المؤتمر العالمي الرابع عشر للعمارة الترابية

14th World Congress on Earthen Architecture

Turab Prize – Earthen Futures In The Gulf

Earthen Architecture & Earthen Cultural Landscape

Design Competition

for GCC Universities Students

TERRA

ICOMOS - ISCEAH
International Scientific Committee
on Earthen Architectural Heritage
International Council on
Monuments and Sites

دائرة الثقافة والسياحة
DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE
AND TOURISM

RIBA

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Desert X AlUla by Syn Architects

Earthen Futures In The GCC

An initiative of the Department of Culture & Tourism – Abu Dhabi, as part of the 14th Terra world Congress 2026, under the auspices of ICOMOS–ISCEAH, in collaboration with the RIBA Gulf Chapter.

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RIBA
Chartered Practice

UAE Pavillion Doha by BIG Architects

1. Introduction & Context

The 14th World Congress on Earthen Architecture (TERRA 2026) will be held from 13–16 April 2026 in Al Ain, United Arab Emirates. Organised by ICOMOS–ISCEAH with the Department of Culture & Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi)

The Congress convenes international experts to advance the conservation, innovation, and future of earthen architecture. Al Ain—renowned for its oasis landscapes, mudbrick forts, and archaeological sites—is a UNESCO World Heritage City and an exemplary living cultural landscape.

DCT–AbuDhabihaspartneredwithRIBAGCCtolaunchtheTURABStudentCompetition,organizedasakeysideeventoftheTerra2026WorldCongress.

Aligned with the Congress theme, "Managing Change in Earthen Cultural Landscapes," this GCC-wide student competition mobilises emerging designers to propose culturally grounded, environmentally responsible, and technically clear ideas for earthen futures in the Gulf region.

2. Purpose & Objectives

• Strengthen academic engagement across GCC universities in the domains of earthen architecture and   cultural landscapes.
• Encourage rigorous, research-led studio proposals that connect heritage, climate resilience, and contemporary needs.
• Provide a high-visibility platform for student work integrated with the Congress exhibition and discourse.
• Foster ethical innovation—combining traditional knowledge with appropriate technology and materials.

3. Competition Theme & Thematic Alignment

Theme Title: Managing Change in Earthen Cultural Landscapes: Student Visions for Earthen Futures
Entrants must align their proposals to the following Congress-aligned sub-themes:

3.1 Transmitting Earthen Heritage and Architecture: Celebration of communities and craft; documentation and teaching of know-how; promotion of earthen architecture's environmental and cultural benefits.

3.2 Safeguarding Earthen Cultural Landscapes: Understanding, documenting, conserving, and managing earthen cultural landscapes under demographic, urban, or ecological pressures.

3.3 Innovations in Earthen Architecture: Novel materials and hybrid systems; construction and conservation techniques; adaptive reuse; new spatial expressions that respect continuity.

3.4 Resilience to Vulnerabilities: Climate-responsive strategies (heat mitigation, water management, flooding/drought), hazard reduction, responsible regulation and advocacy.

4. Scope & Project Types

Projects must be site-specific, in the GCC.
Suggested project types include:

• Architectural interventions in earthen cultural landscapes (pavilions, cultural facilities, community hubs).
• Public realm and landscape strategies integrated with earthen cultural buildings.
• Housing prototypes (incremental, modular, or community-oriented) using earthen techniques.
• Exhibition structures communicating cultural narratives, and public realm strategies.
• Speculative futures exploring new paradigms for earthen structures and settlements.

5. Site Selection Guidance

• Locate a real site within the GCC ideal for the project
• Demonstrate a clear understanding of the site's cultural, environmental, and regulatory context.
• Consider climatic data (orientation, shading, thermal inertia), material availability and community stakeholders
• Embedding conservation principles—suitability, compatibility, reversibility, sustainability, authenticity, and context-sensitivity.
• Projects should also reflect circular economy thinking, ensuring resource   efficiency, adaptability, and long-term stewardship.
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• Projects should also reflect circular economy thinking, ensuring resource   efficiency, adaptability, and long-term stewardship.

6. Eligibility

• Open to currently enrolled students in architecture, engineering architecture, urban design at GCC universities (UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait).
• Individual or team submissions (maximum 5 members).
• Each university may submit up-to 10 entries; internal shortlisting is encouraged.
• Original work only.

7. Deliverables & Technical Specifications

7.1 Design Boards (Mandatory)

Four (4) A1 boards in PDF format (portrait), maximum 20 MB per board.
Presentation deliverables set

- Elevations: scale for Architectural designs: 1:50/ 100
- Sections: scale for Architectural designs: 1:50/ 100
- Floor Plans: scale for Architectural designs: 1:50/ 100
- Enlarged sections and elevations highlighting key spaces or relationships (suggested scale 1:10)
- Details (suggested scale 1:5/1:10)
- Envelope Material information
- Key materials
- Axonometrics
- Contextual Elevations: Showing Urban designs at 1:200
- Masterplan / Urban Layout designs at 1:200 /1:500
- Rendered Perspectives - Primary interior / exterior spaces

(Submitters should use an appropriate scale for their submission within Architectural design or landscape design .)

7.2 Project Preview Sheet (Mandatory)

One Project Image from the presentation that best describes the project alongside a 500–800 word summary to describe the project's narrative, thematic alignment, cultural/contextual rationale, environmental and social strategies, material sourcing and feasibility, and anticipated impact or pathways to prototyping.

