

المعهد العربي لإنماء المدن
Arab Urban Development Inst.

FIRST ISSUE
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BY THE ARAB URBAN DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

AUDI'S TRANSFORMATION

MEET OUR PRESIDENT

H.H Prince Dr. Faisal Bin Ayyaf talking about AUDI's aspirations.

READ ABOUT OUR NEW STRATEGY

Get to know AUDI's Vision & Programs.

SEE HOW ARAB CITIES ARE ENGAGING IN INSITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION

MUDUNUNA

TABLE OF CONTENT

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IN THIS ISSUE

1
EDITORIAL

3 What Is Mudununa?

2
INTERVIEWS

6 Meet AUDI's President

3
URBAN INSIGHTS

12 Cities United: Collaboration Paving the Way for a Better Future

15 AUDI's 2025 Strategy: A Comprehensive Institutional Transformation to Support the Development Efforts of Arab Cities

16 AUDI'S New Work Environment: A New Team Reflecting AUDI's Ambitions

4
CITIES IN ACTION

24 An Ambitious Institutional Transformation for More Effective Urban Development: Including Oman's Spatial Strategy

26 Municipal Cooperation Mechanisms in Morocco and Lebanon: Towards Efficient Municipal Resource Management.

30 The Cities and Villages Development Bank in Jordan: A Vital Tool for Municipal Financing.

34 In an Initiative that Aims to Improve Coordination with Urban Projects: Riaydh sets a Specialized Center for Infrastructure Management and Development.

38 A Decade of Participatory Budgeting in Morocco.

5
OUR NEWS

40 AUDI Roadshow

50 Partnerships

56 AUDI's Participations

EDITORIAL

WHAT IS MUDUNUNA?

By Dr. Jihad Farah - Editor in Chief of MUDUNUNA

MUDUNUNA is AUDI's new bimonthly newsletter. In addition to our website and social media channels, MUDUNUNA is an outlet that shares news about the activities of our institution. However, it is also much more than this. It is the promise of a platform that will grow to resonate the voices of Arab cities and share their stories and experiences. This is possible due to the unique advantage of MUDUNUNA: it is supported by AUDI's network of **650+ cities in the Arab region**. These cities represent not only our main audience but also the potential contributors to MUDUNUNA's content.

MUDUNUNA is one of the initiatives of the AUDI Strategy 2025. As with the strategy's other initiatives, it aims to encourage regional exchange, knowledge sharing, and more broadly cooperation between Arab cities. In fact the strategy, and subsequently AUDI as an institute, advocates exchange and collaboration as a way of pooling practical and local knowledge to empower cities, helping them respond to the rising challenges they are facing: rapid urbanization, massive migrations, high vulnerability to climate change, limited institutional resources and prerogatives, etc.

For these, the strategy sets a threefold approach in designing its initiatives and outputs. First, they should respond to the priority concerns of Arab cities. Second, they should be easy to appropriate by Arab cities; they focus more on practice than on theory and are communicated in a simple and accessible language and tone. Third, they cover the voices and experiences of the widest geography possible of Arab cities, making them relevant to diverse contexts.

All these aspects are reflected across the issues of MUDUNUNA. Each issue focuses on a particular theme. The themes cover priority concerns of Arab cities, as identified in a survey with 90 municipal representatives from around the Arab region. Hence, beyond news on AUDI and its activities, a major section of MUDUNUNA is dedicated to projects, initiatives and on the cities addressing challenges within the respective theme in the region. Each issue also consists of interviews with relevant mayors and municipal representatives, and integrates contributions by recognized experts with experience in the subject matter and in Arab cities.

In this introductory issue one however, the structure is slightly different. As we feel there is the need to provide the reader first with a comprehensive overview of AUDI and its recent transformation, the interview and several articles are here dedicated to this purpose. Therefore, in alignment with the pattern of a pioneering issue, the first section of the MUDUNUNA newsletter presents an interview of AUDI's President, **HH the Mayor of Riyadh Prince Dr. Faisal Bin Ayyaf**. He discusses the importance of exchange and knowledge sharing between Arab cities, his aspirations for AUDI, and the role he sees AUDI playing in the regional and global landscape of urban development actors. Following up on the ideas of exchange and knowledge sharing, Dr. Neila Akrimi, member of the AUDI Advisory Board and Head of VNG's international department, sheds light on inter-city cooperation in Europe and the Arab region as well as the role cities play today in the face of global challenges. In his article, our Director General Dr. Anas AlMughairy discusses the transformation of AUDI as well as the highlights of its 2025 Strategy. This is followed by an additional piece highlighting the iconic new interior of AUDI's symbolic office space, a bold transformation reflecting the institute's dynamic team.

Keeping in line with the theme of transformation, this issue of MUDUNUA tackles in a number of short articles, the theme of municipal institutional transformation in the Arab region. We see how Oman is overhauling its local administration structure for enhanced efficiency. We discuss different ways of addressing the issue of cooperation between neighboring municipalities in Morocco and Lebanon. We consider the original roles played by historic municipal institutions like the Cities and Villages Development Bank in Jordan, as well as by very recent ones like the Infrastructural Projects Center in Riyadh. We look into the introduction of participatory budgeting in the Arab region through the case of Morocco, as a pivotal tool of public engagement. This issue of MUDUNUNA also illustrates the active engagement of AUDI's team with Arab municipalities, primarily through the regional roadshow, it has spearheaded over the last 4 months.

I hope my words here have captured your interest and that you enjoy reading this and future issues of MUDUNUNA. More importantly, I hope that you do not hesitate to write back to us with any comments and suggestions. We also welcome anyone who would like to join us in this venture as one of our contributors or correspondents in the region.

INTERVIEWS

Meet AUDI's President

PRINCE DR. FAISAL BIN ABDULAZIZ BIN AYYAF

An Interview

His Highness Prince Dr. Faisal bin Abdulaziz bin Ayyaf
Mayor of the Riyadh and President of AUDI, Chairman of a number of boards of directors of companies and institutions, and a member of several boards of directors for Saudi's largest projects. His Highness specialized in the field of city planning and management, where he obtained a doctorate degree from the University of California Berkeley, and a master's degree in urban planning from Harvard University and additional master's degree in urban design from Columbia University in the United States. His practical and research interests focus on aspects of development and city management, and he has many recognized engagements and seminars in the same field.



Photo: His Highness Prince Dr. Faisal bin Ayyaf

The title of AUDI's newsletter, MUDUNUNA, reflects the Institute's conviction regarding the crucial role cities play in addressing contemporary global challenges. It also expresses AUDI's belief that Arab cities can contribute to this effort. Based on your experience as an urban planner and a mayor of a major Middle Eastern city, what would be in your point of view the main challenges faced by cities and municipalities? And what is the specificity of Arab cities in this regard?

Cities today, are facing various multiple challenges. These challenges differ between one city to the other. However, some of these challenges are common to all cities, particularly Arab cities.

The main challenge faced by cities is that of time, or rather, the lack thereof. The process of urban development is complex and requires time. Cities' life expectancy is far longer than that of humans. Cities that are renowned today as remarkable and successful were those that were built over centuries, and established their identity through a palimpsest of experiences. Ideally, we should develop our cities along the same process. Unfortunately, we do not have this luxury; the ambitions of our leadership and the expectations and needs of our residents are pressing, and ever growing. We need to speed up the journey; what has been achieved elsewhere in centuries, we are necessitated to do it in decades.

