



Enhancing Excellence of Education in Egypt

Experiences in promoting Accreditation
and Quality Assurance System

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LEENA KAIKKONEN & TUIRE MÄKI (EDS.)

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AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM



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ENHANCING EXCELLENCE OF EDUCATION IN EGYPT
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WORLD-CLASS EDUCATION FROM CENTRAL FINLAND

Timo Koivisto, Mayor of the City of Jyväskylä

Jyväskylä is a city of education experts located in the middle of Finland, a country known for its successful education system. Our city has a very powerful tradition in education, and the strong local educational institutes and organisations are still building on it every day in many different ways. We support high-quality studies and self-education opportunities throughout people's lives. Our know-how is highly valued both domestically and internationally.

I am extremely proud that Jyväskylä has had the honour of being behind the first Finnish Twinning project in education. Carried out successfully in Egypt, the project was funded by the European Union with a budget exceeding one million euros. It is proof of what we can achieve together with our international partners.

I would like to thank all the Finnish, German and Egyptian parties involved in the project. Thanks to you, our competence has not only spread but also further strengthened. We also reached the objectives set for the project work. The work was not always easy, but you did it anyway. During the project, Egypt was undergoing drastic changes and the unstable conditions posed a challenge for the project. JAMK University of Applied Sciences coordinated the project operations even in difficult situations, tenaciously proceeding with the development work together with other operators from Finland and Germany. This is yet another display of JAMK's reputation as an excellent project partner in the global operating environment.

Our city has world-class education competence and expertise that results in international success stories. This is the kind of development work in which the City of Jyväskylä wants to be involved in future as well. High-quality education helps build the future and competitiveness everywhere. I wish our Egyptian partners the best of success in the continued development of the quality of local education.

TWINNING – TWO WAY STREET IN SHARING EXPERTISE

Heidi Lempinen, Desk Officer, Twinning coordination, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

The best way of learning is to teach others. This is an observation that also serves for Twinning cooperation. Twinning projects are closely interlinked with EU enlargement and neighbourhood policies. EU member state experts are mobilised to share their expertise and knowledge in different fields of administration to support the modernization of administration and legislation in the partner countries. Transfer of knowledge often needs to be wrapped up in a suitable package taking into consideration the different cultural settings and expectations towards external experts. Therefore, communication and project management skills play a crucial role.

Education is one of the key areas to improve the overall quality of life and future opportunities of people affecting comprehensively the society as a whole. The Finnish education system is considered as a success story and it is internationally appraised. Twinning offers one channel to export Finnish know-how in education.

I highly appreciate that the Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences (JAMK) in cooperation with the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) shared their knowledge and high quality expertise related to the quality of education and accreditation in Egypt. The project has been remarkable in many senses. JAMK remains a forerunner in Twinning, being the first Finnish educational institution to take responsibility over implementation of a Twinning project in the field of education. Furthermore, the *“Twinning Project for the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education in Egypt”* was the 150th Twinning project implemented by Finland.

JAMK in cooperation with DAAD has splendidly succeeded in achieving the results and carrying out the project in a very challenging environment. My sincere hope is that this project in Egypt results in the enhancement of skills in Finland bringing new perspectives to one’s own work in addition to the creation of long-lasting professional connections and networks with German and Egyptian colleagues. Twinning is a two way street and a mutual learning process. I hope that, this project has also provided you with valuable experience and a solid reference for many other opportunities in international cooperation.

APPRECIATIONS TO THE PROJECT PARTNERS

Pasi Reinikainen, first Resident Twinning Adviser of the project

According to European Commission, Twinning is a European Union instrument for institutional cooperation between the Public Administrations of EU Member States and of Beneficiary Countries. It was originally designed in 1998 to help potential candidate countries to the EU of the time to acquire the necessary skills and experience to adopt, implement and enforce EU legislation. Nowadays, beneficiaries also include countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy. One of the recipients of the Twinning instrument is Egypt (EC, 2015).

The beneficiary partner in this Twinning project was the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation (NAQAAE). The Twinning project was worth €1.3 million, it started in 2013 and sought to strengthen the institutional and technical capacity of the NAQAAE, the national authority in charge of education accreditation and quality assurance. More specifically, the knowledge and skills exchange between Egyptian, Finnish and German experts aimed at reviewing the operational functioning and the management structure of NAQAAE. It also pointed at aligning NAQAAE quality assurance processes and accreditation procedures with international standards. Furthermore, the aim was to assess the regulatory framework of NAQAAE and drafting a strategy to further link it to European standards and best practices.

I worked as the RTA with the project for the first year and a half. I am happy that Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences (JAMK) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) were able to carry out the project successfully until the end. Without a doubt, gratitude for the success of the project goes to: the new leaders of NAQAAE and its very good staff members, as well as to Resident Twinning Advisor Mr Reijo Aholainen, RTA assistant Madame Houaida Mostafa, Project Leader Mr Heikki K. Lyytinen, Junior Project Leader Mr. Peter Webers besides the great supporting teams, Ms Tuire Mäki and Mr Jorma Sinkkonen from the coordinating organisation JAMK and to Ms Stefanie Kottowski from the junior partner organisation DAAD. I gladly congratulate them all of the encouraging implementation of this very first Twinning project carried out in the field of education by a Finnish organisation.

EU-EGYPT TWINNING PROJECT WAS A SUCCESS: STRENGTHENING THE NAQAAE AND EDUCATION QUALITY IN EGYPT

Reijo Aholainen & Tuire Mäki

The Twinning project described here, *“Strengthening the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE) Institutional Capacity with a View to Improving Accreditation and Quality Assurance Education System”*, was funded by the European Union (EU) under the Association Agreement signed between Egypt and the EU in 2004. The project stood for strengthening national institutions with partnerships between Egyptian and European countries’ institutions and experts. Twinning is about cooperation for concrete results, not for replicating European systems but rather seeking best practices. The purpose of this Twinning project was to strengthen the core functions of the NAQAAE and to support the Egyptian education and training system in achieving the standards of quality in line with the National Strategy Framework and the Egyptian Government’s reform agenda.

The project started in February 2013, based on a contract between the Ministry of International Cooperation in Egypt and the City of Jyväskylä in Finland in the EU. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) in Germany acted as a junior partner in the project. It was implemented by the NAQAAE and its European partners, JAMK University of Applied Sciences in Finland as the project leader and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) as the junior partner. Finnish and German short-term experts and NAQAAE experts constituted the project’s human resources during the implementation period of 30 months. The financial budget provided by the EU was 1,3 million euros.

MAIN OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of the project was to strengthen the institutional and technical capacity of the NAQAAE as the national authority on accreditation and quality assurance in line with the relevant European best practices in standards, norms and processes in education. The project consisted of three components which aimed at three mandatory results:

- Review the operational functioning and the management structure of NAQAAE in order to strengthen the organisation to implement the accreditation and quality assurance, to coordinate and support stakeholders in achieving quality standards, and be actively part of international networks and Agencies of Quality Assurance Institutions.
- Align NAQAAE quality assurance processes and accreditation procedures with international standards and strengthen the capacities of the NAQAAE experts.
- Assess the regulatory framework of NAQAAE and draft a strategy for further linking the Egyptian accreditation and quality assurance to European standards and best practices.

Education reforms, including fighting illiteracy, upgrading vocational training systems, setting a national qualification framework and enhancing quality assurance in education and higher education systems are a priority in the Government agenda. Improving the quality of education in pre-University education and Quality Assurance in Higher Education are the most pressing challenges in Egyptian education and training today. Education quality is of primary importance for all students at all stages of education but also for the economy and society as a whole. Improving knowledge, skills and competences need to focus on labour market relevance, which is essential for the economic growth and for better employability.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AT THE EXPERT LEVEL

The project was divided into three components corresponding to the three key result areas. The components were divided into a total of 25 activities. Finnish and German short-term experts worked closely with NAQAAE experts during the implementation of the project. In total 40 European experts went to missions in Egypt. The one-week missions consisted of workshops, seminars, conferences, training and joint drafting of recommendations. During the project implementation period of 30 months, the Finnish and German short-term experts used in total 533 working days together with their Egyptian colleagues in Egypt. The project also provided six study visits for in total 48 Egyptian experts who had an opportunity to learn to know European standards and practices of accreditation and quality assurance as well as meet and exchange views with their Finnish and German colleagues.

STRONG INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND ACCREDITATION CAPACITY

The project activities aiming to strengthen NAQAAE institutional capacity management consisted, on the one hand, of support for the NAQAAE strategy work. The development of the organisation and management, efficient accreditation and educational data management as well as improved cooperation with stakeholders' active participation in international networks were the main issues in building stronger institutional capacity.

NAQAAE strategy work was supported by expert missions and study visits. NAQAAE cooperation with the Ministries developed during the project. NAQAAE cooperation and commitment to participate European and international networking increased during the process. In total, about 500 participants received training under project component 1.

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND IMPROVING CAPACITY

The promotion of the quality work at schools and quality assurance in higher education institutions focused on the efficient use of self-evaluation as an instrument of enhancing quality. The reform of training of reviewers aims at the continuous development of the quality of accreditation. Increasing utilisation of digital technologies in data collecting, analysis and use has potential of making the accreditation process more efficient and contribute better quality.

The study visits to Finland and Germany, and the joint workshops and other joint work with European colleagues contributed to improvements in the core tasks of the NAQAAE – standards and guidelines of accreditation and quality assurance. At the same time, they made an impact on the competences of the NAQAAE experts. Working together was a learning experience also for the European participants in the project. Intercultural cooperation provided all the participants with new points of view for their everyday work by challenging some current beliefs and practices. The cooperation also helped to create new networks of friends and colleagues.

The project has brought about a boost to prepare and embed new elements in NAQAAE guidelines of accreditation and quality assurance. These new elements concern the standards, indicators and assessment of entrepreneurship education, employability and e-Learning and open and distance learning in education programmes. In particular, the opportunities of e-Learning for education and digital services for accreditation open new pathways for Egyptian education and for NAQAAE. Component 2 activities reached about 700 participants.

IMPROVED REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The project made an assessment of the NAQAAE legal and regulatory framework and developed recommendations of improvement. While the experts concluded that the present law does not necessarily require major amendments, the expert recommendations on a few legal amendments would support the strengthening the NAQAAE core functions in strengthening Egyptian education.

EXAMPLES OF THE BEST PRACTICES PUT INTO ACTION AT NAQAAE

The Twinning stands for strengthening national institutions with partnerships between beneficiary countries and European countries' institutions and experts. It is about cooperation for concrete results, not for replicating European systems but rather seeking best practices. Below are three examples of the best practices resulting from the project.

BEST PRACTICES 1: REFORM IN TRAINING OF REVIEWERS

The new training programme of reviewers was prepared in 2015 and is taken in practice in 2016. The new training model consists of a theory part, which is mainly implemented by e-learning or distance learning and practice training which is implemented under the supervision of experienced reviewers. The objective is to improve the quality of accreditation undertaken by skilful reviewers.

BEST PRACTICES 2: E-LEARNING

The NAQAAE Twinning project has changed the attitudes of the NAQAAE experts in e-Learning and open and distance learning. The new criteria for the quality standards and criteria for the assessment of the quality of e-learning courses and programmes are required because new forms of teaching and learning progress rapidly. The project has drafted guidelines for the assessment of e-Learning to complete NAQAAE Accreditation Manual and the Training Manual of Reviewers.

BEST PRACTICES 3: INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

NAQAAE Twinning project strengthened the capacity of NAQAAE to participate actively in European, Arabic and African networks in quality assurance and accreditation. The consciousness of the importance of European and international partnerships and networks has become a key part of the strategic development of the NAQAAE.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

Even though the project faced many challenges during the implementation, the cooperation between all the partners remained at an excellent level. The revolution of 30 June 2013, the political instability, travel warnings of the Ministries for Foreign Affairs of Finland and Germany, curfew and the change of project key personnel were not expected, but were overcome. At the end, the mandatory results of the project were achieved and all the partners expressed their satisfaction in the closing conference in Cairo on July 2015.

The success of the Twinning project has raised expectations on follow-up and future cooperation. The project partners are committed to continuing the cooperation. Egyptian education is still facing many challenges, which require further development and reform, such as the completion of Egypt pre-University education strategy, the development of technical and vocational education and training, quality assurance in postgraduate higher education, the construction of the national framework of qualifications and in the joint education data management with the ministries and other agencies. These might be subjects for future projects for strengthening the education quality.

KEY ACTORS

Mr Heikki K. Lyytinen, the Project Leader, Finland

Dr Youhansen Eid, the BC Project Leader and NAQAAE President, Egypt

Mr Peter Webers, the Junior Project Leader, Germany

Mr Reijo Aholainen, the Resident Twinning Advisor (RTA), Finland

Dr Narymane Elnashar, NAQAAE RTA Counterpart, Egypt

Ms Ahlam Farouk, Programme Manager, European Union

Ms Riham Elezaby, Senior Project Manager, PAO, and

Ms Houaida Mostafa, the RTA Assistant, Egypt

ABOUT THE PROJECT'S IMPACTS

Heikki K. Lyytinen

THE OVERALL OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

The overall objective of the Egyptian Twinning project was *“to strengthen the institutional and technical capacity of the NAQAAE as the national authority on accreditation and quality assurance in line with the relevant European best practices in standards, norms and processes in education.”* The project aimed at three mandatory results. Firstly, it aimed at strengthening NAQAAE's operational and the management capacity in making accreditations, supporting stakeholders to achieve quality standards, and taking actively part in the international quality assurance networks. Secondly, the project was to support NAQAAE to align quality assurance and accreditation with international standards, and strengthen the capacity of NAQAAE experts accordingly. And, finally, the project was expected to assess NAQAAE's legal framework and promote a link between the Egyptian education framework and the EU standards and best practices.

