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BEACH CLEAN-UPS AND OTHER CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN KUWAIT



NELE LENZE

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Beach Clean-Ups and Other Civic Engagement for the Protection of the Environment in Kuwait

Nele Lenze

About the Author

Nele Lenze is publishing director at Berlin Story Publishing. Before moving back to Berlin, she researched online culture and participation culture in the Gulf and lectured at RMIT in Vietnam and the Gulf University for Science and Technology in Kuwait. She also conducted research at the Middle East Institute at the National University of Singapore. She holds a PhD in Middle Eastern Studies and Media Studies from the University of Oslo and obtained her Master's in Arabic Literature from Freie University Berlin. Nele has co-edited four academic books on media, participation culture and the Middle East and wrote the monograph *Politics and Digital Literature in the Middle East. Perspectives on Online Text and Context* (2018).

Abstract

Informed by English and Arabic sources, including information published by NGOs and grassroots organisations, government information campaigns, social media posts and original interviews with a small number of people in the environmental community in Kuwait, this paper argues that civic engagement is an important factor in caring for and promoting environmental concerns in Kuwait.

Contrary to the argument that there is minimal citizen engagement in rentier states, the research finds both Kuwaitis and long-term residents actively engage in community work. Historically, this civic engagement in Kuwait has been associated with social and political changes, such as the 2006 'Orange Movement' which successfully lobbied to reduce the number of electoral districts.

Using a theoretical framework of participation culture, the paper highlights how one of the main drivers of change related to the awareness of environmental challenges in society derives from organisations such as NGOs and activist groups, including the Kuwait Dive Team, the Kuwait Water Association, Mw6iny and Trashtag. Social media is central to how these groups communicate their initiatives to the population.

The participation of private individuals, who aim to improve living conditions in the country, ensures many of the environmental projects in Kuwait continue. Compared to other Gulf states, the political system in Kuwait permits greater and freer civic engagement which allows for democratic forms of organisation and for the public to be involved in social and political developments.

Background

This paper intends to show that civic engagement is an important factor in caring for and promoting environmental concerns in Kuwait. Recent climate modelling suggests that Kuwait will be among the hottest inhabitable places on earth with daily summer temperatures above 50 degrees Celsius.¹ The paper examines citizen engagement and participation culture in Kuwait. It argues that one of the main drivers of change related to the awareness of environmental challenges in society comes from smaller groups such as NGOs and other active initiatives. The paper shows that Kuwaitis and long-term residents alike actively engage in community work. The activities of both stand counter to the argument that there is no citizen engagement in rentier states and that non-nationals do not engage in the betterment of the community. The research is informed by information provided by NGOs and grassroots movements, and governmental response and information campaigns. Sources in Arabic and English serve to inform the research. The purpose of the research is to highlight civic engagement campaigns in Kuwait. Therefore, it is of great value to evaluate what steps have already been taken on an outreach level to create more awareness of the threats of global warming. The evidence supporting the argument of this paper stems from media sources and interviews. To identify often discussed topics and issues, we will investigate critical sources of traditional media, as well as social media. Framing the work through the concept of participation culture helps to understand on the ground developments. With about 40.5 percent of Kuwait's population using Instagram² and more than 41 percent using Twitter,³ Kuwait has one of the largest per capita user communities of Instagram and Twitter in the region. Modern social media is thus significant sources of outreach when it comes to addressing the topics at hand.

The research is a modest study on current developments and only shows a snapshot of contemporary social movements in Kuwait. It is based on a limited sample of social and mass media sources. The framework for the research is designed by reading the material through the lens of participation culture. As participatory culture stands for a connection between actors and audiences as well as actors and authorities,⁴ this framework is helpful for studying civic engagement. The data for this research was collected in 2018–2019. The newspaper articles are from online platforms and highlight reporting on the topic of the environment. To find these articles we used the search function of a variety of Kuwaiti newspaper websites. Snowball system sampling helped to gather insights on NGOs and social media accounts. After researching a selection of accounts and hashtags on Instagram that deal with the topic studied, we also engaged with activists, journalists, friends

¹ Kundan Pandey, 'Kuwait Could Face Serious Climate Change Impacts Over the Next Few Decades', *Down To Earth*, 28 February 2016. Available at <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/interviews/agriculture/-kuwait-could-face-serious-climate-change-impacts-over-the-next-few-decades--5296> (accessed 6 September 2019).

² According to the media analytics agency Napoleon Cat, data was published in September 2018. Available at <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/instagram-users-in-kuwait/2018/09> (accessed 6 September 2019).

