

Final Report: Student Research Stay at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

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My main motivation to do this research stay at HUJI was based on the fact that this scholarship would be a great opportunity to study in a country which is quite different from Germany regarding the cultural and political background. I expected to gain new perspectives for my research approach and to learn new aspects about how to tackle a scientific problem. I was especially interested in environmental justice aspects and wanted to know in what way this concept is also discussed in Israeli universities and how they use it.

In the very beginning I planned to do a comparative research project regarding environmental justice in Israel and Germany. Therefore, I planned to compare the probable environmental injustice case of the Bedouins in the Negev (Hebrew) or Naqab (Arab), a desert in the southern part of Israel with areas in Germany where Nuclear Power Plants are shut down or where an (interim) Nuclear Waste Storage (e.g. Gorleben) is located. At these sites, I planned to analyze possible effects of marginalization on the community and compare it to the Bedouins' case. This Israeli case was recommended by my main contact person at the HUJI, Prof. Eran Feitelson. The Bedouins case is interesting, because this minority has to deal with missing infrastructure for electricity, water and waste management as well as social services like education and health. Exposure to air and water pollution, military zones and hazardous industrial facilities already show up an asymmetrical distribution in comparison to Jewish settlements and cities in the Southern district. Regarding deeper laying structures we have to deal with social-spatial aspects of non-recognition, land conflicts and a strong value laden spatial planning. Until today 34 of 45 Bedouin villages have a status of unrecognition. But even if the state recognizes a village, there is still the question in how far this improves the life of the inhabitants.

It soon became obvious that a direct comparison would not be scientifically fruitful, as there are so many (cultural) differences and different contextual backgrounds of the German and the Israeli case. For that reason, I adapted the project and decided to focus on the Bedouins and examine the case in depth regarding the situation of this minority, applying environmental justice theory as well as spatial theories.

The research turned out to be very challenging. As I don't speak Hebrew and therefore haven't been able to read the official documents regarding the development in the Negev like laws, planning policy, reports, etc. I was dependent upon expert interviews. Unfortunately, it was hard to get in touch with the necessary people. Persons from NGOs were more easily available for an interview but especially employees from governmental bodies/authorities, which are in charge of the development in the Negev were harder to win for an interview and I have to try to get contact to those authorities during a second field trip in November again.

During my research, I met several very interesting people. I went to Be'er Sheva, the capital city of the Negev to talk to Prof. Avinoam Meir from the Ben Gurion University of the Negev. This University is working highly inter-disciplinary and is specialized regarding desert studies. It plays a central role in the development of industry, agriculture and education in the Negev. Prof. Meir dealt with the Bedouins' case for decades and was a very valuable source to get to know more about the history of the Bedouins and their cultural development from semi-nomadic lifestyle to settlement.

Additionally, in Be'er Sheva I met Haia Noach, the founder of the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality. This is an NGO that advocates for the Bedouins and helps them getting basic services in the recognized and unrecognized villages.

Furthermore, I interviewed Yeele Raanan, head of the regional council for unrecognized villages. This represents a very interesting institution, because as the unrecognized villages have no official or legal representation this body was founded in 1997 to organize those villages in an (inofficial) regional council.

The most important person for me to understand the Israeli spatial planning was Nili Baruch, a planner who is working for an NGO called Bimkom - planners for human rights. She helped me to understand the planning policy in Israel, the different planning levels, authorities and procedures as well as the links to the situation of the Bedouins.

The case turned out to be complex, because many different governmental bodies are involved in the Bedouins' case, like the Ministry for Agriculture and Rural Development that has a special unit called "Authority for the Regularization of Bedouin villages in the Negev" or rather "Administration for the

Coordination of Bedouin Affairs”. Regarding spatial planning in the Negev the Ministry of Finance is in charge now (just a few years ago it was the Ministry of Interior).

I had efficient meetings with Prof. Feitelson of the Hebrew University. He gave me new impulses for my work and provided helpful advice. On top of that, I got new perspectives on how to deal with a scientific problem. It was interesting to talk with him about environmental justice as he already had dealt with that concept in previous projects. He sharpened my thinking about (environmental) justice, the role the dimension of time plays, how to differentiate between injustice and inequality and how to integrate this in a conceptual framework. My research project turned out to be highly instructive for future research projects regarding organization and preparation.

Unfortunately, when I arrived in the mid of June most classes were over already, but I was able to attend one 5 days course about “Ethics, Technology and the Environment” of Prof. Armin Grunwald from ITAS at Karlsruhe and a critical very informative single lecture about the Israeli-Palestinian E-waste system by Yaakov Garb. Those experiences gave me the impression that the students at HUJI learn to discuss and also enjoy discussing. Regarding the subject of sustainability which was also a topic of the course of Prof. Grunwald, I got the impression that in this particular course even amongst the environmental science students the knowledge about this guiding principle, its different conceptions and its usage in different (political) contexts was not really profound. They were really interested in it though and we had good discussions.

After that, there were no more classes which was problematic from several points of view: I couldn’t get in touch with students and make new acquaintances, which was from a social perspective not comfortable. The main problem was that I didn’t learn a lot regarding sustainability or environmental and political science and also didn’t get any impression how and what they are teaching and discussing at HUJI, e.g. what discourses and theories they are following in the research field of environmental policy and planning. At this point I would have wanted and expected more support and a better communication in benefit of the scholars.

In total, I mostly benefited from my interviews with the experts, the meetings with Prof. Feitelson and the talks with my very friendly and supportive flat mates in the student village. They really were interested to talk to me about the Bedouins’ case, to make their perspectives clear, and to help me getting in touch with interview partners.

Regarding future research projects I cannot recommend working on such a project as a single person. For a project like that, a more or less inter-disciplinary team seems to be necessary as well as some contact people and gatekeepers at the universities or institutions you’re working with. Additionally,

the language barrier shouldn't be underestimated. A translator or good language skills are absolutely necessary to successfully work with locals (like Bedouins who mostly only speak Arabic, and a few also speak Hebrew) as well as with local authorities whose representatives tend to also have just little English language skills.

Nevertheless, it was a fruitful experience for me as a young researcher and it made me not just more aware of critical factors, that need to be considered in the preparation for such a research project but also of my own needs to make a research successful.