

## Economic Research on the Arab World and the Middle East – A Neglected Field of Study in Germany

Steffen Wippel

The article gives an overview of the development of contemporary research on Middle Eastern and North African economies in Germany. It includes the most important institutions and central research topics and approaches, underlining that this field is, in fact, multidisciplinary. The article also points out some of its most salient structural, conceptual, and methodological problems. Referring to research on regionalization processes, the author advocates an open, transregional and transdisciplinary approach closely based on empirical findings.

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Public and academic interest in the broader Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, and especially in the Arab world, has always surged in conjunction with dramatic events like wars, assaults, and revolutions, which have been increasingly associated with religious strife and extremism. At the same time, socio-economic causes, needs for economic reforms, economic crises, and, importantly, the security of oil supplies have attracted increased attention. Parallel to that, in 2013, Germany traded goods worth 90 billion euros with MENA countries (including Turkey, Iran, and Israel), including 50 billion with Arab League members; depending on the definitions of regions, exports

in particular had approximately doubled to 35 and 62 billion respectively over the previous ten years (calculations based on the Statistisches Bundesamt). The share contributed by these economies in total German exports was 3% and 6%, respectively, and nearly 7% to 13% if we exclude intra-European Union (EU) trade.

However, despite great individual efforts, continuous research that also takes the social complexity of economic life into consideration has developed only moderately in the German academic landscape. Historical and institutional reasons, as well as epistemic and methodological ones, have contributed to this sustained negligence on the part of the disciplines involved, mainly economics, and responsible authorities. To begin with, the following article will explore the long-term development of German academic economic research on the MENA region, and the Arab world in particular, before it turns to major research topics and approaches, as well as to some of the salient structural and conceptual problems.<sup>1</sup> Finally, it expounds the problems of Middle Eastern economics as an area study and provides some guidance for opening up the regional and disciplinary container. This problematic will be substantiated with research on “regionalization”, which constitutes a central issue in Middle Eastern economics.

In conjunction with this concern, this paper's title and first paragraph already show that a clear definition is quite difficult and point to the fuzzy use of terms to designate the region on which research is done (see more below). Yet, designations used by most centers and courses of studies refer to "the Middle East" (or sometimes still *Vorderer Orient* in German), while in practice they focus predominantly on (parts of) the Arab world. Corresponding to these varying terms in institutional practice, in the following the terms "Middle Eastern" (including North Africa), "Arab", and (rarely) "Oriental" will mostly be used interchangeably.<sup>2</sup>

### **A Late Start for Research in Contemporary Middle Eastern Economies**

Studies with a focus on language, religion, and literature in the Arab and Muslim world have a longstanding tradition in Germany. In the German Empire, this research was closely linked to then current colonial policy. Institutes for Oriental and Colonial Studies were established to provide national institutions with the necessary information about the geography, economy, and culture of non-European areas (Wissenschaftsrat; Weiss; Rang). Thus, following Wirth, in the early twentieth century, Orientalists already considered it a matter of course to work on con-

temporary subjects, including issues of economy and social structure, whereas in the emerging disciplines of sociology and national economy only a few researchers contributed to the understanding of Middle Eastern societies.

In the aftermath of World War II, Oriental Studies in Western Germany once again confined itself primarily to historical, philological, religious, and literary studies. The little economic research that was done on the region concentrated mostly on *non-Arab* MENA countries (like Turkey and Iran). Only in the late 1960s and early 1970s did major events—such as the Arab-Israeli wars and the oil crisis—trigger increased interest in contemporary regional expertise and research. Notably, a 1972 memorandum from the *Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft* showed Orientalists' readiness to open up their research to the interdisciplinary study of modern Muslim societies (Wirth; Roemer).<sup>3</sup> In addition to Fritz Steppat, Professor for Islamic Studies at *Freie Universität* (FU) Berlin (Scheffler, "Fritz Steppat"), Eugen Wirth, Professor of Geography at the University of Erlangen, also showed a great concern for contemporary social and economic transformations of the Middle East and was a major pioneer of modern Middle Eastern Studies (Bahadır).

Decisive contributions to such a reorientation came in the 1970s from the independent Volkswagen Foundation, which initiated and financed several reports, workshops, and programs on research on the region (Büren; Wirth; Steppat; Rudolph). In particular, it established professorships in Middle Eastern Politics and Economics at two German universities in the early 1980s. The economic professorships at the FU Berlin and at Erlangen were filled by Dieter Weiss in 1980 (see also Büttner and Weiss) and by Şefik Alp Bahadır in 1984, respectively.<sup>4</sup> Both were integrated in favorable interdisciplinary institutional frameworks which, at that time, made both universities comprehensive centers for contemporary Middle Eastern research.