A LARGE-SCALE INTERVENTION

This large-scale Twinning project intervention meant 25 activities conducted by 40 Finnish and German Short-Term experts who worked closely with NAQAAE experts during their 65 missions using in total 533 expert working days in workshops, seminars, conferences and drafting recommendations. On the other hand, 48 Egyptian experts had the opportunity to visit Finland and Germany in 6 study visits organised by the Twinning Project where they had the possibility to get acquainted with the standards and practices of accreditation, quality assurance in pre-university, TVET, higher education and e-learning in Finland and in Germany. In total, about 1,200 participants took part in the workshops in different activities.

The next examples of contents indicate the extent of the knowledge of the project. NAQAAE experts gained wide and thoroughgoing information on quality assurance in schools in Germany and Finland. They could learn about

- the aims and methods of Quality Analysis as an instrument to develop the school's own quality assurance;
- the procedures and techniques of quality analysis, including the importance of lesson observation in the school at a systematic level;
- the theoretical and practical training of reviewers that work on a continuous basis in the field of Quality Analysis;
- the tasks of the school before, during and after the Quality Analysis thought to be redone every five years;
- the German accreditation system and the Finnish evaluation and quality assurance system;
- organisational structure, tasks and internal Quality Analysis of accreditation agencies and evaluation agencies;
- different accreditation and evaluation procedures, role and tasks of experts, outcomes and experiences;
- accreditation of eLearning and mobile learning programs, new developments in the field of distance learning and criteria for eLearning and mobile learning;
- legal and regulatory framework of NAQAAE;
- improving culture of change in schools;
- reviewing and developing of the standards on entrepreneurship in regards of employability;
- the stakeholders in the process of quality assurance;
- self-assessment approaches, methods and instruments;
- educational indicator systems and information systems; and so on.

We can list many issues. This also illustrates that the content was substantially very rich and topical, and the entire intervention was on a large-scale and many-sided.

ASSESSING THE IMPACTS OF THE INTERVENTION

In view of the aforementioned, we have good reason to believe that the project has been effective. The closing conference was very impressive; it indicated strong social capital and cohesion among the participants who were involved in the project. It was easy to get an impression that NAQAAE had indisputably strengthened and enjoyed confidence in the Egyptian education system. How much it is because of the changes in the Egyptian society in general or the new management of the NAQAAE – it is very difficult to assess. The main thing is that the visible impacts are positive.

The project achieved very well so-called mandatory results according our original working plan. The expected working days, study visits, workshops, seminars, and some extra seminars were completed. A lot of learning material was produced and a huge number of recommendations for strengthening the capacity of NAQAAE were proposed during the project. The final two quarters were the most successful and the busiest in the project. The positive visibility of the project was also strong.

The project helped also to prepare new elements in the NAQAAE guidelines of accreditation and quality assurance. These new elements concerned the standards, indicators and assessment of entrepreneurship education, employability besides e-Learning and open and distance learning in education programmes. In particular, the opportunities of e-Learning and mobile learning for education and digital services for accreditation opened new pathways for Egyptian education and for NAQAAE work.

The aforementioned matters are the tangible outputs produced within the framework of the Twinning project. However, the actual impacts are possible to see in the longer run. The more or less permanent and sustainable impacts are a deeper and more complicated phenomenon.

Impacts depend on personal, physical, social, organisational and cultural contexts and may not be evident until sometime after the experience. In addition to these types of factors, audiences may be highly heterogeneous. For these reasons, impacts are more complicated to assess than in the classroom, especially since the most important learning outcomes may be non-cognitive and more difficult to measure. It is clear that the real benefits will come later, perhaps during and after many years. However, it is difficult to imagine that this kind of large-scale and many-sided intervention would have not any impacts already in this phase – more or less.

DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF IMPACTS

The impacts of previously described activities might be very different ones. We can divide the impacts at least into these six categories:

- 1 **Knowledge:** This category of impact emphasises what the participants (in this case the experts of NAQAAE) consciously know. Impacts in this category include knowledge, awareness or understanding.
- 2 **Engagement:** The impacts in this category capture the excitement and involvement of participants in a topic, area or aspect of evaluation and quality assurance.
- 3 **Attitude:** The impact in this category encompasses changes in the long-term perspectives towards a quality assurance and assessment topic.
- 4 **Behaviour:** This category of impact is particularly targeted in this kind of projects that are of environmental nature. Evidence of behaviour change might include participants' self-reported intentions to change their behaviour and longitudinal follow-ups with them to determine whether such behaviour has occurred.
- 5 **Skills:** This impact category targets the procedural aspects of knowing. The participants have really learned to do something in a new way. The participants have learned to do quality assurance and assessment processes and procedures that they could not previously do.
- 6 **Other:** This category is for impacts, which do not fit into any of the above categories. This kind of impacts can be, for example, creative and innovative problem solving procedures and a new kind of developmental culture.

It is justified to say that the project has changed the knowledge and consciousness, even interest and motivation among the NAQAAE staff on issues such as eLearning, entrepreneurship education and international cooperation. It is significant that the renewed NAQAAE Guidelines for accreditation – where eLearning, entrepreneurship education and employability are embedded –

take a firm step towards learning outcomes based accreditation, the direction where the Bologna process is showing the way for Higher Education in Europe and beyond.

Because the staff of NAQAAE comes from universities, they are well experienced in the field of Higher Education and have been involved in quality assurance procedures for quite a while. Thus, there was no need to train someone from the permanent staff in certain skills. The whole approach of the project targeted at the training on certain approaches and intended to create awareness of other practices in the field of quality assurance.

EVIDENCE EXAMPLES ON THE IMPACTS IN PRACTICE

The modern organisational development model is a so-called tri-level or multi-level model: we are not thinking about changing individuals and single organisations like NAQAAE and its experts, but also changing systems and contexts at the same time such as external steering systems, regional, local and institutional level, e.g. different stakeholders. This kind of change approach or model has been one very essential project impact, which has been carried out during the project. The change process – like that of NAQAAE's – is always a cooperation process, which requires a commitment from many national education authorities and requires lots of resources.

We can in this connection talk about stakeholder mobilisation: the various activities of the project involved stakeholders from the Ministries of Education and higher and vocational education, widened stakeholder participation and abolished the resistance of change that yet occurred at the beginning of the project. We can also see an impact, which concerns the whole organisation. NAQAAE has transformed into a 'learning organisation'. It is studying foreign experiences and best practices comparing the Finnish and German systems to its own, adapting their good practices to NAQAAE's needs before adopting them. This learning organisation approach initiated by the study visits through which NAQAAE experts studied the European systems and were encouraged by the discussions and collaborations that occurred between the local experts and STEs.

An important impact is also the international visibility. One of the major gains of Twinning projects for the beneficiary country is to show its potential for its partners. Through the current project both the German and Finnish partners recognised the abilities of NAQAAE and its efforts in internationalisation. NAQAAE also showed its willingness to create cooperation with the European quality assurance agencies and to apply to the level of the Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The project has created also the good preconditions for international networking of experts at both the institutional and personal level and it can be continued beyond the duration of the project. The project has also built in this respect trust in how to share expertise. Ties have been established between NAQAAE and Finnish as well as German institutions (including accreditation agencies). This could and should be harnessed and strengthened after the expiry of the Twinning project in many ways, in particular in the form of regular workshops, staff exchanges, joint accreditations, use of observers in accreditations etc.

Apparently, it seems that, as the result of the project, NAQAAE's staff and leadership has become more exposed to the Bologna system of accreditation and, most of all, its different procedures and objectives. In particular, their awareness has massively increased with respect to learning outcomes as a key objective of accreditation as well as, generally speaking, the importance of qualitative indicators alongside quantitative ones.

All encounters and meetings have produced new insights for both the Egyptian professionals and STEs. Especially the respect and the friendliness of the Egyptian experts offered to short-term experts must be underlined. Many differently motivated and educated experts and professionals participated during the two years of the project. In most of the workshops, participants worked with STEs very motivated and brought about a good communication within the Egyptian participants on the main issues. The professionals and NAQAAE experts had in general an open-minded attitude towards change and alteration of existing procedures. All discussions between STEs and colleagues and reviewers from NAQAAE were predominantly of an intense nature. The motivation of the colleagues of NAQAAE was high and they welcomed suggestions for the improvement of procedures and instruments by STEs. We have the impression that the Egyptian counterparts truly appreciate the exchange with their colleagues from Europe.

The crucial questions will be; how to secure the results reached so far, how to create internal knowledge transfer between stakeholders from Egypt, and how to sustain exchange with international (Arab and European) quality assurance practitioners? As all discussions during the Twinning project were characterised by the ambition of NAQAAE staff to develop and improve current practices and methodology and by a respectful way to treat all participants in the project. Therefore, in a long-term perspective, I strongly believe that discussions between NAQAAE staff and STEs initiated a mind-set that will lead to short-term and long-term future change.

‘AWARENESS IMPACTS’ AND CONCLUSIONS

Given a state of the size of Egypt, with the still tremendously rising young population and proportionally the necessary schooling quality assurance, one major conclusion shared by all involved in the final phases of the project is that quality measurement and quality improvement must use modern technologies. This is especially important for an agency like NAQAAE. Quality analysis, reflection, and training of professionals can only keep up with demands if all the necessary information, exchange of ideas, reasoning, and reliable governance is based on electronic devices and adopted. NAQAAE is very well aware about this essential issue and it is a project impact itself.

When we talk about project impacts, we have to remember that the impacts are always bilateral. Member State partners have learned a lot. Learning processes have been mutual as Twinning projects should have bilateral impacts. For us, the important lesson to keep in mind was that throughout the lifetime of a project, needs and realities change. What has been written in a project fiche does not always reflect the reality. Therefore, it is crucial to the success of a project like this to maintain continuously open and honest communication. In order to fulfil the expectations of the partner, they need to be clear. The real expectations of your partner are not always the expectations you would expect. The impacts can be also unexpected or unintended. Rapidly increased consciousness of the growing future importance of eLearning, entrepreneurship education and employability can perhaps be regarded as positive unexpected outcomes, which the project really contributed. Especially the speed of the change in motivation and attitudes in the NAQAAE was not foreseen in autumn 2014.

The above-mentioned issues are only preliminary signals regarding the project impacts. The current “wind of change” in the NAQAAE office will also lead in the future to notable improvements. The systematic follow up and the possible new projects during the next years can also strengthen the impacts.

PERSPECTIVE OF A JUNIOR PARTNER IN THE TWINNING PROJECT

Peter Webers

ROLE OF A “JUNIOR” PARTNER IN A TWINNING PROJECT

Everyone knows the in-depth manuals, the instructions and the extensive regulations governing EU project funding. Together they cover every last detail – or so it seems. However, if you try to find out the role of a “junior partner” in a Twinning project, these otherwise comprehensive documents are rather silent on the subject. What they do say is that the junior partner, in this case the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) – must ensure good coordination with the main project leader and that the Member State junior partner makes an adequate contribution to the project.

Clearly the role of “junior partner” must be defined and acted out by everyone for themselves – which is a novelty considering the high degree of regulation in European bureaucracy, but one which should be welcomed because it is the only way to create the scope which is required to handle complex and highly differentiated issues. However, it is also a difficult situation: the sheer volume of regulations in the bureaucracy has caused the otherwise punctilious bureaucrats within the system to lose their ability to see these freedoms, let alone make use of them. I would only like to remind you here of the matter of deputising at short notice, which appears to be unregulated here, but is a standard feature in public administration worldwide. In the end, we found a solution for that too.

POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE REGION AND THE PROJECT

The arrival of hundreds of thousands of refugees is currently shaking Europe’s foundations to the very core. Only very few of these refugees are from Egypt. Many of the refugees’ home countries have been shattered by violent conflicts, where human rights abuses are nothing unusual, and many suffer political, religious or ethnic persecution.

This is not the situation in Egypt, nor do extreme natural events such as those e.g. in sub-Saharan Africa pose any specific risks. Egypt faces challenges of another kind, but ones which are just as enormous. As in

many other countries in the Mediterranean region, we also have high youth unemployment, and therefore a very high potential for conflict. The official rate is about 20% but in reality, it is much higher. We also know about the shortcomings in education: underfunding of the state education system, poor teacher pay, the need to pay for expensive private tuition if one wants to pass the state final examinations. Add to that the high rate of unemployment among university graduates, many of whom become taxi drivers, housekeepers in hotels or are self-employed after gaining their degree. The vast majority of these unemployed scholars studied humanities and social sciences, law, economics – people who could move society forward if given a chance.

Why is this so? For one, it is because training lacks practical orientation and is geared instead to the individual's personal and supposed interests and preferences, and not to the requirements of companies which are meant to provide graduates employment after their studies. There is a complete disconnect in this respect. Virtually none of the university teaching staff have any experience in the private sector to speak of – and why should they?

