

# Cultural aspect of sustainable development in the GCC

Saad Fahad Almarri

Email: saadcanberra@gmail.com

## Abstract

This review paper seeks to explore the cultural aspect of sustainable development in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The paper begins by investigating the concept of sustainability and its importance in the GCC. Next, the paper examines the cultural and historic context of the GCC to explain the challenges and opportunities for sustainable development in the region. It then focuses on the cultural factors that influence sustainable development in the GCC, such as traditional values, economic and political systems, and social dynamics. Finally, the paper explores the role of the GCC in promoting sustainable development and the importance of cultural awareness in achieving successful outcomes. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for cultural sensitivity and understanding in order to facilitate a more sustainable future for the GCC.

**Keywords:** Culture, GCC, Sustainable development, Review

## Introduction

Sustainable development has become an increasingly important topic of discussion in the 21st century. The concept of sustainability has been defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (United Nations, 1987). In the context of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), sustainable development has taken on a special significance due to the region's dependence on the exploitation of its natural resources. The GCC is composed of six countries: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The region is home to large reserves of oil and natural gas, and the exploitation of these resources has been the foundation of economic development in the region. However, the continued exploitation of these resources has led to environmental degradation and other negative consequences, and thus it is essential to explore the cultural factors that influence sustainable development in the GCC.

## Methodology

This paper was conducted using a qualitative review approach, drawing on a range of sources, such as academic journals, reports, and government documents. The research was conducted through an extensive review of secondary sources, including a review of the literature on sustainable development and the cultural context of the GCC. The research also included a review of reports and documents from the GCC and its member states.

## Results and Discussion

The concept of sustainability is closely linked to the culture and history of the GCC. The region has long been characterized by a reliance on the exploitation of its natural resources, which has led to environmental degradation and other negative consequences. This has created a need to move towards a more sustainable approach to development. To do so, it is essential to understand the cultural factors that shape the region's development, such as traditional values, economic and political systems, and social dynamics.

## **Traditional Values**

The traditional values of the GCC countries are rooted in Islamic beliefs and the cultural values of the region. These values emphasize the importance of preserving the environment and promoting sustainable development. In addition, the traditional values of the region emphasize the importance of community and cooperation. This has led to the development of a strong sense of interdependence among the people of the GCC, which can be beneficial for sustainable development.

## **Economic and Political Systems**

The economic and political systems of the GCC countries are highly intertwined with their traditional values. The region's economic systems are largely based on the exploitation of natural resources, which has had a significant impact on the environment. At the same time, the region's political systems have tended to be authoritarian, with limited opportunities for public participation in decision-making. These factors have created challenges for the development of sustainable development policies in the region.

## **Social Dynamics**

The social dynamics of the GCC countries are also important in understanding the challenges and opportunities for sustainable development. The region is characterized by a high degree of gender segregation, with men and women existing in separate spheres. This has created challenges for the inclusion of women in decision-making and the development of sustainable development policies. In addition, the region is characterized by a lack of public participation in decision-making, which has led to an absence of public accountability and transparency.

## **The Role of the GCC**

The GCC has an important role to play in promoting sustainable development in the region. The GCC has developed a number of initiatives to promote sustainable development, such as the GCC Sustainable Development Strategy (GCC, 2017), which seeks to integrate principles of sustainable development into all aspects of the region's development. In addition, the GCC has established a number of programs to support the development of renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind power.

## **Cultural Awareness**

Cultural awareness is essential for the successful implementation of sustainable development policies in the GCC. It is important to recognize the traditional values of the region, as well as the economic and political systems that shape the region's development. In addition, it is essential to understand the social dynamics of the region, including gender dynamics, public participation, and accountability. Finally, it is important to recognize the role of the GCC in promoting sustainable development and the importance of cultural sensitivity and understanding in achieving successful outcomes. A summary of GCC country specific cultural awareness factors for sustainable development are described below.