7.3 Supplementary Media (Optional)

Up to 6 images of physical models or prototypes; and/or a video (maximum 2 minutes, MP4) explaining construction logic, narrative, or stakeholder engagement. Supplementary files should not exceed a combined 200 MB per entry.

7.4 File Naming & Formats

Naming: Unique Registeration Code_TeamName_ProjectTitle_Descriptor (e.g., TA234_DesertWeave_OasisPavilion_Board01). Accepted formats: PDF for boards and written statement; JPG/PNG for images; MP4 for video.

Note:
a. Presentation boards should not include any information related to the university or personal team information.
b. Team name must not include the University name.

7.5 Accessibility & Legibility

Use clear typographic hierarchies and contrast; include north arrows, scales, and legends. Ensure text is readable at 100% zoom. All non-English text must include English translations.

• Open to currently enrolled students in architecture, engineering architecture, urban design at GCC universities (UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait).

• Individual or team submissions (maximum 5 members).
• Each university may submit up-to 10 entries; internal shortlisting is encouraged.
• Original work only.

8. Sustainability & Technical Guidance

• Prioritise local soils and aggregates where feasible; use stabilisers (lime, pozzolans) only as appropriate, and favour native species for landscaping.
• Demonstrate thermal mass benefits, shading, and passive ventilation strategies relevant to hot-arid climates.
• Indicate water-sensitive design approaches (e.g., greywater, condensate reuse, rain harvesting where climatically plausible).
• Detail disassembly, repairability, or circularity (earthen reusability, minimal waste).
• Address maintenance regimes and community-enabled stewardship where relevant.
• Draw Inspiration from traditional techniques, earthen built heritage and urban architectural techniques.

9. Submission Process

Submissions must be completed via the official Competition Portal (URL to be issued to universities to share with their students).
Each university will verify team eligibility and completeness prior to upload. Late submissions will not be accepted.
All entries must be anonymised on boards and written statement following the naming format:
Unique Registeration Code_TeamName_ProjectTitle_Descriptor (e.g., TA234_DesertWeave_OasisPavilion_Board01).
University and team details are entered only in the portal forms.

10. Timeline

Milestone	Date	Details
Competition Launch	Early September 2025	Brief circulated to GCC faculties; webinar schedule released.
Registration Deadline	15 December 2025	Universities confirm teams and designate a faculty contact.
Q&A Deadline	10 January 2026	All participant questions answered.
Submission Deadline	24 January 2026	All files uploaded by 23:59 GST via portal.
Shortlisting	January 2026	Internal panel selects up to 30 entries.
Jury Review	February 2026	Jury convenes (digital or hybrid) to evaluate shortlisted entries.
Exhibition set up	Before 10 April	Poster printing and set up
People's Choice Voting	10-14 2026	Public at exhibition voting for shortlisted projects.
Exhibition & Awards	13–16 April 2026	Exhibition and ceremony during TERRA 2026 in Al Ain. Ceremony 14th Afternoon.

11. Jury & Evaluation

The jury will include 4-5regional and international experts in architecture, earthen construction, and cultural heritage, including DCT-nominated members.
Evaluation will adhere to a transparent scoring rubric (100-point scale).

Criterion	Weight	Descriptor (Excellence)
Innovation & Creativity	20%	Original concept; inventive use of earthen materials; advances discourse.
Cultural & Contextual Relevance	20%	Deep engagement with place, communities, narratives, and heritage values.
Sustainability & Environmental Responsibility	20%	Robust passive strategies; material circularity; resilience to climate/hazards.
Design Excellence & Clarity	20%	Spatial quality; technical coherence; high-quality drawings and visuals.
Narrative & Communication	20%	Compelling storytelling; clear, legible presentation across media.

12. Prizes & Recognition

• TURAB Prize: Earthen Architectural Design. (1st prizes – 10K AED / runner up 5k AED)
• TURAB Prize: Earthen Cultural Landscapes. (1st prizes – 10K AED / runner up 5k AED)
• Special Jury Recognition – Exceptional idea or execution.
• People's Choice Prize – Determined by votes cast by Terra World Congress attendees
Benefits:
custom-carved earthen trophies;
exhibition of winning and shortlisted entries at TERRA 2026;
inclusion in Congress publications and online gallery;
waived Congress registration for shortlisted participants;
travel and accommodation for winners of top 2 categories and runner-up's, (4 people) to attend the ceremony in Al Ain.

13. Exhibition Logistics

• Display format: printed boards (A1 or consolidated A0), select models/prototypes, and digital screens as space permits.
• Print specifications for boards (guidance): 300 dpi minimum; recommended foamboard mounting 5–10 mm; matte finish.
• Shipping: shortlisted entrants may be asked to provide high-resolution print files and/or ship models by March 2026.
• Credits: names and universities displayed post-judging (ensuring anonymity during evaluation).

14. Disqualification, Conflicts of Interest & Appeals

Grounds for disqualification include:

• late submission;
• breach of anonymity; plagiarism;
• offensive or discriminatory content;
• non-compliance with file specifications;
• or attempts to influence jurors.

The use of AI tools is permitted, provided the submission remains the entrant's own original work and technical data.
Conflicts of interest will be managed by recusal.

15. Communications & Support

Competition Portal: URL to be issued via university contacts. FAQs, templates, and updates will be posted.

Official queries via:
anita@aquaarchitects.com
alia@aquaarchitects.com

Optional webinars will be hosted in October and November 2025.

Earth to Earth Pavillion by Dabbagh Architects