³ According to the Arab Social Media Report of 2015. Available at <https://de.slideshare.net/othmaneg/arab-social-media-report-first-report-2015> (accessed 28 March 2021).

⁴ Nele Lenze and Charlotte Schriwer (eds), *Participation Culture in the Gulf: Networks, Politics and Identity* (Kent: Routledge, 2018).

and students to find further active groups. Through personal contacts, Instagram and WhatsApp it was possible to contact some of the active members of the community. We then conducted interviews with representatives from three major actors in the environmental community of Kuwait.

The next three sections focus on citizen engagement, social media activities and environmental awareness campaigns in Kuwait to set a foundation for later discussions.

Kuwait and Citizen Engagement

Kuwait has an active scene of participation culture and civic engagement. NGOs work on the stateless residents of Kuwait, called 'Bidoun', on workers' rights (Social Work Society), women's rights (Abolish Article 153), animal rights (Protecting Animal Welfare Society in Kuwait) and many other issues. Collections of donations for causes such as for the people of war-torn Syria or in the West Bank and Gaza are part of reoccurring engagement with international causes. Kuwaiti clubs and societies organise regular political events related to global and local developments.

Dawawin/Diwaniyyas that offer mostly private spaces for discussions and open discussion spaces such as Niqashna invite Kuwaitis and expatriates to debates and inspire actions through grassroots work. Participation culture is also visible when it comes to cultural activities such as art exhibitions, concerts and craft markets. Participation culture means that people act and do not only consume. The audience is part of the outcome and participates through comments and contributions. According to Jenkins et al., participation culture also includes collaborative problem-solving.⁵ According to Kligler-Vilenchik, participatory culture can lead to civic engagement.⁶ Through the examples of activist groups and NGOs presented in this paper, we show that collaborative problem-solving can be seen in the work of groups and individuals in Kuwait. We also hope to show how participation culture leads to civic engagement by highlighting activities such as beach clean-up groups (amongst others). Discussions on the local consequences of global warming and specific ways of dealing with local environmental problems are still low level but increasing. Engagement with social and environmental causes in Kuwait comes from locals and expatriates alike.

In Gulf studies, the terms 'migrant labourer', 'bachelor' and 'expatriate' are often discussed. The terminology needs to be explained when writing about the foreign long-term residents of Kuwait. The majority of Kuwait's population is not Kuwaiti. Apart from the large foreign population, Bidoun are also not citizens in the country. Foreign

⁵ Henry Jenkins, Ravi Purushotma, Katherine Clinton, Margaret Weigel and Alice J. Robison, 'Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century', *MacArthur Foundation* (Chicago, 2005). Available at <http://www.newmedialiteracies.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/NMLWhitePaper.pdf> (accessed 28 March 2021).

⁶ Neta Kligler-Vilenchik, "'Decreasing World Suck': Fan Communities, Mechanisms of Translation, and Participatory Politics", *University of Southern California A Case Study Report Working Paper, Media, Activism and Participatory Politics Project* (Los Angeles, CA: Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, 2013).

non-citizens of Kuwait are usually described as expatriates in Kuwaiti media. The use of this terminology is independent of their social status. Certainly, even if there is no difference in terminology, social status impacts living conditions and social interactions in Kuwait. Expatriates usually come to work in Kuwait and their visas are granted within the kafala system.⁷ People come to Kuwait from many countries in the world seeking better work opportunities and are employed in all sectors of the private economy including engineering, the medical profession, service and construction. Along the lines of Neha Vora's research, we argue that long-term migrants form a sense of belonging in the Gulf independently of citizenship.⁸

For this paper, it is important to note that expatriates who engage voluntarily in environmental work are mostly from the middle class because this group has access to monetary and time resources. Expatriates and Kuwaitis are active in their work for the protection of the environment. An example of expatriates engaging in these activities can be seen in the work of Indian communities who hold competitions for children to write about the issues. On the Kuwaiti side, NGOs, business people and former educators all contribute to participatory activities to protect the environment. They demand more care for Kuwait's resources like water and energy but also generally want to live in a cleaner environment. These groups and individuals voice their concerns through social media, public outreach through the mainstream media, dialogue with politicians and organised workshops and activities.

