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Welcome to Jordan – more than just a phrase My five months teaching at GJU

About the author: Professor Jan Mugele, a professor for "Regenerative Building Energy Technologies" at the Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences, spent a sabbatical semester teaching at GJU. He taught "Basics of renewable energy" (in German!) and "Efficient Energy Use" at the School of Natural Resources Engineering and Management und "Utility Planning & Design II" in the School of Architecture and Built Environment.

„Welcome to Jordan“ – that is not just a phrase, people here - taxi drivers as well as my academic colleagues - really mean it. Foreigners, Germans in particular, are welcome in a country that is not very old yet and still seems to be searching for its identity between Bedouin culture and a modern lifestyle.

Germany enjoys an excellent reputation in Jordan, and I mean not because of its history! I often heard “you are good people, not arrogant, reliable, you work hard for your standard of living, you produce high quality goods, and, of course, you have the best soccer team in the world”.

The mentality of people is different here than in Western Europe – I discovered the IBM principle: inshallah (God willing, hopefully), bukra (tomorrow, later), malesh (it's OK) – and as a forward planning German engineer it took me a while to get used to it. I had to learn that problems are dealt with when they occur, not when they are anticipated. In Jordan, planning ahead means “we should maybe do it this way, inshallah”. It was a good experience for me to learn that flexibility and readiness to change plans can lead to new opportunities. Once I found myself on the way to the Dead Sea when moments earlier I had planned to shop for groceries.

I am very proud of the students I taught at GJU! Especially in the lecture I held in German, and with the method of teaching being German as well, the students got really involved – even though they had to learn such long and difficult words like ‘Sonnehoehendiagramm’ and ‘Schwimmbadwassererwaermung’. Considering the constant exam pressure the students are under here at GJU – there are tests, quizzes and homework submissions almost every week which makes studying in the classical sense of examining and reflecting very difficult – I experienced that the students coped very well with the system that I applied in my courses, with less spoon feeding and more freedom to study. I noticed the significant difference in students before and after their German year: students in their 5th year who had just come back from Germany were a lot more independent and motivated, which is testament of the good work of the network partners, and shows the benefits of spending a year in another culture.

The people I met in Jordan have all been very kind and helpful, and generous with their time. Whenever I had a problem, the reaction was always: “Dr Jan, I can help, I will come with you to assist”, or “I know someone who can fix that”, or “You have to go from Madaba to Amman, me too, I will give you a lift”. Offering money for such help was seen as an offence. I was deeply impressed by their openness and friendliness, given that people here are much more affected by hardship and even war than we are in Western Europe. A “malesh” attitude helps here.

This more relaxed attitude of allowing things to play out, and not overplan, is something I take home from my experience here. I wish this immensely important project of the GJU will continue to be successful, and serve as a model to other projects of this kind. “Inshallah”.