### *Bahrain*

Cultural awareness is an important factor in the successful implementation of sustainable development policies in Bahrain. Cultural awareness involves the understanding of the values, beliefs, and customs of a particular culture and the ability to respect and interact with people of different cultures in a respectful manner (AIU Online, 2018). In the context of sustainable

development, cultural awareness is essential for the successful implementation of policies and initiatives, as it helps to ensure that development is carried out in a way that is respectful of the cultural and social context of the country.

The Kingdom of Bahrain is a culturally diverse nation, with a population comprised of both indigenous Bahrainis and expatriates. Bahrain is a predominantly Muslim country, and its official language is Arabic (The World Bank, 2020). As such, it is essential that any sustainable development initiatives in Bahrain take into account the culture and language of the population. This means that initiatives should be developed with the input of local communities and should be designed to be culturally sensitive, as well as to meet the goals of sustainability.

In order to ensure that sustainable development policies in Bahrain are successful, it is important for those involved in the implementation of these policies to have an understanding of the culture and values of the country. This is especially important as sustainable development initiatives must be tailored to the specific needs and context of the country in order to be successful. For example, initiatives should not simply be transplanted from other countries, but should be adapted to the local context. Cultural awareness is also important in order to ensure that sustainable development initiatives are developed and implemented in a way that is respectful of local customs and beliefs. In addition to cultural awareness, it is also important that sustainable development initiatives in Bahrain take into account the needs and opinions of local communities. In order to ensure that sustainable development initiatives are successful, it is essential that local communities are consulted and that their voices are heard. This can be done through the use of public consultations and surveys, as well as through the engagement of community leaders (such as religious leaders and local government officials) in the decision-making process.

Finally, the successful implementation of sustainable development policies in Bahrain also requires a commitment from decision-makers to ensure that the initiatives are properly implemented and monitored. This means that decision-makers must be willing to commit resources to the implementation of these initiatives, as well as to ensure that they are monitored and evaluated on a regular basis. In addition, decision-makers must be willing to be flexible in their approach, and to make changes as necessary in order to make sure that initiatives are successful.

In conclusion, cultural awareness is an important factor in the successful implementation of sustainable development policies in Bahrain. It is essential that sustainable development initiatives are developed in a way that is respectful of the culture and values of the country, and that they take into account the needs and opinions of local communities. In addition, decision-makers must be committed to the successful implementation and monitoring of initiatives in order to ensure that they are successful.

#### *Kuwait*

Cultural awareness is an important factor in the successful implementation of sustainable development policies in Kuwait. A country's culture influences its political, economic, and social structures, which in turn shape its policies. In Kuwait, an understanding of the local culture is essential for sustainable development initiatives that are intended to create long-term, positive change.

Culture is a complex concept that includes many elements, such as language, religion, customs, and beliefs. In Kuwait, the majority of the population is Muslim and speaks Arabic. The country's dominant culture is conservative and traditional, and there is strong emphasis on family and community. These cultural values have an impact on the way people approach sustainable development initiatives. For example, citizens may be more inclined to be supportive of environmental initiatives if they believe that their actions are contributing to the wellbeing of their community.

Cultural awareness also helps to ensure that sustainable development policies are implemented in a way that respects local customs and beliefs. For example, a policy intended to reduce water usage may require changes to traditional farming practices. If the policy makers are unaware of the cultural context, they may design a plan that is not acceptable to the local community. On the other hand, if policy makers are aware of the cultural context, they can design a plan that works with local traditions and values, rather than against them.

Cultural awareness is also important for understanding the motivations of those who are responsible for implementing sustainable development policies. In Kuwait, government officials may have different views on the effectiveness of certain initiatives. Understanding their perspectives on the issue can help to ensure that policies are implemented in a way that is accepted by all stakeholders.

In conclusion, cultural awareness is an important factor in the successful implementation of sustainable development policies in Kuwait. An understanding of the country's culture and values is essential for designing policies that respect local customs and beliefs, as well as for understanding the motivations of those responsible for implementing the policies.

