DIALOGUES FOR KNOWLEDGE AND DEVELOPMENT:

The Case of International Development Cooperation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

PhD Thesis

by

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Acknowledgement

Learning to listen has been my starting inquiry about knowledge and development in the field of international development cooperation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). This where I have had innumerable encounters with a great variety of experienced and skilled people, with the most knowledgeable experts from the region, and with people and colleagues from Europe and the US who can be considered MENA experts. I was one of them. So I took the courage to reflect our performance and our terms of reference, our interlocutors and our counterparts in and with MENA. It is with great appreciation that my thoughts go to those who shared their doubts and their feelings, their experiences and their wisdom with me.

My special thanks go to Prof.Dr.John Rijsman who let me reorganize myself and helped me rethink the purpose of my endeavours about the MENA region. My sincere gratitude also goes to Dr.Salua Nour from Free University Berlin. Her sharp spirit and healthy criticism offered me the opportunity to accomplish an extended overhaul of my preliminary essay. To the colleagues of the Centre for Near and Middle Eastern Studies (CNMS), it is Prof Dr.Rashid Ouaissa and the PhD Colloquium in the years 2010 and 2011 whose colleagues enriched my reflections throughout the research phase. Last, I am more than grateful to my interview partners who gave me their honest view of the current state-of-the art of the Middle East and North African region, in short MENA.

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PART I

1. Background, Purpose and Outline of this Study

1.1 Background

My assumption for key priorities of the IDC consulting industry in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is challenged by the limits of a *bold vision.* I asked myself how to effectively engage in appreciation of opportunities to instill change in favour of equal opportunities for the people in the region. The MENA communities in the IDC context I am targeting remain insufficiently heard to look at the *'how'* of development work. Instead *'more of the same'* type of IDC projects and programmes receive funding for their conventional practices. My contribution at the German Orientalist Conference Marburg (DOT: 2010) complemented the flow of reflection. I synthesized the issue of transformation as a Western construction of modernity towards MENA, presenting my doubts as to the theoretical framing of Western Societal and Economic Sciences and their projects and programmes. As for myself, I decided to conduct analysis and empirical research in a multi-disciplinary approach in MENA.

1.2 Purpose of this Study

As an introductory note, my belief in what is '*good*' and '*real*' is to trust the sense of meaning, value and action through the co-creation of relational practices. Only when conducting this research, I started to understand that the concept of dialogue carries two fundamentally different meanings to be distinguished: first of all, dialogue in international development cooperation (IDC) refers to organisational formats of conferences, workshops or research events that aim to expand knowledge by dialoguing on thematic topics. The starting point for basically each IDC project is the problem to be identified. Dialogue is therefore used as an instrumental tool to adressing problems and finding solutions by means of conducting dialogue from an operational perspective, often in high-level fora. For my research on IDC in MENA, I will call this type *'**IDC dialogue**'*.

Secondly, dialogue in conducting appreciative inquiry (AI) for relational practices is meant to sharing working practices with the aim to creating meaning together. Here, the process of involving individuals, groups or entire communities is to bring about change. In conjunction with AI, the community of practice (CoP) approach allows to share the *'what'* and the *'why'* in the context of consultancy limits, boarders and opportunities in MENA. I will therefore introduce AI as the language that has the potential to let people express their situation and their ideas for the future in their own words, and explain the AI methodology together with the approach of communities of practice (CoP). I will call this type *'**AI dialogue**'*.

