

Center of Excellence for Water Management and Technology

Holder of the Sultan Qaboos Academic Chair for Quantitative Water Management assists with initiative to create education institute in the field of water in Oman

Oman is located in a (semi-) arid region. During summer, the temperature can reach 55°C while the average annual precipitation amounts to 20 to 100 millimeters inland and to circa 800 millimeters in the mountainous areas. At first sight, the wet Netherlands and dry Oman seem to have little in common in the field of water management. However, nothing is further from the truth.

Both The Netherlands and Oman have to deal with floods, pollution of groundwater caused by industrial activities, seawater intrusion in coastal areas caused by overexploitation of fresh groundwater and scorching created through the collection of drinking water. While the climatic circumstances may be totally different, the water management problems are not. The solutions on the other hand are often very diverse and thus interesting from the perspective of water management.

In the summer of 2010, the Dutch Ministry for Economic Affairs called for projects aimed at long term education cooperation with foreign countries, in the framework of the program 'ToGetThere'. The University of Utrecht, Deltares and Saxion Higher Education therefore offered a proposal to establish a Center of Excellence for Water Management and Technology in Oman. The idea is to turn it into a high-level education institute in the field of water, which can measure up to the Dutch quality norms for higher education (both on university and higher vocational education level) and can exploit the knowledge and experience of Oman and The Netherlands.

The education center could play a significant role in the Gulf region and therefore not only attract students from Oman, but from this entire area.

Internships in The Netherlands

Courses will be given by acknowledged international and national (Omani) teachers in Oman. Although there is a strong tradition of providing scholarships to Omanis for studies abroad, it was a conscious decision to let the first year take place in Oman. In the second year, the students have the possibility to do either an internship or a graduate research (both with a length of half a year) in The Netherlands at a water related company, a higher education institution or a national research institute. A student has to gain at least a half year of experience in The Netherlands.

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In December 2010 the Omani Minister of Higher Education, H.E. Rawiyah Bint Saud Al Busaidiyah, indicated her interest in this initiative. Subsequently, cooperation was sought between the Middle East Desalination Research Center (MEDRC) and the Sultan Qaboos University, both located in Muscat. The Sultan Qaboos University is the largest, and only, public university in Oman. At first, the idea was to organize a meeting in Oman with stakeholders within the

framework of the State Visit of Queen Beatrix in March 2011. However, as a result of the unrest in the Middle East and the developments in Oman, this State Visit was converted to a private visit at that time. Therefore, the activities regarding the education institute were, at the request of Oman, put on the backburner. Meanwhile, the time is ripe for both countries to continue.

Group Dutch and Omani knowledge

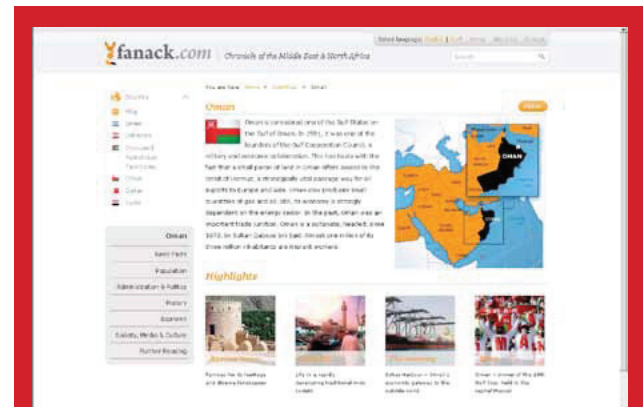
Omani parties involved in the initiative are a delegation of the Sultan Qaboos University, the MEDRC, the German University of Technology Oman, the Sohar University, the Ministry of Water Resources and Municipalities and the Ministry of Higher Education.

Recently, several Dutch students drew up an inventory of the higher education in Oman and the role of female students in this area. Mainly cultural matters (are about to) play a big role in the realization of the education institute. Omani students often get married at a very young age (<20 years) and start having children very early as well. This means that most of them are studying part time and long term work visits abroad, like provided by this project, are often hard to realize.

However, when paying attention to the enthusiasm of the ambassador of Oman in The Netherlands, the Ministry of Higher Education in Oman and the Dutch embassy in Oman have complete confidence that the water institute will come into being. A high-level institute, which will bring together knowledge from The Netherlands and Oman in the field of wa-

ter management and technology. An institute that will give young people from the Gulf region the opportunity to be educated at the highest possible level in the field of water and additionally gain relevant international experience.

This article by Prof. Dr. Ruud Schotting, holder of the Sultan Qaboos Academic Chair for Quantitative Water Management at Roosevelt Academy/



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A new website with facts and analyses on the Middle East and North Africa

In mid 2011 the website www.fanack.com was launched. The site, offering texts in both Arabic and English, aims to provide facts and analysis on the Middle East and North Africa, their history, politics, society, economy and culture in an effort to increase the knowledge about the region and to provide easy access to information.

At present six country profiles are available, in alphabetical order: Israel, Lebanon, Oman, Occupied Palestinian territories, Syria, Qatar and Yemen as well as more in depth coverage of major issues concerning specifically Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. In the coming months country profiles of Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates will be added, as well as new files on regional matters such as water management and energy. Fanack also intends to make available other specialized content including a series of classic books about the Middle East.

The section on Oman – and all other countries – provides in-depth information on population, administration & politics, history, economy, society, media & culture besides basic facts and suggestions for further reading.

Fanack is named after the Arabic word for 'fox', hence the website logo.