Much research has been conducted, a lot written about these conditions, and many states have launched a range of measures to address the problem. In Egypt alone, about 32 per cent of its 87 million people are younger than 15 years old, and roughly half are younger than 30. The situation is similar in other states around the Mediterranean, which is why we need medium- and long-term solutions to transform the lack of prospects for millions into opportunities to live a good life. So what should we do?

Notwithstanding the truly difficult political circumstances that emerge in the aftermath of a revolution, Egypt has long worked with determination to improve its education system. Thanks to these efforts, education – even in the medium-term – is one of the soundest and most lucrative investments there are. Egypt has always been cast as the cradle of wisdom and piety, the birthplace of the writing system, science, medicine, alchemy, theology and many other achievements of advanced civilization. Pythagoras, Eudoxus, Plato and other Greek scholars, philosophers and scientists are said to have travelled to Egypt for long periods of time to learn from Egyptian priests.

Given this historical background, and seeing Egypt as the gateway to the Middle East and the rest of Africa, it seems only natural that cooperation between Egypt and European countries has grown. As an example, I would like to mention a joint Egyptian-German science year in 2007. It was an investment which continues to pay off for both sides until today in the form of intensive partnership, broad-ranging knowledge transfer, a large number

of functional networks and a great deal of exchange. Furthermore, there is keen cooperation in the area of higher education involving universities and Ministries of Education in countries but also private investors, companies and accreditation agencies.

TWINNING WITH NAQAAE – TAKING STOCK

The purpose of the “Strengthening the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE)” Twinning project, as well as its successes, is presented in this publication in greater detail by others and is based on their first-hand experience. I would merely like to mention and weigh in with the experience gained from the point of view of the junior partner. I summarise it in the following.

The Twinning mechanism has some great strengths: two public authorities, in this case three, have joined forces to pursue joint objectives. The idea is to unite and systematise material and formal knowledge, and ideally, to implement this pooled knowledge immediately. All sides profit mutually from one another. This is the ideal scenario and is certainly typically the case. Unfortunately, this project in Egypt revealed the shortcomings and limitations of the idea. This can be traced mainly to the regulatory environment and the contingency of success being in the hands of the players involved – on all sides.

Along with the extremely difficult circumstances in a country that is not exactly treading on firm ground in the wake of a revolution, these factors make for a volatile mix that could have caused the entire project to fail at any time because they are so closely linked. The regulatory environment in which the Twinning project must operate is already complex and difficult enough on its own. In a concrete situation where uncompromising attitudes and refusals of certain individuals to communicate hamper the progress of a tightly scheduled project, it is this complexity, which brings everything to a complete halt. It could have meant the end of the project had it not been for then the RTA, his successor and the new management at the partner agency. Their prudent and responsible action are to thank for the fact that only half a year’s time was lost in the end and that the project became a complete success despite the stumbling blocks I just mentioned. On all accounts, it was that team’s enormous commitment and management of an incredibly heavy workload that saved the project and it was worth it.

Another critical issue is the non-existent resources for administrators, in this case at the JAMK and DAAD. For the success of projects as complex

as Twinning it is crucial for administrators to have an opportunity to get a close-up look at local conditions and to meet the people responsible on all sides. However, there is no money available for this purpose up until today.

THE FUTURE

My personal view, based on my experience with the country, is that we should continue with determination along the path we have gone so far – and expand our efforts. This is because we must very soon develop some solid recommendations as concerns

- a scheme for vocational education and training
- a binding “train the trainer” system
- orientation to the requirements of industry
- intensive involvement of the private sector
- arranging for teaching staff to spend regular periods of time in private sector companies

and thus create opportunities and prospects for millions of young people. That would be a good next step, perhaps in the context of another Twinning project.

I AM MR REIJO, THE RTA

Reijo Aholainen

HOW I TURNED OUT TO BE THE RTA

I happened to meet with Heikki K. Lyytinen in a meeting in Helsinki. Before that, I had never heard about the Twinning project in Cairo. Heikki and I used to be colleagues when he was the Head of School Department in the Provincial Government of Western Finland. Now he was the Project Leader in a project, which was about quality assurance and accreditation in Egypt. It was most interesting and we talked about it a lot, but I soon forgot the project since I had nothing to do with it.

After several months, Mr Heikki called me and asked if I would like to take part in the project as a short-term expert. I was interested, but with some reservations. Anyway, after my superiors in the Ministry had given me permission, I found myself on an airplane to Cairo. I was supposed to act as an expert on legal affairs. I am not a lawyer, but missions to Cairo proved that extensive on-the-job learning in the Ministry makes one competent to deal with education legislation. The mission was a nice experience both professionally and otherwise – I visited the pyramids and rode on a camel, too. That was it, I thought, case closed. – I was wrong.

After a few months Mr Heikki called me again. Pasi Reinikainen or Mr Pasi, who was the RTA (Resident Twinning Advisor) in the project, had resigned and Heikki was looking for a new RTA. I was interested, but I was not ready to leave the Ministry. The second time when he called me I changed my mind. That is how I became an RTA – through a series of unlikely coincidences.

TWINNING AS A TOOL

The project was about strengthening the NAQAAE (National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education), but had suffered from two lengthy delays, the first in 2013 after the 30 June Revolution and another after the RTA resigned in 2014. When I arrived in Cairo in late October, half of the two-year project was uncompleted but only three months of its time was left.



Mr Reijo in front of the Egyptian museum in Cairo.
(Photo: Reijo Aholainen Photo Album)

Here it is necessary to briefly explain some elementary basics about Twinning. It is an EU instrument for institutional cooperation between public administrations of the EU Member States (MS) and the beneficiary countries (BC). Beneficiary countries mean southern and eastern neighbours of the EU or countries applying for EU membership. The purpose of Twinning projects is to increase administrative capacity in the beneficiary. Projects must have two Project Leaders (one from the EU Member State leading the project and another from the beneficiary) and a Resident Twinning Advisor. The RTA is seconded from the lead MS to the beneficiary administration for a minimum of 12 months up to 36 months – in my case for nine months. In short, the RTA is the working hand in the project, who lives and works in the country in question and whose job it is to support the project partners to achieve the work plan objectives by all means available. The work plan is usually based on short-term (one week) expert missions, training events in the BC and study visits from the BC to the EU member states.

STARTING AS THE RTA IN CAIRO

Instead of starting in September as I had been told, I had to wait almost two months until the EU had endorsed the revised contract and I could move to Cairo. The chaotic traffic of Cairo of 20 million inhabitants would be a shock to anyone. In addition, other surprises came up – my telephone did not function, laptop would not get connected to the Internet and I could not use Skype. Computer problems constrained me for a long time before I learned to find a connection and react to the various peculiarities of Microsoft Explorer and Google Chrome that waged a bitter war on the soul of my laptop. But getting connected was not my only concern: the whole project had to be re-launched.

I was warmly welcomed in the NAQAEE – the Egyptians had been waiting for me as eagerly as I had been waiting to start. That became soon understandable when I learned that no activities had been implemented for five months and all missions had been cancelled, because nobody knew if the project would continue or if it would not. Rapid action was needed, but that was not easy. The experts, who have a central role in Twinning projects, are usually civil servants or university professors who cannot leave their work in a short notice for a week's mission in a distant foreign country. The project needed an extension of at least six more months.



Nile River, Cairo city and Mr Reijo. (Photo: Reijo Aholainen Photo Album)

WORKING WITH MY EGYPTIAN COLLEAGUES

Considering history, culture, religion, population, geography or climate, just to mention a few, Finland and Egypt are very far from each other. Surprisingly, people are not that different: my bright, nice, highly educated and language skilled colleagues felt easy and relaxed to work together with a foreigner who could not speak a word of Arabic. In fact, I learned not to panic when discourse turned into Arabic – you cannot imagine how much one can understand of a foreign language discussion even without any knowledge of the language they are speaking! I even got used to last minute decision making and short notice changes in my daily plans. Often something unexpected appeared, requiring my full attention.

The new management of the NAQAAE became the salvation of the project. In particular, the new President, Dr Youhansen Eid was determined to make the Twinning project a success. She and her Vice-Presidents Dr Ragia Taha, Dr Alaa Abdel Ghafar and Dr Azza Agha became my loyal working partners for the rest of the project. My closest partners were my RTA Assistant Ms Houaida Moustafa and my RTA Counterpart Dr Narymane Elnashar with whom I shared my daily work. They are great professionals and became my close friends during the project. Without their competence and experience, the project would not have survived. Yet it was very important to be able to trust the continuous support of the top management.

STRONG TIES WITH THE BACK-UP TEAMS IN FINLAND AND GERMANY

The RTA is also fully dependent of the back-up teams in Europe. The confidence of the Project Leaders Mr Heikki, and Mr Peter, Peter Webers from Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, had kept the project alive in difficult times and their support was always available when needed. Mr Heikki, the one who asked me to Cairo, was the soul of the project, full of ideas on development with a deep knowledge and wide experience of education quality assurance and evaluation. However, it was the back-up teams in Jyväskylä – Tuire Mäki and Jorma Sinkkonen – and in Germany – Stefanie Kottowski and Andreas Knorr – who kept the project on track and prevented me from stupid errors.

Learning to know and spending time with our competent weekly visiting experts became an extra bonus for me. The experts turned out to be not only competent, but also highly social and pleasant people with wide knowledge from all walks of life. We had a good time in discussions during our daily travels through the October Bridge traffic rush to the Nasr City and back. Ayman and Ahmed who took care of the transportation became my close friends while we were driving around Cairo. By accident, most STEs stayed at Hotel Longchamps in Zamalek, close to my apartment. Many activities were planned and even more reports finalised in there. Frau Hebba Bakri, the director, made the experts' life comfortable and easy in the hotel's premises – another positive surprise benefiting the project.

THE PROJECT WAS A REAL SUCCESS

Finally, also the project itself was a success. The purpose of the project was to strengthen the core functions of the NAQAAE and to support the Egyptian education system to achieve international quality standards. It is obvious that the NAQAAE has strengthened during the project and enjoys credibility in Egyptian education and beyond. This is mainly because of the efforts of the management of the NAQAAE and perhaps also wider changes in Egypt, but the contribution of the Twinning project has to be recognised, too. The project achieved its mandatory results, even surpassed them in many activities, and used all the human and financial resources available. It increased the knowledge and consciousness, even interest and motivation among the NAQAAE staff. In particular, knowledge and skills in e-Learning, entrepreneurship education and international cooperation were improved. It is

significant for the future that e-Learning, entrepreneurship and employability are embedded in the new NAQAAE Guidelines for Accreditation which are taking steps towards accreditation based on learning outcomes – in the direction of the Bologna process in Europe and beyond.

I AM MR REIJO

I must confess that I enjoyed my time in Cairo, both at work and in private. Work was challenging but also rewarding. Cairo, at least Zamalek, became another home with friends, familiar people, nice shops and restaurants around. I had a decent apartment in a decent environment with the necessary conveniences. My fitness hall, my books and bookshops were close. During my stay, I learned to live with the traffic, noise and dust of the biggest city in Africa. My beloved wife Ilona and my dear daughter Maria visited me giving me moments of happiness. I had an opportunity to learn much about Egypt's history and politics and I also found Egyptian and Arab authors I never knew before, such as Naquin Mahfouz, Alaa Al Ashwan and others. Yet, there is much to learn.

I was called Mr Reijo in the NAQAAE and among my friends in Cairo. It is perhaps easier to pronounce Mr Reijo than Mr Aholainen. But using the first name with title may also be an Egyptian way of expressing familiarity and respect. Also Heikki K. Lyytinen and Pasi Reinikainen were called Mr Heikki and Mr Pasi. Even the NAQAAE President, Dr Eid was called Dr Youhansen and my counterpart Dr Elnashar as Dr Narymane. Now I am so used to being called Mr Reijo that I use it myself in daily life. I am Mr Reijo, the RTA, a part of a project which is now successfully finished in Cairo.



The first Quality Assurance conference ever in Al Azhar University in Cairo.
(Photo: Reijo Aholainen Photo Album)

THE STUDY VISITS TO FINLAND – PRACTICAL EXPERIENCES

Jorma Sinkkonen

PLANNING THE STUDY VISITS

In Twinning projects, most of the activities take place in beneficiary countries. Therefore, mainly the EU experts travel. Anyhow, in many Twinning projects there is an opportunity for experts from beneficiary countries to travel to EU countries for study visits. I am happy that in in this Twinning project we had this possibility. In the work plan there were six study visits – three to Germany and three to Finland. These study visits gave quite a good contribution to the project.

I myself had the pleasure to be responsible for organising the study visits to Finland. At the beginning, this task seemed quite demanding. I had to find out exactly what the needs and expectations of the experts were regarding coming to Finland. Also, I had to clarify the division of work with the Germans. To plan all the study visits, it was important that a common mission to Cairo together with a German expert was organised.

During this mission in January 2014, I had a good possibility to discuss with the experts in NAQAAE and expert from Germany about the objectives of all the coming study visits. I obtained information about the expectations of the Egyptian experts and with the German expert Doris Herrmann, we could agree about the division of themes of the study visits. Consequently, at the end of this mission, we had finalised the outlines of the all six study visits.

THE THREE STUDY VISITS TO FINLAND

The first study visit to Finland (9.-15.2.2014) involved visits to the education evaluation organisations in both Helsinki and Jyväskylä and lectures about evaluation and quality assurance in comprehensive schools. Visits to schools were also in the programme.