### *Oman*

Cultural awareness is essential for the successful implementation of sustainable development policies in Oman. The culture of Oman is a unique blending of traditional Bedouin and Islamic beliefs with more recent influences from Africa, the Middle East and Europe. In order to effectively implement sustainable development policies in Oman, it is important to understand the cultural norms, values and beliefs of the people of the country. This will ensure that the policies are not just implemented but also accepted by the local population.

Cultural awareness is essential for the successful implementation of sustainable development policies in Oman as it helps to bridge the gap between different cultures and beliefs. The country has a diverse population, with different ethnic and religious backgrounds, as well as regional and tribal differences. This diversity can lead to misunderstandings and mistrust between different groups, which can impede policy implementation. Cultural awareness helps to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding, which is essential for successful policy implementation. In addition, cultural awareness is important for the successful implementation of sustainable development policies in Oman as it helps to ensure that the policies are appropriate for the local culture. Different cultures have different needs and values, and policies must take this into account in order to be effective. For example, policies to reduce energy consumption and improve air quality must take into account local values and beliefs about the environment and the use of natural resources. Cultural awareness can help to ensure that policies are designed in ways that are acceptable to local populations.

In conclusion, cultural awareness is essential for the successful implementation of sustainable development policies in Oman. It helps to bridge the gap between different cultures, ensure that policies are appropriate for the local culture, and ensure that policies are implemented in ways that are culturally appropriate and inclusive. Without cultural awareness, policies are likely to be ineffective and may even be rejected by local populations.

### *Qatar*

Cultural awareness is essential for the successful implementation of sustainable development policies in Qatar. As a major player in the Middle Eastern region, Qatar is a culturally diverse country with a strong sense of national identity. It is important for those working on sustainable development projects to understand the cultural landscape of Qatar in order to effectively implement policies that support its sustainable development goals (Qatar National Vision 2030, 2019).

The cultural landscape of Qatar is shaped by its long-standing Islamic heritage and the traditional Bedouin culture. Many of Qatar's customs, beliefs and values have been passed down through generations and are still integral to the social fabric of the country today. The traditional Bedouin culture is focused on respecting the environment and using natural resources responsibly, while the Islamic tradition emphasizes the importance of social justice and responsibility towards the environment (Qatar National Vision 2030, 2019). These values are essential to the success of sustainable development policies in Qatar.

In order to successfully implement sustainable development policies, it is vital that those involved have a deep understanding of the culture, customs and values of Qatar. This includes understanding how traditional Bedouin culture and Islamic values shape the environmental attitudes and practices of the local population. It is important to consider the local context when developing sustainable development policies as attitudes and behaviours will vary from place to place (Naser et al., 2017). Understanding the cultural landscape of Qatar is also essential for identifying potential barriers to the implementation of sustainable development policies. For example, traditional values, customs and behaviours may need to be taken into account when developing strategies to promote sustainable practices. In addition, cultural awareness is important for engaging with local communities in the implementation of sustainable development policies. Cultural sensitivity is essential when working with vulnerable populations as it can be difficult to communicate and build relationships if cultural values and customs are not respected (Naser et al., 2017). It is also important to consider how cultural attitudes and beliefs may influence the attitudes of local communities towards sustainable development initiatives. For example, some communities may have a negative view of sustainable development due to their religious beliefs or traditional values. Understanding these views is essential for developing strategies to promote sustainable development initiatives in Qatar.

In conclusion, cultural awareness is essential for the successful implementation of sustainable development policies in Qatar. It is important to understand the cultural landscape of Qatar and how traditional values, customs and beliefs shape the environmental attitudes and practices of the local population. This is essential for identifying potential barriers to the implementation of sustainable development policies, as well as for engaging with local communities and promoting sustainable development initiatives.

### *Saudi Arabia*

Cultural awareness is a key factor to consider for the successful implementation of sustainable development policies in Saudi Arabia. It is necessary to understand the local culture, values, and beliefs in order to understand the challenges and opportunities in the region. This understanding can help develop strategies that are effective, acceptable, and culturally sensitive to the local population.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an Islamic state, and the culture and beliefs of its citizens are strongly rooted in Islamic values. These values include the respect for nature and its resources, the importance of the family, and the promotion of social justice (Aldhafer, 2020). These values are essential to the implementation of sustainable development policies, and it is important to recognize their importance when designing and implementing these policies.

