Arab/Muslim city? How can the city achieve complete social sustainability given the challenge of receiving and accommodating a significant number of expatriate workers?* The research will present findings of interviews conducted to a snowball sample of local and expatriate residents of the city.