Another major common concern for Arab cities is that of the relationship between growth and development. A few years ago, international organizations announced that, for the first time in history, urban dwellers represent a major share of the global population. The speed of urbanization in Arab cities is among the most remarkable in the world.



Photo:Riyadh, ©2023

With such rapid urbanization, the relation between growth and development manifests as a conundrum, raising the question regarding which ought to be prioritized over the other. With more people moving to cities, city leaderships are forced to take short cuts and use growth as the motor for development. However, true commitment to a better quality of life and to the enhancement of the living conditions of urban residents should empower us to reverse the equation. In order for growth to adequately serve the people, and create a positive impact, development needs to precede growth. This, however, is a monumental challenge.

Both the Arab Towns Organization (ATO) and the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) focus on cooperation among Arab cities to raise their capacity to deal with urban challenges. As member of ATO's Executive Board and President of AUDI, how do you conceive the role of these institutions? What are the challenges and foreseeable horizons in this regard?

Despite the differences between Arab cities , they share many common characteristics and face many similar challenges. Usually the journey of dealing with these challenges and with development is a long one with several phases. Here lies the most important role of organizations like the Arab Towns Organization (ATO) and Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI). They help to shorten this journey. They do so through focusing on the shared challenges and approaching these challenges as an opportunity for common learning. They develop cooperation, complementarity, and collaborative projects, so no city is isolated in its journey. Cities can benefit from shared experiences and the lessons learned elsewhere and progress towards the milestones other sister cities have already achieved. This helps minimize the needed efforts and resources, including the most important resource, time.

Additionally, non-profit organizations such as AUDI play an important role in creating optimal conditions for dialogue and building bridges between cities. Dialogue and exchange between cities is crucial in facilitating the process of development in them. Even though it may seem tedious at times, these common efforts in dealing with shared challenges are certainly more valuable and impactful than if each city were to toil through individual effort. Hence, AUDI focuses on sharing successful experiences for dealing with different types of challenges, so it may serve other cities and reduce the repetition of processes and projects that have shown to consistently fail. This is in addition of course to other numerous tasks and responsibilities that AUDI undertakes, not in the least its role in advocating for the recognition and protection of the cultural and heritage characteristics that contribute in defining the unique identity of each Arab city.

How do you conceive of the importance of municipal institutional and technical transformation to raise their capacity to deliver its services? How does this impact urban development?

Decision makers in cities today are usually quite aware of the difference between the contemporary challenges that cities are facing and those that the same cities used to face in previous development phases. With rapid technological change, globalization, and new types of transportation, residents' expectations have transformed considerably, and are more pressing than ever before. Even the responsibilities and roles of these decision makers have had to change. This is why institutional transformation in municipalities is gaining importance.

There is a need for a renewed system and process that can adapt and respond to the changes in context and meet residents' expectations. This system needs to be well structured and equipped with the right tools to deal with emerging challenges, as well as ready to work hand in hand with the population to raise the quality of life in their cities. City management should live up to what the present era brings in terms of challenges and opportunities and be sensitive to what the city and its population are going through. There is no doubt that residents of Arab cities today are quite different from those of earlier times, and thoughtful institutional transformation is the right way for city administrations to bridge the gap between them and their residents.

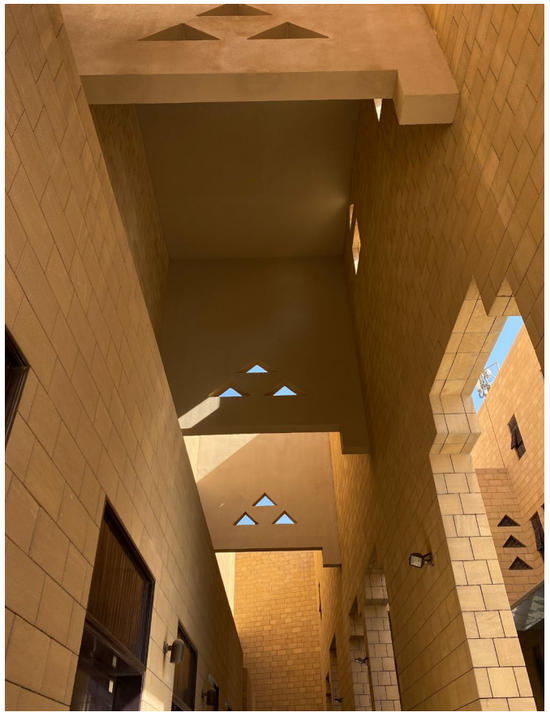


Photo:Riyadh, ©2023

"AUDI has a pivotal role to play in facilitating the knowledge exchange and sharing best practices among its network of 650+ cities. This, with no doubt, will be one of the most crucial focus areas where AUDI will support Arab cities in the near future".

Technical transformation is also highly needed in urban administrations today. One should, however, always remember that it is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a tool to enhance the quality of the urban services provided to the population and to raise the impact of municipal efforts – and this is in fact the core role of city administrations.



Photo: King Salman Park, Riyadh. ©2023

In light of the growing complexities in urban development, municipalities are making significant strides in enhancing their technical and administrative expertise, particularly in the realm of city management. What are the key priorities and initiatives undertaken by the Riyadh Municipality in this domain?

Having a successful team is at the core of the success of any city administration. Such a team works behind the scenes, dealing with challenges and driving the process for sustainable development that serves its residents and visitors, as well as remains attentive to their needs. I mentioned earlier the changing conditions that all cities are facing today, and anyone can easily recognize the diversity, complexity and severe impacts of these challenges. In this context, as anyone who works in city administration knows, it is difficult to foresee the next challenge. Todays challenges are different than those of yesterday, but also than those that will come tomorrow. In these constantly changing conditions, it is challenging to successfully deliver with teams that are primarily comprised of personnel with a few, highly specialized skills. In fact, it is notable that successful development experiences are those that are led by a team of people with high managerial and intellectual capacities. These are people that have the capacity to adapt their way of thinking and approach to respond to complex challenges, irrespective of the technical domain these challenges relate to.

Hence, in the municipality of Riyadh, we focus today less on specialized technical aspects and more on developing the leadership, managerial and intellectual skills of our team to reach innovative solutions. And this should be the focus of human resources administrations' work.

In conclusion, what message would you like to convey to the readers of the first issue of the AUDI newsletter, MUDUNUNA?

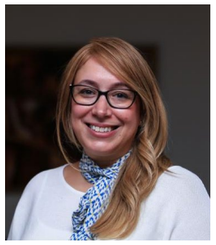
I am very happy with the transformations that AUDI has seen in the last two years. These transformations enable the Institute to better respond to what cities and municipalities are facing, and position itself to address their expectations.

I would like to emphasize the vital role that AUDI could play in supporting cooperation between Arab cities to build solid relations between them and maximize the benefits of shared learning for cities and their residents.

I would like to thank you for this interview regarding the horizons of municipal development today, and wish that the readers of Mudununa enjoy and benefit from the ideas and informative content the newsletter offers on municipal and urban development issues. I hope that this newsletter will become a useful reference for urban development in Arab cities. All my best wishes to AUDI in fulfilling its mission in supporting municipalities and cities in the Arab region.

URBAN INSIGHTS

COLLABORATION PAVING THE WAY FOR A BETTER FUTURE



Dr. Neila Akrimi - (VNGI)
Director Strategies and Networks,
VNG International, The Hague.
Chair UCLG-CIB, Barcelona.
Founder and Director VNG international Center for Innovative Local Governance, Tunisia.

