

For the sake of education

AGYA Education Group held its first focus workshop in Manama, Bahrain

Education is a key factor in individual and social well-being. "You have to start at early stages to improve outcomes in higher education", says the Berlin psychologist and AGYA member Dr Vanessa Lux, who contributes her expertise to the AGYA Education Group. In public, the group discussed higher education issues in the Arab world and Germany at the Arabian Gulf University (AGU) in Bahrain on 23-24 November 2014. Sharing and comparing problems as well as stories of success raises awareness for education issues and is actively promoted by the AGYA.



TACKLING CHALLENGES IN LEARNING BIOGRAPHIES

There is a strong wish to improve the education system in Arab countries, as highlighted by the Arab participants once again during the two-day workshop. On the German side, instead, the focus is on the use of flexible models in a standardized education system to cater for the special needs of vulnerable focus groups: children in poor neighbourhoods, migrant children, children with intellectual disabilities or girls in science, technology, engineering and mathematics - the so called STEM fields. In this broader context the AGYA Working Group mainly debated on critical points in learning biographies. "The focus on critical junctures allows highlighting most sensitive turning points in a child's or student's career and to discuss and compare problems across educational institutions – in kinder garden, primary school, high school and at university - and, most importantly, across educational systems", says Vanessa Lux. Especially the latter is key to Arab-German collaboration in education due to the differences in the education systems. "Interventions and policy programs which especially address these sensitive turning points would be very effective in terms of costs but also general outcomes."

DISCUSSING PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Another debate during the workshop turned to the pros and cons of Public Private Partnerships (PPPs). Today there is an important goal to use scientific innovation to facilitate economic development – e.g. by establishing technology parks, financial support for start-ups launched by universities or research departments. Although PPPs appear to be the ideal format to support the development of new, more profitable and innovative products and the intellectual potential of a country, there are critical aspects discussed by the AGYA, as Lux reports. "Companies benefit from the public funding in the beginning, but possible profits go only to the private sector or the company". Thus, that the financial risk is covered by public funds - a consequence which must be considered carefully according to the AGYA Group's debates in Bahrain.

SPREADING VALUABLE DEBATES

The fruitful workshop atmosphere on education, to which Prof Khalid Abdul Rahman AL-Ohaly, President of AGU and Her Excellency Sabine Taufmann, German Ambassador to Bahrain, had welcomed the participants, was brought to Fez, Morocco, a few months later – when AGYA participated in the Humboldt Kolleg "Beacons of Hope in the Quest for the Next Einstein in the MENA region", 04-06 March. On this occasion the audience vividly discussed with the AGYA members on different university systems, the urgent need for new interdisciplinary study programs dealing with climate change or the latest developments in academic disciplines – and again on learning biographies. "The AGYA activities are already starting to bear fruits", says the Egyptian mathematician and AGYA member Dr Ahmad EL-Guindy who is currently based in Qatar. "A group of Egyptian students, e.g., will participate for the first time in the Mediterranean Youth Mathematical Camp organized by the International Centre for Theoretical Physics in July 2015. A few more Arab-German activities are in the planning and we look forward to a significant boost to the program through the active involvement of AGYA members."

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The AGYA Steering Committee

The AGYA is independent in respect to the content and forms of its academic activities. The activities of the AGYA are carried out by its members and coordinated by the Steering Committee. They invest a significant amount of effort and time to establish a network of cooperation partners by meeting politicians and leaders of academic institutions in the 22 Arab member states and Germany. They present and represent the AGYA regularly at international conferences and actively engage in exchange with leading academic institutions.

For more information visit their AGYA member profiles on our new Website: www.aga.info

Meet the first AGYA Steering Committee



Prof Alaa El-Sadek - Director of the Arab Regional Water Center and Coordinator of the Environmental Management Program at the Arabian Gulf University, Bahrain.

■ RESPONDING TO URGENT NEEDS IN ENERGY AND WATER

High population growth, increasing food demand, climate change impacts and heavy economic factors touch diverse disciplines and are all interconnected. In order to take action and face these looming problems, Alaa El-Sadek develops together with his AGYA fellow members a new Energy, Water and Environment Center for Egypt. He is the main Arab initiator and current president of the AGYA. The water scientist also is consultant for the University of Science and Technology, Zewail City, Egypt. He intends to first launch the Water Center in Egypt but expects the model to be implemented in regions struggling with water scarcity worldwide.



Prof Verena Lepper - Tenured collection keeper for Egyptian and Oriental Papyri at the Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection on the Museum Island in Berlin and Honorary Professor at the Humboldt University Berlin.