In distinguishing between these two meanings for dialogue, the first emphasis of my study is to clarify this differentiation to be made. This will enable me to analysing the different forms of dialogue in the MENA context where these two types of meanings are of relevance. In a second emphasis, based on my professional experience as an AI practitioner who mainly works in IDC, I had entered the AI-based dialogic approach applied for the MENA context. So my urge for attention implies both the theoretical sources of IDC dialogues and AI dialogues conducted in the MENA region. Technically, the purpose of my research is beyond the duration of programmes and projects. It encompasses the trends for dialogue and reform in MENA in its current potential to merge tradition and modernity in contemporanean practice. Religion is considered of less relevance to conducting this research, because Islamic studies or religious aspects are not in the focus of my study. Instead, I have chosen an interdisciplinary methodology that enables me to discuss the conceptual importance of

dialogue in the MENA region in IDC as well as in AI-based formats. Using the mix of qualitative content analysis and research bodies spelled out above, I follow the academic concepts of area studies as one focus, and behavioural and societal studies as the other focus. I will therefore treat my research body along two schools of thought for the methodological approach, as indicated herewith:

- the **Tilburg University (NL),** Oldendorff Research Institute, Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences in cooperation with the US-based Taos Institute. The theme of social sciences constitutes the overall umbrella of its research units and their approach to social and behavioural sciences. The innovative approach of the virtual community, in its organizational framework as a comprehensive dissertation body, is open to junior and senior professionals at all stages and phases of their individual stakes. The strength of the Taos/Tilburg approach is to allow for a comprehensive methodological design that nurtures and accompanies the researchers along their academic interests and their courage for innovation. With regards to PhD students, the programme is "…*designed for mature professionals who wish to pursue a line of inquiry that will enrich their endeavors and speak to the concerns of a broader audience of scholars and practitioners*…".

Partnering with the **Taos Institute** whose primary focus is on social construction, I developed and carried forward my research idea in conducive partnership with both Tilburg and Taos. Interdisciplinary competences and sectoral technical expertise bring together a rich agenda of studies and research that encompass such different topics as language, literature, history, religion, ethnology, archeology, geography, political science, social science and economics. Grasping the complexity of these aspects towards a deeper understanding therefore calls for an overall depth of these particular implications for many countries and regions within MENA.

This is the moment when I decided to discuss „**dialogue in IDC**" used as an instrumental tool to adressing problems and finding solutions from an operational perspective which I then coined „**IDC dialogues**".

Through my research exchange with the Taos Institute, I was able to coin „**AI dialogues**" that describes the process of involving individuals, groups or entire communities in future-oriented collaborative practices to instill change. It was through a continuous flow of virtual research exchange with Prof.Dr.John Rijsman that I was able to ‚deconstruct' the differentiation between ‚AI dialogue' and ‚IDC dialogue' that has become the substance of my research on AI and IDC in the MENA setting. Tilburg integrates various fields of relevance for my reflection that encompass development and IDC as much as knowledge and modernity aspects of sociology, organizational sciences and methodology. Dialogic references are of particular concern for IDC in an interdisciplinary fashion. Organized as a joint program together with the Taos Institute (USA), the Taos/Tilburg program is designed for ‘…*seasoned professionals who…continue to carry on full-time employment* …' while completing their writing (within a two- to three year period).

The **Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies** (CNMS, University Marburg, Germany) founded in 2006 has a total of seven professorships by 2012. As a young research hub for interdisciplinary excellence, CNMS aims at qualifying students in a regional perspective (MENA; Iran; Turkey), to broaden the classic orientation of the hitherto language-dominated focus towards a wider spectrum of area studies that include social sciences and interdisciplinary academic exchange. Its vision is to enter professional careers including political, economic and historical fields. The CNMS' goal is to creating synergies and enriching the basic qualification of oriental languages in its drive to foster intercultural competencies for more practical-oriented Middle Eastern studies. Against these lines of

process development, CNMS staff carries a view to achieve future-oriented international networking capacities in line with broad-based career development for scientific cross-regional potential beyond Germany and Europe. In an encompassing advisory opinion by the German Council of Sciences and Humanities, the CNMS is described as becoming an „...*internationally visible competence centre for cultural, scientific and social research and teaching of the Near and Middle East...*" (Wissenschaftsrat (WR): 2010, 18).

