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NIASD NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2008

1. Introduction

We are happy to inform you about the activities which have recently taken place in the Netherlands Institute for Academic Studies in Damascus (NIASD).

2. Institutional and Organizational

New NIASD assistant: Yara Ajeeb (as of November 2008)

After having been with the NIASD for many years, Alissar Al-Chami left the NIASD at the end of September 2008 to return to university to continue her studies. Caroline Kinj took over her position for one month. As of the beginning of November 2008 the NIASD welcomed as its new assistant Yara Ajeeb. Yara studied English language and literature and did a masters in translation at Damascus University. Before joining our team, Yara worked as a teacher of English and as a movie translator.



New NIASD house keeper: Hamza Shehab (as of July 2008)

As of the beginning of July 2008, Hamza Shehab took over the position of Nanda Wedjesuriya as the house keeper of the NIASD. Nanda returned to her home country Sri Lanka. Hamza Shehab is working with the NIASD on the basis of a service contract between the NIASD and the Syrian service provider Jad United Services.

Institutes' Day at Radboud University (21 November 2008)

NIASD director Astrid Rijbroek attended the yearly Institutes' Day which was this year organized at Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. There she met with all

other directors of Dutch institutes abroad. In the course of this event Astrid met with a number of researchers in various fields of Radboud University.

3. Science and Education

Promotion Dutch Higher Education: Educational Fairs: Aleppo (14 - 16 October 2008), Amman (29 October - 1 November 2008), Damascus (2 December 2008)

The NIASD participated in three education fairs, providing information about bachelor and master programmes taught in English at Dutch universities, visa, scholarships and other issues related to studying in Holland. The first fair was 'Academia Syria' which took place in the city of Aleppo from 14-16 October 2008. In Amman, the NIASD was present at the Jordan Education and Training Exhibition (JETE, *see picture*), in cooperation with the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Amman which provided decoration and a staff member for the booth. The third fair took place in the context of an initiative of the Delegation of the European Commission in Syria: a 'Study in Europe'-day organized in the building of the Language Center of Damascus University. At this event, Syrian students were given an overview of the various possibilities to continue their studies in Europe.



Promotion Dutch Higher Education: 'Study in Holland' presentations (October – December 2008)

In the last couple of months the NIASD gave one general and five specific 'Study in Holland' presentations at local universities, following the general presentations which we organized last year at six Syrian universities. Just before the start of the JETE fair on the 29th of October 2008, NIASD's free lance assistant Martijn Leefink delivered a general presentation — covering all study possibilities in English in Holland — at the University of Jordan in Amman. This presentation was attended by around 40 persons, both students and staff members.



With the kind co-operation of the respective faculty deans, specific 'Study in Holland' presentations were given in Syria on study possibilities in the following fields:

- Water Management and Hydrology (at the University of Damascus, Faculty of Civil Engineering, on the 9th November 2008, *see picture*);
- Sustainable Energy (at the University of Damascus, Faculty of Mechanical and

- Electrical Engineering, on the 13th of November 2008);
- Rural Development (at the University of Damascus, Faculty of Agriculture, on the 24th of November 2008);
- Business Management (at the Arab International University, on the 26th of November 2008);
- Biomedical Engineering (at the University of Damascus, Faculty of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering, on the 30th of November 2008).

These specific presentations gave an overview of the available study programmes in these specific fields at Dutch universities and covered issues such as costs and scholarships. At the end of the presentations information brochures of Dutch universities were distributed as well. Most of these specific presentations were attended by around 75-150 students as well as faculty staff.

Second and third session of the training course Project Development and Management (PDM), organized by the NIASD together with the Danish Institute in Damascus (DID), delivered by the Maastricht School of Management (2-4 September and 22-24 October 2008)



The second and the third session of the Project Development and Management (PDM) course took place at the NIASD in September and October 2008. This course is initiated and organized by the NIASD and the DID together and gives fifteen Syrians working in small or medium sized organizations the

opportunity to improve their skills with regard to the various elements of the project cycle, most notably the drafting of project proposals and the proper management of projects. The training course consists of seven two-to-five day sessions, delivered alternatively at the NIASD and the DID. The last session of the course is scheduled to take place in August 2009. The long duration of the PDM course allows it to accompany actual projects of participants in real time at their various project stages. The fourth session of the course is scheduled to take place at the DID from 11-13 February 2009.

Study abroad fairs in the Netherlands (Amsterdam 1 October, Nijmegen 9 October 2008)

The NIASD was present at two study abroad fairs for Dutch students. One was organized by Radboud University in Nijmegen, and one by the Hogeschool van Amsterdam (HvA) and the University of Amsterdam (UvA) in Amsterdam. During these fairs we explained

to students in what way the NIASD can assist them with for example studying or finding internships in Syria and the wider region.

