

► The Malta Experience – An entire island as a conference venue

The island of Malta was not only the thematic focus of the conference “Fluid Nature, Fluid Cultures: Malta and the Mediterranean”, but also the place of the event. With the funding of the Volkswagen Foundation, the organizers of the conference Prof Julia Hauser and Prof Jens Scheiner were able to realize an innovative conference format: investigating Malta as a physical and cultural space by visits to actual sites related to the conference topics.

From 9 to 13 September 2015 about 25 researchers from Egypt, Germany, Italy, Lebanon, Malta, the Netherlands, Palestine, the

The multidisciplinary nature of the conference was most evident in the panel topic on migration, which was held at a Volunteer Center in Valletta. Due to the geographical location of the island in the Mediterranean, migration is a centuries’ old reality in Malta’s public and political life. The conference has approached this complex issue from legal, sociological and historical perspectives, next to a presentation about the media coverage of migrants and refugees. The interdisciplinary concept was challenging and rewarding at the same time: Malta as a physical space and a space of collective experiences has served as a shared reference frame and a case for studying the complexities of global processes of exchange on a micro level.

In conclusion to his Malta experience with AGYA, Prof Michael Cooperson (UCLA) expressed his appreciation: “The AGYA meeting provided an opportunity to learn more about Malta through the



UAE, and the US came to Malta and gave their presentations on-site instead of meeting at a conventional conference venue. Sweet and salt water separation as well as the motifs of wine in Arabic poetry was discussed at the Reverse Osmosis Plant, environmental issues at the Il-Majjistral Nature and History Park and syncretistic practices at the temple of Hagar Qim, to name just a few of the venues; the historical sieges of Malta were presented on a boat floating directly opposite the quay walls of Valletta, thus adding a strong sensual and aesthetic aspect to the presentations. In fact, the conference allowed its participants not just to reflect upon Malta as a shared physical and cultural space but also to fully experience it.

■ MALTA AS A PLACE OF ENCOUNTER AND SEPARATION: MULTIDISCIPLINARY INSIGHTS

For centuries the island of Malta has been at the center of cultural, military and commercial encounters across the Mediterranean. Shaped by dynamic processes of exchange, the Mediterranean island acts as a gateway to both the Arab world and Europe. The process is also visible in the dynamics of biological and natural phenomena. Therefore, Malta is characterized by a fluidity of nature and culture that can only be tackled entirely by an interdisciplinary approach.

work of scholars I would never have met otherwise. I admit that I was skeptical at first about how such a wide range of disciplines and interests were to converge, but using Malta as a shared frame successfully brought it all together. The idea of giving talks in different places was not only original, but it worked out perfectly well”.

The international and interdisciplinary conference “Fluid Nature, Fluid Cultures: Malta and the Mediterranean” was organized by the AGYA Working Group Common Heritage and Common Challenges. Find out more about the projects of the Working Group on page 2.

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AGYA Working Groups introduce themselves: “Common Heritage and Common Challenges” and “Energy, Water and Environment”

All AGYA members contribute to interdisciplinary Working Groups in which they promote academic discourse and realize joint research projects on topics relevant to the Arab world and Germany. So far, five Working Groups have been established on “Arab and German Education”, “Common Heritage and Common Challenges”, “Energy, Water and Environment”, “Innovation” and “Transformation”.

COMMON HERITAGE AND COMMON CHALLENGES

Processes of exchange across the Mediterranean throughout history left a common heritage and responsibility. The focus of the Working Group lies on the questions closely related to the shared Arab-German cultural, social and intellectual history in its past and present. Bringing together Archaeologists, Historians, Biologists, Philologists, Legal Scholars, and Social Scientists, the Working Group creates a truly interdisciplinary forum shedding in full spectrum new light of intellectual diversity on familiar topics and developing innovative approaches to intriguing novel questions which address challenges common for the Arab world and Germany. These include various topics such as the preservation of endangered historical sites, the flows of migration, cultural aspects of food, bioethics, sports, and other. The Working Group is committed to identify various areas of common interest and to discuss approaches to cope with the challenges that may result from their transregional character. Upcoming projects of the Working Group include the conference “Insatiable Appetite: Food as Cultural Signifier” (May 2016, Beirut, Lebanon), a workshop dedicated to the preservation of antiquities in Syria, a workshop on Glass art and Glass blowing in the Middle East and Europe, a project on migration as well as the role and meaning of taboos in the European and Arab world, and sports in a comparative historical view between German and Arab traditions.

