



Abdulrahman Ahmad Alsayel

Assistant Professor of Urban & Regional Planning
Educator | Researcher | Advisor

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Profile

"Humanizing cities is not limited to the beauty of the place but also involves creating a life that celebrates humanity in all its forms, envisioning spaces that provide noble values and offer experiences that touch and protect human senses from all forms of pollution."

Abdulrhman has over 13 years of experience in academic research, university teaching, professional practice, and advisory work in inclusive and sustainable urban and regional planning. His research interests focus on the sustainability of the built environment, city humanization, inclusive urban policies, community engagement, place branding, and placemaking. He seeks to develop approaches that bridge theoretical inquiry with applied urban practice.

He holds a Ph.D. in Urban Development, Governance, Place Branding, and Inclusive Urban Prosperity Dynamics from the Institute for Housing and Urban Studies (IHS) at Erasmus University Rotterdam (The Netherlands). He also earned a Master's degree in Sustainable Planning and Environmental Policy from Cardiff University (United Kingdom). He serves as a faculty member in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the College of Architecture and Planning, Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University.

His professional trajectory has been shaped by his role as a consultant within international development programs, including UN-Habitat and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), where he contributed to the development and implementation of participatory urban methodologies and analytical frameworks supporting urban transformation, particularly within the context of the Future Saudi Cities Program and related urban development initiatives. He has also served as Director of Research and Studies across several urban platforms and initiatives, leading strategic studies and analytical frameworks that integrate academic research with institutional practice and translate knowledge into actionable policy tools.

In addition to his advisory and academic work, he is an active researcher and author. He contributed to the World Bank publication *Greater Than Parts: A Metropolitan Opportunity* and co-authored a chapter titled *Metropolitan Dammam: City of Mega-Projects*. His work has been recognized through several academic distinctions, including the Best Scientific Paper Award at the International Place Branding Association Conference in France (2022). In 2025, he received the Prince Abdulaziz bin Ayyaf Award for Best PhD Dissertation in Humanizing Cities for his doctoral research on humanizing city branding policies and their role in urban transformation.



Education

- **Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Urban Development and Governance (2018 - 2024)**
 - Erasmus University, Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies (IHS), Netherlands
 - Research focus: Abdulrahman explored how cities can redefine themselves to attract new audiences. His research focused on using place branding to enhance sustainable urban development, attract global investments, and improve residents' quality of life. Through his in-depth analysis, he revealed the challenges cities face in balancing progress with cultural preservation, emphasizing innovation and social equity in urban planning within various governance contexts. His work addressed balancing creativity and inclusiveness in city branding, the impact of multi-level governance models on place branding performance, and the application of place branding methodologies in centralized systems, along with understanding rapid transformations in rebranding strategies.
- **Master's in Sustainability, Planning and Environmental Policy (Merit) (2015 - 2016)**
 - Cardiff University, UK
 - Research focus: During his master's studies, Abdulrahman became well-versed in sustainable planning concepts through a comprehensive program that covered topics such as environmental management, theories and principles of sustainable development, and planning for sustainability. He also delved into debates on eco-city planning and development and sustainable transport policies. These concepts enabled him to integrate sustainability principles into urban planning to address contemporary environmental challenges. In his thesis, he explored how digital participatory platforms can enhance public interaction with urban development in Saudi Arabia, highlighting the importance of modern technology in achieving sustainable development through effective public participation. His research demonstrated his ability to employ smart city concepts to facilitate community participation, thereby enhancing the quality of life in urban areas.
- **Bachelor's in Urban and Regional Planning (Top of Class) (2008 - 2012)**
 - Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University, Saudi Arabia
 - Research focus: During his bachelor's studies, Abdulrahman delved into various crucial areas such as urban management, urban economics, transportation planning, environmental planning, urban design, and regional planning. These subjects enabled him to develop a comprehensive understanding of the challenges in urban planning and effective strategies to address them across different spatial levels. In his graduation project, "Transforming Al-Khobar into a Green City," he focused on applying sustainable planning principles to redesign the city in ways that support environmental sustainability and enhance the quality of life for residents. The project highlighted strategies to reduce carbon emissions and increase green spaces while preserving cultural heritage. This project showcased his ability to translate academic theories into practical applications, emphasizing the importance of integrated and sustainable planning in achieving urban development goals.