Lecture "Language Adrift, the Rise of Darija (Moroccan Arabic Dialect) in Writing" by Mr. Jan Hoogland, assistant professor of Arabic at Radboud University, Nijmegen, the Netherlands (17 September 2008)

Mr. Jan Hoogland, as of January 1st 2009 the new director of the Netherlands Institute in



Morocco (NIMAR) and well known as editor and coordinator of the Bulaaq dictionaries Arabic-Dutch and Dutch-Arabic, presented a lecture on the increasing use in Morocco of the Moroccan dialect in writing, for example in advertisements, some magazines and newspapers and even TV subtitles for French language

parts in Moroccan soap operas. In the lecture Mr. Hoogland analysed possible causes of this phenomenon and discussed four hypotheses for its possible future development.

Lecture "Autoportraits on Camera in Multicultural Society" by prof.dr. Patricia Pisters, Head of the section Media and Culture of the Department of Media Studies at the University of Amsterdam (8 October 2008)

Prof.dr. Patricia Pisters delivered a lecture in which she analysed several recent Dutch documentaries and feature films dealing with immigration issues and cultural diversity:

'Hollandse Hokjes' (Dutch Boxes), 'De kinderen van mijn vader' (The Children of My Father), 'In het huis van mijn vader' (In My Father's House) and 'De Onmacht' (The Faint). Prof. Pisters compared these recent works to the famous Dutch documentary 'Alleman' (Everyman) of Bert Haanstra (1963), in which a collective autoportrait of Dutch society was given in which most Dutch people saw their lives represented. The recent Dutch documentary and film



productions show that such a collective autoportait of society is no longer possible, but that instead many autoportraits are needed to form an image of contemporary multicultural Dutch society. This development is also reflected in the technical aspects of the documentaries, such as the different role of the film director, the different use of the voice over technique and the positioning of the camera.

Lecture 'Action Research: Doing Intercultural Communication', by dr. B.W.M. Boog, formerly with the University of Groningen, now with Boog Research in Groningen, the Netherlands (17 November 2008)

Dr. Ben Boog delivered a lecture on a specific research methodology in the fields of the humanities and culture: 'action research': a participatory research methodology in which the professional researcher and the persons studied evolve into co-researchers in a co-generative learning process aimed at workable solutions that are grounded on the expert knowledge people often have about their own world. After exploring the characteristics of action research, Dr. Boog demonstrated this research methodology with an interactive exercise with the public about intercultural communication. Reflecting the diagnosis phase of action research, the aim of the exercise was to find out from each other the way



we look at, and experience, intercultural communication and what kind of solutions we can think of to enhance it. For the purpose of this exercise, the public was split in groups with a Dutch person in each group as well. The results were discussed in

a plenary session. One of the views expressed was that people should be more interested in each other and try to understand each other's cultural background better, for example through cultural exchanges.

Lecture "Traditional Water Management in Syria", by dr. Joshka Wessels, a Dutch social geographer and journalist who recently obtained a PhD at the University of Amsterdam on the rehabilitation of traditional water tunnel ('qanat') systems in Syria (21, 22 December 2008)

Dr. Joshka Wessels gave lectures at both the NIASD (21 December) and the Faculty of Civil Engineering of Damascus University (22 December) on how rural Syrian communities undertake efforts to maintain their common water resources. She focused specifically on the so-called 'qanat' systems in Syria, which are ancient underground water tunnels still in use today, for example in the Kalamoon



Mountains. The 'qanats' date from the Late Roman and Early Byzantine period. These fifteen hundred year old systems still contribute to the present day water supply in Syria, but are unfortunately getting out of use. Dr. Wessels shed light on the reasons why, focusing in particular on the extent to which 'qanat' community members are able to cooperate to maintain the tunnels. During the lecture a documentary film on the Syrian

'qanat' system was shown as well. In total dr. Wessels made 3 such films, one of which was broadcast on BBC World in 2003.

Visit of Prof. Ferial Mouhanna (Media Department, Damascus University) to the Faculty of Arts of the University of Groningen (23 October 2008)



The NIASD arranged for a visit of prof. Ferial Mouhanna, Head of the Media Department of the Faculty of Human Sciences and Literature of Damascus University to the Faculty of Arts of the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. The purpose of this visit was to propose and discuss proposals for student research exchanges in the field of media and culture. In these proposals Dutch and Syrian students would co-research in small groups various media issues, such as representations of (events and people in)

the Middle East and the West in each others' media sources. NIASD's deputy director Taco van der Zwaag accompanied prof. Ferial Mouhanna (*see picture, top left*) in Groningen, where they met with prof.dr. Ger de Haan (Dean of the Faculty of Arts, *see picture, middle*), Monique Swennenhuis MA (Policy Adviser on Education and International Affairs, *see picture, below right*), Mr. Robert Wagenaar (Director of Undergraduate and Graduate Studies, *see picture, top right*), Sanna Buurke, MA (Course Manager Journalism Studies) and dr. Markus Egg (Communication Studies, *see picture, below left*). Prof. Ferial's proposals were well received in Groningen. At the moment, Mr. Robert Wagenaar is preparing a concept memorandum of understanding.

