

Mutual Solutions to Mutual Problems

International AGYA Conference on Migration and Transnational Cooperation in Education, Research and Innovation

The arrival of large numbers of refugees from Syria, Iraq and other countries of the Middle East and Africa preoccupied Germany's domestic policy in 2015 and 2016, and posed a challenge to the German educational system. At the same time, these challenges offer a unique opportunity to develop further Arab-German academic cooperation and knowledge transfer.

"From an Arab perspective, migration is nothing new", said AGYA member Dr. Vanessa Lux, who together with colleagues from the Arab and German Education Working Group initiated the international AGYA conference "Migration and Transnational Cooperation in Education, Research and Innovation: An Arab-German Dialogue", 2 to 3 May 2016 in Berlin. The conference was generously supported by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).



"Syrians have been migrating to Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt for years. In these countries, the issue of how to include displaced persons into educational systems has been dealt with for a long time. We want to learn from their experience to improve our own integration programs", Lux says. Therefore, AGYA brought together 200 high-ranking Arab and German scholars and leading university representatives from 19 countries to discuss the results of the latest research on migration and migrant education, the role of migration in innovation and knowledge transfer and the importance of online and blended learning for improved integration programs. In thematic workshops the conference participants developed policy recommendations directed at decision-makers in the domains of: education policy on academic cooperation; the integration of international students in university systems; the creation of bilateral exchange programs; teacher education and educational research; migration studies; as well as innovation and knowledge transfer. During the conference the "AGYA Award" was granted to outstanding educational projects supporting migrants and refugees. Jusoor, an initiative of Syrian expatriates helping Syrian

youth to realise their potential through programs in the fields of scholarly and career development was honoured with the first prize. The other winners were NaTakallam from the USA, Conquer Babel from Germany and StARS from Egypt.

"A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR ARAB AND GERMAN KEY PLAYERS"

In a closed meeting, 20 presidents of leading universities in Germany and the Arab countries added momentum to the discussion on how to improve the opportunities and participation of refugees in education. They shared their experiences of programs at their home universities and jointly identified new key areas for immediate action in Arab-German and Arab-Arab cooperation.

"It is our duty to intensify the scientific dialogue between Germany and the Arab world given the current political developments and challenges in North Africa and the Middle East which have a direct impact on Germany and Europe", says **German Federal Minister of Education and Research Prof. Dr. Johanna Wanka** on the importance of the AGYA Conference.

According to Prof Dr Mahmoud Sakr, President of the Academy of Scientific Research & Technology, Cairo/Egypt and AGYA Advisory Board Member, "With this conference, AGYA succeeded in taking on a leadership role in the discourse on migration and transnational cooperation. The conference was a unique opportunity for Arab and German key players to come together and to formulate recommendations for joint measures in the field of higher education, research, and innovation".

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Discovering Food as a cultural Agent

AGYA members together with external experts on food culture took a seat at the “academic dinner table” to understand the cultural history of onions layer by layer, to learn about healthy quinces – one of the heavenly fruits, and to discuss the religiously motivated do’s and don’ts of cookery in the Middle East. “Insatiable Appetite: Food as a Cultural Signifier” – was the title of an AGYA conference held in Beirut from 12 to 14 May 2016 and organized in cooperation with the American University Beirut by the AGYA Working Group ‘Common Heritage and Common Challenges’. The conference and the resulting publication is one research project that has been realized in the framework of the recently received funding in the amount of four million Euro for the next four years by the Federal Ministry of Research and Education (BMBF).

differences. The keynote presentation by Prof. Dr. Eric Dursteler, for example, examined the multifarious ways in which food such as pork and wine was used to form religious and regional identity in the early modern Mediterranean. AGYA members also discussed with high-ranking experts a variety of topics: such as the history of vegetarianism and its early global aspects, genetically modified food in contemporary Muslim juridical ethics and the meaning of halal food in Western Muslim communities.

Next to these theoretical discussions, the participants were also given the chance of actively experiencing food as a vehicle to create local identity and to achieve social status: at an excursion along the “Lebanese Food Trail” which has been established with the aim of preserving, documenting, and reviving alimentary



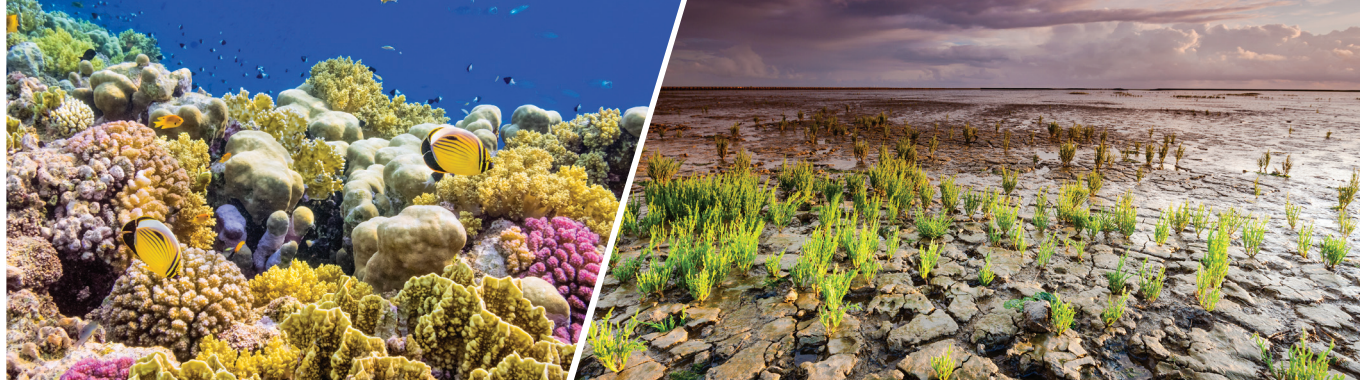
FOOD AND CONSUMPTION PRACTICES: ENHANCING BOTH SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