Kuwait and the Media

A July 2016 study by the Kuwaiti media agency, Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), reports that 72 percent of the people surveyed used mobile media for more than five hours a day.⁹ With the high rate of mobile media usage it is no surprise that Kuwait and other Gulf countries are becoming essential centres for mobile media interactions, production and usage. Fast internet connections and access to the newest devices enable a rich internet culture. Creative, commercial, and political content online can be read in the context of participatory culture. Active initiatives create awareness of social and political problems in Kuwait while bloggers and influencers inspire debates and national discussions. Outreach activities include hashtags, Instagram stories and posts as well as streaming and reporting on public discussion panels. These initiatives can be commercially or politically motivated. It is important to note that NGOs and bloggers and influencers are not doing the same work. NGOs undertake a much more long-term initiative related to climate awareness activities. However, occasionally bloggers and influencers support their message. A long-term initiative can be seen in the time NGOs devote to supporting particular causes

⁷ Omar Hesham AlShehabi, 'Policing Labour in Empire: The Modern Origins of the Kafala Sponsorship System in the Gulf Arab States,' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (2019), pp. 1–20. Available at DOI: 10.1080/13530194.2019.1580183.

⁸ Neha Vora, *Impossible Citizens: Dubai's Indian Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

⁹ KUNA, 'Social Media in Kuwait: A Double-Edged Sword – 72 Percent Kuwaitis Use Social Media 5+ Hours a Day', *Kuwait Times*, 30 July 2016. Available at <http://news.kuwaittimes.net/pdf/2016/jul/30/p03.pdf> (accessed 4 March 2021).

on the ground and online. If we look at the Kuwait Dive Team, a group of young Kuwaitis who are attempting to rescue and rehabilitate the Kuwaiti marine environment through dedicated marine operations, for example, we can see social media content, print content and media interviews supporting their message continuing over many years.¹⁰

It is also important to note that bloggers and influencers may be paid for the content they provide and it is not always clear if they blog in official or private capacities. Reporting on environmental issues and climate change in Arab newspapers has been researched by Bradley C. Freeman,¹¹ Mikkel Fugl Eskjær¹² and by Jon Nordenson.¹³ All three concluded that most of the reporting on the issue was not investigative pieces but agencies' announcements from KUNA or international news agencies. Researchers connect the problem to publishing regulations. Bradley C. Freeman analysed English language newspapers in the GCC only, among them the *Kuwait Times*, and found that the coverage was limited. Despite having the highest diversity of newspapers per capita in the Arab world, Kuwait follows the global trend and is experiencing a decline in readers. Recurring topics in publications relating to environmental issues in Kuwait deal with the problem of rubbish production and disposal as well as energy consumption and less so with the impact of the big oil companies on the environment.

Kuwait and Climate Change

Kuwait is often described as the hottest country in the world based on the temperature measured in inhabited spaces. In June–August 2019, Kuwait was exposed to heatwaves of 52 degrees Celsius and in November 2018 torrential rain flooded the country causing severe disruption for several weeks. While floods, as well as extremely hot summers, have occurred before, the more extreme conditions in 2018 made the general population and also the media more aware of the changing climate around the globe. Environmental challenges in Kuwait are often related to water usage, food imports, the hot climate, waste and the pressure on energy resources caused by air conditioning use. Kuwait is documented to be the highest per capita water consumer in the world with the lowest per capita production of water.¹⁴ Water consumption per capita is, on average, 447 litres every day.¹⁵ With

¹⁰ The Kuwait Dive Team's Instagram/Twitter accounts can be found at @guardiansofsea and their Facebook page is https://en-gb.facebook.com/pg/guardiansofsea/about/?ref=page_internal (accessed 28 March 2021). See also an interview with the team: Ramona Crasto, 'Kuwait Dive Team: Guardians of the Sea', *Kuwait Times*, 25 October 2018. Available at <https://news.kuwaittimes.net/website/kuwait-dive-team-guardians-of-the-sea/> (accessed 28 March 2021).

¹¹ Bradley C. Freeman, 'Protecting the Gulf: Climate Change Coverage in GCC Print Media', *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 3/1 (2016). Available at DOI: 10.1080/23311983.2016.1212690.

¹² Mikkel Fugl Eskjær, 'Climate Change Communication in Middle East and Arab Countries' in *Oxford Encyclopedia of Climate Science*, Oxford University Press (2017). Available at DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190228620.013.484.

¹³ Jon Nordenson, 'Between Populism and (Electric) Power: Reconciling a Green Shift and Popular Legitimacy in Kuwait,' presentation given at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (September 2018).

¹⁴ Pandey, 'Kuwait Could Face Serious Climate Change Impacts Over the Next Few Decades'.

¹⁵ Haweya Ismail, 'Kuwait: Food and Water Security', *Future Directions International*, 1 September 2015.

minimal freshwater sources, desalinated water comprises more than half of the water used within the country.