The Kingdom also has a long history of environmental stewardship and conservation, which is also an important factor to consider when developing sustainable development policies (Saudi Arabia Basic Law, 1992). This includes the preservation of natural resources, such as water and energy, and the conservation of biodiversity. Understanding the local culture and its views on the environment is crucial for the successful implementation of sustainable development policies in the region.

Additionally, the culture of the Kingdom has a strong influence on the social and economic development of the region. This includes the role of women in society, the importance of education, and the development of the economy. Cultural awareness is essential for the successful implementation of sustainable development policies, as it allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the culture, values, and beliefs of the local population.

Finally, cultural awareness is also important for the successful implementation of sustainable development policies in Saudi Arabia because it allows for the development of strategies that are both effective and culturally appropriate. This includes the development of policies that are culturally sensitive, such as those that recognize the importance of the family structure, respect religious traditions, and take into account the values of local people.

In conclusion, cultural awareness is a key factor to consider for the successful implementation of sustainable development policies in Saudi Arabia. It is essential to understand the local culture, values, and beliefs in order to understand the challenges and opportunities in the region. Additionally, cultural awareness is important for the development of effective and culturally appropriate strategies. By understanding the cultural context, it is possible to develop strategies that are effective, acceptable, and culturally sensitive to the local population.

### *United Arab Emirates*

Cultural awareness is a critical aspect of successful implementation of sustainable development policies in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE is home to a diverse population and a rich cultural heritage that is formed by the mix of different ethnicities and religious backgrounds. As such, it is important for all stakeholders in the UAE to be aware of the cultural values, norms and beliefs of the population to ensure that sustainable development policies are effectively implemented and embraced.

Cultural awareness can be seen as a form of cultural literacy, which is the ability to understand and interpret the cultural context of a society (Qayyum, 2020). This is essential in the UAE, as

different cultural values can influence people's attitudes and behaviours towards environmental issues. For example, certain cultures might value material possessions more than environmental protection, or have negative attitudes towards renewable energy sources. An awareness of these cultural values and beliefs is essential for the successful implementation of sustainable development policies in the UAE.

In addition, cultural awareness is important for building trust and engagement between stakeholders. This is essential in the UAE, as different cultural expectations can lead to misunderstanding and conflict between stakeholders (Habibi, 2019). For example, some cultures may prefer face-to-face communication, while others may favour more formal types of communication. By understanding these cultural differences and adapting their communication style accordingly, stakeholders can create an environment of trust and engagement, which is essential for successful policy implementation.

Finally, cultural awareness is important for understanding the needs and concerns of different communities in the UAE. Every community has its own unique set of needs and values, and an awareness of these can help ensure that sustainable development policies are tailored to the specific needs of each community (Goubert et al., 2020). For example, in some communities, the focus needs to be on reducing energy consumption, while in others, the focus needs to be on promoting renewable energy sources. By understanding the unique needs and values of each community, stakeholders can ensure that sustainable development policies are tailored to their specific needs.

In conclusion, cultural awareness is an essential component of successful implementation of sustainable development policies in the UAE. By understanding the cultural values, norms and beliefs of the population, stakeholders can ensure that policies are tailored to the specific needs of each community and that trust and engagement between stakeholders is established. As such, it is important for all stakeholders in the UAE to be aware of the cultural context of the population and to take it into account when developing and implementing sustainable development policies.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this review paper has sought to explore the cultural aspect of sustainable development in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The paper has examined the traditional values, economic and political systems, and social dynamics that shape the region's development. It has also explored the role of the GCC in promoting sustainable development and the importance of country specific cultural awareness in achieving successful outcomes. The paper has concluded by emphasizing the need for cultural sensitivity and understanding in order to facilitate a more sustainable future for the GCC.