In this combination of CNMS and TAOS, I developed a simple comparative research formula in an open attitude that addresses aspects of heterogeneity in the sense of chrystallising the concept of ‚*MENA modernities’.* I have drafted my own coining of the research topic in applying an evaluative approach to study the societal processes and dynamics in the MENA region. My research focus encompasses historical references and their aspects of modernity, modernisation and historical knowledge as described above. The 20th and 21st century brings me to conducting open-ended interviews in an AI approach to increase clarity among both sides of MENA and European interview partners. My professional background and experience gave me the courage to sharpen the two sides of modernity and modernization in a way to tackle development work and governance issues that intrigued my long-term wish for deeper reflection on the case of MENA.

The technical focal area for ‚IDC dialogue’ chosen for my research is sustainable economic development (SED) in German technical cooperation. SED is considered a key area of IDC’s private sector development agenda for the MENA region. Funded largely by the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), IDC projects are run by people who act as stakeholders of development, knowledge and modernity concepts. SED trends in the development context are often described with a clear bias on ‚*success*’ and a future orientation in the sense of ‚*economically viable*’ communities and/or business entities. Here, the role of the actor is often described indirectly only. Emphasis is put on economically healthy businesses and industries with minimal environmental impact on communities. This is where ‚*IDC dialogue*’ comes in to put ‚SED’ into concrete steps of action.

1.3 Rationale and Research Goal

The rationale of my study is to deconstruct the *‘constructed reality’* (Kruse 2011: 50) of MENA’s image in the West, and the Western image in the Middle East and North Africa, short the MENA region. The principle of the ‚*lowest common denominator’* in qualitative research (Kruse: 2011) determines qualitative research as a reconstruction, and not a review of concepts. Attitude is further translated as a process of understanding ‚*the other*’. This attitude is seen as a precondition for conducting qualitative interviews in a narrative capacity. Applied to the MENA region, the goal of my research is to understand whether there was, there is, or there will be sufficient ‚*dialogue capacity*’ to transfer and share knowledge in MENA. Understood as skills capacities, organisational capacities and financial capacities, ‚*IDC dialogue*’ aims to stir dialogue for building exactly this type of capacities. Yet the validation of capacity-building in the IDC context remains critical, and does not wait for an answer to the bold statement that ‘…*no one can (or should) help a MENA state that cannot help itself*’. This type of statements and surveys was a reaction to the emergence of the Arab „Spring" in MENA, coming-up from the West in numerous debates to understand the sudden situation of unrest and revolt in the region. The implications for international development cooperation and political partners can continuously being traced in online discussions outside the official media channels.

I see the people in the region as actors who start moving for change. My research goal explores the relevance of inquiry drawn from both formats of ‚IDC dialogue’ and ‚AI dialogue’

in development work over a given duration and time frame. The analysis of efforts needed to building effective dialogue capacity in MENA are undertaken in '…*reflective interaction*…' (Shotter: 2010). Yet the understanding of dialogue puts into question whether dialogically-structured activities imply sufficiently non-hierarchical interventions of actors in communication with each other. My own development consultancy experience draws on developmental aspects that I was able to trace along their causes of action in a cross-sectoral responsiveness to various themes of priorities in MENA (SED, PSD, TVET, all to be discussed in detail in part II and part III of this research). My research goal further queries the level of capacity and knowledge in MENA along a set of variables. I will analyse IDC's categories used to generalize the status of the region as less developed than the West. Modernity variables that help to describe the different approaches for modernization concepts include the following elements for comparability:

MODERNITY	MODERNIZATION
achievement (McLelland: 1973)	- access to finance, information, resources
development	- progress, advancement
economic development	- bureaucracy
ethics	- public/private sector ethics
education	- capacity development
emancipation	- decentralisation
enlightenment	
evolution	- dissemination of wealth
	(secular) laws
learning	- gender
knowledge	- industrialization
progress	- innovation
secularity	- networking
social practice	
(universal) standards	- rationalization (positivistic rationality)
	- sustainability (scenarios)
technology	- urbanization

Furthermore, the notion of failure in development work is explored against the background of social change in the MENA region. My research questions therefore ask what to deduct from the concept of '*development*' and its '*success stories*' when there is the risk of failure, at the same time. I am aware that the concept of '*knowledge*' is largely pursued by development practitioners with different means and results. The same applies to the concept of failure from a Western point of view. However, social practice in the Muslim-Arab MENA region indirectly puts into question to what extent knowledge increases are effectively generated through *‚IDC dialogue*'. Said this, the politeness of MENA actors and so-called recipients or *‚target groups*' of development aid does not easily make Western actors admit failures of official international aid instrumentalized by them.