As there is an ongoing discussion on the possibilities of job creation for Kuwaiti talent, it may be of interest to consider the debate surrounding possible job creation through the protection of the environment, primarily through sustainable water resources management. This aspect of the study can be related to the role of businesses involved in commercial environmental protection and climate change in Kuwait. The sea, and connected to that the beaches, play an essential role in the Kuwaiti environment. Both suffer from a great deal of pollution, namely 'ship-based pollution, offshore oil leaks and spills as a result of offshore operations, fishermen dumps, municipal wastewater discharge, and industrial discharge'.¹⁶ On the other hand, the sea, as well as the coastline, are an important space for fishing, trade and desalination plants. In addition to industrial pollution, the sea and the beaches are exposed to a lot of littering and industrial waste disposal. These water and waste problems are the main focus of civic engagement groups.

Research Design and Methods

The main focus of this research is environment-related outreach, including recent campaigns on plastic waste, beach cleaning and other environmental issues in Kuwait. The paper examines reoccurring topics and their significance and dominance in the media. Several problems can manifest when engaging with new and traditional media. Problems that may occur can arise from inaccurate data, a limited selection of sources or inaccessibility of information due to either a lack of records or restrictions on access.

This research paper documents and analyses accessible information and campaigns targeting the public. The primary sources of information for awareness campaigns are Twitter and Instagram as these are the most used social media tools in Kuwait. A problem when using Instagram as a source of research is the fleeting nature of the media. Content often only stays online for 24 hours or is deleted early with little possibility of storing it. Additional sources may be material from state-run television channels, newspapers, as well as the national news agency, KUNA. As value transmission is one of the functions of the media, a review of educational programmes (mostly organised by NGOs and private initiatives) can provide new insights on communicating challenges through environmental changes. Newspapers based in Kuwait, written either in Arabic or English, and published between 2017 and 2019, were identified. Additionally, the KUNA website served as a source. We searched for key terminology related to environmental protection. This research focuses on traditional media and online campaigns that translate to on the ground activities. The main sources of

Available at <http://www.futuredirections.org.au/publication/kuwait-food-and-water-security/> (accessed 28 March 2021).

¹⁶ Mohamed Abdelraouf, 'Promoting GCC Regional Integration: An Environmental Perspective', GRC Gulf Papers, *Gulf Research Center* (Dubai, 2014). Available at https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/183788/Gulf_Unity_paper_2952.pdf (accessed 28 March 2021).

information are publicly accessible data from authorities and NGOs, newspaper articles and campaign outreach on social media.

The three interviews relevant to this research paper with the main actors of environmental platforms were conducted in person or over the phone. For a balanced sample of qualitative semi-structured interviews, a selection was made that included a variety of participants. The selection was based on affiliation to institutions as well as availability. Key questions we asked related to impact, strategies and participation in these campaigns by both the initiators as well as the target audience.

As outlined in the edited volume *Participation Culture in the Gulf*, social dynamics in the Gulf have undergone rapid changes connected to globalisation and new network structures that extend beyond the tribe or the family.¹⁷ Civil society movements in various shapes and forms have begun to dominate social and political discourse in the Gulf states. Increased networks within cultural movements, art collectives and alternative civil society engagement, particularly through social media outlets, are a growing phenomenon in the Gulf countries today.

An orientalist view on rentier states would suggest that social movements are not initiated because of the underdevelopment and low productivity of the local population that is incentivised by rentier money. Hazem Beblawi would call this a 'rentier mentality'.¹⁸ Rentier state theory claims that the rents are keeping society together as a whole. The theory refutes the potential for change that is explored in this paper by looking at the plurality of environmental and social engagement. Contrary to rentier state theory and rentier state mentality, we believe that engagement of civil society is evident in political, social and cultural developments. Participation culture is not restricted to only being related to new media but instead can be seen as occurring in offline and online spaces simultaneously; its essence is the interdisciplinary connection of events across multiple spaces of interaction. Participatory culture represents a connection between actors and authorities as well as creators and audiences, and it presents private actors in their function of public participators who become involved in current social, political and economic events. Participatory culture is mobilising and encouraging cultural and political actions. Participation culture is a driving element in continuing the dialogue about and creating awareness of environmental issues. While the government prefers a top-down approach, many bottom-up initiatives already work within the various communities in the country.

¹⁷ Nele Lenze and Charlotte Schriwer (eds), *Participation Culture in the Gulf: Networks, Politics and Identity* (Kent: Routledge, 2018), pp. 12–23.

