

Report on research field trip to Cairo, Egypt

26.05 – 04.06.2012

The purpose of this research field trip to Cairo was to establish a connection with Cairo University, in order to set a partnership between the universities of Cairo and Halle with the goal of submitting an application for the DAAD-sponsored program, Transformationsprojekt Ägypten und Tunesien, Kurzmaßnahmen 2013. The main idea of the project is to organize a summer school to be held both in Cairo and in Halle focused on how to manage post-graduate studies in the social sciences and the humanities. This field trip was a kind of follow-up from the one I had already done in November 2011, that time sponsored by the Orient Institut Beirut.

I spent the week in Cairo going to the Faculty of Political Science and Economics, Cairo University, in order to meet with professors, understand if there could be a factual interest in the project from their side, and to get their approval to become part of the project. After some days it became clear, the troubling political situation notwithstanding, that the project had the potential interest of some junior professors of the Faculty, although I needed the whole time I spent there in order to secure their support, having discussed the application format and its contents with the three professors separately. It is to be noted that the Faculty of Political Science and Economics is possibly the most prestigious faculty in the humanities at Cairo University, the oldest and more respected public university in Egypt, and that as such professors there are quite used to have international contacts and cooperation. Nevertheless, the fact that I personally went there and met with them, usually not exactly at the first attempt, and not knowing in advance all of the people that I ended up meeting, is to be considered one of the major factors in the success of the trip – also because this enabled me to gain a personal understanding of the internal dynamics at the Faculty of Political Science and Economics and on how to proceed in order to be able to submit the application by the end of June.

The professors that agreed to be part of the project are Mona Amer, economist and coordinator of the French section inside the Faculty, Riham Bahi, political scientist and Dialogue Coordinator at the Center for Civilization Studies and the Dialogue of Cultures at Cairo University, and Mohammed Soffar, political scientist with a PhD from Freie Universität Berlin who is the Director of the abovementioned Center. They all took note of the project, read the relevant documents, and accepted to take part in it. The date that has been agreed upon is next year, either the last week of June and the first one of July or the first two weeks of July (it was agreed that the first week be held in Cairo and the second one in Halle). I also met with the Head of the Department, accompanied by Riham Bahi, but due to the difficult time of the year it was not possible to get a written signed approval of the project, although I was reassured that the Department would accept the project when and if it gets funded. The possibility of having the week in Cairo of the summer school hosted by the Faculty has been discussed, as well as the possibility of having the OIB as sub-contractor especially for what concerns a secretary, and possibly also a student aid in the months before the summer school takes place.

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