In recent years, the context in which international development cooperation occurs has changed profoundly. Major development challenges are intensifying, with some have been-addressed, whilst new ones are constantly emerging. These include the climate crisis, conflicts, and a weakening of democracy. Regional and international city collaborations play a vital role in addressing these issues and have become key players in the implementation of solutions that seek to improve the quality of life worldwide.

By 2050, close to 70% of the world's population will live in urban areas, putting cities, and regional, governments in an critical position to address global issues. This has been recognized in the SDGs, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and other international agendas.

In fact, the trend of shared governance responsibility has increased over the past decades, with more central governments transferring their powers and responsibilities to authorities at the subnational level. Thus, municipalities, regions, and their associations are responsible for delivering relevant public services, and considering People, Planet, Peace, and Partnerships. In order to effectively fulfill their tasks cities, Local and Regional authorities (LRGs)' and Local Government Associations' (LGAs) are engaging in capacity reinforcement processes to build internal competences that will allow them to serve higher purpose of public service. To this regard development cooperation between cities, LRGs and their associations, commonly designated as "decentralized cooperation", has proven to

be an effective model for building capacity, and helping address global challenges. Collaborations between cities go beyond financial flow transfers, as they provide a common platform for knowledge sharing, the exchange of practices, as well as opportunities for creating multi-stakeholder partnerships with civil society, and the private sector capable to shaping policies that aim to improve contemporary challenges.

" Collaborations between cities provide a common platform for knowledge sharing, the exchange of practices, as well as opportunities for creating multi-stakeholder partnerships with civil society, and the private sector capable to shaping policies that aim to improve contemporary challenges".

Various global development strategies such as the SGDs, and the 2030 Agenda have confirmed the need for well-planned and -managed cities and regions. In 2015, the international community recognized urbanization as a major trend with the inclusion of SDG 11 “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” in the 2030 Agenda. This was also acknowledged through the “localization” of all the other SDGs to ensure their effective implementation. Since the adoption of these global agendas, local and regional governments globally affirm cities, and regions can connect their local plans to the international strategies to better engage local stakeholders in their implementation.

Arab cities are not isolated from these global trends. They are increasingly involved in international city collaborations and contribute valuable input to these platforms.

Organizations such as the Arab Towns Organization (ATO) and its’ affiliate institution Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) foster collaboration between Arab cities by furthering cooperation through the adoption of plans that guide activities and services based on their economic, social, cultural, and environmental characteristics. Such collaborations are set to gain even greater prominence in the future, as the region is confronted with shared challenges. AUDI’s commitment to working with Arab LRGs and national governments to create and achieve the vision of balanced, well-planned and sustainable communities will contribute greatly in shaping the future of the urban growth, and creating thriving communities around the Arab region.

With the continuing trend of decentralization and the importance of resolving challenges at the regional level, will the function of regional and international city collaborations for the Arab cities only become more pivotal in governance decisions as they have the ability to impact the lives of many citizens and pave the way toward a better, more sustainable future.

AUDI's 2025 Strategy

A COMPREHENSIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS OF ARAB CITIES



Dr. Anas Almughairy
He is the director general of AUDI since 2022. As urban planning and governance expert, he has contributed significantly to research in the field. He successfully led multiple programs and organizations in their establishment phase. His expertise covers municipal organization, strategy, and regional economic development.

The Arab Institute for Urban Development is a pioneering institution with specialized expertise and a regional scope of work. Since its establishment, it has gone through various phases of work and research production in various development fields. In the fourth quarter of 2022, under the guidance of His Highness, the Mayor of Riyadh and the Institute's President, the Institute formulated an ambitious plan for comprehensive transformation based on core principles: to respond to the needs of Arab cities through urban policy research, capacity development, and knowledge exchange; to produce impactful and highly reliable outcomes that contribute significantly to urban development; and to become a global reference institution for Arab city development.

The institutional transformation plan included four elements:

- Developing an institutional strategy that encompasses the Institute's programs and projects with an ambitious vision, targeted objectives, performance indicators for evaluation and monitoring.
- Restructuring administrative and financial procedures within an operational structure that supports task distribution and responsibilities to achieve the strategy.
- Attracting technical expertise with outstanding qualifications and practical experience in the Institute's specialized areas.
- Building partnerships with cities, universities, and influential international organizations in shaping the urban agenda and city development.

The Institute embarked on designing its strategy simultaneously with the recruitment of specialized expertise, which resulted in the completion of the Institute's strategy and its presentation to His Highness, the President during the first six months of 2023. The strategy was designed to reflect the development needs of cities and municipalities through the involvement of more than 90 Arab cities, 130 experts, and the analysis of the orientations of six international reference organizations in the Institute's specialized fields. As a result, the strategy was distributed into three core action lines, which later formed the program departments of the Institute: Urban Policy Research Program, City Support Program, and Partnership Program. Each program included 5 to 7 major initiatives, totaling 17 initiatives. A detailed description was prepared for each initiative, including its objectives, expected outputs, implementation mechanisms, timeline, proposed budget, performance indicators, and monitoring.

"AUDI formulated an ambitious plan for comprehensive transformation based on core principles: to respond to the needs of Arab cities through urban policy research, capacity development, and knowledge exchange".

On the other hand, the Institute designed a new operational structure that supports strategy implementation and task distribution, responsibilities, job descriptions, and the qualifications required for each position. Jobs and benefits were redistributed based on the tasks and performance indicators for each position. In parallel with these efforts, the Institute engaged with municipalities and international and regional organizations, resulting in the signing of several partnership agreements based on joint initiatives and projects with entities such as King Saud University, the Project Management Institute (PMI), the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG), and more. The Institute is currently working on expanding its partnership list through an introductory round of its strategy, which includes visits and work meetings with more than 93 municipalities, organizations, and universities in over 15 countries.

In conclusion, the Institute believes that there are extensive opportunities for participation in the development of our Arab cities, based on what we have heard from municipalities and experts who participated in the Strategy Survey regarding the future role that the Institute can play in supporting development efforts. The team will focus in the coming period on implementing the initiatives and projects of the strategy within the core areas of urban policy research and city support and partnerships, targeting municipalities and specialists in urban development and the general public. The outcomes of these programs will reflect the Institute's leadership's commitment and the support of Arab cities' needs within the Arab Cities Organization.

The Arab Urban Development Institute

STRATEGY 2025

VISION

"A leading institution that contributes to a better global urban future through innovative partnerships and collaborative learning"

MISSION

Support municipalities and cities in the Arab region in addressing their urban development challenges, through credible and impactful policy research products and training programs and by instigating a culture of collaboration and collective learning.

URBAN POLICY RESEARCH

- Arab Cities Urban Info Hub
- Arab urban development barometer
- Urban Development Reports and Briefs
- Arab cities Urban Living Lab
- Newsletter
- Podcast

URBAN NETWORKING

- Network brokering
- Arab European cities dialogue
- Mayor talks
- Arab Urban Development Award

CAPACITY BUILDING

- Executive Program
- Advisory and Knowledge Sharing
- Training and Capacity Development

A NEW WORK ENVIRONEMNT THAT INSPIRES INNOVATION

To realise its vision, as expressed in its **Strategy 2025**, The Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) believes there is a need to push for a reformed work environment. Seeking impact and credibility, this reformation is based on collaboration and the encouragement of innovation. It is necessary for the work environment to respond to this new orientation as well as to the contemporary and rapidly evolving demands of managing a regional institution that works in the dynamic field of urban development.

