

The Majlis (council) has traditionally been an essential part of Emirati social and political life, serving as a forum for members of the community to discuss issues among themselves and to raise important matters with elders and Sheikhs. The term 'Majlis' has been adopted by modern governments to refer to both elected and unelected advisory and decision-making bodies, including legislatures and councils of ministers. Because of the significance of the Majlis, the UAE, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia inscribed it in 2015 on the UNESCO 'Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity'. Majalis run by elders, chieftains and Sheikhs are called barza, and the Majlis host is said to be 'barez' (prominent) when he is presiding at his Majlis. Merchant Majalis were open to all, but especially pearl divers, as it provided a way to raise funds for their journeys and to see that their families would receive basic foodstuffs, such as rice, flour and coffee. LOCATIONS Majalis in cities and towns along the coast are often constructed of plaster and mud, arbour and bower, or simple canvas to provide shade. Topics included beekeeping, goat herding and the location of antelope herds, hyenas and wolves. The Majlis of Justice specialised in dispensing Shari'a judgements and often dealt with cases passed up from barza and Merchants Majlis. Justice Majalis were recognised not only for settling disputes, but also for providing education on religious topics to attendees. The atmosphere is one of constructive dialogue, defined by honesty, openness, freedom and ingenuity.