

Book presentation

CORIEN W. HOEK

The Sultanate of Oman is endowed with oil resources, as are its neighbouring Gulf countries. Exploitation of the state-owned resources began at the end of the 1960s, and the oil revenues were used by the government to initiate a countrywide process of development. *Shifting Sands* analyses this process for al-Sharqiyah, a region without oil resources of its own, which has as its main economic activities animal husbandry, agriculture, fishing and commerce. The study is based on extensive fieldwork conducted between 1985 and 1990 and a number of visits thereafter.

Regional development in a historical-geographical perspective provides the setting of the book. The present situation is analysed through highlighting the roles of the three major development forces: the government, the private sector and tribal organization. Furthermore, economic activities are investigated in terms of present performance and future prospects. The question at hand concerns the potential of an activity to offer employment to the rapidly growing population. For example, growth in agriculture and herding is defined by the limited water resources and arable land. At the same time, sustained development of agriculture and herding are seen as prerequisites to continued life in the desert and oases settlements. The fisheries sector could potentially be a core business in the region and a large part of this study is devoted to its modernization process.

The study discusses the significant phenomenon of two opposite labour flows in the region. One is represented by an influx of people mainly from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, which contributes to commercial expansion yet poses a threat to the employment of Omani people. The other is a temporary outflow of locals employed outside the region, which provides the main source of income to the region. The study con-

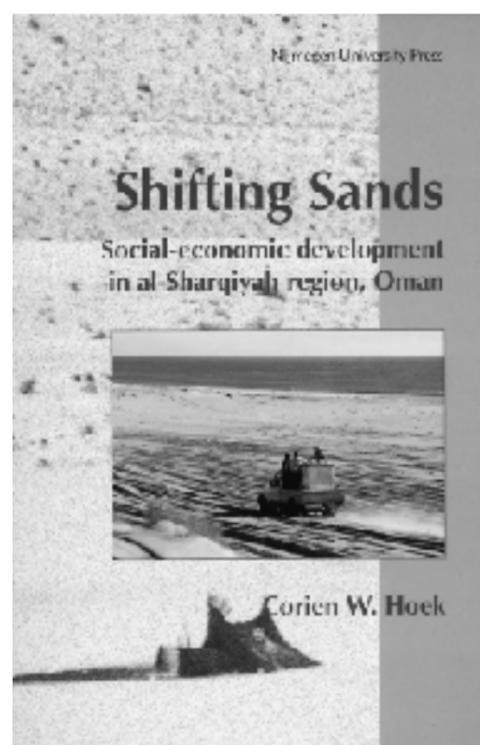
Shifting Sands

Social-economic development in al-Sharqiyah region, Oman

siders the rapidly improved living and working conditions and the flexibility of people to adapt to changing opportunities, as assets in the development process.

Macro policies affect the main topics in the regional development process and the region's situation sets conditions to national development. This linkage is explored in the concluding chapter of the book and tentative suggestions are given to attune the two strategic levels. Cooperation at all levels amongst the three major forces (government, the private sector, and the tribal organization – or other comparable social organizations), is seen as vital to a successful approach to development in al-Sharqiyah region. ◆

Dr Corien W. Hoek is an economic anthropologist and works for the Centre of Islamic Culture in Rotterdam, the Netherlands.



Shifting Sands

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