■ CONNECTING INNOVATIVE TECHNIQUES WITH CULTURAL HERITAGE

Without physically unfolding them, Verena Lepper reconstructs papyri with their texts and scripts from Elephantine Island in Egypt – a most exciting research on 4000 Years of cultural history. For this project, the Egyptologist was able to secure the highly ranked European Research Council (ERC) Starting Grant in the amount of 1.5 million Euros in 2015. In addition to her crucial role in the foundation of the AGYA and her strong commitment as German Principal Investigator, Verena Lepper initiated the ERC-project concerning her own research interests and will lead now an interdisciplinary team of ten researchers for the next five years.



Dr Maha Al-Hendawi - Assistant Professor of Education and Director of the Core Curriculum Program and the Foundation Program at Qatar University.

■ EDUCATION AS THE FOUNDATION FOR INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS

Her passion for education is reflected in her work in the AGYA: As member in charge of the Working Group Principal Investigator Arab and German Education, she is one of the driving forces who made it possible that the members of the group participated in the Humboldt Kolleg 2015 on the kind invitation of Prof Abdelhadi Soudi, Representative of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Morocco and member of the AGYA Advisory Board. In their input presentations the AGYA members addressed new trends in higher education and the internationalization of academia with a focus on Arab-German academic cooperation.



Dr Kirill Dmitriev - Lecturer in Arabic in the School of Modern Languages at the University of St Andrews and member of the German Die Junge Akademie.

■ ENCODING ARAB CULTURE THROUGH LITERATURE

“I see it as a unique opportunity to engage myself in the first bilateral Young Academy and hope that with my interest in the Arab world, its culture and history, I can positively contribute to the community of AGYA members, to our ideas and projects.” In his research, Kirill Dmitriev focuses on the study of the cultural history of Late Antiquity, early and classical Arabic language and literature, the Arabic philological tradition and Arabic lexicography. Until 2017, the Arabist is the Principal Investigator in the project “Language-Philology-Culture. Arab Cultural Semantics in Transition” which is funded by the European Research Council.



▀ The Migration Debate: Insights from the Euro-Mediterranean zone

Historian Jenny Oesterle and political scientist Tamirace Fakhoury reflect on immigration and refugees

■ DOES MIGRATION ENHANCE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT?

Jenny

Migration and refugee movements are no 'modern' phenomena: Different migration movements took place in Europe as well as in the Middle East between the 7th and the 15th centuries, ranging from mass movements down to individuals. Reasons to migrate could be natural and hunger crisis, economic strain, religious expansion movements, forced slavery or persecution. Refugees and migrants carried with them traditions, experience, ideas and knowledge.

Tamirace

Immigrant communities circulate socio-cultural notions and contribute to city expansion, diversity and attractiveness in fields such as art, tourism, gastronomy, and economy. They further situate cities as interactive global zones in international relations. Throughout centuries, the Euro-Mediterranean zone has been characterized by mobility, circularity and transboundary economic, ideational and cultural processes. As such, it represents an ideal contact zone for studying the beneficial aspects of migration. With this in mind, policy makers could take on refugee crises as an opportunity rather than a liability.

■ WHAT ARE LINKAGES BETWEEN MIGRATION, POLITICAL ACTIVISM, AND REBELLION?

Tamirace

Throughout history, many have emigrated as a result of oppression. Once in exile, they have contributed - through protests, awareness raising, citizen journalism, and lobbying - to crafting a transnational politics of democratization. In the light of the Arab uprisings, diasporic communities have established grassroots

initiatives, attracted attention to the plight of ordinary citizens, and raised awareness on the longstanding popular grievances.

Jenny

Vivid scholarly discourses on rebellion and resistance against unjust ruler-ship existed in Medieval Latin-Christian as well as the Arabic-Islamic world. Christian medieval scholars focused on the question of legal resistance against tyranny. Islamic discourses on rebellion were advanced by legal experts of different law schools who concentrated on the evaluation of 'legal' reasons to resist. Migration and exile were alternatives to resistance and protest in the Middle Ages.

■ WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE PAST WHEN IT COMES TO HANDLING THE REFUGEE CHALLENGES?

Jenny

Destination societies are not 'receiving societies'; they oscillated between the exclusion and the acceptance of refugees and migrants. A variety of forms of refugee protection existed in the Middle Ages; some of them were legally institutionalized. Whether we look at the specific Christian form of asylum in churches, or the Arabic *jiwar* (protection for strangers): Protection played a major role in crisis management and in the prevention of violence in the Islamic and Christian Middle Ages.