¹⁸ Hazem Beblawi, 'The Rentier State in the Arab World', in Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani (eds), *The Rentier State* (Kent: Routledge, 1990), p. 88.

Official Initiatives for the Environment

When investigating campaigns and strategies applied by the Kuwaiti government, we can see contrasting directions. On the one hand, ministries, schools and universities are encouraged to save energy and recycle. On the other hand, Kuwait - together with Saudi Arabia, Russia and the US - blocked the endorsement of a landmark study on global warming at COP24 (Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) in 2018.¹⁹ While not approving of more studies on climate change, in the same year, Jenan Bezhad, the Secretary-General of the Kuwaiti Society for the Protection of the Environment, made clear that the flash floods that occurred over several weeks and brought the country to a standstill can be attributed to global warming and more studies should be conducted. Sherif Al-Khayyat of the Department of Climate Monitoring Change at the Environment Public Authority (EPA) confirmed that there is a connection between the rainfall and global warming.²⁰

The researchers of ETH Zurich emphasise that Kuwait has had environment-related regulations in place since 1997.²¹ Initiatives that the government supports are implemented by the EPA in collaboration with corporations and NGOs and inform the public through social media, talks and events. There are also events in collaboration with the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). Together with the Scientific Center in Kuwait, an annual celebration takes place for Environmental Awareness Day. In 2018, the focus was on highlighting the problem of high single-use plastic.²² The government conducts outreach on the issue of environmental protection and climate change through KUNA. Awareness is also facilitated through collaborations between the various ministries and other organisations. One such example is the annual 'Re-Use' exhibition at the Scientific Center in Salmiya. In 2018, the exhibition was organised by Kuwaiti artist Zahed Sultan who invited artists from all over the world to create artwork relating to re-use and recycling. While many people visited the exhibition, workshops on the same topics had to be cancelled because of a lack of attendees. The exhibition is curated by a different person every year, and the event is usually financed by various public and private sponsors like the telecommunications company Zain and the en.v Initiative. A campaign run by Kuwaiti authorities with more success and also impacting a public debate as well as showing actual results is connected to campsites. The campaign in 2017–2019 encouraged people to clean

¹⁹ Associated Press, 'U.S., Russia, Kuwait and Saudis Block Key Climate Study at COP24', *CBC*, 9 December 2018. Available at <https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/un-climate-welcome-study-report-objections-cop24-1.4938765> (accessed 28 March 2021).

²⁰ 'Experts: Climate Changes Behind Weather Fluctuations, Heavy Rains in Kuwait', *KUNA*, 17 November 2018. Available at <https://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2759884&language=en> (accessed 28 March 2021).

²¹ 'In Kuwait, in 1997, the GCC adopted common systems for the protection and development of wildlife, for dealing with radioactive materials, for waste management as well as the adoption of the procedures for coordination among the GCC countries concerning the transfer of hazardous waste across borders among themselves for the purpose of processing and recycling or disposal', Abdelraouf, 'Promoting GCC Regional Integration'.

²² *Ibid.*

up their campsites.²³ Campsites are usually spaces in the desert where families can spend their weekend. Increasing complaints about the conditions of the campsites led to the campaign which encouraged less littering and pollution.²⁴ The EPA erected billboards and enforced environmental regulations during the camping season of 2017–2019.

Nordenson states that Kuwait allocates resources for public discourse on the environment. Importantly, Kuwait has laws and regulations, including a system of fees in place that relate to the environment.²⁵ An environmental activist who organises communal clean-ups clarified that even if rules are in place, they are not followed. Kuwaiti authorities also publish an environment magazine, however, according to Nordenson, within the magazine no demands or policies relating to environmental protection or climate change are made.²⁶ The government conducts outreach and issues policies and outlines regulations. These regulations are supposed to ensure that only officials, usually in the government, with strategic planning and legal authority lead the work on environmental issues and climate change. In line with this, a top-down approach serves as the only solution because it helps to maintain power. By contrast, NGOs note that changes can only happen bottom-up through educating the public and especially the youth on how to adapt behaviour to live sustainably and create a cleaner environment. To involve the public further, the Kuwait EPA engages the audience with campaigns such as the Tarsheed campaign, launched in August 2007, to raise people's awareness of the need to preserve energy. This campaign spread to Doha and Sharjah. The same authority also undertook a survey and discovered that 78.5 percent of the participants were either not aware of any governmental campaigns regarding the protection of the environment or were dissatisfied with them.²⁷ Reoccurring topics highlighted by the authorities relate to limiting energy consumption as Kuwait is still using a higher than average amount of energy due to the need for air conditioning in the summertime. Deep-seated and institutionalised issues such as pollution from cars or oil refineries are not a central focus of the campaigns. The problem of littering is communicated more often through NGOs. Citizens and expatriates are both parts of the audience that the various governmental organisations aim to reach with their campaigns. The impact of official campaigns is limited. The selectiveness of which environmental issues government institutions discuss is not part of this study of participation culture and environmental groups in Kuwait but it does merit further investigation.