The Headquarters of the Arab Urban Development Institute is located in the Diplomatic Quarter of Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia. The Diplomatic Quarter itself boasts several remarkable attributes with its distict urban landscape and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, standing out as a unique neighbourhood in the city of Riyadh.

The AUDI headquarters, designed in 1998 by the esteemed **Architect Nabil Fanous** (1940 - 2017), was conceived as an architectural icon, embracing a unique approach to post-modernism in the region. The building celebrates the amalgam of geometric precision and organic form, showcasing profound reverence for the environment, and standing boldly enveloped in an elegant pearl white exterior.

This architectural masterpiece was generously bestowed by the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The architectural formation of the building eloquently translates the principles of openness, transparency, and practicality into its design. It seamlessly integrates the elements of natural light and verdant environmental features throughout its interior and surrounding spaces, creating a truly remarkable atmosphere. Upon entering the main lobby, the building's architecture offers a harmonious blend of monumentality, with its high ceilings and imposing columns, and human-scale design where users and visitors enjoy vistas of lush indoor and outdoor greenery.



Architect: Nabil Fanous
(1940 - 2017)



Photo: AUDI outside the building, ©2023

Photo: AUDI outside the building, ©2023



Photo: AUDI inside the building, ©2023

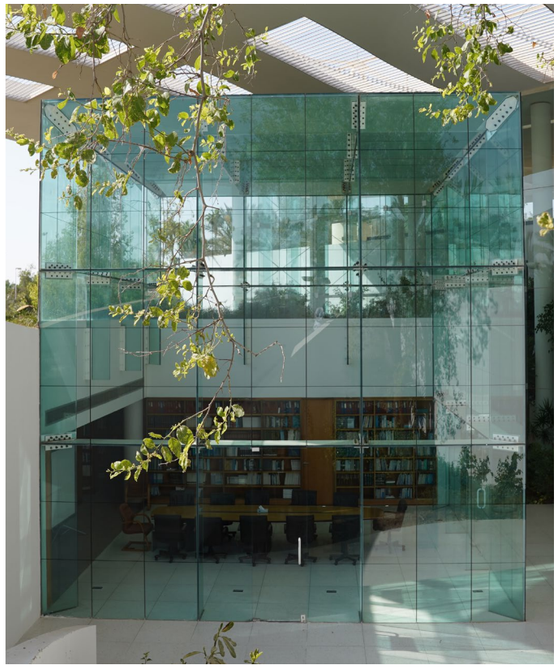


Photo: AUDI outside the building, ©2023

The Building,
A Striking Glass Cube

The building is organized into three functional wings, each serving a unique purpose: the main wing houses work-office spaces, while the theater wing hosts events and lectures, and the institute's exclusive library wing showcases a remarkable touch of creativity.
The AUDI library, designed as a striking glass cube standing tall at a height of 9 meters, embraces the visitor in natural light, and creates a fitting ambience for a readers retreat. The library itself is home to a historic rich collection of publications and literature dedicated to urban affairs and local development. All of these elements are located under one roof providing complete coverage to the three wings while also covering the building's external lobbies throughout the day, where one can sit in its shade during hot times.

Notwithstanding the building's architectural appeal, the institute's new leadership keenly observed that the existing interior workspaces did not fit today's business needs. Consequently, renewing the work environment stands as a paramount imperative in the institute leadership's quest for a transformative and effective institutional reform. In pursuit of optimal efficiency and seamless collaboration among team members, AUDI embraced a modern design ethos characterized by simplicity and the Open Plan Concept. These deliberate considerations have significantly reduced the bureaucratic trappings of traditional institutional setups, expediting information transfer and interdepartmental communication. This, in turn, fosters a participatory and efficient-decision-making process.

The Workspace,
An Open Plan Office

Learn more about AUDI's team.

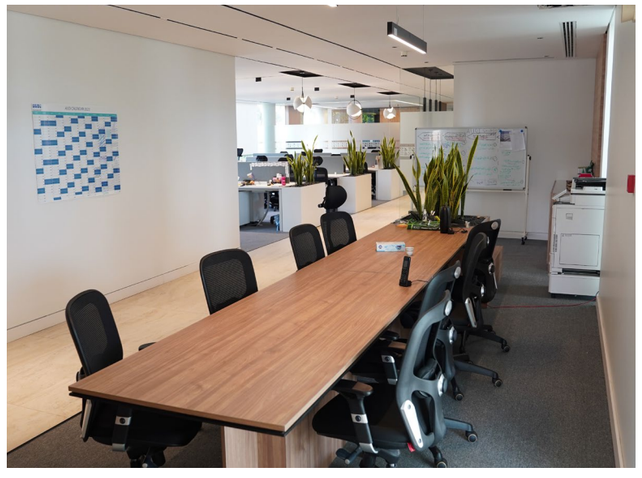
The workspaces include many interactive meeting rooms of different sizes catered to a diverse needs. These spaces intentionally break free from the confines of administrative hierarchy, encouraging innovation by facilitating the direct presentation and discussion of ideas with the team.

Moreover, the layout thoughtfully situates the workspaces, housing urban planning experts, adjacent to the glass façade, allowing an abundance of natural light to permeate the area while affording breathtaking views of the verdant outdoor spaces. It is also worth noting that the building has accessibility measures that render its highly inclusivity and welcoming to people with disabilities, further enhancing its overall appeal. On the other hand, in order to move forward towards the ambitious transformation envisioned by the Institute's new direction, it was necessary to assemble a dynamic team of young talents possessing exceptional and diverse technical and professional proficiencies that adept at steering innovative programs that stand as pivotal milestones in reshaping the Institute's operational methodology.

Ultimately, through the synergy of an enhanced work environment and a top-tier team, AUDI aspires to elevate its performance to align with the high ambitions set forth in its new strategy and, in doing so, exceed the expectations held by the vibrant Arab cities.









Photos: AUDI The Office, ©2023

CITIES IN ACTION

Project Oman
National Spatial
Strategy 2040

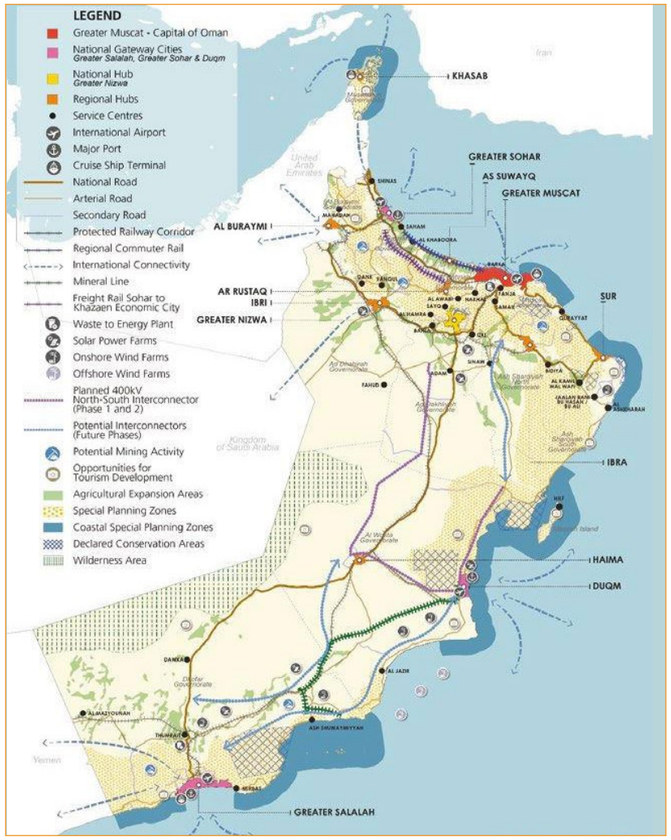


Photo: Oman Ministry of Housing and Planning Spatial Strategy 2040, ©2020

An Ambitious Institutional Transformation for More Effective Urban Development

In the last three years, Oman has experienced substantial institutional transformation in the area of urban development. This transformation began in 2020 with the Royal Decree 93 that dissolved the Higher Council of Planning and changed the name of the Ministry of Housing into the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning. The decree's articles cover a number of issues related to institutional prerogatives and responsibilities in the areas of planning and housing. It urges the setting of national policies for housing and urban planning, as well as the launching a national urban development strategy that would help materialize the sustainable development goals at the level of all governorates. The decree pushes for a guide derived from the aforementioned policies and strategy that defines the norms and standards for governmental and