Expert Meeting Intercultural Communication (16-18 November 2008)

Following earlier NIASD activities in the field of intercultural communication, an expert meeting was convened at the NIASD last November in order to conceptualize and lay the foundations of a NIASD course on intercultural communication. This course would be the third NIASD course, next to the NIASD Summer Course Arabic and the NIASD Summer Course



Christian and Islamic Art and Architecture; the latter course is scheduled to start in June 2009. Participants in the expert meeting were Mr. Youssef Azghari and Mr. Jelle Alkema of Avans University in Breda/Tilburg, Dr. Ben Boog of Boog Research in Groningen and Mrs. Anke van Haastrecht of the Department of Media, Art and Culture of the Faculty of

Arts of the University of Groningen. The course design resulting from the expert meeting focuses on communication between persons from a Western and a Middle Eastern cultural background in three domains: informal personal communication, communication between professionals and clients and communication within organizations. On the basis of the results of the expert meeting a concept project proposal was written in December 2008. At present we are in the process of finalizing a definitive project proposal. If sponsors can be found very quickly this new course may already run in the summer of 2009, otherwise the course will be scheduled to start in 2010.

Symposium Christian and Islamic Art and Architecture (11-12 December 2008)

In December the NIASD and the Paul van Moorsel Center of Leiden University organized a symposium at Leiden University on Christian and Islamic Art and Architecture. Both Dutch and international speakers participated in this symposium: Mat Immerzeel (UL), Luit Mols (consultant Islamic art), Dianne van de Zande (UL), Lucinda Dirven (UvA), Hans Theunissen (UL/UU), Nada Helou (Université de Liban), Yasser



Tabbaa (King's Academy, Amman, Jordan) and Rima Smine (Los Altos, CA). Mat Immerzeel opened the symposium on Thursday 11th December with a key note lecture titled: 'A Mixed Company of Syrians, Saracens and Greeks. Artistic Interaction in the Middle East' (*see picture*).

The other lectures followed on Friday 12th December and covered a variety of related topics, including the context of Christian images in Islamic art of the 13th century (Tabbaa), the use of Old Testament scenes in the baptistry of Dura Europos and the relation between Jews and Christians in 3rd century Syria (Dirven) and Christian-Muslim artistic interaction in the ornamental decorations of two 13th century Syrian Orthodox manuscripts (Smine). Many of the symposium speakers will also teach in the NIASD Summer Course on Christian and Islamic Art and Architecture, which will start in June 2009 at the NIASD.

On Saturday 13th December the summer course teachers and NIASD's deputy director Taco van der Zwaag held a meeting at Leiden University to coordinate several organizational and programmatic aspects of the course. More information about this course, for which you can apply until 15 March 2009, can be found at www.niasd.org.

Two Dutch language courses (5 October – 14 December 2008)

In the last couple of months the NIASD delivered two Dutch language courses on a beginners level for two groups of in total 13 students. The lessons were given in the evening, three times per week, in the period from the 5th of October until the 14th of December 2008.



Arabic translation assignment: ‘Canon van Nederland – a Key to Dutch History’ (December 2008)

Upon the request of Dr. Hubert Slings, director of the Foundation “entoen.nu”, the NIASD took up the assignment to translate the English version of the “Canon van Nederland” into Arabic. The ‘Canon van Nederland’ was presented in October 2006 by prof.dr. Frits van Oostrom, chairman of the Committee for the Development of the Dutch Canon, as commissioned by the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science. The Canon aims to contribute to the awareness of Dutch history.

Photo/Video workshop ‘My Image Amsterdam’ (30 November – 14 December 2008)



Students Dina Alsaadi and Jalal Maghut and lecturer Shahin Abdullah of the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Damascus participated in the photo/video workshop “My Image Amsterdam” from 30 November until 14 December 2008. This workshop was sponsored by Shell Syria, the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Damascus, the NIASD and Kosmopolis. The Dutch artists Anita Mizrahi and Maarten Rens coached the participants, whose assignment was to explore Amsterdam and produce a video and three print works each. In the resulting art works, which are exposed in the Netherlands and Syria, one sees Amsterdam through the eyes of three Syrian artists. The picture on the left shows a work of Jalal Maghut, inspired by Amsterdam. The videos that were produced are: ‘Only in Amsterdam’ (Dina Alsaadi), ‘Colourful Amsterdam’ (Jalal Maghut) and ‘Lines’ (Shahin Abdullah). Specific things in Amsterdam which caught the eye and attracted the attention of the Syrian artists included the immense number of bikes in the city (which led to some bike riding lessons as well!), the colourful diversity of the people in Amsterdam as well as the extent to which Dutch society seems to be organized.