During the second study (30.3.-5.4.2014) visit, the target was on the institutional level. The group studied evaluation and quality assurance systems and processes and how to assess learning outcomes in higher education. In secondary level vocational education, the group got information about the NVQ-system in Finland and about skills demonstrations.

The theme of the last study visit (14.-20.12.2014) was e-learning and mobile learning. At the beginning, the Egyptian experts obtained information about the theory of e-learning and mobile learning. They learned how to plan, implement and evaluate e learning and mobile learning processes and learning outcomes. They also had the possibility to meet and discuss with students from higher and secondary level education.

In the first group, there were seven, in the second group nine, and in the third group eight participants. This was a very good group size. It was small enough to go to visits to schools and other organisations and big enough to analyse together what they have seen and how to apply all this in Egypt.

Planning each of these study visit programmes took several weeks. The first phase was to make a draft of the contents of the visit. After Dr Narymane Elnashar had approved it, it was possible to start to discuss with the experts, organisations and schools to be visited. This was quite normal work and it was easy to make the needed arrangements. The biggest problem in this preliminary phase was that it took quite a long time for NAQAEE to nominate the members of the group coming to Finland.

I was at the airport to meet the first group and the bus driver picked the other two groups. Sadly, some of the group members of the first and second group had to wait a couple of days for their luggage. The airline company had lost their bags and it took them some time to deliver these to the owners. Also some additional work was needed due to the cancellations of some group members a day or two before their planned arrival.

EXPERIENCING THE FINNISH WINTER

The first study visit took place in February, one of the coldest months in Finland. I was very worried about the weather conditions. I knew that our guests were not used to very cold conditions but we walked between the venues. It was a big release when the temperature stayed around zero Celsius degrees. Anyhow, I found out that even this was too cold for some of the participants, but nobody ever complained. Walking took much more time than what I expected. I had learned if the group goes on foot, the distance between venues should be less than one kilometre. The unusually warm winter weather had its advantages, even though it was February, our guests did not see snow, they only had to walk in sleet.

The next study visit was in totally Jyväskylä. It was early spring and the weather was as expected around zero. Walking might have been not such a bad option. Anyhow, most of the transfer was organised by taxis or by private

cars. Only the last group before Christmas 2014 had the possibility to touch snow. They loved it. They were like Finnish small kids in the autumn after the first snowfall.

IMPLEMENTING THE STUDY VISITS

During the lectures and visits to schools and other organisations, the participants of all the three study visit groups were very active. They asked a lot of competent questions and checked that they had understood right. These questions and comments revealed that they were very highly qualified experts. Often the group members referred to previous lectures. This means that they had really understood and remembered what they had heard before.

Many times the questions were so demanding that the lecturer had to promise that he/she would get more information and send it to the participants. I am sure that also the lectures learned a lot while working with these groups.

At the beginning, it was difficult to get direct contact with the participants of study visits. I did not have their e-mail addresses and all the e-mail traffic went via one Egyptian expert. After the first group arrived in Jyväskylä, this problem disappeared. We created a web-based platform to simplify communication. During the first two study visits, this was more like practising. For the last group the learning platform was opened well before their arrival at Finland. We added all the study visit material and a lot of extra material on this platform. It also contained learning tasks and comprehensive feedback area. The visitors used it actively and it was open for the several months after the study visit. We learned that this kind of platform is very useful tool both for us and the participants of the study visit.

CLOSING SESSIONS

At the end of each study visit, we had a closing session. During these sessions, all the participants had the possibility to give feedback about the arrangements and about contents of the programme. One of the subjects of the discussions was what they had learned and what they can apply in their work in Egypt.

All of the participants of these three study visit groups seemed to be rather satisfied with the arrangement and the programme of the study visit. In the discussions and in their written feedback, it appeared that they had very well understood the message of the lecturers. Because of the difference between Finland and Egypt, there were also many things which they found working

well in Finland but which they cannot apply in Egypt. Anyhow every group found also many Finnish practices which they could adapt immediately or after some modification in their work.

The discussion was very open. Of course, we had some critiques. The critiques and proposed changes helped us improve the programme of the next study visit.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY VISIT

Study visits are an excellent way to help the participants understand the practices in a foreign land and culture. They are also very demanding for the participants. The programmes are usually very tight, some are homesick, the food is different and using a foreign language all day is tiring.

Our Egyptian guests faced all these problems. Anyhow, they did not show them. They adapted to the Finnish thinking about schedules. In the morning, they were always on time to leave the hotel. If we sometimes were late, it was because the previous Finnish lecturer did not finish in time. They stayed active even in the last lectures of the day. They had come to Finland to learn.

What I liked most during those five days the group stayed in Finland is that we worked a lot together; we learned to know each other and became friends. Because of the long distance, the friendship continues now on Facebook.

EVERYDAY PRACTICES AT THE HOME OFFICE

Tuire Mäki

It is funny how things get started sometimes. Like when two people meet at a gym and, as a result, a project gets started. A fiche of the NAQAAE project was launched at the beginning of 2012 and the actual negotiations started during the summer. Finally, the Resident Twinning Advisor Pasi Reinikainen moved to Cairo with his family in February 2013 and the implementation of the project started.

Even though the project was the 150th Twinning project in Finland, it was the first one in the area in education and the first for JAMK University of Applied Sciences and the City of Jyväskylä. There were many things to learn, I knew that, but at that moment, I had no idea of what kind of journey I had ahead of me.

I was not involved in the planning of the project, but worked as a project coordinator whose responsibility was financial reporting at first. During the project lifetime, my responsibilities increased. Luckily, I had great colleagues both in Finland and Germany to work with. At the beginning, we had weekly telephone meetings via Adobe Connect Pro with RTA, project leader, German project coordinator and JAMK team. Sometimes we even managed to see each other's faces, for a while at least, but in many cases, the connection was so bad that you could barely call it a meeting. Between Finnish colleagues, we also used Skype. Later on, we moved to Lync and Skype for Business applications, but the connection problems followed us until the end of the project. These meetings, however, were very important for all of us to keep on track.

In addition to the weekly meetings and other telephone meetings, thousands of emails were sent between Egypt, Germany and Finland. It would be important that the project funding would allow administrative staff from Member State partners to visit the Beneficiary institution and the Programme Administration Office (PAO) in the beginning of the project. The importance of face-to-face meetings should not be forgotten, especially in the international context, where most of the communication between partners takes place via email. It might also decrease the challenges caused by cultural differences.

For me it was a surprise for how long it took to get decisions concerning the project from PAO and EUD. It seemed that everything took more time than I expected, even though I did not expect anything to happen fast. Getting

signatures from whoever was needed was not always easy either. One DHL package got stuck in London, one was delayed because of a strike, the signatories were out of office and so on. Despite all the obstacles, we got everything there in time.

One challenge in the project was planning. Many of the STEs raised as an important issue the possibility to be prepared for the mission in Cairo through careful planning in order to give their best and meet the needs of NAQAAE. However, in most cases this was not possible due to different working cultures or unexpected changes in situations, which sometimes was difficult. In order to fully take advantage of the given resources this is definitely an issue always to pay attention to in the future projects, but maybe, we also can learn something about the flexibility of Egyptians. And yet, it is worth emphasising that the last six months of the project were extremely busy in all ways.

Working together with Egyptian, German and Finnish professionals was a pleasure. My closest colleague was the Component Leader Jorma Sinkkonen with whom we made a great JAMK team. Another great team mate was DAAD's project coordinator Stefanie Kottowski and of course the project leader Heikki K. Lyytinen, the RTAs Pasi Reinikainen and Reijo Aholainen and the RTA assistant Houaida Mostafa.

There is no doubt that this was the most challenging project I have worked on. The situation in NAQAAE was challenging at the beginning of the project. The revolution in June 2013 almost caused the suspension of the project. The RTA decided that his family members would stay in Finland instead of Cairo after the political circumstances had dramatically changed. Travelling warnings by the Embassies of Finland and Germany and a curfew are not common in projects funded by the EU. The resignation of the RTA, finding a new one, waiting for the addendum to be endorsed, the running out of the implementation time of the project, Egypt's decision to change the visa procedures in the country and then not to change it anyway... A project full of challenges, but also people who determinately kept beating the challenges, one after another. Cooperation between the partners was excellent and in the final conference in July 2015, everyone could agree on the opinion of the project leaders: the project took a final sprint, reached its goals and was a great success story.

All is well that ends well!

PROJECT COORDINATION – THEORY AND PRACTICE

Stefanie Kottowski

My job as the coordinator of the German partner contribution to the Twinning project was to ensure the smooth practical implementation of the project on the German side in close cooperation with our German project leader Peter Webers at the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). Based at DAAD headquarters in Bonn, my main tasks included, in short, the preparation of German short-term expert missions, organisation of study visits and financial administration. The basis for it all constituted the Twinning contract and the activities and mandatory results that were laid down therein.

UNEXPECTED CHALLENGES SOURCED FROM AN INSECURE ENVIRONMENT

Theoretically, this sounded rather straightforward. Activities had been defined before and short-term experts (STEs) appointed already during the proposal phase. However, in practice, things proved to be very different. We started the project with a kick-off conference at the end of March 2013 for which we all partners made detailed plans concerning who was to implement which activities at set points in time. What we had not taken into consideration was the revolution of 30 June 2013 and its unexpected and crucial effects on our project. For almost four months, no activities could take place due to the unstable situation in Cairo and the fact that the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs had issued a travel warning.

When the security situation in Cairo improved so that the project could be continued, all mission planning had to start anew. However, finding experts who were willing to travel to insecure Cairo during that time became a great challenge. Many hours were spent writing emails and making phone calls to potential short-term experts both from the existing pool as well as new ones. The reduced number of volunteers made the upcoming months even more intensive in terms of missions and time invested for those who continued the work in Cairo. Consequently, a logical sequencing of activities seemed unlikely. The supply of short-term experts seemed to determine the course of the project rather than the demand on the Egyptian side. The most difficult

task was finding suitable solutions to the shortage of experts, to cater to the need on the Egyptian side and to achieve the (still valid) mandatory results of the contract at the same time.

The project faced another setback about one year later, in the summer of 2014. The Finnish Resident Twinning Adviser resigned and a qualified candidate and successor had to be found. This, taking into consideration the events one year ago, was not an easy task. Fortunately, our Finnish partner succeeded. During the same time, the President of NAQAAE and the entire Board were replaced by the Prime Minister.

MOVING FORWARD

After the unpredicted and quite long period of instability, a move into a period of re-organisation within NAQAAE as well as within the project took place. Activities were eventually continued in January 2015 – one month before the initially agreed termination of the project. Luckily, all actors agreed that in order to reap the full benefit of the project, a prolongation had to be issued. It was due to this extension until August 2015 and, of course, due to the renewed ambition and spirit of all actors on the Egyptian, Finnish and German sides, that the project eventually yielded the results demanded by the Twinning contract. It was a very intense time for all involved as the largest portion of activities and expert missions was squeezed into a relative short time period of seven months. But after all the struggles we had been going through before, nothing was going to stop us now, and it can be said that we all jointly achieved the Twinning project's targets.

Relations between NAQAAE and DAAD have intensified to a large extent to other activities in the area of quality assurance which will be maintained beyond the Twinning project. But what's more, in the past months NAQAAE has turned itself into a very valuable partner for cooperation in the field of quality assurance and higher education. The institution has managed to gain renewed trust of the higher education institutions, which seemed to be hesitant about quality assurance agencies, which are supposed to "judge" their work. Doing so, NAQAAE has the potential to become not only the bridge to universities in Egypt but also become an indispensable partner for European and Egyptian higher education institutions.

WORKING TOGETHER ON COMMON GOALS – STEPS TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

My final remark concerns the sustainability of the project. We can only hope that the results and changes that have been achieved by the Twinning project will be sustained. In the best case scenario, they will not only sustain but constitute the foundation for the future work and development of NAQAAE and therefore can have a long-term impact. What has a greater potential even for change however are people – and many people have been involved in this project.

People become the agents of change. One of the great assets of the Twinning instrument is that it brings people together to work for a common goal – in contrast to classical consultancy projects in which the beneficiary merely receives a service and does not have to engage in its development. So not only the Egyptian side has learned about the European ways of working, the European short-term experts also were forced in their work to consider the cultural habits of their host country.

As mentioned before, I was located in Bonn throughout the project duration to serve as the contact person for the German STEs and project leader and the Finnish lead partners. With the implementation of the study visits in Germany, I finally got the chance for a personal exchange with the Egyptian partners. Overall, three visits took place in Germany in 2014 and 2015 and while it took a great deal of organisation, the actual face-to-face contact with the Egyptian people made it all worth the while. It was one of the rare occasions during which I had the chance to interact with the partners in ways other than email. The benefit of it cannot be overestimated.

In times of suppressed freedom of press and freedom of speech in Egypt and very one-sided media coverage about Egypt in Germany, I had a chance to gain a thorough insight into the Egyptian society and the thoughts and fears of my generation in this country. The encounters and personal conversation have changed my views on Egypt to a very considerable extent. At the same time, I felt that the Egyptians acquired new perspectives on certain matters, too. Together, we can hopefully contribute to sustainable changes on both sides of the Mediterranean.



Study visit group with Finnish colleagues in Jyväskylä, Finland



Study visit group getting to know a construction site built by the students of Jyväskylä College



The project leaders Dr. Youhansen Eid and Mr. Heikki K. Lyytinen signing the last quarterly report of the project. RTA Reijo Aholainen standing.