Photo: Oman Ministry of Housing and Planning Spatial Strategy 2040, ©2020

non-governmental entities' activities in the area of urban planning. It requires the preparation of plans for all new urban areas subject to development, identifying the lots to be allocated for public amenities as well as those to be attributed to private citizens benefitting from the national land distribution policy. It insists on establishing a national GIS system integrating all maps, plans and databases. Finally, to speed up and enhance the implementation of all these measures, the decree encourages the development of collaborations with international institutions working in the same field.

To implement the decree and comply with its new role in the area of planning, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning had to overhaul its organogram. It had to develop national policies on one hand and ensure their implementation through its local offices in the different regions on the other. The Ministry also established its new Spatial Strategy that aligns with Oman's Vision 2040. The strategy represents an essential document for controlling urbanization and planning development at the national level. It is based on the identification of the economic assets of each of the Omani regions, as well as the recognition of their urban and cultural heritage and the rich climatic and environmental diversity of the country. The strategy links national investment plans in terms of infrastructure to the economic, social and environmental priorities of the different regions. The Ministry also produced seven of these regional structural plans. These plans translate the goals and orientations of the national Spatial Strategy at the regional and local levels.

"A society where people are creative, the environment is sustainable, the economy is competitive and the administrations are responsible".

Most notable is Muscat's structural plan, particularly in the way it deals with the local characteristics, assets and challenges of the capital and its surrounding areas. The plan guides land use patterns as well as transport development initiatives, including for Muscat's metro and BRT systems. It takes in consideration the topography and climatic characteristics of the city, particularly its steep valleys and its multiple running water paths that cut through the urban fabric to reach the ocean. It hence requires maintaining large open spaces along these paths and integrates specific measures to deal with flooding risks. Implementation of the Muscat plan is set to start in 2024.

Regarding the capacity development of urban planning and other needed professionals to implement these strategies and plans at the national and local levels, the Ministry has set its "Rafed" capacity development program. The program aims at providing knowledge and skills and coaching leadership through structured training in the areas of interest of the Ministry: sustainable development, urban planning and design, local economic development, urban governance, digital transformation and public participation.

Institutional transformation in the area of urban development is a long journey that includes the drafting of comprehensive urban legislations and the establishment of an effective urban governance. The latter defines responsibilities of the local, regional and national levels to ensure impact and effectiveness in implementing needed actions. These actions include daily issues, like delivering building permits, managing density and land use and ensuring that plans are respected, as well as more strategic actions including the constant review of the structural plans to integrate local economic and environmental changes as well as relevant new national policies. The different phases of this journey require close coordination between urban institutions and complementarity in the roles and activity of the Ministry and its local offices in the regions. It also requires a continuous effort of capacity development to allow these institutions to fulfill their mandate and help Oman realize its 2040 Vision of "a society where people are creative, the environment is sustainable, the economy is competitive and the administrations are responsible".

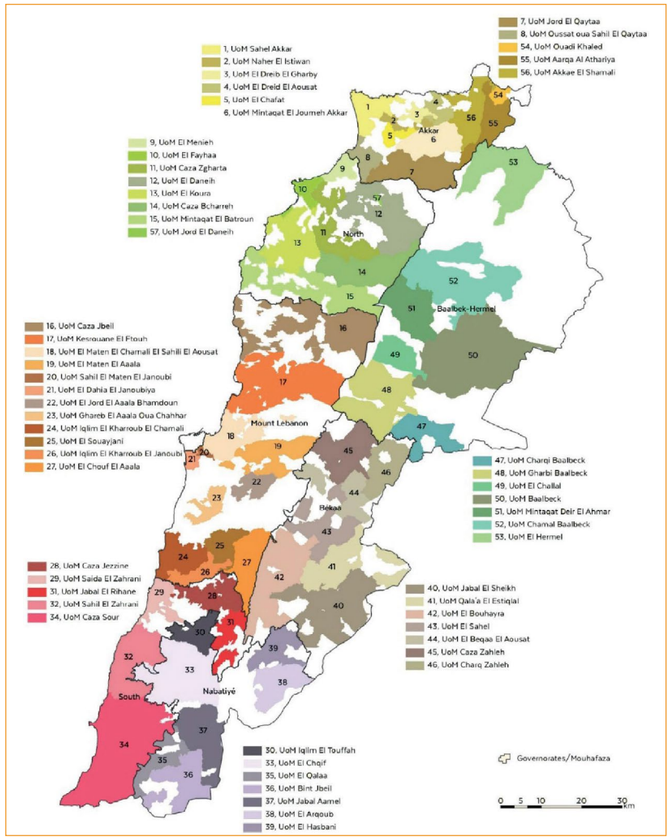


Photo: The Case of the Union of Municipalities - European Spatial Research and Policy, ©2019

TOWARDS EFFICIENT MUNICIPAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Municipal Cooperation Mechanisms in Morocco and Lebanon

Dealing with increasingly complex urban environments requires substantial resources and organizational structure that few municipalities have. This is why legislators in several countries in the Arab region push for the establishment of large municipal institutions at the metropolitan level. These institutions integrate both the preexisting urban and the new suburban neighborhood municipalities, and are awarded significant prerogatives and resources to enable them to better plan and intervene on the city as a whole. This is the case for cities such as Amman, Riyadh and Muscat.

Some countries, on the other hand, prefer the route of municipal cooperation. This is the case in Morocco in particular. Large metropolitan institutions exist in Morocco. However, as of 2015 and the implementation of the new constitutional directives, local authorities have been able to resort to new types of cooperation instruments: "partnership contracts" and issue-based "public establishments". Under the partnership contract modality, neighboring municipalities can come together to develop a joint project and implement it in their territory. The contract runs for the duration of the project and stipulates the financial, managerial, and operation arrangements with the latter also covering modes of contributions that are brought in by participating entities. Private entities can also be included as partners in a contract. Greater strategic cooperation may require setting up public establishments. The latter are public institutions that are created at the request of neighboring municipalities that want to pool their resources, for long term efforts to deal with a specific development issue in their territory.

The public establishment is then delegated part of the local authorities' mandates related to the issue (solid waste management, transportation, river management, development of affordable housing, etc.). It becomes responsible for the planning and execution of the needed interventions to ensure that the respective issue is adequately addressed. The public establishment has its own elected director and council. It is to be noted that in Morocco, these cooperation instruments can also be used by local authorities at larger territorial scales such as the region and the district. The Ministry of Interior in charge of municipalities has published guides to encourage local authorities, especially in smaller urban centers and rural areas to make use of these cooperation instruments.