The following research questions are therefore meant to address the cultural encounters in MENA of '*being modern*' and accepting knowledge transfer still dominated by the West:

what is the leverage for building knowledge-based societies with well-trained local/ national experts from MENA and international advisors in MENA?

How do development partners and development agents transfer knowledge when working for sustainable change and transformation in the MENA region?

How does '*development work*' target '*knowledge*' aspects in MENA in particular?
How does the concept of '*transfer of knowledge*' contribute to the development and/or strengthening of knowledge-based economies in MENA?
Who are the main '*development protagonists*' in MENA, and what is their particular focus to stir change towards a '*sensible and forward-looking transformation*'?

1.4   Working Hypothesis

IDC research acts as a hands-on practice of social construction. We as development practitioners from outside the MENA region discuss the Mediterranean along a particular object/subject discourse in our development work, because we are in search of knowledge that is constructed as a product of communities over time. Hypotheses generally present blue-print approaches for IDC programs, designed along a set of variants similar to story-based inquiry. Constructed in a world of '*Idealtypus*' in analogy to Weber (Shubat: 2011), the aim for truth (in German: '*Erkenntnisziel*') in the sense of inquiry does not ask whether something is right or wrong. It rather analyses what deviations are perceivable, and how to describe the ideal type of knowledge for producing a new realization or finding.

When undertaking scientific research in the MENA region, the traditional belief that there is some '*truth*' in our findings that need to be dismantled through a '*community of practice*' (CoP) approach. MENA actors born in the region often live and work outside their home countries in Europe. They share their ideas and beliefs, their experiences and wisdoms on the constructedness of this type of knowledge. Culture constitutes a driving element for what can be defined as '*knowledgeable*'. By building around individual expert experience as an IDC practitioner, I belong to the cultural '*tribe of experts*' (Hüsken: 2003) who seeks to transfer '*good*' practices for knowledge-building. I understand that it is not always clearly defined how, why and if the practitioner's expertise effectively responds to what is being required by the MENA community as the '*recipient*' of development cooperation.

My inquiry of what is '*good*', or what could or should be '*knowledgeable*' therefore aims to 'deconstruct' the 'constructed reality' (Kruse 2011: 50) through my **working hypothesis** as follows:

Working Hypothesis:

> *efforts to building capacity through development work translate into*
> *increased knowledge and improved performance in the MENA region.*

KNOWLEDGE Categories
- acquisition   - hubs
- access to   - information
- application   - instruments
- building   - sharing
- transfer   - data
- management   - human resources

IDC Stakeholders

actor/ beneficiary / partner / recipient **/**

Chart 1: Bauer S.L. Working Hypothesis September 2011

In order to illlustrate this working hypothesis, brief IDC cases describe the intended social dimension of economic development through development cooperation. These project and programme cases for '*sustainable economic development*' (SED) pursued by German international development cooperation (IDC) further serve as a roster for the validation of experiences by national and international actors. The *‚how'* of these actors' feedback is assessed through a series of appreciative-inquiry (AI) interviews in part III. Human capacities are assumed as essential for building knowledge through learning and innovation. The findings help to understand points of intervention that leverage knowledge and development, and to distill where and how knowledge is being shared by whom, to whom and in what way. In short, I will assess in what way actors foster and use local knowledge for sustaining capacity-building in IDC in MENA.