²³ Badah Alenzi, 'The Start of the Camping Season Tomorrow and Today's "Electronic" Reservation' (بدء موسم التخييم غداً والحجز اليوم «إلكترونياً»), *Al Anba*, 15 November 2017 (accessed 28 March 2021).

²⁴ KUNA, "'The Environment': Designated Places for Throwing Waste Close to Campsites' («البيئة»: تخصيص أماكن لرمي النفايات قريبة من المخيمات), *Alaan*, 7 November 2017. Available at <https://www.alaan.cc/article/293561/> (accessed 28 March 2021).

²⁵ Jon Nordenson, 'Between Populism and (Electric) Power'.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ 'Kuwait's Initial National Communications Under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change', *Kuwait Environment Public Authority* (Kuwait, 2012). Available at <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Kuwait%20INC%20final%20to%20COP.pdf> (accessed 4 March 2021).

NGO Work and Social Media Campaigns

Most NGOs either focus on dealing with the large rubbish and littering problem or on water issues such as the protection of drinking water or the cleaning and protection of the sea. Beach clean-ups, as well as awareness campaigns in schools for rubbish-related issues, are often organised in collaboration with large corporations. Some NGOs that clean up beaches like Trashtag (@trashtagkuwait) and Mw6iny (@mw6iny) conduct outreach through social media in addition to their hands-on work. Others such as the Kuwait commute movement promote their campaigns using public transport (@Kuwait-commute). The civil engagement group Mw6iny, run by Latifa Al-Wazzan (who started her work in 2017), works on beach clean-ups and environmental protection awareness campaigns and does a lot of outreach, especially with schools and companies. The NGO is funded by the Kuwait Dive Team (@kuwaitdiveteam) and works as the biggest supporter of the protection of the sea in Kuwait.

The social media accounts of these environmental NGOs and activists have most followers on Instagram compared to Twitter, Facebook and Snapchat. The lowest subscriber number for an account is for Mw6iny with 1,580 subscribers (as of August 2020) and the highest is 14,000 for the Kuwait Dive Team (as of August 2020). Counting the subscription numbers does not tell us about reposting or the popularity of hashtags. However, it is clear that environmental awareness campaigns cannot compare with commercially directed social media accounts such as, for example, Kuwaiti social media influencer Ascia's who has 2.6 million (as of August 2020) subscribers globally. We can conclude that, compared to commercially directed key opinion leaders on social media, outreach for the environment in Kuwait is more of a niche pursuit. Nevertheless, compared to other political issues such as women's rights, the numbers are comparable.

The group of engaged people Guardians of the Sea/Kuwait Dive Team inform the public and protect and rehabilitate the marine environment. The Kuwait Dive Team regularly helps clean the sea of rubbish and documents this through media statements and Instagram videos. The NGO's divers tirelessly clean up large patches of plastic pollution in the water. The Scientific Center and other organisations support their work by directing awareness of the extraordinary project. The NGO also supports the protection of the coral reefs and receives support for that from the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences. Both groups, the Kuwait Dive Team and Mw6iny, emphasise the connection between human beings and the environment. Both organisations address changing environments. The Kuwait Water Association (KWA), founded in 2012, is another NGO and hosts youth forums with workshops and research presentations. KWA (@kuwaitwater2012) helps to create awareness of general issues related to water, such as how to read the newly installed water meters or how to save water on a day-to-day basis. KWA is bringing water awareness to schools, and offers training related to water and greywater as well as conducting water audits in buildings. The NGO consults the government and produces workshops like the Water Safety Plan. The KWA designs animated videos which encourage people to save water through the Rushoud (رشود) campaign. The videos are

shared on social media and narrated by a water drop that explains how to manage water consumption better. The NGO's work intends to rebuild the material relationship that Kuwaitis and expatriates have with resources. All of the mentioned NGOs receive regular awards by governmental entities. The knowledge and data that groups like the Kuwait Dive Team and Mw6iny gather might be more valuable in the local context than any other data gathered by international organisations which may lead to a deeper understanding of the particular problems of Kuwait.²⁸

