

Press release

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Amman (Jordan): Annual Conference of the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA) from 26 to 29 October 2017

From 26 to 29 October 2017, the members of the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA) met for their Annual Conference in Amman, Jordan. During the autumn plenary, the members elected a new AGYA Steering Committee as well as two co-presidents for a one-year term. Six new Arab and five German members were inaugurated in a celebratory ceremony into the academy. AGYA addresses topics that are of equal importance to the Arab world and Germany: in a public evening event at the University of Jordan, high-ranking experts and international guests discussed the future of Arab-German research cooperation. Shared storytelling traditions were the subject of a public event in cooperation with the German Jordanian University. The first evening brought together both topics: The Palestinian-Jordanian storyteller Sally Shalabi presented "Stories of Cooperation".

From 26 to 29 October 2017, the AGYA Annual Conference took place in Amman, Jordan. The members discussed and developed in Working Group Meetings as well as on bilateral basis ongoing and new research projects on topics such as climate and environmental protection, storytelling traditions of the ancient and modern Arab world, and the promotion of young talents in STEM. Furthermore, the biannual AGYA Member Conferences are an ideal opportunity for members to take decisions on all matters of general importance to AGYA. A new AGYA Steering Committee was elected democratically for a one-year term during the Annual Conference in Amman, as were the two co-presidents Prof. Dr. Ahmad El-Guindy, Texas A&M at Qatar, and Dr. Jan Friesen, Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research GmbH - UFZ, Leipzig. The six members of the Steering Committee, which consists of three Arab and three German members of AGYA, regularly represent the academy at international conferences and actively engage in exchange with leading academic institutions in the Arab world and Germany. During their term the newly elected co-presidents aim at supporting the innovative and interdisciplinary work of their fellow members at extending the co-operation network of AGYA saying: "As AGYA members we highly profit from access to an academic network of excellence and can enhance our academic careers. Serving as Co-Presidents on the Steering Committee also means for us giving something back to the academy."

AGYA welcomes eleven new members

Five German and six Arab scholars from Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia were inaugurated to the academy during a solemn ceremony. During their five-year membership, they will develop new interdisciplinary research projects together with their AGYA colleagues – amongst others, in the following academic fields that are highly relevant to society:

- Trans-regional migration
- Common heritage and protection of the cultural heritage
- Environmental protection and sustainable use of resources
- Education in the Arab world and in Germany
- Nutrition and health in a global and cultural perspective
- Technical and social innovations.

The members benefit from the strong Arab-German research and innovation network of AGYA which opens up new possibilities for cooperation.

AGYA members were welcomed to an evening event on "Arab and German Funding Institutions: Their Roles and Future Perspectives" at the University of Jordan by its President, Dr. Azmi Mahafzah. The panel's high-ranking representatives of Arab and German funding institutions discussed possibilities of North-South-South cooperation and research funding and informed AGYA members and local researchers about post-doctoral funding opportunities. Guests of the panel discussion were: Prof. Dr. Jutta Schnitzer-Ungefug (Leopoldina -

National Academy of Sciences), Prof. Dr. Abeer Al-Bawab (Jordanian Scientific Research Support Fund), Prof. Dr. Zeidan A. Kafafi (Jordanian Club of Humboldt Fellows), Prof. Dr. Adnan Shihab-Eldin (Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences), Ms. Gabriele von Fircks (DAAD Information Center Amman), and Prof. Dr. Rami (Arab Council for the Social Sciences).

Storytelling as a central theme of the Annual Conference

Fairy tales and stories have the power to inspire. This is not only true for tales and traditional myths of the Islamic world's pre-modern era, but also in today's world of interactive storytelling in digital games and interactive learning applications. This became evident when Maic Masuch, professor for media informatics with a research focus on entertainment computing at the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Essen, hold a keynote on "Gaming as a Form of Modern Storytelling". During the public event that was organized in cooperation with the German Jordanian University on 29 October, a panel of AGYA members Prof. Dr. Bilal Orfali (American University of Beirut), Prof. Dr. Carola Richter (Freie Universität Berlin) and Dr. Jan Friesen (Helmholtz Center for Environmental Research) discussed the topic "Storytelling Entangled between Entertainment and Education" together with Sally Shalabi, a Palestinian-Jordanian professional storyteller.

Up until today, the oral narrative tradition is of great importance in the Arab world and is used to convey cultural values and social norms. The AGYA members were able to experience this popular form of community art for themselves in Wadi Rum: The local storyteller Sally Shalabi (Shalabieh al-Hakawatieh) presented an English adaptation of Ahmet Ümit's "A Tale within a Tale" that interweaves five traditional old tales framed within one story.

The transcultural value of storytelling traditions as a common immaterial cultural heritage is also the topic of an AGYA exhibition project: Together with her AGYA colleagues, Prof. Dr. Verena Lepper (AGYA Principal Investigator (PI) and Curator of the Egyptian and Oriental Papyrus Collection, Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection, State Museums of Berlin-Prussian Cultural Heritage is currently preparing an exhibition on oral narrative traditions in the Arab countries and in Germany from antiquity until today. The exhibition is to be presented in the Arab world and Germany. Prof. Lepper explained that "Storytelling is an essential format of transmitting knowledge both in the Arab world and Europe. It allows communicating important contents through a format that equally appeals to both on the transgenerational as well as the transcultural level."

The Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA)

The AGYA Annual Conference takes place twice a year – once in Germany and once in an Arab country. The Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA) at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (BBAW) was founded in 2013 as the world's first bilateral young academy. It currently offers the unique opportunity to conduct interdisciplinary research projects within the framework of Arab-German research cooperation to more than 50 members – in equal numbers German and Arab scholars. The members are excellent scholars (3-10 years after receiving their PhD) from various academic disciplines. AGYA is supported by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) with four million Euro between 2016 and 2020.

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