Professional Experience

Assistant Professor of Urban & Regional Planning – Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University (IAU)

January 2026 – Present

Lead teaching and research activities within the Department of Urban and Regional Planning. Areas of expertise include urban governance, place branding, city humanization, sustainable urban development, regional planning, and GIS applications. Supervise undergraduate research projects and contribute to curriculum development aligned with international planning standards.

University Lecturer of Urban & Regional Planning– Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University (IAU)



January 2016 – December 2025

Delivered undergraduate courses in urban design, sustainability, transportation planning, housing, regional planning, and Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Actively engaged in academic research, international publishing, and institutional collaboration. Contributed to advancing applied urban planning knowledge in the Saudi context through research-practice integration.

Teaching Assistant of Urban & Regional Planning- Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University (IAU)

January 2013 – December 2015

Supported academic instruction, studio coordination, and research activities within the department. Assisted in curriculum delivery and contributed to early-stage academic research in sustainable planning and urban systems.

Lecturer and Researcher – Erasmus University, Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies (IHS) | 2018 – 2023

In this role, Abdulrahman supervised master's students and delivered lectures on urban development, sustainability, and governance, aligning with his research focus on place branding, creative cities, and inclusive urban governance. His contributions included curriculum development, student mentorship, and collaborative research projects, enhancing the academic and practical understanding of sustainable urban development.

Research Assistant – Saudi Aramco | 2013 – 2014

During his tenure as a Research Assistant at Saudi Aramco, Abdulrahman undertook significant responsibilities related to Traffic Safety research. His role involved conducting in-depth research on Traffic Safety and supervising students in empirical projects aimed at enhancing sustainable and smart mobility. Abdulrahman's work played a crucial part in advancing the understanding of traffic safety measures and contributing to the development of sustainable and intelligent transportation solutions, aligning with Saudi Aramco's commitment to innovation and safety in mobility.

Chairman of Youth Unit – King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue | 2012 – 2014

As the Chairman of the Youth Unit at the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue, Abdulrahman assumed a leadership position with significant responsibilities. He was entrusted with designing and implementing a qualitative strategy aimed at bolstering national unity and preserving the social fabric among Saudi youth. This role required a keen understanding of the dynamics and challenges faced by the youth demographic, as well as the ability to create and execute initiatives that fostered unity and cohesion within this crucial segment of society. Abdulrahman's leadership contributed to the center's mission of promoting dialogue and understanding among the youth, ultimately strengthening the bonds of national identity and social harmony.

Advisory Board Membership

Technical Reviewer – The King Salman Charter for Architecture and Urbanism Award | 2023 – Present

Abdulrahman was invited to join the Advisory Board for the King Salman Charter for Architecture and Urbanism Award, a prestigious event organized by the Architecture and Design Commission in Saudi Arabia. As a technical reviewer, he is responsible for evaluating and assessing projects in the categories of built projects, non-built projects, and university student projects. His role includes conducting site visits, documenting technical excellence, and presenting reports to the jury committee. This initiative aims to honor outstanding projects that respect local identity and address future challenges.

Advisory Board Member – 3rd Landscape Sustainability & Accessibility Awards 2024

Abdulrahman has been appointed to the Advisory Board for the 3rd Landscape Sustainability & Accessibility Awards 2024, to be held in Riyadh. This prestigious event, organized by Landscape Magazine with the International Federation of Landscape Architects, Middle East, and the Saudi Society of Landscape Architecture, celebrates the transformative



power of landscape architecture in the Middle East. As an Advisory Board member, Abdulrahman will work to promote sustainability and accessibility, identify and nominate groundbreaking projects, and inspire active participation. This initiative is pivotal in designing people-centered cities and enhancing quality of life through sustainable development.