ENERGY, WATER AND ENVIRONMENT

Finite resources, preservation of a habitable environment as well as natural resources like fresh water and food are a shared concern in Arab societies and Germany. Even though the challenge is a global one, the strategies of environment protection and sustainable resource use differ locally between the Arab world and Germany, and from the governmental to the individual level. The Working Group Energy, Water and Environment brings together mainly natural and technical scientists from different regional and academic backgrounds to discuss the public perception of energy, water and environmental issues and to promote innovative solutions to the challenge of sustainable resource management. The members of the group further initiate projects that foster the understanding of how technologies are applied differently in order to efficiently support the technological transfer between different societies.

A current book project of the Working Group tackles disputed technologies such as climate engineering, waste water treatment, natural conservation, biomass, and solar energy. Next to a comprehensive introduction of the technology the resulting perspective papers will include different approaches in the Arab world and Germany regarding regulations, historic backgrounds and public discourses about the controversial technologies. Although the main activities of the Working Group are related to natural sciences, the group also benefits from other disciplines via close cooperation with members from other AGYA Working Groups.

For further information and updates please refer to:
www.agya.info



▀ The path to publication

Biologist Skander Elleuche and Geoscientist Jan Friesen talk on publication strategies in natural sciences

In natural sciences, researchers mostly publish journal articles on the basis of which they are mainly evaluated. To reach a broad audience, they can choose between different forms of publishing. These forms are traditional toll access or open access models; in addition mixed forms exist. Toll access journals are restricted to personal or library subscriptions. Open access journals are usually online journals and are freely accessible.

▀ IF YOU TAKE A LOOK AT YOUR PUBLICATION LIST WHAT DOES IT TELL ABOUT YOUR PUBLICATION STRATEGY?

Skander

In the natural sciences, you first choose the highest ranked journal in a respective field of research or if possible one of the very few interdisciplinary journals that are well established and well accepted to reach maximum recognition. In my case, I usually try to publish in journals that are focused on applied biotechnology and extreme microbiology aspects.

Jan

The bulk of my research is in eco-hydrology and interception. With regard to these topics that have a relatively small community, I also select journals that are of relevance to this specific research community, but for general scientific visibility, a citation is the most important scientific currency that counts today. In this aspect the value of a journal, expressed through its impact factor, also plays a role in the selection.

▀ WHY IS THE IMPACT FACTOR SO IMPORTANT? WHAT DOES IT REPRESENT IN DETAIL?

Jan

The journal impact factor is the ratio between the number of citations of articles published in the journal and the number of articles published within the journal. It is usually calculated for

the last two or five years and can be seen as a quality characteristic of the journal. When evaluating scientists not only the number of personal article citations, but also the impact factors of the journals are taken into account.

Skander

This is a very important point. However, the impact factor (IF) is highly diverse across disciplines with more than 50% of all listed journals ranking below 1. Therefore, the significance of the IF needs to be strictly evaluated for a certain field of expertise. In my research area, an impact of 2 to 4 is quite good, but there are even few journals in other disciplines e.g. cancer research, that exhibit IFs above 100.

▀ ARE THERE ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO PUBLISH YOUR RESEARCH?

Skander

To get scientific recognition, there are no real alternatives. However, different journals offer versatile opportunities to attract the broadest audience, including short audio summaries or video publications. Entering the fast moving post-print era, most scientific research will be exclusively published as online open-access articles in the future. Publication fees are up to 3000 US \$ for several high impact journals; therefore, several open access journals provide waiver funds for low-income economies. The fees have to be covered by the author's institution, and the authors always have to balance between cost and visibility of the research.

Jan

I agree that there are few alternatives to publish. As Skander mentioned, publishing is linked to high prices and especially early career scientists have to decide: Do I travel to the next top international conference or do I cover exaggerated publication fees? Furthermore, the bulk of the quality assurance, both editorial and review tasks, is handled voluntarily by scientists. In view of the post-print era and new media I would add that, nowadays, it is much easier to promote journal articles through social media such as ResearchGate, LinkedIn, or Twitter.



Skander Elleuche is Lecturer at the Institute of Technical Microbiology at Hamburg University of Technology. In his research he focuses on gene fusion techniques, enzymatic biomass degradation, protein and intein engineering and bioenergy. Currently he is working on his habilitation project on environmental friendly degradation of biomass using tailor-made biocatalysts from extremophiles.

