Globetrotting scientists

Are the red flag as a PhD candidate in the junior research group “Cascade Use” I am fortunate because we maintain many international contacts in countries like China, Canada and Chile. And in July I traveled to South Africa, where I met old and new contacts.

The researchers of the “Cascade Use” group are studying processes that are going to end at the end of a vehicle’s life cycle in order to prolong the use of the materials it is made of as much as possible. The goal is to reduce the consumption of primary raw materials and the environmental damage this entails. talk about the success of previous expeditions, we were able to perform all stated tasks according to plan. We had already visited South Africa before we left on sabbatical, but to travel to Port Elizabeth with the family and a project at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) something very special. For us, the long-term partnership between Oldenburg University and the NMMU was an opportunity to spend time abroad. Both the host university NMMU and the University of Johannesburg (UJ) were created by merging once white-dominated research universities with the more vocational Technical and Institutions of the once all-black Vista University. This type of university differs from the former advanced universities” of Stellenbosch, Witwatersrand and the University of Cape Town (UCT) not only as a result of integrating different institutions but because the students there mostly have poor school education. All South African universities are called upon to play an active role in society and to act as motors of regional development – a task which presents an exceptional challenge for the NMMU, located in one of South Africa’s poorest provinces with 36 percent unemployment (2011). What is interesting about these projects for the South Africans is above all the development and implementation of interdisciplinary structures and working methods in Oldenburg and the wide-ranging experience in teacher training, business informatics, renewable energies and sustainability research.
Saudi Arabia: Fitting in prayers

After giving a keynote at a conference in Brazil the director of the Department of Educational Computing and Online Learning at the King Saud University asked me whether I would like to come to his university in Riyadh as a visiting scholar.

Aside from the difficult situation for women in Saudi Arabia, the story of blogger Raif Badawi was all over the news at that time, after he was condemned to 1000 lashes for his blog posts criticising strict interpretations of Islam. But I decided to take up the invitation in spite of all this in order to experience Saudi Arabia first hand. It’s not so easy to travel around the country as it does not issue tourist visas.

I spent two weeks in Riyadh during which I gave a workshop for Dubai scientists (men only at King Saud University) who want to integrate digital media into their teaching. The path to becoming a professor is obviously highly selective and heavily influenced by the American system. All colleagues in the department attained their PhDs in the US on full scholarships from the Saudi Ministry for Higher Education.

I also gave a keynote at the International Conference on E-Learning and Distance Education organised by the Saudi Ministry for Higher Education. It is incredible how much money is being invested in digitising university teaching. By our standards, utterly unthinkable. The conference took place in a luxury hotel the likes of which I will probably never set foot in ever again.

I had given a workshop for female professors, but he was not allowed to be in the same room with them and had to sit in front of a video camera next door. He might as well have stayed in Canada doing a video-conference.

In all, my trip to Saudi Arabia was an unforgettable experience but also a big success. So my trip was not only an amazing and Overrated and yet everyone has their own opinions. Appearances are not commended for its people. Iceland has a strong influence on its inhabitants. Appearances are not clearly pronounced, many pleasant encounters and incredible landscapes everywhere you look. I travelled to Iceland for research; I returned captivated by its landscape and the openness of its people.

What I was actually doing was collecting marine sediments for my DFG-financed research on globally distributed microbial populations. The aim of the project is to collect data on the molecular diversity of cyanobacteria in the North Sea tidal flats and to compare these with their distribution in ecologically similar but geographically distant locations. “Is everything everywhere and nature selects?” This question was posed by Martinus Willem Beijerinck (1851-1931), a Dutch microbiologist in the 19th century. Until now marine benthic cyanobacteria had not been found in arctic regions.

Iceland has a strong influence on its inhabitants. Appearances are not overrated and yet everyone has their own style. Icelanders attach great importance to being able to make their own decisions. This is particularly noticeable even when it comes to tourist attractions. Natural wonders are not, as they are in Germany, plastered with warning signs. For example, at the entrance to hot springs there is a sign simply stating: Water temperatures may reach 100°C. And it is left to the individual to decide whether to dip in a finger to see if the water really is that hot.

And cyanobacteria! In my samples, analysed by PhD student Janina Vogt, there were Cyanobacteria clearly present! So my trip was not only an amazing experience but also a big success. Prof. Dr. Katarzyna Palinska

Quo Vadis, Belarus?

It is due to be re-erected in front of the infamous Lubyanka, the KGB headquarters in Moscow; in Minsk it is still standing today. I refer to the monument to Felix Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the Cheka, or Soviet secret police, who was born in Belarus to aristocratic Polish parentage. “Iron Felix”, who organised the Red Terror in the early Soviet times, and myself are looking at the KGB headquarters in the centre of Minsk – Belarus retained the Soviet abbreviation KGB (in Russia it is now called the FSB). The photo was taken on my last research trip to study the linguistic situation in Belarus and Ukraine. While Dzerzhinsky and Stalin are undergoing a renaissance in Russia thanks to former KGB officer Putin’s traditionalist politics, the West hopes that the ‘Minsk Protocol’ will prevent any further escalation of the Ukraine crisis. This is an opportunity for the Belarusian President Lukashenko to present himself as a mediator between Russia and Ukraine, and the West. Lukashenko, whose country is economically dependent on Russia, has famously refused to adopt a clearly pro-Russian stance in the Ukraine conflict, stating instead: “Everyone must respect our sovereignty and our independence. This must be remembered. And we will not cede our territory to anyone.”

The Kremlin justified its actions in both the annexation of Crimea and the Donbass conflict saying that was acting in the interests of the Russians, or Russian-speakers, who were supposedly either under threat or being perse-