

Branding the Middle East

Panel at the 33rd Deutsche Orientalistentag (DOT) and the 24th International Congress of the German Middle East Studies Association (DAVO), Friedrich Schiller University, Jena (Germany), 18-22 September 2017

Organised and chaired by Steffen Wippel (Research Network "Re-Configurations. History, Remembrance and Transformation Processes in the Middle East and North Africa", Philipps-Universität Marburg and DAVO Working Group "Middle Eastern Economies")

The panel intends to investigate branding in the Arab and the wider Muslim world, but also invites comparative studies from Africa, Asia and Europe. It will critically analyse the processes of strategic communication and image building under conditions of globalisation, neoliberalism and postmodernity (and currently, in part, of war) and go behind the pure presentation of logos and slogans. In particular, it will look at actors involved and their interests, motives and strategies and investigate tools, dissemination channels and textual and visual forms of branding, including the contents conveyed to the addressees. A major interest exists in the multiple contributions to building brands coming from several actors and from different spatial scales. Attention is paid to reconfiguration of certain images over time and to the positioning of objects of branding in time and space and at specific interfaces, e.g. between "tradition" and "progress", or between different world regions.

The panel will be organised in three parts around three major objects of branding – consumer brands, place brands and personal brands – and welcomes proposals to all three of them. Local consumer products, for instance, increasingly compete with Western ones and try to establish themselves as brands addressing particular lifestyles, e.g. "halal products" for the more religious parts of society. Beyond long-existing urban brands such as "the Mother of the World" (Cairo) and the "Paris of the Middle East" (Beirut), places (project sites, cities and nations) have started to actively position themselves as more than tourism destinations. Often following the example of Dubai, they also want to become attractive sites of investment and are trying to enhance their public reputation by means ranging from creating novel architecture to intermediation diplomacy. Political, economic and cultural personalities, including religious scholars, have found increasing opportunities – notably with the expansion of social media – to establish themselves as brands beyond political borders, too. The increasing unrest in large parts of the MENA region since 2010 shook up established images of persons and places, but also offered opportunities for the repositioning of existing and the establishment of new brands (like the "Islamic State" and its leader).

Abstracts should contain a title, a summary not exceeding 300 words (formal requirements for registration for the DOT have not been published yet), and all relevant personal data with institutional affiliation and contact details. The panel will be submitted to the interdisciplinary "Politics, economy and society of the Middle East" section of the DOT, but is open to contributions from all regional specialisations represented at the congress. Before submitting abstracts to the conference organisers, which will be possible as of January 2017, please send them to the panel organiser at steffen.wippel@uni-marburg.de (subject: Jena2017_Branding_<name>). For more information on the conference (in German and English), please see <http://www.dot2017.de>.

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