

Symposium exploring mobility in the Arab World and around the Mediterranean

1 – 2 June 2011

Organized by

The Arab Education Forum – Safar program and the Roberto Cimetta Fund

In cooperation with Istikshaf program partners

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Over the span of two days, more than 45 participants from 8 Arab and 11 European countries met to discuss concepts relating to mobility around the Mediterranean reflecting diverse experiences, both personal and collective, as well as research that has been conducted to explore the various meanings, obstacles, benefits, and importance of artistic mobility, and how it can be promoted as a tradition amongst youth. In their opening speech, the AEF, on behalf of the *Istikshaf* partners, welcomed the participants to Amman, a city that has always been welcoming to travelers and immigrants alike, from the region and the world at large. This Symposium was scheduled for February 2011 in Alexandria, Egypt, but the latter city had a rendezvous with a revolution, hence the uprising of the Egyptian people against injustice and oppression had a sweet and sour taste: sweet because we could feel the distinct hope and pride in the eyes of fellow Egyptians, just like the people of Tunis gave us a sense of pride a few days before. Both their movements proved to us and to the whole world the veracity of our conviction that Arabs, despite the negative press we get from all the “human development reports”, do have all it takes to lead a decent life: dignity, will, and solidarity. The bitter taste was a result of the need to postpone the meeting. However, and even though the symposium itself was itinerant in its own way, we ultimately set sail in Amman. All the participants were delighted to finally meet friends and acquaintances whom they had mostly known through email or through their writings. We all discovered first hand that at the end of the day, this is what travel is all about: not the bag or the plane or train or car or crossing borders, but the actual meeting of life-long friends, the ones we know and the ones we haven’t met yet.

Between the different sessions exploring research on mobility; artists’ experience of travel; an in-depth dialogue and exploration of travel literature; and a questioning of mobility operators, participants travelled in the different countries and experiences which were mutually enriching, and particularly underscored the positive impact of travel and mobility on creativity, learning, and life.

As to the most important recommendations and outcomes of the Symposium, they were as follows:

- Develop partnerships between NGOs concerned with mobility and local and regional authorities as well as organizations for Arab and European cities.
- Cultivate Arab funding for the mobility of Arab artists and social entrepreneurs.
- Advance initiatives pertaining to travel literature.
- Organize a joint trip on the “path of wisdom”.
- Develop mechanisms to measure community impact of mobility operators.
- Convene similar important meetings which encourage communication across borders and disciplines.

The full papers presented at the Symposium will be published in electronic format in both Arabic and English on the Safar fund/ *Istikshaf* website: www.safarfund.org.