IDC measures carry an implicit assumption to the making of '*modern societies'* in their concept and normative framework for social and political practice in MENA. The current IDC agenda acts in an interdisciplinary approach for development. The examples studied for this research screen the IDC concepts of development, knowledge and modernity in MENA. These formats appear to be only artificially combined and framed as such by the same IDC actors and stakeholders. Evidence of how IDC concepts create impact is approached in a qualitative interview sequence elaborated in part III by means of appreciative inquiry (AI), individual observation and qualitative content analysis (Mayring: 1983; 2000). In concrete terms for this research, IDC management is analysed along a range of generic concepts, tools and instruments. The subject – object discourse of modernization efforts also looks at selected cultural dimensions validated in the MENA region.

GIZ's recent focus on scaling-up its *‚concepts for solutions*' calls for both expertise and experience, and it needs the courage to step-up dialogue inside the company (GIZ: 2010) and *‚outside with our partners and clients*'. The ingredients for doing so are done in a multi-level approach, critical for the design of the detailed scaling-up process. By setting-out clear objectives and financing options, effective models such as the British joint information systems committee (JISC: 2007) follow a six-steps approach. Organized in a multi-level approach, the interventions are validated along a detailed project plan with indicators for the stakeholder analysis. This approach helps to focus on the importance of particular stakeholders for the intervening organization on the one hand. It spells out in detail whom to identify as immediate partners, final clients and other actors on the other hand.

Ownership and involvement of key stakeholders are elements steered for implementation at local level, linked with policy advisory services and backed-up by incentive mechanisms in a change process. Results-based monitoring (RBM) provides the additional value generated by this type of innovative approaches. Finally, quality standards and manuals ensure that the tools are effectively used. The above-described scaling-up scenario caters for professional institutions. Communication, awareness programmes and networking are further key ingredients that make the scaling-up scenario realistic (see denkmodell). The CW success factors (GIZ) were applied during the present research on *‚hiwār*' (Arabic: dialogue) in a combined fashion against selected evidence of monitoring, evaluation and impact measurement documents of international development practice, in order to re-evaluate a set of modernity variables that may be applicable (or not) in the MENA context for dialogues against Western patterns of contemporaneity *(thesis statement)*. Research practices applied during my research refer to empirical evidence in IDC of external support to democracy versus effects or impacts on the current trends of revolutions in MENA (Prof.Dr.Rashid Ouaissa, CNMS Marburg, Bauer/Interview 3, 29.7.11).

1.5 Outline and Thesis Structure

The outline of my research takes the title of „*dialogues for knowledge and development*" as the basic theme for analysing the case of international development cooperation (IDC) in its principles and practices in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Both concepts of knowledge and development are used throughout the study for critical reflection of the way IDC is practised in dialogue forms and formats in MENA as a region. The thesis structure is divided along four main parts, taking-off with drafting the hypothesis that efforts to building capacity through development work translate into increased knowledge and improved performance in the MENA region. The historical discourse on modernity patterns of Western society today (PART II) reviews the background of the heritage of Muslim modernization in the 19th and 20th century.

The purpose of the study features scientific progress and technology in their characteristics as '*traditional*', '*transitorial*' and '*modern*' for the concept of Mediterranean modernity. The rationale of the reflection addresses the issue of ‚*time*', assessed for critical self-reflection against the level of '*self-renewal*' of Muslim society. Applying the '*objective-subjective*' social science approach throughout the research, my aim is to critically share the discourse of '*otherness*' between the European West and the Oriental Middle East from an IDC perspective (PART II).

Here, the dialogic principles and practices are assessed against various formats of dialogue that lead to the possible transformation leverages applied in the MENA context and region. The interview design is tested and implemented for detailed screening and analysis (PART III). A set of reflections on SED and modernity in IDC practice concludes the study with an outlook to SED action. Voicing the stakes by development partners in appreciation and need for capacity-building in the field of small- and medium-sized enterprise (SME) knowledge, capacity building efforts cause only little effective dialogue to performance increases by development partners (PART IV). A possible paradigm shift within MENA's IDC operations remains an open argument for discussion among national (MENA) and international (Western) IDC staff.