In Lebanon, the Municipal Law of 1977 (still in effect) also provides local authorities with municipal cooperation instruments. The law allows municipalities to develop partnership contracts quite similar to those we have seen in Morocco. However, it also allows for a different type of municipal cooperation instrument: the "union of municipalities". A union is a public institution, the of which territory encompasses that of member municipalities. It is created at the request of said municipalities, and has a council constituting of their representatives. Unlike the public establishments in Morocco, it is not issue-based and can develop a variety of common services for the municipalities and the populations of the larger territory. However, also unlike those in Morocco, a municipality can be part of only one union. The rapid growth in the number of union of municipalities – more than doubling in the last two decades – indicates a clear interest by municipalities towards cooperation to meet increasing development challenges.

Nevertheless, there is a conviction among officials and municipal stakeholders that this law should be reformed to better integrate financial, transparency, and public engagement concerns. Several "enlarged decentralization" draft laws are in discussion in parliament. Most propose to have a new decentralized authority at the level of district with large prerogatives to be able to push development agendas. It is not clear if, in the final version of the new law, the union of municipalities as a cooperation instrument will be maintained.



Photo: Jordan Development Bank, ©2023

CITIES AND VILLAGES DEVELOPMENT BANK

A Vital Tool to Finance Municipal Projects and Services in Jordan

In Jordan, similar to many countries around the world, municipalities play a crucial role in delivering essential services and promoting local development. In 1979, the Jordanian government laid the foundation for the Cities and Villages Development Bank (CVDB), establishing it as an autonomous financial institution with a dedicated mission: to empower municipalities to fund essential services and projects. This is achieved through avenues like direct lending and a variety of financial mechanisms.

Municipalities readily seize these financing opportunities, channeling them into the realization of vital services such as solid waste and wastewater management, road construction, parks, and a spectrum of capital projects. Beyond the financial aspect, it's noteworthy that many municipalities face a twofold challenge. Apart from securing funding, they may also grapple with limited technical and administrative capabilities essential for overseeing project implementation and ensuring they adhere to the most technical standards.

The CVDB is committed to advancing Jordan's development agenda by extending financial support to municipalities and local institutions collaborating with municipalities in the delivery of essential public services. Recently, the bank has introduced innovative financing mechanisms that foster partnerships between municipalities and the private sector, opening avenues for them to access essential services and credit facilities. This includes the management of grants and loans, diligent oversight of their expenses, and expenditures.

Furthermore, the bank actively promotes the enhancement of municipal financial performance. This is accomplished through conducting relevant studies and the development of a comprehensive database and information repository related to municipalities, ultimately facilitating the evaluation and assignment of credit ratings for municipalities. In addition to this, the bank offers a pool of expertise and advisory services in the realm of financing, ensuring that municipalities have access to the guidance needed to make sound financial decisions.

The project financing cycle commences once the loan application is submitted by the municipality, and approved by the municipal council, to the Ministry of Local Administration. The Ministry reviews and transfers it to the CVDB. The bank's committees conduct a due diligence analysis of the applications, including the financial and technical aspects, and refer them to the Central Lending Committee. After approval of the loan application, the municipality can initiate a bidding process for the project. A final agreement between the municipality, CVDB and the contractor is then signed in order to start the loan transition and project works.

The purpose of highlighting the CVDB's mechanism of project financing is to present municipal financing methods that differ from the conventional practices observed in many Arab municipalities. Typically, the government shoulders the financial burden of projects and services, often without expecting a direct profit return. This exploration of alternative financing and implementation methods offers a valuable perspective. Municipal project financing, whether through a government bank as seen in the Jordanian context or via municipal bonds, a common practice in the United States and Canada, presents an opportunity for municipal policymakers in Arab countries to investigate



Photo: Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, ©2023

IN AN INITIATIVE THAT AIMS TO IMPROVE COORDINATION WITH URBAN PROJECTS

Riaydh sets a Specialized Center for Infrastructure Management and Development

The city of Riyadh is experiencing rapid urban development, driven primarily by reformations in the vision and government policies of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This reformation is reflected in the numerous major projects that have been implemented across the city, and is accompanied by a population growth of approximately 38% since 2010, putting Riyadh's population at 8.6 million in 2022. To achieve the government's target of boosting Riyadh's position in the global economic landscape, growth in major projects, and subsequently increase in economic activities is expected. As a result of this, as well as due to other driving factors, the population of Riyadh is projected to reach 15 million by 2030.

Successful implementation of projects in cities requires adequate infrastructure to ensure optimal project operation and provision of high quality services to the city's current and future residents. The Saudi government has recognized the importance of proactive measures to accommodate future population growth and maintain urban development without potential misalignment in the infrastructure's construction and maintenance, particularly in the capital city of Riyadh. Thus, the Council of Ministers issued a decree to establish the "Infrastructure Projects Center in Riyadh." The center aims to enhance infrastructure projects in the region, improving the quality of life and urban landscape while contributing to cost efficiency in these projects. To ensure its alignment with the city's general plan, the government entrusted the Secretary of the Riyadh Region with the presidency of the center's board, which constitutes representatives of institutions and entities responsible for infrastructure in the city.

Among the center's key tasks is the development of a comprehensive and detailed plan for infrastructure projects in the region, as well as the preparation of programs and schedules in coordination with relevant authorities. The projects cover a variety of domains, such as telecommunication, energy, water, sanitation, roads, cross-sectoral infrastructure works, and other public and private sector projects.

Additionally, the center also works on establishing a platform for the collection of information, data, plans, and budgets related to infrastructure projects in the region. It reviews the strategic and detailed plans submitted by government and private entities regarding infrastructure projects to align them with the comprehensive detailed plan of infrastructure projects. With the aim of achieving community and government convergence in service delivery and ensuring an improved quality of life for city residents, the center is responsible for receiving reports and complaints related to infrastructure projects in the region. It takes necessary actions, whether by communicating with relevant authorities or by conducting studies and addressing obstacles through partnerships with government and private entities, collaborating with research centers, and specialized institutions in fields related to the center's activities.

Earlier, the government announced several pioneering infrastructure projects as part of the Public Investment Fund's initiatives. Among these projects are King Salman Park, the largest of its kind globally, the Riyadh Sports Track, the Square Project, and the Riyadh Metro Project, which is expected to commence operations in the coming year.

Photo: Riyadh Metro, the Royal Commission, April ©2021





Photo: Participatory Budgeting Report, ©2022

A Decade of Participatory Budgeting in Morocco

In the last decade, participatory budgeting has been gaining ground in several Arab countries including Morocco, Tunis, Egypt, and Palestine, etc. Participatory budgeting in Morocco presents itself as an interesting case as it is consistently pushed by the Ministry of Interior, in charge of supporting local authorities in this country. As citizens become more engaged in shaping their collective futures, Morocco stands to benefit from increased transparency, accountability, and inclusive decision-making. With ongoing efforts and commitment from both the government and civil society, participatory budgeting is expected to play a transformational role in the country's development landscape.

The main idea of participatory budgeting is to dedicate a portion of the municipal budget to projects that would be identified in accord with residents and local associations. However, this could be done in several ways. A municipality might choose to divide the allocated budget between its neighborhoods and leave it to the residents of each neighborhood to identify the projects that they would like to see in their area. Contrariwise, another municipality might choose to organize a consolidated city-wide participatory budgeting process. It would then invite representatives of all neighborhoods and associations to propose and discuss development projects for the municipality to implement. These projects might relate to a particular domain (public spaces, street lighting, public transportation, etc.) or aim at improving the living conditions of a certain vulnerable social group (youth, seniors, children, etc.).