Closing seminar of the project in Cairo: Project Leader Heikki K. Lyytinen, Ambassador Tuula Yrjölä, Ambassador Gamal Bayoumi, Ragia Taha, Diego Escalona Paturel, Ambassador Hansjörg Haber, Junior Project Leader Peter Webers

(Photos: Jorma Sinkkonen)

EXPERIENCES AND IMPACTS ON DEVELOPING ASSESSMENT CULTURE IN CAIRO

Hannu Ikonen & Harri Keurulainen

FIRST IMPRESSIONS IN CAIRO

The culture in Egypt is different from ours. However, some things could be expected. Such as Cairo is a crowded and noisy city and the traffic is chaotic, although it flows rather smoothly. It was astonishing to find out how strong women's position is in Egypt, at least in NAQAEE's organisation. When discussing with some representatives of the administration of both NAQAEE and the Ministry of Education, we paid attention to the current situation in Egypt in which both genders have equal possibilities to educate themselves and proceed professionally in their career. We regarded this fact as a new concept, which we did not recognise before the visit in Cairo. This is definitely a remarkable option for the whole nation in order to face the challenges in the economic, social and educational fields of general development.

Our task within this project was to improve the curriculum of the training of trainers (ToT) in NAQAEE. This was supposed to happen by getting acquainted with the basic principles of the programmes (TOT and Advanced TOT) and observing the implementation of the programmes. Dr Youhansen's claim for a "paradigm shift" in Egyptian education culture gave a good starting point for our mission.

The planning of how to carry out the task at first glance seemed to be simple; at first to get the information of the present curriculum, and then to go to Cairo and see how it works and, after that, to make some suggestions of how to improve the training activities. And then, after a month, to go back to Cairo and see how the new ideas work.

But the process did not go so smoothly. It turned out that it was not that simple to define the basic ideas of curriculum. The trainers were happy to let us observe their activities with the training group. However, as there was not any information available about the basic principles of the training programmes for us in a shared language/in writing, it was really challenging to try to make a critical assessment of their activities. Accordingly, during the first mission week we were busy trying to construct some understanding through different discussions with the key persons who seemed to be very busy in their everyday duties, which did not lighten our challenge.

Perhaps one of the best occasions in this respect was the seminar during our second mission when we had a chance to talk with some trainers from NAQAAE's network.

DIRECTIONS FOR DEVELOPING ASSESSMENT CULTURE

Consequently, we were a little bit afraid that the concrete impact of our two missions on improving the curriculum remained quite modest. However, by these two missions it was possible to raise awareness on the importance of developing the assessment culture as a vital part of training programmes, and also to raise awareness of the importance of developing the quality management of these programmes.

From the point of view of developing assessment culture, we were able to point out three major directions. Firstly, we suggested that it would be beneficial to shift the emphasis from a summative assessment culture to a formative assessment culture. Secondly, we felt that in order to make assessment culture more transparent it would be wise to shift the emphasis from quantitative assessment culture towards more qualitative and criterion-referenced assessment culture. Thirdly, it would be good from the learning point of view to shift the emphasis from culture that concentrates on controlling learning and making judgements about the level of learning outcomes to culture that enables formative assessment by active feedback and in which self-assessment has a crucial role.

Furthermore, we suggested two major development directions from the quality management and development point of view. Firstly, there should be established a trainee feedback system, which should also include a strong self-assessment perspective. Secondly, there is a need to develop a rooted and generally established process description model concerning the course feedback system.

During the missions there were some interesting meetings concerning these ideas about developing assessment culture and the quality management and process issues of training experts. We understood that the shared ideas during the meetings were acceptable but somehow – due to the short time available – they were left in a little obscure phase. It isn't sure as to whether these ideas will really help the planning and executing the expert training to be improved or not. It is finally a case of the NAQAAE staff as to whether to use the results of the discussions or not. In any case, the meetings were gone through in a nice, positive atmosphere in which both sides learned something from each other. This kind of an international and intercultural process is beneficial for both partners.

EXPERIENCES FROM SEVERAL MISSIONS AS A SHORT-TERM EXPERT

Kauko Hämäläinen

I took part in five different missions. My main focuses have been on the structure of NAQAAE, European standards for quality assurance agencies and the role of stakeholders. During my last two visits, I had a possibility to comment on the draft of the new national educational strategy.

The most useful topics were the European standards and the role of stakeholders. Both themes activated good analysis and reflection about the current functions of NAQAAE. European standards offered concrete criteria for agencies and the leaders of NAQAAE were willing to make the needed changes. In addition, the discussions about the most important stakeholders brought concrete proposals, which the new directors were willing to implement.

From the beginning, it was surprising how professional and hard working the directors and the staff of NAQAAE were. They were well informed about the evaluation systems in many European countries and USA. The accreditation processes were well planned and they were able to implement a big number of evaluations with a relatively small staff. The huge number of educational institutions in Egypt made their work the most demanding.

From the standpoint of a short-term expert during the project it was eye-opening to see how important the attitude of the directors is in promoting change. People working in NAQAAE and different stakeholders were very positively taking part in the seminars and interviews and discussions with them seemed to be open and honest. Yet, sometimes it was difficult to get what their real commitment was. Nevertheless, when the new directors got involved, the situation changed totally. New people were very cooperative and willing to learn together. They had also well-functioning and positive relations to the Ministry of Education. It was also very important that new leaders were centrally involved in developing the national education strategy.

One of the biggest challenges was the planning of the programmes for the visits. This was due to many reasons; cultural differences, nature of the project, instability in the region, just to mention a few. Though the general objectives of the visits were clear enough, the planning of the weeks could happen at a very late stage. At the beginning of the week, we did not know whom we were going to meet and who would attend the seminars. But always the organisers found the relevant people for interviews and motivated professionals to seminars.

It was difficult to plan the focus of the interviews and the content of the seminars, when we did not know who would participate, what they knew already and what their needs were.

EVALUATING ACTIONS TAKEN

As the Short-Term Expert, it is interesting and motivating to know how the recommendations are used and what kind of changes they have perhaps activated. When being in the process and still in the field, the short-term experts cannot yet get much definitive feedback about their work and contributions. However, it is important for their own development and learning to get comments from organisers and from the people with whom they cooperated. Especially those STEs who are taking part in missions it is important to know if their way of working is useful and successful to help to fulfil the objectives of the project.

During the next years, it can be useful for NAQAEE to evaluate itself by European standards. I think they have good possibilities to fulfil the criteria and get feedback, which can be useful to develop their activities. It could be interesting to think about what the role of accreditation is in the quality system. It is good to ask what kind of information accreditation can bring for activating educational change and institutional development and what kind of information policymakers need. Can also other kinds of evaluations be useful? Accreditation is only one method among many other possible ways of evaluation.

When planning projects like this, it is important that local people are taking part in preparing the proposal for the EU to enable their involvement in the plan and be the owner of the ideas. Furthermore, the challenge for projects like this is that when the project plan is finally accepted and it can start, normally a lot of time has already passed. Surroundings and conditions in the target country are often changing fast and people are exchanging. Therefore, the accepted plan can be irrelevant in many parts in new situations. It is not a great idea to try to implement an old plan in a new situation when the needs are not the same as they were during the planning period. For these reasons, it should be easier to make changes during the years of the project implementation.

IT ALL STARTS FROM MUTUAL COMMITMENT

Jouni Välijärvi

During this Twinning project, I participated in two short-term, one-week expert visits. Based on these experiences, I will present below some personal views about the practical implementation of such projects.

COMMITMENT TO THE PROJECT

Based on my own experience, building commitment is important for the success of any actions, also in projects. At first, it seemed that in Egypt people were not very highly committed to the aims and activities of the project. This concerned above all the local project partner, the NAQAAE, while the central aim of the project was to strengthen its expertise. The lack of commitment showed in many ways. The trainees seemed to lack knowledge about the purpose and aims of the training. The trainees also changed even during the same workshop, so that it was difficult to decide whether one should continue discussing the themes from the point reached in the previous day or whether one should start it all over again with the new audience. In addition, in his comments the former director of NAQAAE repeatedly referred to their well-functioning national practices, the evaluation, development let alone the changing of which was unnecessary.

The problems were obviously related to Egypt's political instability, which also reflected both in NAQAAE's and the project's operations. For a short-term visiting expert, who has but a limited understanding of the overall situation, the setting was difficult. It was hard to figure out what the focus of the activities should be to serve the needs of the ever-changing target group. Fortunately, NAQAAE's internal situation later improved. Accordingly, during my second mission in June 2015 the trainees were better prepared for the joint consideration of various alternatives to develop their effective practices. Admittedly, this time the group was smaller, but their motivation and commitment was good. However, for the projects aiming at increasing effectiveness it is needed to emphasise that a lot of basic work is needed to get the local partners committed and to internalise the shared objectives.

FRAME OF REFERENCE AND PLANNING FOR THE MISSIONS

Largely due to the above, the preparation and careful planning for the mission was quite a challenging task. Drafting a work plan together with the local operators inevitably stayed to a rather late stage, and expectations for the expert's actions changed sometimes quite remarkably just before travelling to Egypt. Concrete needs were not brought up until the negotiations in the previous day before the activities began. This was especially the case in 2014 when essential expectations and needs for the contents were still brought up during the workshop. Responding to these needs in a sensible way was then really demanding. At that time, we were prepared mainly to strengthen the expertise of the NAQAAE staff, but it turned out that most participants were persons carrying out audits/inspections at schools, and they were expecting something totally different. In the summer, the 2015 course preparations and participants' expectations were clearly better matched. Even then, my topmost feeling was a slight uncertainty as to how well the activities actually served the local needs and how it fit together with other provisions under the programme.

This mismatch was obviously partly due to the Egyptian circumstances and partly to NAQAAE management not being so accustomed to longer-term preparations for the project. Thus, the expectations tend to grow to rather ad hoc type sporadic wishes. For a short-term expert, however, the overall approach of a Twinning project with expectations of reciprocity already as such raise a difficult demand to adjust themselves to quickly changing expectations– and keep them within one's own field of expertise. So the need for good planning is really needed.

It would be best if a short-term expert would have an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the overall aims and current stage of the project before their visit. That would enable them to bring in their own contribution to serve the overall interests of the project as efficiently as possible. Indeed, this is really challenging in a project of this kind, where the operation environment is changing all the time, in sudden and unforeseen ways. If both parties, i.e. the provider and the beneficiaries of the services, have a shared understanding – to a reasonable extent at least – of the goals of the project, it definitely would pay to spend some resources to brief in advance the experts involved. In my case, the project leader surely did his best to brief me about the local setting, particularly when preparing for the second visit. Even despite this, some elements – for example the ever changing composition of course participants – came as a slight surprise after all.

CHALLENGES OF INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

Although I present some fairly critical comments based on my personal experiences, I do not wish by any means to underrate the significance of this kind of international co-operation projects in developing local expertise abroad, building collaboration networks and developing the intercultural competence of experts at this end. Nonetheless, from an expert's point of view, expertise is always bound to a specific field and is therefore best targeted for a particular audience. Training sessions are most effective when they meet the needs and expectations of the trainees. Every effort should be made to build and maintain this connection, even though in circumstances like currently in Egypt it may be almost impossible. In spite of this, I find that through this kind of co-operation we can, in the long run, nevertheless ultimately contribute to the development of expertise in education systems as well, while also gaining a wider intercultural understanding for ourselves. It might be, however, that activities lasting just a week, are too short in this respect in order to achieve any significant results. On the other hand, committing experts to a longer period would require careful preparation in advance, but this is easier said than done as their daily work and other obligations rarely offer adequate chances for this.

From a human perspective, my experiences from Egypt include many positive aspects. Once the connection with NAQAAE staff was established, working with them was pleasant and our mutual interaction was successful. Especially in 2015 the participants were genuinely willing to learn new things and develop evaluation practices in line with international standards. It remains to be seen how the short time spent on acquiring the new knowledge will be applied to the local daily evaluation practices.

IMPROVING PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN EGYPT

Klaus-Georg Wey

SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

The following text is based on my participation in the EU Twinning Project Egypt “Strengthening the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education institutional capacity (NAQAAE)” with a view to improving the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Education System. As a so-called “Short-Time-Expert” (STE) I stayed in Egypt between May 2013 and June 2015, about 13 full weeks. I was able to gain good knowledge on the conditions and circumstances of quality assurance in the pre-university branch of the Egyptian educational system.

With respect to security questions, the Egyptian partners were cautious in arranging for direct contacts with schools and educational institutions. However, I was able to meet more than 100 Egyptian experts from diverging professional backgrounds: teachers, school-masters, project-leaders in quality assurance processes, members of accreditation teams, professors for didactics and pedagogics, and the team members of NAQAAE. We discussed in about 30 different workshops and meetings the state and possible developments of the educational system in Egypt. In addition, we were able to arrange a study-visit for Egyptian experts to Germany that brought about many insights concerning the different approaches to quality assurance in the pre-university educational system of Egypt and Germany.

As the EU-Twinning Projects have often two European partners, here Finland and Germany, I have to add a short appraisal of the cooperation between all the partners and experts of the two countries. In all terms and criteria of organisational, professional and personal cooperation and esteem cooperation and partnership did very well. In terms of configuration and shaping of contents, the different practical approaches towards quality assurance in Finland and Germany did not allow for an integrated consulting of Egyptian experts. Therefore, these experts had to make their own choice from the respective offers.