Honours and Awards

- **Prince Dr. Abdulaziz bin Ayyaf Award for Humanizing Cities – Best PhD Dissertation, 2025**
Abdulrahman received this prestigious award in recognition of his doctoral research on “Humanizing City Branding Policies and Their Role in Urban Transformation.” The award highlights the academic and practical significance of his work in advancing the humanization of cities within the Saudi context, integrating urban governance, place branding, and inclusive development frameworks.
- **Best Scientific Paper Award, International Place Branding Association Conference, France, 2023**
Abdulrahman received this award for his research titled “City branding in a multi-level governance context: comparing branding performance across five institutional models for urban development in Saudi Arabia.” This study examines how different multi-level governance models affect place branding performance in Saudi Arabia, providing valuable insights for urban planners and policymakers.
- **3rd Place, Urban Design Competition, Madinah Municipality, 2023**
Abdulrahman, along with his team, won 3rd place in the Urban Design Competition organized by Madinah Municipality for the Al-Asfarin District. Their proposal focused on reviving organic areas, making them vibrant, and increasing the quality of life for their inhabitants using methodologies of humanizing cities and placemaking. The design philosophy was inspired by the sound and echo of the Athan, utilizing sound waves to attract locals and visitors to public spaces. This recognition underscores Abdulrahman’s commitment to developing people-centered urban spaces that enhance the local identity of cities.
- **1st Saudi Smart Cities Conference Award, Urban Planning Track, Dar Al Riyadh, 2017**
Abdulrahman was honored with this award for his innovative contributions to the urban planning sector. His work on smart city initiatives and urban development strategies showcased advanced methodologies and practical solutions that significantly enhanced the planning and management of urban spaces in Saudi Arabia.
- **5th Scientific Conference Award, Engineering Track, Ministry of Education, 2012**
Abdulrahman was recognized for his outstanding research in the engineering track at the 5th Scientific Conference organized by the Ministry of Education. His study focused on sustainable urban development and the integration of smart technologies to improve urban living conditions and infrastructure efficiency.

Journal Articles

- Alsayel, A., Fransen, J., de Jong, M., & Almatar, K. M. (2025). *Riyadh: King of gigaprojects – Can Riyadh’s dramatic place rebranding realize path-breaking and profound urban transformations?* *Cities*, 163, 106022. [Click here](#)
- Alsayel, A., de Jong, M., & Fransen, J. (2025). *Cultural and institutional determinants in city-branding practices: Evidence from three Saudi cities.* *Urban Studies*. [Click here](#)
- Alsayel, A., Fransen, J., & de Jong, M. (2023). *City branding in a multi-level governance context: Comparing branding performance across five institutional models for urban development in Saudi Arabia.* *Journal of*



Place Management and Development, 16(2), 267–290.

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- Alsayel, A., de Jong, M., & Fransen, J. (2022). *Can creative cities be inclusive too?* *Cities*, 128, 103786.
[Click here](#)
- Abdellatif, M. A., Alshihri, F., & Alsayel, A. A. (2014). *Measuring the applicability of the green city concept: A study of views of samples from residents, high school students and city officials.* *Emirates Journal for Engineering Research*, 19(2), 11–28.
[Click here](#)

Book Chapters

- Alsayel, A. (2025). *Governance models.* In *Encyclopedia of City and Place Branding* (pp. 168–172). Edward Elgar.
[Click here](#)
- AbouKorin, A. A., Alsayel, A., & Abdelfattah, H. M. K. (2020). *Metropolitan Dammam: City of mega-projects.* In S. Mehrotra, L. L. Lewis, M. Orloff, & B. Olberding (Eds.), *Greater Than Parts: A Metropolitan Opportunity* (Vol. II). World Bank.
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Theses