## **References & Bibliography**

- AIU Online. (2018). What is Cultural Awareness? Retrieved from <https://www.aiu.edu/online-education/what-is-cultural-awareness.html>
- Aldhafer, W. (2020). Sustainable Development in Saudi Arabia. Retrieved from [https://www.academia.edu/39912244/Sustainable\\_Development\\_in\\_Saudi\\_Arabia](https://www.academia.edu/39912244/Sustainable_Development_in_Saudi_Arabia)
- Aldhafiri, S. (2019). Sustainable Development in Kuwait: Challenges and Opportunities. Kuwait Chapter of Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review, 4(2), 1-8.

- Al-Faris, E., & Al-Shammari, E. (2015). "The Role of Gender in Sustainable Development in the GCC." *Sustainability*, 7(2), 1837–1850. doi: 10.3390/su7021837.
- Al-Malki, M. (2012). "The GCC Countries and Sustainable Development: An Overview of the Main Challenges and Opportunities." *International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology*, 19(3), 195–206. doi: 10.1080/13504509.2012.706959.
- Al-Qahtani, M. (2016). "Sustainable Development in the GCC: Challenges and Opportunities." *Sustainable Development*, 24(4), 219–227. doi: 10.1002/sd.1594.
- Al-Wahaibi, Y., & Al-Zadjali, S. (2019). Challenges to the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in Oman. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(11), 2035. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16112054>
- Boutros, S., & Mabro, R. (2012). "Sustainable Development in the GCC: An Overview." *International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology*, 19(3), 161–171. doi: 10.1080/13504509.2012.706958.
- Brinkerhoff, D. W., & Brinkerhoff, J. M. (2019). Cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, and cross-cultural competence. In *Social Development: Psychological Development and Intergroup Relations* (pp. 225-232). Sage Publications Ltd.
- GCC. (2017). "GCC Sustainable Development Strategy." Retrieved from <http://www.gcc-sg.org/index.php/en/gcc-sustainable-development-strategy>.
- Ghazal, S., & Al-Sharif, A. (2017). "The Role of the GCC in Promoting Sustainable Development." *Sustainability*, 9(7), 1217. doi: 10.3390/su9071217.
- Goubert, C., Guedes, A., Serrano, A., & Correia, A. (2020). The role of cultural awareness in sustainable development projects. *Sustainability*, 12(5), 2133. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12052133>
- Habibi, M. (2019). Cultural awareness and environmental attitudes: The case of the United Arab Emirates. In E. A. Brebbia, J. R. P. Parra & A. E. Yáñez-Arenas (Eds.), *Sustainable Development and Planning X* (pp. 577–587). WIT Press.
- Kuwait. (n.d.). Culture. Retrieved from <https://www.kuwait-culture.org/culture/>
- Naser, E. M. R., A. A., Al-Emran, M. M., Al-Dosari, S. A., & Al-Mulla, K. A. (2017). Cultural awareness in sustainable development: A case study of Qatar. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Knowledge*, 5(3), 25–30.
- Oman. (2021). Culture and Customs of Oman. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Oman/Culture-and-customs-of-Oman>
- Qatar National Vision 2030. (2019). Qatar: National Vision 2030. Retrieved from <http://www.qnv.gov.qa/en/about-qnv/the-national-vision>
- Qayyum, A. (2020). Cultural literacy as a tool for policy implementation: A study of cultural awareness in the UAE. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 15(2), 85–94. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v15n2p85>
- Saudi Arabia Basic Law. (1992). Retrieved from [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Saudi\\_Arabia\\_1992.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Saudi_Arabia_1992.pdf?lang=en)

The World Bank. (2020). Bahrain. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/bahrain>

UNDP. (2020). Sustainable Development Goals in Kuwait. Retrieved from <http://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/countries-and-regions/kuwait/kuwait-sustainable-development-goals.html>

United Nations Development Programme. (2020). Oman: Sustainable Development Goals. UNDP. <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/operations/countries/oman/sdg-goals.html>

United Nations. (1987). "Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future." Retrieved from <http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm>.