CONDITIONS IN EGYPT

The general conditions for the project with regard to the pre-university educational system in Egypt were complicated in a twofold sense. On the one hand, duties and responsibilities for quality assurance are delegated to two different authorities, the Ministry of Education and the NAQAAE under control of Prime Minister and President. Therefore, organisational disputes and different assessments of the actual situation and the needs for development are possible and cannot always be avoided. In order to improve the quality of the educational system on all levels NAQAAE organises and carries out accreditations as the central method. This had to be accepted as a given framework for all discussion and consulting within the project.

On the other hand, the complicated political situation in Egypt during the years 2013 to 2015 made it necessary to cooperate with two different presidents and a changing staff within NAQAAE. Therefore, in late 2014 we faced a loss of the information already transmitted. In the workshops and meetings in 2015, I met new and different experts, and a lot of information on specific issues had to be renewed. In addition, the intentions of the new leadership had to be considered in order to make the last phase of the project as useful as possible.

All Egyptian counter partners were good hosts and partners and personal contacts were pleasing. On a professional level, we had different approaches concerning the way of working. For example, insufficient information in advance of different missions, so with regard to the number and sort of workshop-participants, or delays in the translation of necessary documents caused a couple of inconvenient circumstances.

OBJECTIVES AND TASKS OF THE PROJECT CONCERNING PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Our part of the project focused on pre-university education. The missions concentrated on the German, especially North-Rhine Westphalian, experiences and procedures with regard to

- external and internal evaluation of schools and educational organisations,
- the reference framework for Quality Analysis in Germany as an instrument to promote quality awareness and improvement within schools,

- methodology and techniques of data collecting (hard as well as soft data) used in the external evaluation procedures,
- especially lesson observation methodology as a basis of shared understanding for the quality of the teaching and learning processes, and
- reporting of results as an important way to discuss and develop plans for a structured improvement of context, input, processes, and output by the schools themselves and defining the necessary needs of support.

All information provided by the German experts was discussed with the aim of figuring out what part or parts of the German procedures might be fit as means to enhance the methods of accreditation and development of schools used in Egypt. During these discussions it became more and more obvious that the most important step for the strengthening of NAQAAE's capacities is to improve the quality of accreditations in pre-university education. From that result, NAQAAE-leadership and foreign experts drew the conclusion to reach out for an improved professional training of accreditation-teams and auditors, more assignments for well-doing accreditors and auditors, and an improved use of electronic devices in communication and data processing.

In order to tackle the first of these three major issues, a task-force of Egyptian experts was set up. These groups of experts developed a pilot-scenario for an on-site-training for reviewers in accreditation that so far did not exist. As this decision was made as late as February 2015 the pilot-scenario was expected to be implemented during the last months of the year 2015, that is after the start of the academic year 2015–16.

ACHIEVEMENTS

The task-force finished its work and achieved with my support and advice a draft of the manual for a pilot-version of an “on-site-training” in the academic year 2015/16. All the main points of the earlier worked out priority listing were addressed and met. The manual specially describes the preparation and the procedures of on-site-training as well as the criteria for the selection of the qualified trainees.

Within the respective missions, the counter partners made statements in the manual as precise as possible. Whether this aim could be achieved

or whether amendments in the future are necessary can only be clarified when the pilot-version has been implemented. I think the manual and the achievements made since January 2015 are a major progress and will – if adequately implemented – be a very important improvement of the quality of reviewers and of accreditations carried out. Therefore, the manual might be a very good basis for pre-university school-accreditation done by highly qualified reviewers.

ISSUES LEFT OPEN AFTER THE PROJECT

It would be very useful if the manual could be implemented within the now developed timetable and by the methods agreed upon. Within the limited timeline of the project there was no further capacity for missions, the necessary materials (manual, guidebook, materials for the pre-orientation of the mentors and trainees) could not be developed in a tested eLearning version but it was left for NAQAAE to do on its own. Especially helpful would be to publish all materials related to the “on-site-training” on a specific website. I strongly suggested that as an integrated part of the improved training for accreditation, eLearning methods should be used to prepare for and accompany the “on-site-training”.

As a summary, I'd like to say that although external conditions of the project caused many hardships the professional exchange on all levels between the experts from the three countries involved turned out into a couple of very precise and concrete impulses for the development of quality assurance within NAQAAE. I hope that the experts of this institution will get the necessary support to implement the many ideas and measures designed for the enhancement of the quality of education in Egypt.

PROMOTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN EGYPT

Jussi Halttunen

In mid-January 2015, I participated with the Vice President Pekka Jääskö in the work of the JAMK Twinning Project. We went on a one-week mission in Egypt and our theme was entrepreneurship for the associated training colleges in Egypt and vocational secondary schools. The development target organisation and the Twinning partner in the National Agency for the Evaluation Egyptian universities NAQAAE. JAMK had started this Twinning project nearly two years earlier, together with a German partner DAAD. In this mission, we were accompanied by a German expert, Dr Stefan Wolf from Fachhochschule Munster.

Pre-Commission with the expectations of the Egyptian departure were a little mingled with fear. This was probably due to Cairo's Arab Spring events due to which our Twinning project also experienced a variety of steps during the first stages of the project. Many of the challenges then led to the need of finding a new RTA, and fortunately, JAMK was able to recruit an experienced international expert Reijo Aholainen from the Finnish Ministry of Education to become the local project advisor. Reijo encouraged us to come to Cairo to the Commission in mid-January.

Brave minded, we went with Pekka on a Saturday morning trip from Istanbul to Cairo via a Turkish Airlines aircraft from Helsinki. After more than five hours our flight landed at the Cairo airport. Money exchange, visa, passport control and customs went surprisingly quickly. After that, we headed to our hotel situated on the island of Zamalek. Hotel Longchamps was a positive experience. Small and peaceful family-run hotel in a quiet area of the Nile island. The business lady Ms Hebba Bakri had a German background, and the hotel rooms were very good. Yes, we are fine here this week, we thought with Pekka.

On Sunday morning, we met German colleagues and RTA Reijo Aholainen at the hotel's breakfast and we left at eight to Nasr City and NAQAAE's office. The little over 10 kilometres in Cairo's morning rush hour lasted approximately one hour by the Arab brothers Ahmed and Aiman who proved during the week to be qualified drivers. The rest of the week, we also realised already more suited to their Arab accent. In the morning, the car radio echoed religious tunes and the secular ones in the afternoons such as disco music. On the way to Zamalek Nasr City, we saw a lot of the big city where more than 20 million inhabitants live.

Twinning partners NAQAAE is a government agency with a staff of slightly fewer than 100 officials and assistants. Most of the senior officials are women. Head of the Agency, Professor Youhansen Eid is an architect by training, and she has a long academic career. The new energetic head of the Agency for the Evaluation activities are in many ways activated and the organisational hierarchy lowered. Director Youhansen was very pleased with the functioning of the Twinning project and cooperation with RTA was going very well. On Sunday, we had a number of orientation discussions at NAQAAE between the management and experts. We reached agreement on the objectives and priorities of the Commission rather well. The atmosphere at the workshops and meetings was enthusiastic. Professor Youhansen Eid kept the mission theme on entrepreneurship as a very significant and important part of the development of higher education institutions and secondary vocational schools.

Egypt has a particular challenge in poor employment of the university graduates. This state of affairs has worsened after the 2012 Arab Spring. University system strongly developed in Egypt under President Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1950 to 60 centuries. In this case, all university graduates were guaranteed a job at state offices. The tradition continued also during President Nasser's successors. The development has resulted in the public sector and state administration oversized growth over the decades. Gradually, it has become necessary in the situation that the new government posts can no longer be afforded and university graduates do not have work. NAQAAE increases entrepreneurship in universities as a channel and a means for the better employment of graduates concerned.

Egyptian universities themselves are very high quality players. Many academic professors and the university's senior management have studied at foreign universities in Europe and the United States. During the week of our mission, NAQAAE organised by the initiative of the Director Youhansen Eid two open seminars and discussion meetings which came to a wealth of listeners. The second seminar was entitled for secondary school management and the Wednesday seminar for university management. Our role with Pekka and Dr Stefan Wolf was to tell of the experiences of Finland and Germany. Our talks were listened to with great interest and we received very positive feedback. The mission also gave an opportunity to discuss about further future cooperation between JAMK and Egyptian universities, JAMK and Pharos University of Alexandria (PUA), about a closer cooperation. Also, NAQAAE's leaders expressed their willingness to continue after the Twinning cooperation. We should try to pick up a new twinning project. Also, the Germans are willing to continue now in a good momentum of development.

Egyptian experience was for my part fine and exceeded many times all of my pre-expectations. I became interested in a huge amount of the glorious Egyptian history and culture. Close to the hotel at the American University in Cairo-bookseller I found for the home journey a huge pile of books related to the ancient history of Egypt. Maybe someday I will get back to Cairo, I decided. Mission conclusion might well be that entrepreneurship is also appreciated in Egypt.

I returned back to Egypt in the last week of July. The mild weather of January has turned into the tremendous heat coming straight from the desert of the Sahara. Visit to PUA Alexandria was a thrilling experience. We signed a MOU with the president of PUA. The Mediterranean wind was cooling the extreme heat when I was walking on the ancient sites of the old lighthouse, nowadays the Alexandrian fortress. They also rebuilt the Alexandrian library in early 2000 with the sponsorship of lady Mubarak. They said it includes the most volumes of books from any libraries in the world.

REFLECTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN THE GERMAN VET SYSTEM THROUGH PERSPECTIVES FROM ABROAD

Stefan Wolf

Between 2013 and 2015, I was working in the Twinning project under the lead of Finland in cooperation with Germany. One of the tasks of the project was to support the implementation of Entrepreneurship Education activities in the Egyptian education system. Therefore, we worked together on the Egyptian side with the National Authority of Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education, a public body located under the umbrella of the prime ministry office.

My duty was to discuss the activities in German Technical and Vocational Education (TVET) concerning Entrepreneurship Education and, furthermore, I was to work with Egyptian partners in the process of benefitting the German experiences in the development of Egyptian vocational training system. It was in this way that I gained the possibility to look from an outsider perspective at the activities of Entrepreneurship Education in the German TVET system, which I will reflect in this chapter.

In a first reaction, I would say that no Entrepreneurship Education exists in German TVET. However, after a second longer thought, I would say that we could subsume some important activities of the German TVET under the Entrepreneurship Education issues.

The noun 'Entrepreneurship Education' is not common in, or familiar with, the teaching and training in the German technical apprenticeship system nor in the school based technical education. More familiar is the concept of Entrepreneurship Education in the field of commercial education. We will find only core elements of Entrepreneurship Education in the German TVET system but not under such a term nor under the explicit concept. Indeed, the activities of Entrepreneurship Education which we can identify are integrated in the current professional education and training activities in the technical occupations. In contrast to the practical situation, we will find more explicit relation to technical occupation and Entrepreneurship Education in the TVET research (see Kanning, 2006; Hartmann, 2010).

ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION ACTIVITIES IN THE PRACTICE OF GERMAN TVET

In the system of German vocational education and training we have a tripartied level of education. Starting with the status of apprentice, regularly it will end after a several year stage of learning and practice, and socially it means a phase of socialization in a professional community. The graduation after a final exam is the skilled journeyman. After this graduation, the workers can continue to get training to become a master craftsman with the approbation to open his/her own shop. And with lessons at the chambers of crafts or industry and commerce how to do it properly.

The latter is a clear link to the Entrepreneurship Education in a narrow understanding, i.e. to prepare for creating and running a successful company properly. However, in the German TVET we do more than give lessons in such a limited understanding of Entrepreneurship Education as a preparation for business creation. If we take a broader perspective on the issues of Entrepreneurship Education we have to notice some more (for the narrow and the broad understanding, see Baldassarri, 2010).

Entrepreneurship education can and should be understood as an empowering act as a socially responsible citizen for their concerns and their interests and to implement ideas. Consequently, it has to include aspects that should be reflected in democracy (Citizenship Education) and economic and consumer education. Other important elements of this broader understanding are educational processes to move towards the development of creativity, openness to innovate, the undertaking of risk and the ability for the targeted planning and implementing projects to achieve goals.

However, it should not be forgotten that the activities of Entrepreneurship Education specifically in Germany are situated in a contested educational field full of relationship of tension. The activities are seen as controversial. The clearest criticism formulated at the concept that it is all about business creation and the formation is only to this concern. The legitimacy and the strength of the adaptation and subjection of employees under the operational interests of the company would be taught and focused. The critics mentioned also that the elements of a broad understanding of Entrepreneurship Education are focused on anchor companies' interest in the education system and all serves only this end. At least some critics will prevent the education from the subjection under this business focus.

However, besides for the ambivalences and constraints of the concept, the sketched core elements of a broad understanding here could bring benefit to

a society's education system and improve the capacities of citizens to shape their future sustainably.

And the German vocational training reflects the broad concept of entrepreneurship education at various levels. In the dual vocational training operated under companies' responsibilities one can find on a basic level of didactic endeavour the question of problem solving activities, and the implementation of measures in order to achieve most effectively predetermined objectives. The job training is in their curriculum aligned to the concept of complete action, which consists of the core elements of planning, implementation and evaluation.