The involvement of these residents and associations could be limited to proposing projects or extend to include the follow up on the implementation of these projects and their evaluation. In Morocco, there have been a few cases of participatory budgeting developed by some pioneering municipalities back in the late nineties. However, it is only in the last decade that we have seen an increase in participatory budgeting initiatives. This is largely due to new constitutional directives that give greater prerogative to local authorities and require active public engagement on their part. The publication of a guide by the Moroccan Ministry of interior indicates strong commitment within the system to push participatory budgeting and make it accessible to Moroccan municipalities. A growing number of municipalities are engaging in these processes (e.g. Chefchaouen, Larache, Tetouan, Agadir, etc.) allowing citizens to have a say on a variety of issues and projects.

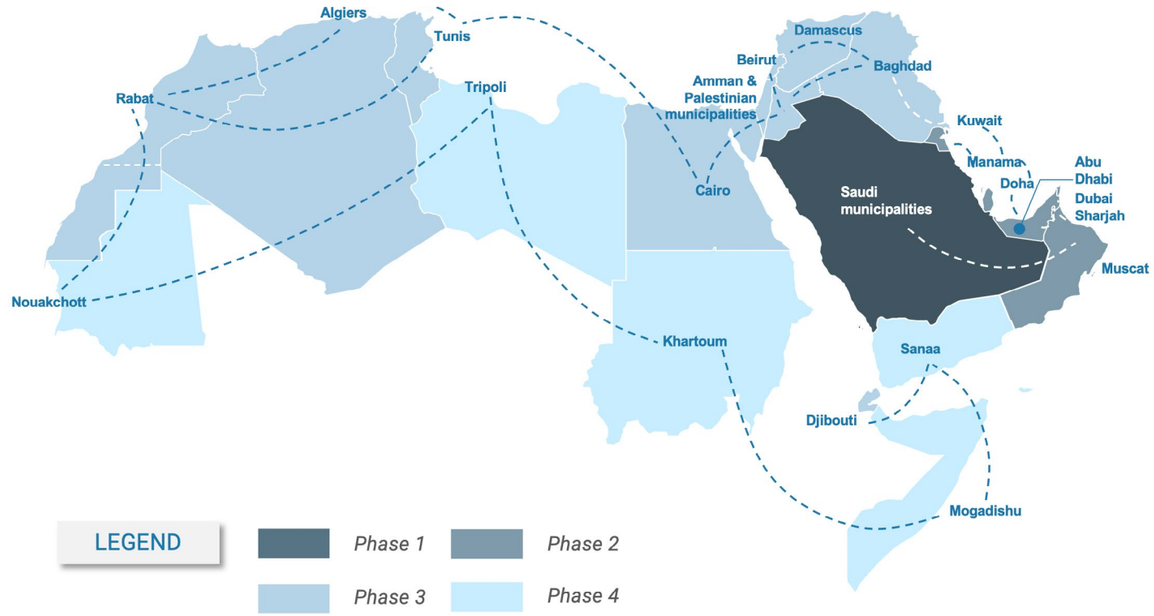
As with any innovative intervention in the urban development domain, participatory budgeting has also faced its share of critique. Some municipal officers believe that it does not bring in any added-value and results in a waste of time. Contrariwise, others insist that for the process to be effective it should be enlarged to include more stakeholders. In any case, there is a need to take notice and learn from the experiences of the Egyptian, Moroccan, and Tunisian municipalities, as participatory budgeting is most likely to be adopted as an instrument of public engagement by more cities and countries in the Arab region.

Photo: Morocco. ©2022



OUR NEWS

EMBARKING ON THE AUDI ROADSHOW



AUDI's Roadshow is as a **pivotal endeavor** in forging connections with key stakeholders in the realm of urban development, spanning diverse sectors within the Arab region. This initiative emerges as a cornerstone of the AUDI Strategy 2025. The tour is designed to accomplish multiple objectives, including acquainting the wider audience with AUDI and its new strategic outlook, providing insight as to the urban development landscape in the Arab cities, grasping the core challenges confronted by decision-makers in Arab cities, and establishing robust relationships with other actors present in the field of urban development.

As we embark on this Roadshow, we diligently pursue these objectives . Our tour is designed to visit a multitude of representatives from the local governance and urban development sector. This includes ministries, municipalities, development and planning authorities, public management institutes, professional institutions specializing in urban planning, universities, and research centers.

During these tours, the AUDI team deliberately presented its strategy and the specialized technical programs in the fields of urban research, development and municipal work, in addition to discussing aspects of cooperation between the AUDI and the counterparts.

The visits included municipalities and development authorities and royal commissions, and universities, as shown:

Saudi Arabia

Jeddah Municipality	King Abdul Aziz University	Jeddah Development Authority	Makkah Municipality

Photo: AUDI’s visit to King AbdulAziz University, ©AUDI 2023.



Photo: AUDI’s visit to Jeddah Development Authority, ©AUDI 2023.



Photo: AUDI’s visit to Jeddah Municipality, ©AUDI 2023.



Photo: AUDI’s visit to Makkah Municipality, ©AUDI 2023.



Asir Municipality	King Khaled University	Asir Development Authority	Sharqia Development Authority	Sharqia Municipality

Photo: AUDI's visit to Asir Municipality, ©AUDI 2023.



Photo: AUDI's visit to King Khaled University in Asir, ©AUDI 2023.



Photo: AUDI's visit to Asir Authority, ©AUDI 2023.



Photo: AUDI's visit to Sharqia Development Authority, ©AUDI 2023.



Photo: AUDI's visit to Sharqia Municipality, ©AUDI 2023.



The visits included ministries, municipalities, and universities, as shown:

Oman

Muscat Municipality	German University of Technology	Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning	Royal Academy Management

Photo: AUDI's visit to Muscat Municipality, ©AUDI 2023.



Photo: AUDI's visit to GUtech, ©AUDI 2023.



Photo: AUDI's visit to Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, ©AUDI



Photo: AUDI's visit to the Royal Academy, ©AUDI 2023.



Bahrain

Capital Municipality	Bahrain University	Urban Planning and Developing Authority	Institute of Public Administration

Photo: AUDI's visit to Bahrain Municipality, ©AUDI 2023.



Photo: AUDI's visit to Bahrain University, ©AUDI 2023.



Photo: AUDI's visit to Bahrain Planning Authority, ©AUDI 2023.



Photo:AUDI's visit to Bahrain General Management Institute, ©AUDI 2023.



Kuwait

Kuwait Municipality

Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development

Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development

Photo: AUDI’s visit to Kuwait Municipality, ©AUDI 2023.



Photo: AUDI’s visit to Kuwait Fund, ©AUDI 2023.



Photo: AUDI’s visit to The Arab Economic and Social Development Fund, ©AUDI 2023.



Jordan

Greater Amman Municipality	German Jordan University	UN-Habitat	Institute of Public Administration	Ministry of Local Administration

Photo: AUDI's visit to Jordan Municipality, ©AUDI 2023.



Photo: AUDI's visit to Jordan GJU, ©AUDI 2023.



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Photo: AUDI's visit to the Institute of Public Administration, ©AUDI 2023.



Photo: AUDI's visit to Misinstry of Local Administration, ©AUDI 2023.



