

Report on Visiting Research Fellowship 2013

Philipp Salzmann & Judith Welz



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Within the framework of the project *Conflict, Participation, and Development in Palestine* (CPDP), two members of the Vienna-based Research Cluster, Philipp Salzmann and Judith Welz, took part in a visiting research fellowship at the *Centre for Development Studies* (CDS) at the Birzeit University in the occupied Palestinian West Bank.

Activities at the CDS at Birzeit University:

Our activities at the Centre circled mainly around the drafting of research proposals and the preparation of reading lists for university courses.

Research proposal on Rawabi

Philipp conducted research for a proposal on neoliberal transformation of rural Palestine using the planned city of Rawabi in the West Bank as case example. He carried out a literature review on possible theoretical approaches for the study, e.g. planning theory, theories on neoliberal transformation/restructuring and urbanizing of rural territories, land grabbing as well as on dispossession processes of peasants and land use-changes through urbanization dynamics.

Outline of a Master's course in Development Studies

Philipp also worked on an outline for a Master's course in Development Studies with the preliminary title "Formations of Development and Third World Struggles for Alternatives". On the one hand, the course was designed to provide a critical conceptual and historical overview of the emergence of

development as a concept, a set of theories, practices and interventions. For this purpose, the reading list contained both primary texts from some of the original theorists of development who dominantly influenced the discourse, and documents from institutional actors. On the other hand, the course aimed at portraying different struggles for alternative forms of development throughout the Global South. By locating the emergence of the development discourse within European colonial and imperial history, the course should enable students to problematize the Eurocentric and highly power laden nature of the concept. Philipp put together useful literature for the course ranging from text classics on development (from Wallerstein and Escobar to Rosenstein-Rodan) to current academic debates on concepts such as de-growth, post-developmentalism and “commoning” which critically reflect on the dominant patterns of capitalist consumption and production as the basis of our current non-sustainable development paradigm.

PHD program

Furthermore, Philipp assisted the drafting of a proposal for the establishment of an interdisciplinary Ph.D. program in Social Sciences at Birzeit University. The main goal and mission were to establish a strong academic program that could enable the emergence of a new generation of social scientists and researchers capable of critically inquiring complex research fields in general, and of generating new knowledge(s) about the Arab region from within Arab and Palestinian locations in particular. Philipp’s main task was to enhance and broaden the list of literature deemed useful for the objectives of the Ph.D. program. For that purpose he specifically concentrated on the following areas: situated knowledge and (dominant) knowledge production, objectivity and “truth” in science as well as feminist critique. Because closely linked to these topics he added literature on eurocentrism and orientalism in science. Lastly, he provided articles on development theory, which critically examine the concept of developmentalism, the political economy of development and underdevelopment.



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“Gaza Visioning Exercise” proposal for UNDP/PAPP

Philipp and Judith together drafted a research proposal for the “Gaza Visioning Exercise”. Despite the devastating effects of the ongoing siege on Gaza, the current socio-economic situation and day-to-day realities for the Gazan people remain understudied. The proposal was based on the belief, that - if one wants to generate sustainable socio-economic development in the Gaza Strip (as aimed for by the Exercise) - it is essential to first develop a deep understanding of the repercussions that the changed socio-economic settings have had for the social networks, class structure and gender relations in place and of the coping strategies that have been invented by subsectors of the economy and the society to handle the isolation. A sustainable form of development needs to build on the realities on the ground and account for the built up knowledge and practices by the people concerned.

Analytical attention was focused on the tunnel economy as one direct outcome of the current situation in the Gaza Strip. Since the electoral victory of Hamas in 2006, the Israeli closure policy and military strikes against the Gaza Strip have reached a new dimension, resulting in devastating effects on the economy due to destructions of production sites, warehouses, power plants etc and vast import restrictions. As a consequence, the unemployment level has gone up while the average wages were decreasing.

We further problematized the impacts of the siege on the agricultural sector being one of the traditionally driving forces of the Gazan economy. Especially the access to land and to fishing waters is highly restricted due to Israeli military measures resulting in a dysfunctional agricultural sector. Closely tied to problems within agriculture is the critical water and sanitation situation in the Gaza Strip. As another crucial element for development, functioning public infrastructure like public transportation, education and energy supply, housing and health services etc. is deemed indispensable. As a matter of fact, all these are impaired in Gaza.

The methods foreseen were a combination of desk research on existing literature/ data and expert as well as focus group interviews with concerned stakeholders and households to gain insight into first-hand knowledge and experiences. Central to the project was a participatory research approach including relevant parties and people on the ground, from the moment of designing the project to implementing it.

ESRC-DFID Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research; Research Grants Call 2013-14

Another proposal Judith worked on focused on examining the economic, social and political determinants driving poverty and inequality in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt). The aim was to identify the structures and processes which facilitate economic deprivation, social exclusion and political marginalisation in order to develop a more suitable understanding on *the making of poverty*. Poverty, even though it is an omnipresent term in development discourse, and its reduction, elimination and alleviation ranks first among the Millennium Development Goals, has no agreed upon definition. The World Bank - in an attempt to formulate a *state of the art* position - proposed the following: “Poverty is the lack of, or the inability to achieve a socially acceptable standard of living.” This definition builds on the so-called capabilities-approach by Amartya Sen, which claims that a persons' well-being is determined by his/her capability to function in society and integrates *relative, multi-dimensional* and *non-material perspectives* on poverty, yet, it doesn't acknowledge poverty as a social relationship. The proposal therefore made it clear that poverty is always a

consequence of the specific historically grown *social, political* and *economic* relations of a given context, and must therefore be conceptualized as a matter of power relations.

In order to get a grasp of the complex dynamics of poverty/inequality, the proposal coupled Sen's capabilities-approach with theories on *social exclusion* and *intersectionality*. Theories on social exclusion provide an analytical concept apt to highlight the mechanisms through which social structures can generate poverty in an interactional fashion: On the one hand, 'the poor' are likely to be excluded from wider participation in society because of their social and material disadvantage. However, deprivation may also be a cause of exclusion along a number of socially constructed categories. Here, theories on *intersectionality* help to understand the connection between social categorisations and discrimination in pointing out that disadvantaging and/or favourable categories may intersect in one person and impact on her/his position within society, space of functionings as well as the experiences linked to this.

The proposal combined quantitative and qualitative methods and interdisciplinary perspectives (mainly social sciences and economics). In a first step, the extent of 'income related' inequality in the oPt and how it has changed over time, should be calculated. Yet, in order to understand the non-material aspects of poverty/inequality and the structural and social drivers of it, narrative interviews were to be conducted. The selection of Informants would be guided by intersecting social categories of high relevance in the Palestinian context, e.g. *race/nationality, class, gender, (dis)ability* and *space*.

Concluding:

Philipp's and Judith's research stay at the CDS permitted them to gain invaluable insight into the Palestinian academic system, current research projects and academic discourses, especially through discussions with Samia al-Botmeh (Director of the Centre for Development Studies) and Ayman Rezeqallah (Coordinator & Researcher). Besides that, they could enhance their understanding of the living conditions of the Palestinians under occupation through conversations and encounters with various different people.



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