In cooperation with the vocational school, the main end of vocational training is condensed in the expression of "Berufliche Handlungskompetenz" (vocational action competence). It means that the following behaviour is formed: "The willingness and ability of the individuals to elaborate appropriate in professional, social and private situations, individually and socially responsible manner"¹ (quoted from curricula of the Standing Conference of the federal Ministries of Education and Culture).

This main objective of vocational training and the previously mentioned curricular founded practical training converge to a broad understanding of Entrepreneurship Education, and it is deeply integrated in the training activities but without ever being named as such in the vocational training.

Also in school based activities of vocational training are essential elements that can be attributed to an Entrepreneurship Education. In the school subject Economic and Social Studies important components of an economic education are provided. These include the basics of business law as well as business-related projects in the classroom, such as the simulation of a business start-up (see Holtsch, 2008).

Specifically, in full-time vocational schools, particularly in the commercial sector, longer term teaching projects are carried out, which can be summarised under the generic term of "student company" (see Tramm, 1996; Fischer & Stuber, 1999; Gramlinger & Tramm, 2006).

In this case, the arrangement tries to simulate business processes of a real company, but in a protected environment. The experiences of the students are embedded in a learning environment to use this for the acquisition of skills that are also entrepreneurially important.

In retrospect, I can say that to pass through the mediation task of *Entrepreneurship Education in the German TVET System* to the colleagues

¹ Original quotation: „die Bereitschaft und Befähigung des Einzelnen, sich in beruflichen, gesellschaftlichen und privaten Situationen sachgerecht durchdacht sowie individuell und sozial verantwortlich zu verhalten“

in Egypt, the view has widened. Inspired to transfer the German experiences of vocational training it became clear as to what various activities are already being implemented on economy-related education in the technical vocational training field. Significantly, however, was also that of the German vocational training, an entirely different logic, driven by the very close relation to the company's business and productive processes as in the more to general content adjusted school-based VET systems of European countries. Therefore the noun Entrepreneurship Education is not used to address the different concerned activities in the VET field, even though the content matches very well.

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QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN EGYPT

Rahel Schomaker

LABOUR MARKETS CHALLENGE THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Labour markets in Egypt suffer from a high labour supply, but a lack of jobs. While the number of university graduates entering the labour market increased significantly over the last two decades, the chance to obtain a job which is suitable to the single individual's qualification (a "career-job", fitting expectations) has even decreased during this period, in particular for the youth. This problem even worsened due to the revolution of 2011 and the subsequent struggles.

The quality of education is not only relevant for the graduates' entry in the domestic labour market, but also – in a global knowledge-based economy – for the competitiveness of the employees in the international labour market as well as for the Egyptian economy as a whole.

In particular, missing employability skills can be identified as the root causes of that problem: Training systems as well as higher education institutions fail to produce the demanded skills. As for tertiary education at higher education institutions, both public and private universities and colleges, several challenges can be identified with the general finding that the Egyptian education system provides "quantity solutions" rather than "quality solutions". As a consequence, higher education is overcrowded. Current data indicates that the number of students entering higher education institutions still grows at about 6 per cent (in numbers: 60,000 students) per year. Furthermore, the expected increase in the higher education students' enrolment goes up to more than 35 per cent, with the percentage of the youth population entering the working age is estimated to rise up to 67 per cent in 2020.

DEVELOPING QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EDUCATION

The need for curricula and the education system to be updated or at least adjusted to the market's needs – in short: quality assurance – is even more pressing since Egypt takes part in the *Bologna Policy Forum* (since 2008) of the European Union, and higher education is planned to be harmonised with the EU standards. So, there is at least some external pressure to reform the higher education sector with a view to quality assurance.

One important pillar in quality assurance in higher education is the accreditation of education institutions through specialised accreditation agencies. This issue has been tackled by the Finnish-German Twinning project that was carried out in cooperation with the Egyptian *National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE)*. NAQAAE, established in 2007, is responsible for all levels and types of education to assure educational quality and effectiveness. The main goal of the NAQAAE is to give accreditation to all universities not only to ensure a higher degree of autonomy for the institutions, but also standardise learning outcomes and ensure employability.

The joint project that took place from 2013–2015 tackled some of the ongoing issues in the Egyptian education system in all system levels, the higher education and vocational training, but also individual tasks, institutional adjustments, legal, socio-economic and pedagogic aspects of education, as well as teaching and learning. The outcomes are as diverse as the aims and goals of the Twinning project. While institutional adjustments – as in all bureaucracies – take a while, individual effects are somewhat faster. Even if hard to measure in quantitative terms, individual face-to-face trainings, workshops and larger conferences provided opportunities for knowledge transfer, but maybe more importantly, network formation and exchange of ideas. The Twinning in many ways acted as a trigger or amplifier, fostering processes amongst the members of the Egyptian partner institutions that otherwise may have taken place later or in a less coordinated way. Hence, fuelling the exchange amongst members of the partner institution in Egypt was one important outcome of the project.

A second important point that has been amplified by the Twinning may be the production of measurable output – drafts for handbooks, questionnaires and surveys. These papers – being in line not only with the specific requirements of the Egyptian education sector, but also the Bologna System – may serve as a basis for further improvements of the quality assurance system in Egypt against the backdrop of high enrolment rates and the need to meet the needs of the domestic and global labour market. Thirdly, also for the Short-Term Experts from Finland and Germany the discussions with each other as well as with the Egyptian colleagues provided interesting opportunities to discuss and reflect on own positions and biases. Last but not least personal relations were implemented that hopefully will last much longer than the duration of the Twinning.

IMPORTANT STEPS

Consequently, even if several problems remain with a view to the implementation of quality assurance in higher education in Egypt (regarding the design of the quality assurance system itself as well as with a view on the practical implementation), important steps have been made in recent years. The Twinning project may have been one of these steps. Other challenges are still ahead. As for the design of the accreditation process, the task to assure adequate qualification and, most of all, neutrality and secretiveness of reviewers and peers has sometimes proved difficult in other countries. This is because of the inherent conflicts of interest facing peers, which teach in competing programme in a relatively small market of only about 35 universities in Egypt. This is especially true regarding highly specialised study programmes, which are offered by just a handful of universities. It should not be overlooked in this context, however, that the sector-specific expertise and the high levels of professional competence of the peers (and, as a result, of the accreditation body) can be seen as a specific advantage for the Egyptian system, compared to other systems worldwide. Finally, the reaccreditation process is fraught with some serious shortcomings. If study programmes do not have to be reaccredited within a fixed period of time – as the evidence from other countries demonstrates – only short-term solutions can be the consequence. It helps to get an accreditation, but it does not foster the long-term quality of the institution and the curriculum accredited.

In particular, with a view to the international comparability of accreditation standards, Egypt has to fulfil not only the Bologna standard, but also has to be able to compete internationally. Otherwise – an international perception of that problem given – there may come a decreasing demand for Egyptian graduates, or lower their chances to continue their studies abroad, in particular the transition from BA to MA courses, or from MA to PhD-programmes. Also the relatively small number of foreign students and graduates (1,136 in 2008) in Egypt, with almost none of them coming from the US or the European Union, could be a consequence of the – perceived or real – low standards of higher education in the country.

These challenges ahead and others being in line, the Egyptian accreditation system is on the way to renewal and improvement. Newly created initiatives by the new government, using e.g. programmes of the European Union as the *Twinning Programme*, are designed to target the problems delineated above. An assessment of these measures cannot be done by now, as most initiatives just started, but is on the research agenda as well as on the political agenda.

DEVELOPING QUALITY ASSURANCE IN UNIVERSITIES

Ina Grieb

My experience in the area of quality assurance is extensive. I was involved in a project in East Africa for nine years concerning all issues around the topic of quality assurance, including sensitisation, training, internal and external quality assurance, evaluation and the development of a handbook. I also contributed in a Twinning project in Georgia leading to accreditation. At the moment, I am part of a quality assurance project in Southeast Asia which, just as all the projects, is mainly concerned with the empowerment of staff in quality assurance.

CONSTRUCTING THE SCENE FOR THE UNIVERSITY STAFF TRAININGS

The four missions in which I participated as a short-term expert in the Twinning project in Egypt concerned internal quality assurance looking at and discussing best practice in Egyptian universities and developing recommendations to support quality assurance in higher education.

The beginning of the training for quality assurance officers was challenging. The existing time frame did not allow us the possibility to discuss the formats and the contents of the trainings in the initial phase of the project. Also the training of quality assurance officers might have been much more effective if there had been permanent groups to work on the challenges of internal quality assurance in Egyptian universities. The European experts were willing to support and demonstrate how they deal with challenges. This way of working only partly took place in the beginning but it improved significantly towards the end of the project with changes in the leadership of the project.

The process showed that the dialogue between the two groups is needed and it helps everyone to understand that many problems are faced worldwide. For example, the quality assurance staff may be confronted with resistance towards change. How do you react? What can you do to improve the situation? Such difficulties are common everywhere. Besides discussions, intense use of existing international materials (e.g. “A Road Map to Quality” developed in East Africa and European standards on QA) could be of value to improve the local QA structure, especially when writing a self-assessment report. Importantly,

the participants of the trainings represented both internal and external quality assurance. This was absolutely necessary because both stakeholders need to know all the processes.

UNIVERSITIES CHANGING THEIR VIEWS

In spring 2014, we visited the Quality Assurance office of Cairo University. The Head was a participant of our training and invited us. At that time, we felt that there was an open resistance to cooperate with NAQAAE and develop a quality assurance system at Cairo University. The necessity was seen on one side, but the general resistance was much stronger and NAQAAE was not seen as a partner which could be of any support.

One year later, we were invited again but the scenery had changed completely. They introduced a very ambitious quality assurance concept, resistance had been mostly overcome and the participating NAQAAE colleagues were regarded as very important partners in the process.

This development was very astonishing for us and it also showed that Cairo University was on its way to a stronger internationalisation, knowing that the evidence of quality is a necessary first step. One could have the feeling that NAQAAE and Cairo University together will follow this road.

The second contact with universities was the monitoring of the evaluation and accreditation of peers. This gave us a better understanding of the Egyptian conditions in all their different facets and we could encourage them further with positive feedback. A follow up session at a later time could have been useful.

SETTING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

A focus of my last mission was to formulate recommendations of how to support and develop quality assurance in higher education. This I did with Prof. Dr. Amany Abbas who is the expert on Egypt and whom I supported with my experiences. The process was very effective; we listened carefully to one another and agreed on the most important issues. The external quality assurance aspect focuses on the national and international role of NAQAAE.

For me, these two days were the most interesting and productive sessions. In many ways our working manners were similar. I learned a lot about the way our Egyptian colleagues work and I am now much more optimistic for the future of quality assurance. Even though the Egyptian education scenery is very difficult, the new leadership at NAQAAE appears to be very engaged and competent, putting in all the effort possible.

MODERN E- & M-LEARNING PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES AND ASSESSMENT OF E-LEARNING ACCREDITATION

Markku Rissanen

GETTING STARTED DURING THE STUDY VISIT IN FINLAND

Having the possibility to work with the staff of the NAQAAE organisation in Cairo, Egypt was a great pleasure for me and I still feel honoured to be one of the international experts there during the Twinning project.

In my case, collaboration with NAQAAE staff started in December 2014 while a group of NAQAAE experts came for their study visit to our JAMK University of Applied Sciences in Jyväskylä, Finland. During the week they spent at JAMK, my task was to present and demonstrate modern e- & mobile learning solutions and pedagogies used in our education. We had a week with various activities like some introductory lectures, study visits and hands-on workshops. I was impressed by the high motivation of the NAQAAE study visit group members – how keen and focused they were about the ways of working in Finland. Excellent questions were asked and answers found by interactive methods.

When I was asked if I could continue working with NAQAAE later in the spring 2015, I was delighted thinking about whether the interest that they showed a couple of months ago had vanished but in fact it seemed to have increased even more. Therefore, I started to prepare for my coming mission in Cairo.

WORKING ON PEDAGOGICAL E- AND M-LEARNING APPROACHES

My task in May was to offer new ideas and raise awareness towards modern pedagogical approaches and possibilities to utilise educational technologies in NAQAAE's various duties and activities. The days of working with the academic staff were full of various training activities including some lecturing, consultation sessions, interactive discussions, demonstrations and workshops.

We discussed a lot about modern e- & m-pedagogical theories and that led us deeper into the very basics of quality of digital learning. Many questions were raised and most of them were answered by interactive swarm intelligence

– just like we did in December 2014 while they visited Finland. During the training sessions, we looked closer at a couple of modern approaches in digital learning e.g. DIANA- model by Helena Aarnio & Jouni Enqvist and AEFIRIP model by Pasi Silander & Anni Rytönen.

As far as I could see, all the training days were quite full of interaction and theories, ideas presented were quickly adapted and modified to meet the needs of NAQAAE digital learning activities, foresight, goals and visions. The staff of the NAQAAE were motivated and focused on the issues that we went through during each day. They shared their own expertise and experiences with me. They expressed freely their opinions and visions so that they were able to reflect their stand with the educational content of each day. Quite many of those discussions were very fruitful for us all.

SHARING AND ASSESSING

We had a look on modern social media applications and how those might be used in education in pedagogically relevant ways. In addition, we organised our collaboration on a shared platform (Realtimboard) that helped us to share training materials and collaborate with each other – even after the project. Most of the students in Egypt are quite aware of mobile learning and the possibilities offered by portable devices and applications used in those. The big challenge is how the educational organisations and the staff can take advantage of the existing potential. This was one of my missions to raise in NAQAAE.

