

Nomad Academy's summer/winter school 2015 -16

An Arab-Nordic Co-evolution Initiative

Proposal for cross-cultural and interdisciplinary workshops
with students from the Arabian Peninsula and the Nordic countries.

Executive summary

Believing that the answer to the ever more acute challenges of environmental degradation, climate change and resource depletion is to be found in cross-cultural collaboration, we, the Nomad Academy, propose to organize a cultural exchange program between the countries of the Arabian Peninsula and the Nordic countries.

Historically, nomadic lifestyles have evolved in response to harsh climatic conditions in both regions. Is it possible, that this shared background could serve as a source of inspiration in the face of contemporary, global challenges?

The program consists of a Summer School in Greenland in 2015 and a Winter School in the Arabian Peninsula in 2015-16. Each "school" is of one month duration with the participation of approximately one hundreds students and ten tutors from various institutions in these two regions and representing a number of different disciplines.

1. Project description

Title

“Migrating Cultures and Resilient Communities”

Hypothesis

Cultural migration may stimulate the exchange of ideas, knowledge and experiences that can help make local communities resilient to global challenges.

Objective

The objective is to enable students from various disciplines and with different cultural backgrounds to meet and interact in order to promote mutual understanding and new cross-cultural and interdisciplinary forms of collaboration; to develop professional networks and opportunities; and to contribute to the discussion of the future development of the two regions.

Format

The Summer School and Winter School will each be of one-month duration – one in Norden during the summer of 2015 and one in Arabia during the winter of 2015-16.

Each “school” will be kick-started by a two-day inspirational symposium with opportunities for social interaction. This will be followed by four weeks of collaborative and interdisciplinary workshops, which will include research and discussions of various topics and production of essays, reports, performances, project proposals, installations, documentaries etc. Each workshop will consist of approximately 20 students who will be guided by two tutors (one from an Arabic country and one from Nordic country).

The four-weeks workshops will also include excursions and various social activities. The results will be presented and evaluated at a one-day conference at the end of each “school” with invited special guests, critics and speakers.

Each “school” will be hosted by a local institution.

Communication

The outcome of the two “schools” will be communicated through an exhibition, a publication and a documentary, which will be produced in collaboration with regional and international media partners.

The results will also be published online (nomad-academy.dk)

Participants

About 100 students who will be selected from Arabic and Nordic partner institutions for each of the two “schools”. Each student will pay a fee of 1.000 EUR. In addition, there will be about 10 tutors and a small team of organizers.

Accommodation

The participants will be accommodated in youth hostels, camps (tents/igloos) and, if possible, privately.

Host institutions provide space for workshops and some equipment.

Organization

Organizer: Nomad Academy

Director: Henrik Valeur

Host institutions: The University of Greenland and (The American University of Sharjah)

Partner institutions: Schools of architecture, art, film, literature and music as well as faculties of humanities and natural science in the Arabian Peninsula and the Nordic countries (at least one institution from each country). The Nordic Institution in Greenland.

2. Background

The Arabian Peninsula and the Nordic countries cover about the same amount of land area, which include some densely populated areas, larger and more sparsely populated areas, and vast uninhabited areas.

Historically, the people of these two regions adapted to some specific environmental and climatic conditions and in so doing developed some cultural characteristics that came to define the people living there.

The harsh climate and environment made traditional agriculture difficult and fostered tribal-based societies and nomadic lifestyles with people depending on subsistent farming, fishing, hunting and herding, extensive trading and conquering/plundering.

While some people maintain these lifestyles (the Bedouins, the Eskimos and the Sami people) others have experienced extreme lifestyle changes in the transition from traditional to modern societies and from cultures of scarcity to cultures of abundance.

Traditional means to survive in harsh conditions have largely been replaced by modern technologies, which make life more comfortable but which may also adversely affect the environment, the climate and the resources.

As the challenges of environmental degradation, climate change and resource depletion become ever more acute, people may learn from each other and from their own past about how to live in harmony, rather than in conflict, with nature - even if they live in modern urban settings.

Another common characteristic between Arabia and Norden is the migration of people into, out of and between these two regions. Those people - migrant workers, refugees, expats etc. who might be viewed as modern day nomads - bring different cultures with them.

It is believed that understanding one's own culture is a precondition for understanding and appreciating other cultures and therefore for a successful integration of people with different cultural backgrounds.

This may be another reason to meet and learn from each other.

It is hoped that this meeting of modern day nomads may contribute to the creation of culturally vibrant and inclusive communities that are also more resilient to environmental and climatic challenges.

"As we become more and more interconnected and interdependent, human development is no longer a matter of the evolution of individual groups of people but rather a matter of the co-evolution of all people". Henrik Valeur, 2014. About

Nomad Academy

Nomad Academy is the result of an agreement forged in 2001 pertaining to an educationally related cultural exchange between the United Arab Emirate of Sharjah and The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen.

Today, it is an international network of institutions and individuals, which includes artists, architects, poets and scholars from Arabia, Norden and the rest of the world.

The aim of Nomad Academy is to contribute to the solution of important global problems of our times by establishing meaningful interactions and cross-cultural collaborations based on mutual respect and equal footing.

Nomad Academy is based on a pragmatic approach with a strong focus on art as a special form of experience and tool in this context.

It was initiated through a meeting in 1999 between the visual artists Dorte Dahlin and Abdul Raheem Salem and developed in cooperation with Else Marie Bukdahl, former rector of The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts and the Sharjah Department of Information & Culture, UAE.

For more information, see: www.nomad-academy.dk

Henrik Valeur

Henrik Valeur is a Danish-born architect-urbanist.

He is the founder and creative director of UiD, a networking urban consultancy and a pioneer of participatory and collaborative design and planning. As the curator of the Danish contribution to the Architecture Biennale in Venice 2006, he conceived and orchestrated "CO-EVOLUTION: Danish/Chinese Collaboration on Sustainable Urban Development in China", which was awarded the Golden Lion for Best National Pavilion.

"We salute the creativity, intelligence, and generosity of the Danish pavilion." The Jury of the Venice Biennale, 2006

Henrik Valeur has served as an organizer, moderator and speaker at numerous international conferences, as a juror on several international architecture competitions and as a critic and lecturer at various universities.

He is the author of "India: the Urban Transition – a Case Study of Development Urbanism", 2014

For more information, see: www.henrikvaleur.dk