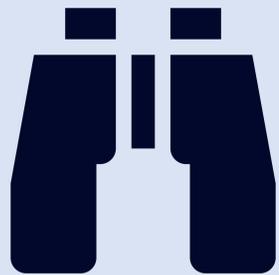


Interdisciplinary Studies of the Middle East (ISME)

How the interconnection of internationalisation, interdisciplinarity, and digitalisation may promote attractive study programmes

retrospective



Internationalisation of HE as a reason for developing an area studies programme taught in English

What means “internationalization”?
Simply English as language of instruction? No!

The master’s programme ISME was introduced in accordance with the idea of “internationalising” the university. Of course, English as the language of instruction opens up a global group of interested students, which may otherwise not be served by master's programmes taught in German, since German as a language of study may be an asset in terms of the job market but it is also a linguistic challenge. However, programmes taught in English aren't automatically more “international” than those taught in German!

Doesn't the “internationality” of a course of study come with its integration of global and intercultural perspectives into the curriculum – and not with only with the language of instruction?

Area Studies means “international” and interdisciplinarity diversifies perspectives

As a combination of six area studies disciplines (Arabic Studies, Iranian Studies, Islamic Studies, Jewish Studies, Semitic Studies, Turkic Studies), all of which deal with the Middle East from the perspective of cultural studies, transnationality is inherent in ISME.

In addition, ISME has a decidedly interdisciplinary orientation, bringing together students with different area studies backgrounds and specialist knowledge, which can result not only from a bachelor’s degree but also from professional experience, in order to jointly explore the multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-lingual space of the Middle East from different perspectives and thus to broaden the international perspective.

Distance learning as a makeshift solution ...

For programmes with a more regional outreach area, on-campus studies in the winter semester may still be an option, with blended learning as a potential ideal.

But what about programmes like ISME whose prospective students have mostly applied from abroad?

... or as imperative?

Travel restrictions and delayed visa processes make it impossible for some international students to get into the country let alone to the campus. Since at least half of all ISME’s students come from abroad, teaching ISME from a distance in winter 2020/2021 will give these students the opportunity to study at all – so distance learning with digital tools is essential.

A pandemic as an incentive to move into virtual space with all its potential flexibility

prospective



thought experiment



But what about funding for teaching and study endeavours?!

An online-only area studies programme as a multiplier for global (virtual) mobility

Facilitating intercultural experiences

Intercultural competences are a career factor. With ISME, students experience the interweaving of six disciplines in their exploration of neighbouring and historically and culturally intertwined regions of the Middle East and their place in global culture throughout the millennia. At best, students pursue their studies in the Middle East or at another HEI where the Middle East is being researched.

If ISME was an online-only programme, it may contribute to a situation where more students opt to getting to know the Middle East directly on site, as online courses may be studied more flexibly.

Digitalisation and internationalisation are mutually dependent

ISME’s team of lecturers is culturally diverse and internationally experienced in teaching and research. Being an online-only programme would expand the possibilities to internationalise the curriculum, e.g., by integrating lectures by guest scholars from abroad, which – in turn – would foster international learning experiences (for the students) and teaching experiences (for the lecturers).

However, while the interdisciplinarity of area studies and internationality go hand in hand, internationalisation of HEI has yet to strategically make the digital turn – especially when it comes to teaching and study endeavours being as equally important as research in terms of funding.