A common suggestion in policy papers on Kuwaiti engagement with the environment is awareness campaigns for children. However, these are already in place. Care for the environment is part of the curriculum and schools work together with groups like Mw6iny to clean up beaches or participate in after school activities with Manifesto 13 (@manifesto13) that offer classes on a more conscious engagement with the environment through art. Tiswa Kuwait (To Increase Sea Welfare Awareness @tiswa.q8) is another civil society organisation that helps, especially with outreach to children. It organises a large variety of workshops to help children engage with the environment. The youth group Agrifag (أغريفاج) is currently working on composting food waste. So far, Agrifag's team has been able to handle more than 500,000 tonnes of food surpluses in Kuwait.²⁹

Funding for the NGOs comes from private donations, corporate sponsors, as well as governmental organisations depending on the cause and the events. The examples above cannot grasp the full scope of civic engagement in Kuwait. They do, though, highlight a number of initiatives that have an impact on the overall discourse on environmental issues. The nature of the civic engagement is to improve and promote increased awareness of fundamental problems that impact everyone's life in the country. If we want to focus on civic engagement with the environment compared to what is stated in rentier theory, we find that the theory's predictions are not reflected in Kuwaiti society. In this paper, we only examine civil engagement connected to the environment, but the reader can find academic research on other kinds of civil engagement and participation culture related to more democratic movements, labour conditions or women's rights.

In Kuwait's recycling infrastructure, private companies work in partnership with the government. Omniya (@omniya_kw), as well as Recycle Kuwait, are both working recycling companies. Omniya is privately run but funded by the state.³⁰ Initiatives such as Omniya Kuwait work together with schools. Omniya is also an active organisation that raises awareness of the problem of littering. The company places recycling containers in front of co-ops and supermarkets in addition to running workshops and educating Kuwait's pop-

²⁸ Eurig Scandrett, Jim Crowther, Akiko Hemmi, Suroopa Mukherjee, Dharmesh Shah and Tarunima Sen, 'Theorising Education and Learning in Social Movements: Environmental Justice Campaigns in Scotland and India', *Studies in the Education of Adults* 42/2 (2010), pp. 124–40.

²⁹ Al Jazeera, "Agrifag".. A Youth Initiative in Kuwait to Convert Food Waste into Fertiliser' (مبادرة شبابية بالكويت لتحويل مخلفات الطعام إلى سماد -شهد المحاميد- الكويت .. "أغريفاج") *Al Jazeera*, 17 March 2019. Available at <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/miscellaneous/2019/3/17/الكويت-عضوي-الطعام-سماد-عضوي-الكويت> (accessed 28 March 2021).

³⁰ Daniel Schlosberg, 'Theorising Environmental Justice: The Expanding Sphere of a Discourse,' *Environmental Politics* 22/1 (2013), pp. 37–55.

ulation on sustainable living. The company Recycling Kuwait (@recyclekuwait) creates awareness of recycling online on Instagram and through their YouTube channel (Khaled alKhashram).³¹ Recycle Kuwait is entirely privately owned.

Both companies are doing extensive outreach on social media. NGO work has an impact on society, the environment and on documenting current problems. Researchers point out that the NGOs can provide valuable data on changes in the environment to supplement data collected by authorities. Jean J. Boddewyn suggests that it is helpful to a cause to have practitioners being activists because practitioners ‘can pro-actively identify social concerns and find ways of contributing to their solution’.³² To reach out to more people that can help engage in the protection of Kuwait, NGOs conduct outreach on social media to find volunteers and raise awareness. The most common medium used by Kuwaitis and expatriates is Instagram. While research conducted on awareness of environmental issues usually focuses on newspapers, we decided to highlight campaigns and outreach in digital media. Instagram in Kuwait serves as a source of entertainment but also as a relevant source of information on current events as they are not regularly publicised or updated on other media. The media outreach by active groups is circulated via Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat. In some cases, television interviews contribute to outreach strategies as well. Audiences engage with the material by reposting and sharing. Through sharing posts, a wider circle of people will be aware of what initiatives are happening. Audiences also comment on outreach material. Additionally, participants of the many initiatives create their own content while actively helping clean up beaches or the sea. The sharing by participants helps to further increase visibility. When we look at audience participation on social media, we must recognise that the vast majority are so called ‘lurkers’ and do not actually produce content or comment on outreach.³³ Since lurking can be defined as listening, this is not a passive act.³⁴ The same audience is still aware of events and the general discourse. It would be deterministic to conclude that social media outreach is the aspect of the work of the environmental groups that creates changes. The active work on the ground provides evidence of engagement with the most pressing issues that NGOs are working on.