The cultural significance of food in processes of exchange remains understudied, especially from a multi-disciplinary perspective. Therefore, the conference brought together researchers from various fields such as Literature, Sociology, Psychology, Arabic Studies, History, Philosophy, and Religious Studies who examined past and present food consumption practices that seem to establish and confirm differences and similarities between different social and cultural groups. The focus of the conference was to deconstruct the various notions of food articulated in cultural and social processes of inclusion and exclusion. Food and consumption practices build bridges and at the same time serve as powerful markers of social, religious, gender as well as ethnic

traditions in Lebanon. Along the trail, participants had the unique opportunity to get in direct contact with local farmers and enter conversations about local food culture.

A TANGIBLE SENSORY CONNECTION TO DISTANT TIMES: ABBASID DINNER EVENT

Knowing by doing: For the conference dinner event “Discovering Abbasid Food”, Brigitte Caland, researcher and trained chef, prepared with her team authentic medieval recipes from Abbasid times when Baghdad was among the richest cities in the world and the art of cookery rivalled that of other arts. Brigitte Caland carefully reconstructed and reinterpreted the Abbasid Calif’s table and its cuisine. Her dishes were commented on by the food historian Charles Perry.



Climate change: From crisis to cooperation

The Biologists Dr. Yvonne Sawall and Dr. Ahmed Debez discuss Arab and German perspectives on the effects of climate change and environmental protection.

WHAT DRIVES YOUR RESEARCH INTEREST?

Ahmed:

In Germany as well as in the Arab world the number of extreme weather events is on the rise and pose a threat to harvests of agricultural products and to native species. Especially the Arab countries struggle with water scarcity. As arid countries they rely largely on freshwater supply for agriculture, industry and tourism. Rising birth rates and climate change effects constitute a major challenge to national governments: the loss of fertile land will further increase population displacement, political and militarized conflicts and, as a result, continuing migration flows. On these grounds, I investigate survival mechanisms of native plants in the Arab region that thrive in extreme – saline or arid – environments.

Yvonne:

My research focuses on adaption mechanism of corals and other benthic organisms that manage to flourish in hostile and extreme habitats. The research on these mechanisms will allow us to better predict how organisms may react to climate change, such as sea surface temperature rise, ocean acidification, and increased land-run off in places where rain fall becomes more extreme. This will also help us to adjust environmental protection management to climate change.

HOW DO CURRENT POLICIES TACKLE CLIMATE PROTECTION?

Yvonne:

There are two main strategies to fight climate change: finding alternatives to fossil fuel and environmental protection. The German government invests in renewable energy, such as solar

energy and wind energy to replace fossil fuels. Furthermore, the establishment and management of nature reserves, renaturation of rivers and lakes, the improvement of waste management, and the increase of organic food products are evident examples of the measures in environmental protection.

Ahmed:

In the Arab countries, the increasing freshwater shortage is one of the main challenges in the region due to shared, but limited freshwater resources like aquifers, lakes or rivers. Instead of mobilizing conventional freshwater resources with limited efficiency, we need an integrated mitigation strategy that involves public and private sectors. In the Arab world, Tunisia adopts an outstanding and progressive position by embedding climate protection in its constitutional text in 2014. The opening preamble notes “the necessity of contributing to a secure climate and the protection of the environment.”

CAN JOINT RESEARCH ENDEAVORS LEAD TO SOLUTIONS?

Ahmed:

In our role as researchers it is vital to increase public awareness of climate change effects by explaining the scientific facts to a general public, advise policy makers, and introduce concepts of environmental education. In general, we have to strengthen the role of researchers in this process.

Yvonne:

I am convinced that we need more research cooperation, especially in the area of resource management - water, energy sources, and agriculture. We have to share our experiences and support each other. In such collaborative frameworks, researchers benefit from mutual knowledge exchange, regarding up-to-date research techniques. Additionally, they gain access to and knowledge about unique ecosystems located in Arab countries.



Yvonne Sawall was researcher at GEOMAR Helmholtz Center for Ocean Research Kiel, Germany, until July 2016. Currently, she is affiliated with the Bermuda Institute of Ocean Science (BIOS), Bermuda. Her research interests include coping strategies of corals that are facing high temperature, low pH, high nutrient loads or turbidity. She conducted collaborative research projects in the Red Sea, where the Southern Red Sea belongs to the hottest ocean basins worldwide, and thereby offering an ideal natural laboratory to investigate the potential of coral reef adaptation to Global Warming.