The Syrian artists visited the Gerrit Rietveld Academie and the Rijksacademie and showed their works and exchanged views during lessons together with Dutch artists. Their works were shown in a Kosmopolis conference titled 'Together Forever', as well as in a private gallery, while the videos will be shown on local tv in Amsterdam. Exhibitions are planned in Syria at the NIASD and at Damascus University.

4. Culture

NIASD Film Programme 2008: 'Who am I?' (7-9 October) and 'Endeavours' (16-18 December 2008)

In total four Dutch feature films and three Dutch documentaries were screened at the NIASD with Arabic subtitles during three days in October and three days in December. Each documentary and film was screened twice, one time around 17:00 hours and one time around 20:00 hours.

The October block, under the title 'Who am I?', focused on issues of cultural diversity, immigration and identity and encompassed the documentaries: *Hollandse Hokjes* (Har Tortike, 1999), *De kinderen van mijn vader* (Meral Uslu, 2005) and *In het huis van mijn vader* (Fatima Jebli Ouazzani, 1997), as well as the



short feature film *De Onmacht* (Karim Traïdia, 1991). Film director Karim Traïdia was present to introduce his film personally at the NIASD (see picture), while prof.dr. Patricia Pisters of the Department of Media Studies of the University of Amsterdam presented an academic analysis of all works screened (see also elsewhere in this newsletter). In December three Dutch feature films were screened under the title 'Endeavours': *Antonia* (Marleen Gorris, 1995), *Het Zwijgen* (André van der Hout and Adri Schrover, 2006) and *Ober* (Alex van Warmerdam, 2007). Including these seven productions, the total number of Dutch films and documentaries translated into Arabic since the start of the NIASD film programme in April 2006 is 32.

Multi Media Exhibition 'Eye Imagine Damascus' by Anita Mizrahi and Maarten Rens (9 – 30 October 2008)

Last October, the NIASD sponsored the multi media exhibition 'Eye Imagine Damascus' by Anita Mizrahi and Maarten Rens, and assisted in its organization. Preparations for this exhibition started right after the successful workshop 'My Image Damascus', which took place in April 2008 at the Faculty of Fine Arts of Damascus University (see more about that workshop in NIASD newsletter April 2008 on www.niasd.org). During the summer of 2008 films, shot in April/May in Damascus for 'Eye Imagine Damascus', were edited, 34 mixed media prints were created and 3 banners were produced. The exhibition took place at the Mustafa Ali Gallery in the old city of Damascus and was opened on the 9th of

October 2008 by Mrs. Désirée Bonis, Ambassador of the Netherlands in Syria. The works which were presented showed how the two Dutch artists look at Syria with an open mind,



curiously investigating this beautiful country with its ancient history. Four news items on the exhibition were shown on Syrian national TV, while articles appeared in the written media as well. In 2009 the exhibition will be shown in the Netherlands.

Damascus 2008 Arab Capital of Culture: organizational assistance in four Dutch cultural productions (November – December 2008)

In November and December 2008 four Dutch cultural performances took place within the framework of Damascus 2008 Arab Capital of Culture:

- Tenor Marcel Beekman on 15 November 2008 at the Zeitun Church at Bab Sharqi in the old city of Damascus;
- Trio Suleika (piano, cello and violin) on 2 December 2008 at the Dar Al-Assad for Culture and Arts;
- Theater play ‘Two Voices’ (actor: Jeroen Willems, director: Johan Simons) on 19-20 December 2008 at the Circular Theater of the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts;
- Stuffed puppet theater play ‘Molière’ (performer: Neville Tranter, writer/director: Luck van Merick) on 22-24 December at the Dumar Cultural Complex.

These four productions were presented by the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Damascus, the Dutch Center for International Cultural Activities (SICA) and the NIASD. NIASD’s contribution consisted of organizational assistance during preparations at an earlier stage in 2008. NIASD arranged meetings for several Dutch partners involved in these projects with the General Committee of Damascus 2008 Arab Capital of Culture and also advised SICA how to proceed in achieving final agreements with the committee. Furthermore the NIASD assisted in promoting the events mentioned above.