- Alsayel, A. (2024). *From oil to identity: Place branding for urban transformation in a top-down society – A case study of Saudi Arabia* (Doctoral dissertation, Erasmus University Rotterdam).
[Click here](#)
- Alsayel, A. (2016). *Online participatory platforms as a tool for effective interaction of public participation with urban development of Saudi Arabia* (Master's thesis, Cardiff University).
[Click here](#)

Reports

- Benmokhtar, E., Alsayel, A. A., Mwai, A., Elhefnawi, A., Thomas, D., Lavagna, G., & Saud, R. A. (2017). *The state of women and youth in Saudi cities.* UN-HABITAT.
[Click here](#)

Conference Proceedings

- Alsayel, A., de Jong, M., and Fransen, J., 2023. Place branding model for cultural and administrative centralised systems. Presented at: 7th Annual Conference International Place Branding Association, Lund University, Campus Helsingborg, Sweden, 18-20 October.
- Alsayel, A. A., 2024. The theory of the city that humans need. Presented at: 1st Architecture and Design Research Conference, Ministry of Culture, Architecture and Design Commission, 6th March.
- Alsayel, A., 2023. The role of parks in humanizing cities, improving individual health, and fostering community cohesion. Presented at: The 2nd Forum for Community Participation, Qassim Region Municipality, Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs and Housing, 5 October.
- Alsayel, A., 2023. Placemaking as a tool for promoting social innovation and humanizing cities. Presented at: Social Innovation Forum, Asbar Center Initiatives, 16 February.



- Alsayel, A., Fransen, J. and de Jong, M., 2022. City branding in a multi-level governance context, Five types of Urban Development approaches in Saudi Arabia and their branding performance. In: The 6th Annual International Place Branding Association Conference, France, 18-21 October 2022.
- Alsayel, A., 2022. Cities for All - Have smart cities succeeded in integrating people with disabilities and leaving no one behind? Presented at: International Day of Persons with Disabilities, College of Education, Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, 13 December.
- Alsayel, A., 2020. Urban Social Innovation Labs. In: International Social Innovation Forum (ISIF), Riyadh, 1-2 November 2020.
- Alsayel, A., 2018. Social Media Analysis: Towards Women and Youth-Friendly Saudi Cities. In: The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), UN Headquarters, New York, 9-18 July 2018.
- Alsayel, A.A., AlSudairi, A., Ragan, D. and Zakri, A., 2018. Engaging young men and women in city planning: The Saudi Experience. In: The Ninth Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF9) - UN-HABITAT, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 7-13 February 2018.
- Mahmoud, M.M., Al Majil, A.H.S. and Alsayel, A.A., 2015. Attitude, Behavior, and Traffic Safety: Evidence from Young Drivers in Saudi Arabia. In: Third Traffic Safety Forum & Expo, Dammam, Saudi Arabia, 23-25 November 2015.
- Alsayel, A., 2017. A strategy to transform Al-Khubar into a "green city". In: Saudi Smart Cities Conference, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, May 2017.