During the days we talked a lot about quality and assessment in the digital world of education. Most of the issues concerned the digital documentation of skills & competences, e-assessment, pedagogical design of e-courses created in NAQAAE, organisation level strategies in e- & m-learning, etc. the training sessions helped a lot to see the parallel “path” towards the future among the participants that represented various universities and faculties in Egypt.

In conclusion, the staff of the NAQAAE and all the participants of the sessions who carried out the outcomes were satisfied on both sides. I would like to thank all the members of administration of the NAQAAE, especially Dr Youhansen Eid and Dr Amany Elsharif, administration of the Twinning project, Resident Twinning Advisor Reijo Aholainen and all the expert colleagues who worked with this two year EU Twinning project in Cairo Egypt. I hope that the work done during this Twinning project will have some significance for the future education in Egypt.

STRENGTHENING NAQAAE – BULLET POINTS FROM THE LEGAL SIDE OF VIEW

Achim Albrecht

FROM CONFUSION...

During my several visits to Cairo as a short-term expert it became clear to me that it was not the primary Law 82/2006 which needed amendment – it had thoroughly installed National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE) as an independent quality assurance body for the educational sector in Egypt. Rather in need of change was the legal and political environment of secondary laws and bylaws as well as chronic underfunding and the necessary but not operated intertwining of different ministries and NAQAAE.

To illuminate my statement above, I will enlighten a bit more the situation in the beginning. NAQAAE had been set up to independently take care of the accreditation of all educational institutions in Egypt. It was supposed to define, coach and assess quality standards of educations, closely related to European Higher Education Area (EHEA) standards, for all higher education institutions both state run and private in the tertiary sector. Furthermore, it was to act for thousands of different schools all over Egypt from highly developed to very basic operations in far off provinces, even for kindergartens which start education for the youngest.

According to the law, NAQAAE should report its findings and development to the prime minister. Similarly, the respective ministries of Higher Education and of Education are running educational operations from educational infrastructure up to inspectorates to assure that the curricula are observed, funded and also report their actions to the Prime Minister. The impression what I as a short-term expert got was that both ministries and NAQAAE were in a tense competition for funding and there was a latent state of conflict of interest because NAQAAE, as a new player, had entered the field.

However, several upheavals and major changes in politics and civil society in Egypt gave proof that the budget for education is not going to produce the necessary amount of surplus funding to nourish the mega-task with which NAQAAE was and is confronting. On the contrary, the initial startup funding for setting up NAQAAE and getting it running had since then dried up. And the institutions (Ministries and NAQAAE) did not cooperate

with each other. The short-term experts in the project did not succeed in getting into official contact with either of the ministries for the necessary discussions.

...THROUGH DEFINING OBSTACLES AND SOLUTIONS

In the planning stage of the Twinning project it was agreed that NAQAAE should be set up as a self-financing body with a relatively small, permanent but highly trained and motivated workforce. In proliferation circles, NAQAAE should develop training materials and training centres to create a wave of well coached trainers and assessment staff all over Egypt in order to establish an expert quality assurance and accreditation climate. As the law is clear that all educational institutions of all sectors should be accredited and pay for their accreditation and re-accreditation, the aforementioned quality proliferation circle would start to turn, finance itself and produce up to standard educational institutions.

However, the system is not yet working that way. To my knowledge, there still is no accountability on the side of educational institutions which don't apply for accreditation. NAQAAE has no operational power to execute consequences for those who do not meet the accreditation process. The ministries seem to be oblivious to the fact that universities and schools fall short of legally the defined obligations. There is no sign as to which consequences the relevant ministries would take on for those who don't oblige (from reduced funding to a change of management or ceasing operations). More likely, the ministries seem to feel that funding for accreditations, which would to a great extent have to come out of their budgets to furnish non-profit educational institutions and schools with enough funds to pay for NAQAAE services, could easily be saved and channelled into other projects by just not reacting and not executing. It is very clear again that NAQAAE needs and NAQAAE obligations are not a primary concern of the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Education. As long as the situation is lingering on the whole accreditation process is more and more grinding to a standstill.

Possible solutions might be that NAQAAE gets real independence, reports to the parliament and possibly the presidential office, thus freeing itself from an uncanny competition situation. Secondly, NAQAAE and the relevant ministries need to run closely planned joint operations with clear cut competences, accountability and independent budgets. Bylaws have to regulate this step by step approach towards joint success. Third, NAQAAE and the lawmaker should rethink the task of a quality assurance body. It is an alien concept to install

such a body for basically every thinkable educational unit in a huge country. The ongoing accreditation and reaccreditation of thousands of schools could paralyse NAQAAE, given that currently it is not even clear which elements have to be included in the accreditations of a school (merely the academic realms or safety and infrastructural questions as well). Also not sufficiently discussed is the possible doubling of accreditation matters by NAQAAE and the parallel inspection by the relevant ministry, both aiming at funding from the same source for similar tasks.

...TOWARDS A STRATEGICALLY CLEAR ROADMAP

As a measure of last preparations for the Cairo Closing Conference in late July 2015, NAQAAE leadership presented a lengthy roadmap 2015–2020, redefining the most pressing short-term and long-term goals of the organisation. It was made very clear that after a period of reshuffle and strategic planning nearly all points, which also have been outlined in the past by the Twinning project experts, have been taken up and integrated in a vision of the things to come. NAQAAE seems to be on a straight path to success, given it can overcome its ongoing finance and resource problems which NAQAAE pledges to tackle urgently with a package of innovative approaches, such as cluster accreditations and accreditations of quality assurance centres at universities rather than trying to accredit the numerous faculties one by one. Challenges will be met with manpower and money saving solutions without watering down quality aspects. All in all, NAQAAE in conclusion seems to be on a promising track. Accordingly, the overall statement of the Closing Conference that NAQAAE is a success story is nothing but the truth.

...AND MUTUAL TRUST

On a personal note, I have enjoyed my weeks in Cairo immensely. From a rather measly start through rough times where nobody was able to tell which way Egypt as a country or NAQAAE as an institution were heading, the last stages of the project showed to be very fruitful and rewarding. Mutual trust between expert groups and our Egyptian counterparts built quickly and the travels of Egyptian experts both to Finland and Germany were much appreciated and praised. The ongoing work and the endurance of everyone involved together the dedication to overcome any difficulties and led to a successful project making an impact.

As a travelling STE in quite a number of different projects around the world, I can earnestly say that the cooperation, camaraderie and friendship between the Finnish and German experts have also been exemplary in this project. As to my knowledge in all Components and Activities, the Fins and Germans have worked smoothly together without a hint of a fallout or misunderstandings.

For the Legal Component, I have mainly worked with my highly esteemed colleague and friend Reijo Aholainen, the later RTA. We have discussed literature, law and all sorts of things, which I have likewise done with my much cherished colleague and friend Heikki K. Lyytinen.

When a professional project like 'Strengthening NAQAAE', on the one hand, leads to feasible results and, on the other hand, enriches the participants' lives across countries, languages, religions and beliefs, one can only be thankful to have been a part of it.

And I am.

A SUCCESS STORY

Youhansen Eid

When I joined NAQAAE (National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education) in June 2014, the Twinning Project was suffering from its second setback. The project was in dire status: there were more missions, activities and STE days than actual calendar days. Yet, and thanks to the support provided, the will, persistence and diligence of the team, which I am so proud to be a part of, the project was concluded and achieved most of its objectives.

Today, we can say that what we have witnessed during the span of the Twinning Project has been a success story. A story that has extended over two and a half years and has witnessed many stops and goes, and endured many upheavals. A story that has survived political, social and institutional change. The project has eventually concluded with quite a number of outputs, workshops, guidelines and manuals. Yet, what is most impressive about it all are not only the concrete outputs but rather the intangible values, experience, sharing good practices, friendship and long-term relationships as well as the outcomes and potential impact of the project, which I will discuss briefly.

THE PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS IN A NUTSHELL

The Project had three major components and each component has achieved its objectives and we have started to witness and foresee specific outcomes.

COMPONENT ONE: TO BUILD NAQAAE'S INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND CAPACITY.

“To strengthen the institutional and technical capacity of the NAQAAE ... in line with the relevant European best practices in standards, norms and processes in education.”

The outcomes have resulted in revisiting and developing our organisational and administrative structures. We have started adopting a new attitude in the assessment of our work. We are now more confident and reflective, and we started to assess and evaluate our processes with the ESG as our benchmark. There is a better allocation of human resources according to actual needs

with better delegation of responsibilities and authorities, with equivalent empowerment, thus creating the environment for better collaboration between departments

Furthermore, we have developed NAQAAE's Strategic Plan 2015–2020 and redefined our strategic objectives. This plan has been in action for quite some time now and many outputs have materialised. We are in the process of reviewing the efficiency of all the operational procedures and we have a consolidated plan to modify the accreditation and training procedures.

COMPONENT TWO: TO IMPROVE THE TECHNICAL CAPACITIES OF NAQAAE EXPERTS IN TERMS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION

This component targeted NAQAAE experts and human resources both internal and external. In essence, it targeted teamwork and partnership with stakeholders. Now there are better relations with stakeholders due their involvement in the Twinning project activities. This has created a great deal of stakeholder mobilisation, a more increased sense of ownership and teamwork. NAQAAE now considers its role as a partner in the process of Quality Assurance, and as an agent of change in educational development. Other outcomes have been, in the development of NAQAAE's expert knowledge and skills, reflected on the new developed model of accreditation standards (more focus employability and entrepreneurship) in addition to the great development in the area of e- and mobile learning as a mode for training NAQAAE's reviewers. We have adopted a more collaborative and critical review for the development of the training materials.

COMPONENT THREE: TO DEVELOP THE LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK OF NAQAAE

This component has helped NAQAAE develop expert knowledge about legal frameworks for Quality Assurance in Europe. As a result, we have acquired a better definition of legislative needs, one that is more flexible and empowering for NAQAAE to fulfil its objectives. One of the outcomes of this component was a new draft for NAQAAE Law amendment. More steps will be taken in the near future.

REFLECTIONS

Sharing experiences and learning from others has had a great impact on NAQAAE. We now have a mature, refined understanding of our vision and role. We can better define our needs and expectations. When NAQAAE applied for the project, it reflected on its “current” needs at the time. Starting almost two years later, the project was faced with the fact that some of the needs were already satisfied. In this respect, we have learnt that we need to develop the tools for forecasting future needs. We are now more capable of anticipating obstacles. We have learnt that we need to set flexible objectives and activities that can accommodate future changes. Other outcomes and further prospects for the project:

- More permissive environment for NAQAAE (wider stakeholder participation, political commitment, increased public awareness)
- Interlinking of the project with other projects NAQAAE is engaged in (e.g. The National Qualifications Framework, Qualifications for the Mediterranean project, and TVET II) aiming to achieve synergistic effects
- Strengthening of the relations between the administrative staff and the middle & higher executive personnel (co-participation in activities and study visit strengthened ownership and added a personal dimension to the relations)
- Development of a database of both international & domestic experts for future needs

In conclusion, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to such a team of great experts who have helped in the refinement of the work procedures by NAQAAE. This story of success is a two-way street; our relationships with our stakeholders and partners have strengthened. We now have deeply rooted relations with the European Commission, our Finnish and German partners and their respective organisations, the Ministries in Egypt, the Universities and respective faculties, School districts and the like. There is more understanding and acceptance of NAQAAE and its role as a partner.

In the next few years, it is expected that Egypt will witness a quantum leap in its education... We have been one of the building stones in this great endeavour.

ABBREVIATIONS

BC	Beneficiary Country
BMBF	Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Germany
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service, Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, Germany
EU	European Union
JAMK	Jyväskylän ammattikorkeakoulu, JAMK University of Applied Sciences, Finland
MS	EU Member State
NAQAAE	National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education, Egypt
PAO	Programme Administration Office
QA	Quality Assurance
RTA	Resident Twinning Advisor
STE	Short Term Expert
TOT	Training of Trainers
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
VET	Vocational Education and Training

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ABSTRACT

ABSTRACT

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Experiences in promoting Accreditation and Quality Assurance System

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This publication describes the project implemented in Egypt and funded through EU Twinning funding which developed the operations of the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Egypt (NAQAAE). Implemented in 2013–2015, the project was the first Twinning project in the education sector in Finland, and it was coordinated by the Teacher Education College of JAMK University of Applied Sciences.

The authors include experts from Finland, Germany and Egypt who worked in the project. In the articles, the authors describe from various viewpoints their experiences with the implementation of the project; content development work; challenges in project management; and the everyday incidents and fascination of international project cooperation.

Keywords: accreditation, best practices, development, education, Egypt, EU, quality assurance, Twinning

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The overall aim of the Egyptian Twinning project described here was to strengthen the institutional and technical capacity of the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE) in line with the relevant European best practices.

The soul of Twinning is, however, about cooperation between people. Accordingly, the project stood for strengthening partnership between experts and institutions in Egypt, Finland and Germany. It was not about replicating European systems but rather seeking the best practices of all and for all. Solving complex challenges always raises possibilities for everyone to learn more: about the content itself through theories and their manifold applications for diverse practices, but also about organisations and cultures besides international cooperation, collegiality, friendship and ourselves as persons and experts in a multidimensional global world. In the texts here, the authors tell about their experiences of all of these.

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