

The AGYA Annual Conference in Autumn 2020 Addresses Empowerment through Communication and Networking

The Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA) held its Autumn Annual Conference from 8-12 November 2020 in cooperation with the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) and the Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST). This online conference attracted more than 50 AGYA members and 40 alumni from 18 countries: Algeria, Egypt, Germany, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

AGYA welcomed 15 new members and four new alumni

This year's Annual Conference was festively opened with welcoming addresses by Prof. Dr. Bassam Alameddine, Vice President of the Gulf University of Science and Technology (GUST), Prof. Dr. Verena Lepper, AGYA Principal Investigator and Curator at the Egyptian Museum and Papyri Collection of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, and Prof. Dr. Adnan Shihab-Eldin, Director General of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS). In his speech, Prof. Dr. Shihab-Eldin acknowledged his preference for face-to-face communication over online conferencing. However, he looked optimistically into the future and repeated his invitation for all AGYA members and alumni to come to Kuwait in autumn of 2021.

After the warm welcoming words, AGYA Co-Presidents Dr. Lena-Maria Möller (Islamic Law, Hamburg/Leipzig) and Prof. Dr. Anis Ben Amor (Literature, Tunis) led the inauguration ceremony of the 15 new AGYA members from Algeria, Egypt, Germany, Kuwait, Libya, Oman, and Sudan. They represent a variety of disciplines from Archeology to Engineering, and from Education in Humanitarian and Fragile Contexts to Knowledge Management in Global Production Networks. For these 15 excellent early career researchers, the ceremony marked the beginning of their five-year membership in AGYA, which will enable them to develop innovative projects through research cooperation across countries and disciplines.

For four AGYA members, the Annual Conference concluded their active membership. As alumni in the growing Alumni Network, they will stay part of the AGYA family.

Science communication and storytelling: "Sharing Truth in the Information Age"

Communicating scientific content to a broader audience has never been this easy: Social media has irreversibly changed the way researchers participate in public discourse. At the same time, social media algorithms determine the rules of the game and limit the diversity of opinions, arguments, views and preferences. This creates echo chambers where content is repeated and reinforced. The inspiring speech on "Sharing Truth in the Information Age" by Max Stossel critically examined the impact of social media, maintaining that technology needs to be realigned with humanity's best interests.

In a fresh and original way, the award-winning poet, filmmaker and speaker suggested how scholars can navigate around the pitfalls of echo chambers in social media. As he spoke, he switched elegantly from speech to poetry to storytelling, blurring the lines between the genres. Max Stossel provided the AGYA members and alumni with recommendations on how to communicate their scientific findings to a broader public with storytelling techniques.

Science communication and women's empowerment: AGYA's success stories on female farmers

Be it shrimp farms in the desert or cows with their calves in the pasture all year: innovative approaches in agriculture must be implemented courageously to realize more sustainable concepts of food production. Here, the commitment of women farmers plays an increasingly important role. Reason enough for AGYA to

bring together encouraging and inspiring female farmers from Arab countries and Germany, and to create a network to exchange ideas on the future of farming.

Two pioneer female farmers, one from Kuwait and one from Germany, shared their inspiring success stories of women's empowerment during the Annual Conference: Dr. Sherain Al-Subiai, specializing in sustainable aquaculture at the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), and Anja Hradetzky, an organic farmer with a focus on stress-free cattle handling, engaged AGYA members and alumni in discussing innovative concepts of ecological agriculture in the Arab world and Germany.

Kindly find more success stories and recommendations on women's empowerment in agriculture in the [AGYA Policy Report](#).

AGYA is led by new Steering Committee and Co-Presidents

Part of each Autumn Annual Conference is the election of six new members to the Steering Committee coordinating all AGYA member academic activities and representing the academy at international conferences to enhance AGYA's cooperation network.

The new Steering Committee consists of Dr. Amro Ali (Political Philosophy, Cairo), Dr. Lilia Makhloufi (Architecture, Algiers), and Dr. Maha Nasr (Pharmacy, Cairo) for the Arab side, and Prof. Dr. Laila Prager (Social Anthropology, Hamburg), Prof. Dr. Marc Ringel (Economics, Geislingen), and Prof. Dr. Amr Rizk (Engineering, Ulm) for the German side. Dr. Maha Nasr will serve as Arab Co-President and Prof. Dr. Amr Rizk as German Co-President. Congratulations!

Launch of the AGYA Idea Competition 2021

Once a year, AGYA members pitch their project ideas and compete for a funding of 50,000 Euro. The winner of the Idea Competition 2021 is the "Voices from Palmyra" project submitted by Dr. Konstantin Klein (History, Bamberg), Prof. Dr. Dominik Michels (Computer Sciences, Thuwal), and Prof. Dr. Ammar Abdurrahman (AGYA alumnus, Archeology, Damascus/Berlin). They will establish an open-access data base of Palmyrene inscriptions, giving a voice to the city's ancient inhabitants.

Training in online communication

Collaborating online requires new skills for process- and result-oriented communication in scientific teams. AGYA offered a training on "Facilitating Online Meetings and Workshops" for members, alumni, and participants from GUST, introducing new pathways to improve their virtual communication skills, as well as best practices for intercultural interdisciplinary online communication. The training was led by Anne Hodgson and Sangita Popat, two professional bilingual communication trainers.

The AGYA Annual Conference was held successfully on a self-hosted online communication platform fulfilling the members' need for networking and exchange despite the difficult conditions. The feedback on the new platform was overwhelmingly positive. However, all participants agreed that they look forward to meeting in person as early as travel restrictions allow for. The next Annual Conference will take place, probably online again, from 22-26 March 2021.

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

The Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA) is based at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (BBAW) in Germany and at the Academy of Scientific Research and Technology (ASRT) in Egypt. It was established in 2013 and is the first bilateral young academy worldwide. AGYA promotes research cooperation among outstanding early-career researchers from all disciplines who are affiliated with a research institution in Germany or any Arab country. The academy supports the innovative projects of its members in various fields of research as well as in science policy and education. Currently, 60 members – Arab and German scholars in equal number – realize joint projects and initiatives. AGYA is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and various Arab cooperation partners.

Further information: www.agya.info
Twitter: @AGYA_events
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Contact:

AGYA Office in Berlin

The Arab-German Young Academy
of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA)
at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences (BBAW)

Prof. Dr. Verena Lepper, Principal Investigator (PI)
Dr. Sabine Dorpmüller, German Managing Director
Jägerstr. 22-23
10117 Berlin
E-Mail: agya@bbaw.de
Tel.: +49 30 20 370-281

AGYA Regional Office in Cairo

The Arab-German Young Academy
of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA)
at the Academy of Scientific Research & Technology (ASRT)

Dr. Amr Radwan, Head of Office
101 Qasr Al-Aini Street
11516 Cairo, Egypt
E-Mail: agya@asrt.sci.eg
Tel.: +201 225643-263

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