

## The project for Rural Development in Oman

### The Omani Village and the projects for rural development.

1 - It is axiomatic that the countryside occupies the most important place in the socio-economic structure of the country . In fact it is the hinterland of the city.

Because its people have more ties with the land , the rate of change and development in the country is subjected more to the natural order of life , than it is in the city . For this reason the country preserves its cultural and native features for a longer time. Lord Stapledon says in his book , " The land and its future " , " The land is the last bastion which keeps the genes and chromosomes that preserve the distinctive personalities of the country and differentiate it from other countries , even in such a country as England , which is 90 % industrialized " .

2 - In the countryside in certain countries : Egypt and the Nile, India and the Ganges and Iraq and the Euphrates, the rural life has been established over the centuries in certain centres of villages and provincial capitals, which serve the rural communities living on the agricultural land ; the existence of these settlements is justified economically and socially by the agricultural resources and the number of people they support.

- 3 - The amount of vegetation on one acre of agricultural land can be found over 1000 acres of desert we may say. The relationship between the sedentarized peasants and the agricultural land, differs from that between the desert nomads who move all the time following their animals since the grazing is spread over a vast area. For this reason, it would be more difficult to extend the social services such as health and education to these people; whereas it is much easier in the case of the village peasants. This is a problem that must be resolved and which we have to face in planning, but the solution should never aim at sedentarizing all the nomads.

It is true that the natural resources of the desert are spread over very large areas compared with the agricultural land, which makes the population density much below the minimum which can justify the provision of public service buildings in the same way as in urban centres. However, though the bedouins are moving all the time in spring and autumn, there are certain periods when they remain seasonally in one place, for instance in the summer, when they camp near the market towns, and in winter, when the climatic conditions are not favourable for moving (cold, rain and lack of grazing), and it is during these stationary periods that we can provide the nomads with the public services. In Oman, we have the nomads and the mountain people as well as the sedentarized peasants, and the national planning for rural development should aim at preserving the ecological balance between all the available resources.

The sea, the land, the plant life, the animal life and the human life, that could be sustained on the geographical area, including the deserts, the oases and the mountains as well as the intensively cultivated land.

As a matter of fact we had to include the mineral resources such as oil , yet , the effect of these resources on the lives of the mass of people is limited, since few of these people participate in this industry in the same numbers as they do in the case of agriculture , fisheries and herding . However they benefit by the revenues of these mineral resources by what the government allots in the budget for development and the raising of the standard of living in rural areas as is the case in our project for rural development.

- 4 - Indeed, nature dictated in the past to the people; nomads, peasants and urban dwellers, in the choice of sites for human settlements and their sizes. It has also determined for them their standard of living. But, now the modern communication open the village onto the outside world , and the culture of the people is no longer the product of the interaction between the bedouin and his desert environment, or the peasant with agriculture alone. The product of the different cultures of the world has come within their reach . This situation is bound to accelerate the rate of socio-economic and cultural changes to a degree that may affect the ecological balance. on the other hand, these modern communications together with the new projects for land reclamation will affect the pattern of sites of settlements .For exxample, in Turkey, modern communications and land reclamation projects are found to effect the regional plan picture. Because some villages lie outside the national traffic system in Anatolia, where distances are so great some existing communities have to be moved. Also, some new villages are to be built as well to serve the land reclamation projects in the country.

In Oman, the present moment is critical in the planning for the countryside, and this planning has to be carefully worked out at both the national and the regional levels. Therefore, it is necessary at this present stage of change that we review the decisions on these sites of settlements as villages or provincial towns and capitals, on a dynamic basis of planning for the future.

5. Whatever the projects for the rural development are, whether for agriculture, fisheries or hydrological projects, in the end it will come down to individual family housing and in specific service buildings, which are the most important factors in raising the standard of living, as they are the buildings which will house civic activities allowing for the establishing of the community on the geographical area, and thus allowing the government to realise its' policy of extending its' services to the people. That is why at this present stage of research we have concentrated on the studies of the different kind of dwellings that the peasants produced by themselves, for themselves, when they used the local materials according to their traditional methods and acquired expertise. These studies have shown that the people have produced valid solutions of great architectural value corresponding with the modern theories of aerodynamics and physics to create thermally comfortable conditions, either by using the materials with hygrometric

properties, such as the palm frond stems, ( Barasti) which absorb humidity from the air; or mud-brick which is considered one of the most effective materials for heat insulation. These solutions also include the placing of the different openings at varying levels in the building, in such a way as to allow the introduction of the cool air during the day time from the higher ones, and at night time from the lower ones, when the cool air would have settled near the ground, as shown in the accompanying photographs. The peasants have also used wind towers, (Bad geers) which catch the wind from any direction and channel it into the room, thus obtaining air movement indoors, which is considered one of the major factors in affecting thermal comfort in hot-humid zones. At present we are concerned with physical planning of house design and public service buildings for Sohar. Useful information from this work can be obtained to serve the rest of the village projects.

6. As these vernacular solutions are highly efficient they fall into the domain of scientific research that is carried out by the different research centres concerned with the problems of climate and architecture, such as 'Le Centre Scientifique et Technique du Batiment' in Paris, Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the United States, the Building Research Centre in Garston, England and the Inter-World Graduate Research Group of the Architectural Association in London, England. It is imperative to record and evaluate these solutions scientifically with modern apparatus to gain conclusive information. For this I have proposed to invite researchers

recording, to which Mr. John Townsend has agreed. The four reserchers, who are specialists in this field, Allan Cain, Faroukh Afshar, John Norton, and Omar el Farouk have accompanied me. We have to thank Professor J. Longmore of the School of Environmental Studies of London University, for his great assistance and for lending some of the equipment necessary for the research.

7. A comprehensive program of work will be set after visiting the regions in which the research will take place, either in the Wilaya of Sohar, in what concerns rural architecture, and/or the cities of Muscat, Sallalah, Nizwa and any other centre in what concerns urban architecture, so as to cover all the different building and planning forms in the whole of the Sultane. These researchers will be in charge of evaluating the different house types and public building services, which will be approved and built in the town of Sohar, starting with the new market, which is designed in a new way that allows for air movement inside the shops and in the strets around them, and also using 'barasti' in the roof construction in an engineered way.