The effects of the discussion of environmental challenges on social media and the work on the ground involving young people can be seen in further developments of school initiatives and discussion panels. Environmental topics are often discussed in connection with demographic and economic changes in the country. The same topics are also discussed by looking at the immediate future of Kuwait and considering water shortages and temperature increases.

³¹ Khaled Al Khashram, ‘Recycle in Kuwait’, 2 November 2017, video. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udbckZp-eCY> (accessed 28 March 2021).

³² Jean J. Boddewyn, ‘Beyond “The Evolving Discipline of Public Affairs”’, *Journal of Public Affairs* 12/1 (2012), pp. 98–104.

³³ Yu-Wei Lee, Fei-Ching Chen and Huo-Ming Jiang, ‘Lurking as Participation: A Community Perspective on Lurkers’ Identity and Negotiability’, in S. A. Barab, K. E. Hay and D. T. Hickey (eds), *Proceedings of the 7th International Conference of the Learning Sciences* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2006).

³⁴ Gerard Goggin and Larissa Hjorth, ‘Waiting to Participate: Introduction’, *Communication, Politics & Culture* 42/2 (2009), pp. 1–5.

Conclusion

Kuwait is a constitutional emirate that works in a political system consisting of an elected parliament and an appointed government. This system allows for freer civic engagement than other Gulf states. Historically, civic engagement in Kuwait often had implications on societal changes. One such example would be the initiative of the ‘Orange Movement’ in 2006 which successfully lobbied to reduce the number of electoral districts. While the ‘Orange Movement’ stands as just one example of participation culture and civic engagement in Kuwait that led to changes, it is not the only one.³⁵ This movement is another example of civic engagement and participation culture that supports the earlier argument against rentier state theory.

Participation culture keeps many of the projects and programmes in Kuwait running. Initiatives are mostly run by private individuals who aim to improve living conditions in the country. Participation culture is democratically organised and allows people to be involved in social and political developments. This engagement leads to shaping the flow of ideas. Members of the NGOs feel their work matters. The dialogue around the protection of the environment is driven by activists from within the communities. Kuwaitis and long-term residents work together to improve the country they live in. Social media is a driving force in communicating initiatives.

While initiatives for more public transport and more renewable energy production and use are in position, and while at the same time suggestions, rules and regulations are in place to deal with personal consumption and behaviour related to littering and recycling, not much has been finalised yet. Projects connected to environmental protection and preservation often stagnate after the initial phase of planning and signing memoranda of understanding and are not completed. The government campaigns intend to reach expatriates and locals alike but do not seem to be very effective. Kuwaiti newspapers, both Arabic and English, mostly show news from agencies and do not have a wide readership anymore. The NGO work and social media platforms paired with on the ground work appear to have the most impact, possibly because it is more interactive. Most topics discussed online are related to rubbish and littering. Under-communicated topics are mostly related to the health impact of environmental issues.

A lived culture of environmental consciousness would possibly encourage the wider society to become more aware of the issues pertinent to Kuwait. However, reducing consumption and protecting the environment are worldwide issues and mostly problems of the industrial world. Groups that practise participation in creating awareness of environmental concerns intend to ‘re-imagine and reconstruct’ the relationship between people

³⁵ Hamad Albloshi and Faisal Alfahad, ‘The Orange Movement of Kuwait: Civic Pressure Transforms a Political System’ in M.J. Stephan (ed.), *Civilian Jihad: Nonviolent Struggle, Democratization, and Governance in the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

and the natural world.³⁶ To make an impact on an institutional level, activists could interact with politicians, the media and government authorities. One of the active participants interviewed suggested that contacting ministers directly may have a greater impact than campaigning disconnected from the elected government. This kind of direct engagement may lead to more significant policy changes related to waste management and recycling.

In terms of avenues for future research, it would be interesting to investigate why private and governmental initiatives for the protection of the environment are selective in the topics that they advocate for. While beach clean-ups and waste management are important issues to tackle in improving environmental living conditions in Kuwait, a pressing matter is the pollution created through the extraction of natural resources such as oil. As Kuwait's economy is not diversified and relies on the oil industry, its associated environmental and health impact merit further study.

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Middle East Centre
London School of Economics
Houghton Street
London, WC2A 2AE



@LSEMiddleEast



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Publications Editor

Mariam Ghorbannejad

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The Kuwait Dive Team cleaning up Kuwait Tower's Beach with the British Embassy. ©Rebecca Farnum