Jan Friesen is Researcher at the Department Catchment Hydrology at the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research - UFZ in Leipzig. His research interests include eco-hydrology, remote sensing and sensor development. With his research on the use of unconventional water resources, in particular the Dhofar cloud forests in Oman, his activities are strongly linked to the GCC region.



Both scholars are member of the AGYA Working Group Energy, Water and Environment.

Upcoming AGYA publication:

Academia in Transformation (to be released in Spring 2016)

The upcoming book "Academia in Transformation" is not just another volume about the so-called Arab Spring. Instead it aims to contextualize the development of scientific approaches that have (also) been shaped by the events that started in 2010 in Tunisia. These events have influenced the language of agents and scholars, contributed to a shift in study focus and challenged dominant theoretical approaches such as those on change and stability in the region. Therefore, the book is to provide an illuminating view of the transformation of the academic landscape in the aftermaths of the uprisings. It covers different disciplines in humanities, social and technical sciences and is an excellent example of the interdisciplinary cooperation of the AGYA Working Group Transformation. (www.agya.info/working-groups/transformation)

Latest news

■ We welcome **Ana Iriarte Díez** as our new AGYA contact at the American University Beirut.

■ **Fayçal Djeffal** has received the Best Paper Award of the 2015 International Conference of Electrical and Electronics Engineering (WCE'2015), which has been held in London, UK, in July 2015. He co-authored the paper "Analytical Investigation of Swing Factor for Nanoscale Double Gate MOSFET Including Gate-work-function Effect".

■ During the period 4-6 October 2015, **Assem Abu Hatab** participated in the Mediterranean Dialogues Congress, co-organized by the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) and the Fondation du Dialogue Sud-Nord Méditerranée at Milan Expo 2015 in Varese, Italy, to discuss the challenges facing rural communities in the Mediterranean region, and the profound implications of rural poverty, youth unemployment and their resultant effects on urban poverty, migration and conflicts in North Africa and Southern Europe.

■ For the project "Media functions in emerging transformation processes" **Carola Richter** received a three-year-grant from

the German Research Foundation (DFG) to carry out comparative research contrasting the events in Eastern Europe in 1989 with North African countries in 2011.

■ **Abdalla Ahmed Elbashir** has been granted the Distinguished Scholar Award of the Arab Fund Fellowship Program for his research project "Development and validation of new, reliable, and low-cost multi-residue methods for pesticide residue analysis in Sudanese food and water resources".

■ In September 2015, **Kalman Graffi** was elected as one of three Junior-Fellows by the German "Gesellschaft für Informatik" (Computer Science Society) to represent and promote the image of Computer Science in the society for the next five years.

■ We congratulate **Fatima Kastner** who successfully completed the habilitation procedure at University of Bielefeld in July 2015. Her habilitation thesis on transnational justice in global society (published in Hamburger Edition 2015) has been evaluated as excellent.

■ In September 2015, **Ahmad Sakhrieh** was appointed Associate Professor at the American University of Ras Al Khaimah, UAE.

Upcoming and planned events

23 – 25 October 2015

Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

AGYA Conference

Arab-German Research Cooperation:

New Chances and Challenges in International Academia

January 2016

Berlin, Germany

Working Group Meeting Common Heritage and Common Challenges

January 2016

Langeoog, Germany

Working Group Meeting Energy, Water and Environment

March 2016

Doha, Qatar

Annual AGYA Conference and ARC'16

May 2016

American University Beirut, Lebanon

AGYA Conference "Insatiable Appetite: Food as Cultural Signifier"

About us

The Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA) has been established in 2013 as the first bilateral young academy worldwide. It is mainly funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and Qatar Foundation. The AGYA aims to establish a community of distinguished Arab and German researchers who are at an early stage in their academic careers (3-10 years after PhD). The academy effectively supports their innovative collaborative projects and cooperative initiatives from different areas of scientific research, science policy and education. Moreover, the AGYA fosters the intercultural experience of its 50 members from the Arab world and Germany and promotes them as ambassadors of sciences and culture.

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Imprint:

Responsible: AGYA | Editorial Work: the AGYA office in Berlin | Photos: page 1 - Impressions from the Malta conference/AGYA; page 2 - AGYA Working Group meeting/AGYA; page 3 - Publication formats in libraries/CC Raysonho & Conrad Nutschan | Art work and layout: Amr El-Geddawy, www.upfrontdesign.net

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Federal Ministry
of Education
and Research