Blogposts and Opinion Articles

- Alsayel, A. and Alrashid, A. (2024) 'Unlocking School Playgrounds: Breaking Down Barriers to Enhance Walkability and Social Cohesion in Neighborhoods', Alriyadh. Available at: [Click here](#).
- Alsayel, A. (2023) 'You Can't Build Community Without Doing The Bump', Aramco Magazine Al-Qafilah. Available at: [Click here](#).
- Alsayel, A. (2023) 'The Story of Barcelona's Pedestrian Transformation and the Invention of the Sidewalk', Caramellaapp. Available at: [Click here](#).
- Alsayel, A. (2023) 'Edward Glaeser: An overview of his personality and his opinion on the future of Riyadh', Caramellaapp. Available at: [Click here](#).
- Alsayel, A., De Jong, M. and Fransen, J. (2022) 'What being a creative and inclusive city means in Toronto, Amsterdam and Dubai', Erasmus University Rotterdam. Available at: [Click here](#).
- Alsayel, A. (2022) 'WHAT IS THE CITY BUT THE PEOPLE?', The Arab Magazine. Available at: [Click here](#).
- Alsayel, A. and Aljawairah, M. (2022) 'Non-Profit Organizations Investing in Parks: Boosting Expertise and Fostering Neighborhood Belonging', Alriyadh. Available at: [Click here](#).
- Alsayel, A. and Aljawairah, M. (2022) 'Social Housing Policies: A Cornerstone for Developing Eligible Families', Bawtaqah Magazine. Available at: [Click here](#).
- Alsayel, A. (2022) 'Seven Proposals to Promote Walking in Neighborhood Streets: Avoiding Cities Becoming a "Trap" Favoring Cars over Pedestrians!', Alriyadh. Available at: [Click here](#).
- Alsayel, A. (2021) 'Replacing classic intersections with "U-turn", a flexible solution for vehicles, but disturbing to pedestrians', AlRiyadh Newspaper. Available at: [Click here](#).
- Alsayel, A. (2021) 'Why is the Modern World So Ugly?', Caramellaapp. Available at: [Click here](#).
- Alsayel, A. (2020) 'The Beauty Premium: How Urban Beauty Affects Cities' Economic Growth?', Saudi Project. Available at: [Click here](#).
- Alsayel, A. (2020) 'Does the city influence the characters of its residents? Or does the behaviour of residents shape the city?', Saudi Project. Available at: [Click here](#).
- Alsayel, A. et al. (2014) 'Towards human-friendly sidewalks', Alyaum Newspaper. Available at: [Click here](#).



Teaching Activities

	Course/Rotation Title	No./Code	Extent of Contribution
1	HOUSING AND RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT	URPL-332	lecture
2	PROFESSIONAL TRAINING & PLANNING PRACTICE	URPL-522	lecture
3	PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	URPL-442	lecture
4	URBAN DESIGN THEORY	URPL-322	lecture
5	REGIONAL PLANNING	URPL-412	lecture
6	NEW TOWNS AND RECENT URBAN DEVELOPMENT	URPL-556	lecture
7	URBANIZATION & URBAN DEVELOPMENT	URPL-596	lecture
8	PLANNING HISTORY AND THEORY	URPL-331	lecture
9	PLANNING GEOINFORMATICS (2)	URPL-342	lab
10	DESIGN STUDIO (7): URBAN PLANNING	URPL-401	Design studio
11	DESIGN STUDIO (8): REGIONAL PLANNING	URPL-402	Design studio
12	DESIGN STUDIO (10): GRADUATION PROJECT	URPL-502	Design studio
13	DESIGN STUDIO (5): PLANNING SURVEY, ANALYSIS, GRAPHICS & CARTOGRAPHY	URPL -301	Design studio

Training courses and workshops

	Course Title	Place	From	Date
1	Workshop: Saudi Housing Eco-system	Khobar	Saudi Real Estate Institute	2019
2	effective Strategies for Boosting Your Efficiency	Dammam	Youth experts	2019
3	Rapid Urban Planning Studio for the Prosperity of Saudi Cities	17 Saudi cities	UN-habitat	2017
4	Comprehensive Urban Development Workshop for Dammam Metropolitan Area	Dammam	UN-habitat	2017
5	Planning and launching youth initiatives.	Riyadh	Youth in	2017
6	E-marketing for non-profit organizations	Riyadh	King Abdullah Foundation	2017
7	Regional workshop for Training of Trainers on Minecraft and Public Space	Cairo	UN-habitat	2017
8	Skills Developments service certificate of professional development "Leadership" From PWC in the UK.	Cardiff	PWC	2016
9	Certified coach course Community Dialogue	Dharan	King Abdul Aziz Center for National Dialogue	2014

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