Ahmed Debez is Assistant Professor at the Center of Biotechnology of the Technopark of Borj-Cedria, Tunisia. His field of research is agriculture and plant biotechnology with specialization in investigating the physiological adaptations of plants with respect to salinity and the development of crops with increased salt tolerance qualities. In the framework of an INCO-DC project supported by the European Union, he established strong and fruitful scientific collaboration with German partners such as the Leibniz University in Hannover and the Max Planck Institute of Molecular Plant Physiology in Golm.



Adopt an Academic: AGYA Starts a Men- toring Program for Refugee Scholars

AGYA has launched a mentoring program that seeks to integrate refugee scholars into the academic landscape of their host countries. Designed as a peer-to-peer mentoring program, Adopt an Academic gives outstanding established scholars the opportunity to counsel excellent refugee scholars in a new academic landscape. On the initiative of AGYA member Florian Kohstall and with the support of AGYA and the Freie Universität Berlin, the project intends to create an Arab-German network of solidarity that not only opens up new perspectives to the program's mentees but also strengthens the value of cross-cultural research cooperation. Adopt an Academic is open for scholars of all disciplines. For more information on the program and how to become mentor or mentee please contact Dr. Mark Halawa-Sarholz at mark.halawa-sarholz@bbaw.de.

Latest news

■ In the framework of the German-Arabic Cooperation **Sarhan Dhouib** published the collective volume "Gerechtigkeit in transkultureller Perspektive" (Justice in transcultural perspective). Furthermore, he was granted a fellowship from the Hannover Institute for Philosophical Research.

■ In July 2016, **Salma Balazadeh** completed her habilitation in the field of Molecular Plant Biology at the University of Potsdam.

■ **Ahmad El-Guindy** has been promoted to Associate Professor of Mathematics at Texas A&M University at Qatar. Together with Prof. Dr. Matt Papanikolas and Prof. Dr. Riad Masri, he has been awarded a Qatar National Research Fund grant on "Arithmetic properties of Drinfeld Modular forms".

■ In April 2016, the JF:TEC (Junges Forum: Technikwissenschaften/Young Forum for Technical Sciences) was founded as an interdisciplinary network of young researchers addressing the interaction of technology, humans, society and environment. **Tobias Redlich** is one of the spokespersons, who has initiated the founding process with his colleague Dr.-Ing.

Robert Weidner at the Helmut Schmidt University in Hamburg. For more information see www.jftec.de.

■ **Bashar Ibrahim** joined the Institute for Numerical Simulations at the University of Bonn as Visiting Professor in July 2016.

■ The Sensor Council of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) has awarded a paper co-authored by **Faycal Djefal** as one of the 25 most downloaded Sensors Journal papers in the months of April, May and June 2016.

■ **Khalid Talahma** was appointed as Director of the summer session at Birzeit University and is currently the Legal Counselor for the Palestine Technical University.

■ **Tamirace Fakhoury** has been appointed as Associate Director of the Institute of Social Justice and Conflict Resolution at the Lebanese American University. From the University of Bochum she has been awarded the Visiting International Professorship Grant.

■ In March 2016, **Skander Elleuche** completed his habilitation in the field of Biotechnology and Molecular Biology.

Upcoming events

3-5 October 2016

Leipzig, Germany

Conference "A New Wave of Populism in Europe and the Arab World: Implications and Consequences for Civic Institutions" of the AGYA Working Group Transformation

6-9 October 2016

Halle, Germany

Annual AGYA Conference in Germany

6-9 November 2016

Tübingen, Germany

Workshop "Preservation of Aramaic Languages and Culture", Tandem Project of Ammar Abdulrahman and Jens Scheiner

November 2016

Tunis, Tunisia

Meeting of the AGYA Working Group Arab and German Education

30 November - 2 December 2016

Athens, Greece

Workshop "Climate Change, Food Security and Migration" of the AGYA Working Group Energy, Water and Environment

8-10 December 2016

Berlin, Germany

Conference "Dynamics of Change: Public Sphere and the Media in Egypt" of the AGYA Working Group Transformation

17-20 January 2017

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Workshop "Twinning for Innovation" of the AGYA Working Group Innovation

About us

The Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA) has been established in 2013 as the first bilateral young academy worldwide with the aim to promote Arab-German exchange based on the idea of scientific excellence and societal commitment of early career scholars (3-10 years after PhD). In light of the present international challenges this mission is more relevant than ever: Arab and German researchers must intensify their cooperation to actively engage in today's interconnected world.

The current more than 50 AGYA members are distinguished researchers from a variety of disciplines working in 15 Arab countries and in Germany. AGYA effectively supports their interdisciplinary projects in different areas of scientific research, science policy and education. Moreover, AGYA fosters the intercultural experiences of its members and promotes them as ambassadors of sciences and culture.

AGYA

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