Tamirace

There is a pressing need to institutionalize rights-based migration and refugee policies. Still, recipient societies could benefit from revisiting informal traditions of refugee incorporation. The aim is to learn how initiatives of hospitality positioning 'foreigners' as 'welcomed guests' could complement right-based policies. In this context, an arising question is how policy and civil society actors could incorporate refugees fleeing from conflict zones not only as 'ethnic communities' but as agents of development in recipient localities. There is much to gain from disentangling migration from the ethnic lens, and migrants should be looked at as actors in global developments.



Jenny Oesterle is head of the Centre for Transcultural Studies at the Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg. There, she leads the research group "Protection in Periods of Religious and Political Expansion".

Tamirace Fakhoury is Assistant Professor in political sciences at the Lebanese American University and completing a research project on the modes of Arab diasporic mobilization with special focus on the 2011 uprisings at the GIGA Hamburg.



Both scholars are member of the AGYA Working Group Common Heritage and Common Challenges.



▶ Launching of the new AGYA Website

We are glad and proud to announce that our new AGYA Website is officially launched at our Annual AGYA Conference in Munich, May 2015. Next to relevant information on the mission and goals, membership and administration of the academy you can find detailed reports about the AGYA Working Groups and their projects. Meet our members and read what research projects they initiate and how they contribute to the network of excellence. Be up to date about our upcoming events and discover what moves and drives our members.

▶ Latest news

■ The AGYA Working Group **Common Heritage and Common Challenges**, in particular **Julia Hauser**, **Jens Scheiner** and **Kirill Dmitriev**, was able to secure funding from Volkswagen Foundation for their international conference “Fluid Nature Fluid Cultures. Malta and the Mediterranean” on Malta in September 2015.

■ For his project “Investigating the anti-cancer properties of natural products isolated from date fruits of the Omani elite variety Khalas”, **Younis Baqi**, Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, won in May 2015 the His Majesty Research Trust Fund, the most prestigious trust fund in Oman.

■ **Khalid Talahma** will join in July 2015 the Law and Economics Department of the University of Chicago Law School. He was also appointed as a legal expert for Strengthening the Palestinian NGO Sector Capacity and Involvement in Governance and Democratic Process (OPT).

■ Since April 2015, **Vanessa Lux** is working as a post-doc researcher in the Department of Genetic Psychology at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum, where she continues her research on “epigenetics in psychobiological development, stress and trauma”.

■ In April 2015, **Ronny Vollandt** was appointed to a professorship at the Institute for Near and Middle East, Lud-

wig-Maximilians-Universität München.

■ **Kalman Graffi** received in March 2015 a grant from the German Federal Ministry of Economics and Energy for a two-year cooperative industry research program to research peer-to-peer-based and secure data synchronization mechanisms for wireless smart devices.

■ Under the coordination of **Florian Kohstall** the German Science Centre in Cairo (DWZ) has released the Egyptian German Science Monitor. As a flagship contribution it contains a summary of a so-far unpublished evaluation of the Egyptian Science, Research and Technology landscape.

■ In January 2015, **Assem Abu Hatab** has joined the Center for Middle Eastern Studies of Lund University as a senior visiting researcher. Moreover, he has recently been awarded the Civil Society Scholar Award from the Open Society Foundations, and was also selected as an “Economic Referee” at the Arab Science & Technology Foundation.

■ After a rigorous evaluation by independent reviewers and by Membership Advisory Committees in various fields of specialization **Fayçal Djeflal** was selected as a Fellow of the African Academy of Sciences (AAS) in December 2014.

▶ Upcoming events

26-28 May

Munich, Germany

Annual AGYA Conference in Germany

29-31 May 2015

Oberaudorf, Germany

Writing Workshop of the AGYA Working Group Transformation

9-14 September 2015

Malta

International Conference “Fluid Nature, Fluid Culture. Malta and the Mediterranean” of the AGYA Working Group Common Heritage and Common Challenges

End of October 2015

Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

International Symposium “Arab-German Academic Cooperation: New Chances and Challenges in International Education and Research”

Beginning of November 2015

Manama, Bahrain

Workshop of the AGYA Working Group Innovation

▶ About us

The AGYA has been established in 2013 at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities and the Arabian Gulf University in Bahrain as the first bilateral young academy worldwide. It is mainly funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and Qatar Foundation. Following two public Calls for Membership more than 600 early career scholars from 22 different countries and from various fields in Natural Sciences, Life Sciences, Humanities, Social Sciences, Technical Sciences, and Arts submitted their applications. 25 Arab and 25 German applicants were selected as the first members who are now working on research projects and initiatives that transcend disciplinary borders. Moreover, the AGYA fosters the intercultural experiences of its members and promotes them as ambassadors of sciences and culture.

▶ AGYA

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