Doha

Doha Municipality | Ministry of Municipality | Qatar Foundation

Photo: AUDI's visit to Ministry of Municipality, ©AUDI 2023.



Photo: AUDI's visit to Doha Municipality, ©AUDI 2023.



Photo: AUDI's visit to Qatar Foundation, ©AUDI 2023.



PARTNERSHIPS

PMI Agreement

In February 2023, a significant milestone was acheived as the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) and the Project Management Institute (PMI) came together to formalize their collaboration through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). This strategic partnership was established with the shared objective of harnessing their collective expertise and resources to mutually advance their goals.

One of the most important aspects of this cooperation is the joint commitment to enhancing the capabilities and proficiency in the management of municipal projects within the dynamic landscape of Saudi and Arab cities.

The Arab Urban Development Institute has achieved official accreditation as an Authorized Training Partner by the PMI. Moreover, this makes AUDI the sole institution in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia offering training in project management programs specific to the built environment. This distinguished status allows the Institute to extend its training services to individuals seeking to engage with PMI's programs.

The Project Management Institute (PMI), headquartered in the United States, stands as a distinguished global authority in the field of project management. It is dedicated to offering a comprehensive suite of project management services, including the development of standards, research, education, publication, networking-opportunities in local chapters, hosting conferences and training seminars, and providing accreditation in project management. With a vast and diverse membership exceeding half a million certified project managers spanning across 185 countries worldwide, PMI's impact is truly far-reaching.



Photo: AUDI PMI Partnership, ©2023

Visit our training programs.

PARTNERSHIPS

KING SAUD UNIVERSITY Agreement

To embrace the fundamental values of effective collaboration and recognize the paramount significance of advancing the municipal and urban sector within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a notable agreement has been officiated between AUDI and King Saud University.

On March 1, 2023, His Highness, the Mayor of Riyadh, and the President of the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI), Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz bin Ayyaf, joined hands with His Excellency, the President of King Saud University (KSA), Dr. Badran bin Abdulrahman Al-Omar, in sponsoring the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This significant document encompasses a spectrum of collaborative initiatives, including:

- Implementing specialized programs in municipal development.
- Providing studies and research in the urban, economic, social and environmental fields within the scope of Saudi and Arab cities and municipalities
- Organizing national and regional events
- Collaborative training for university graduates and postgraduate researchers.

This memorandum establishes a solid framework for a strategic partnership between the university and the institute, piloting their shared interests. Following this pivotal agreement, a diverse array of projects, initiatives, and programs dedicated to the advancement of urban development will be set in motion. In this context, His Highness the President of the Institute, Prince Faisal bin Ayyaf, praised the importance of these agreements, emphasizing their vital role in fostering the growth of municipal initiatives, enhancing institutional capabilities, and facilitating the exchange of knowledge between AUDI, universities and cities. It's worth noting that the institute boasts a membership comprising over 650 Arab municipalities and cities, all which stand to gain great benefit from this partnership.



Photo: AUDI - King Saud Partnership, ©2023.

AUDI'S PARTICIPATION IN OMAN URBAN OCTOBER IN MUSCAT

As part of the Omani contribution to the global campaign of UN-Habitat in promoting Urban October, The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning organized the Urban October Week themed by "Urban Economic Resilience", as part of it, the First Gulf Housing conference (29 - 31 October 2023) commenced as a key event. The event brought together urban planners, municipalities and policymakers, housing corporations, industry experts, and professionals from the GCC Region and beyond.

By acknowledging our presence in the Arab Region, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning of Oman invited us to participate in one of the key panels about 'Lively Urban Development' along with notable presenters such as Jan Gehl (Gehl Architects) and Hrvoje Cindric (Buro Happold); Dr Jihad - Program Director of Urban Policy Research - of AUDI, presented a paper entitled "Urban Development in Arab Cities: Challenges, Priorities and Capacity of Actions" this delves into urban development trends and issues in Arab cities and the ability of stakeholders to address them. Drawing from a comprehensive review of both existing literature and a survey conducted by AUDI involving 90 municipal representatives from Arab cities and 130 urban experts. Ultimately, the article emphasizes the significance of networking and knowledge sharing in bridging the gap among these stakeholders, thereby empowering Arab cities to confront their challenges more effectively. The presentations followed by panel discussion to further address key concepts of livability of urban development in the Arab region.

Coupled with our participation in presenting a paper, AUDI team actively engaged with various participants to introduce our scope of work, wide range of initiatives and possible collaboration channels.

View the research paper online

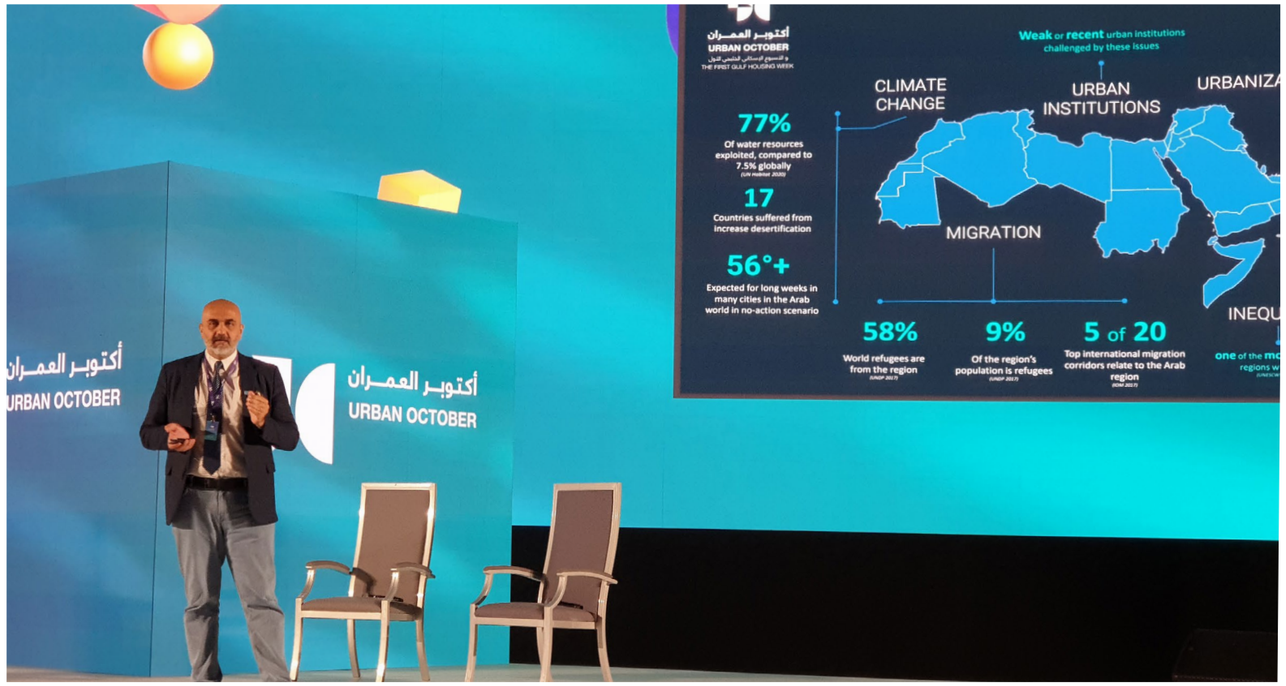



Photo: AUDI's participation in Oman Urban October in Muscat, ©2023.

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Inside the AUDI building, ©AUDI 2023

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