Yet, despite the fact that the Middle East is a considerable trade and investment partner, these two universities remained the only places in Western Germany that had permanently institutionalized professorships for economics with such a regional specialization. In addition, motivated by personal interest, Volker Nienhaus, Professor for Political Economy and from 1985 to 2004 also Director of the interdisciplinary Institute of Development Research and Development Policy at *Ruhr-Universität Bochum*, made important contributions to the study of the economy of the Arab and

Islamic world since the 1980s; and in Trier, El-Shagi El-Shagi, Professor for Economics, sporadically published on Arab countries. In the German Democratic Republic, research on the modern Middle East developed at least one decade earlier than in the West (Hafez; Preißler and Kinitz). In the early 1960s, departments for history, economics, and state and law were launched at the Institute for Oriental Studies at the University of Leipzig. In the course of an academic reorganization in 1968, Leipzig became the only East German university with a profile in comprehensive modern Middle Eastern studies and its Oriental Institute was integrated into the local Section for African and Middle Eastern Studies. In the ensuing decade, the state's interest in expanding trade relations with oil-producing countries in the Middle East led to an explicit research orientation toward economic issues. The main protagonist of this field was Günter Barthel, Professor for the Economy of North African and Middle Eastern Countries from 1975 onwards. In the 1980s, the center of research partly shifted from Leipzig to the Berlin Academy of Sciences, where research on developing countries had been undertaken since the late 1960s and which was much more independent from the requirements of daily politics.

### **Developments in the University Landscape Since the 1990s**

Since the late 1990s there has been a renewed interest in promoting regional studies in Germany (e.g. Wissenschaftsrat).<sup>5</sup> In consequence, a new survey edited by Rudolph recommended a further fostering of social and cultural research on the Muslim world, including regionally oriented work in the "big" disciplines. The interdisciplinary Institute for Oriental Studies at Leipzig University had already been re-established after German unification. After Barthel retired in 1996, Jörg Gertel, a geographer, took over the Professorship for the Economy and the Social Geography of the Arab World in 1999. In contrast, when Weiss' post ended in 2001, the FU Berlin was ready to liquidate his department under the pressure of rigorous savings measures (Büttner and Weiss). That left Bahadır with the only full professorship in Germany devoted exclusively to the economy of Middle Eastern countries. In effect, in 2009 he succeeded in establishing the economy-oriented Center for Iraq Studies at Erlangen University. In 2006, pushed by Nienhaus, its then-President, the University of Marburg launched the interdisciplinary Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies (CNMS) leading to a junior professorship for Economics at the center. From 2009 to 2012, another junior profes-

sorship for Political Economy was attached to the Department of Middle Eastern Politics at the FU Berlin. In 2013 and 2014, courses of study with the possibility of a full or partial specialization in Middle Eastern and Arab Economy existed on the bachelor or master levels in Marburg, Erlangen, Tübingen, and Leipzig. However, with the relocation of the specific post to the Institute of Geography in summer 2014, the Oriental Institute in Leipzig is at risk of losing this long-established speciality.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, the post of Bahadır, who retired the same year, has been advertised as open once more.

In addition, a few Universities of Applied Sciences offer business studies with a specialization in the Arab world, such as the *Hochschule Bremen*—represented by Alexander Flores since 1995, with the post being taken over by Juliane Brach later in 2014—and the private *Munich Business School*. At Heilbronn, Elias Jammal, Professor in the Department of International Management, has been working on intercultural communication with a focus on Arab countries since 1998.<sup>7</sup> Ulrich Wurzel is a Professor for International and Development Economics at the University for Technology and Economics in Berlin who also shows a genuine interest in the economic problems of this region.

Occasionally, mainstream economists also dabble in the field of Middle Eastern economics (cf. below). But in the university landscape, it is primarily researchers from other disciplines, in particular in various faculties of Geography and Political Science, who show an explicit interest in economic matters of the Middle East that is often missing among economists. In Political Science, the Department for Middle East and Comparative Politics at Tübingen, chaired in sequence by Peter Pawelka and Oliver Schlumberger, has a renowned specialization in the theory of the rentier state and economy, with disciples now found in a wide range of institutions. In Geography, Eugen Wirth too, inspired a considerable number of scholars to engage in the field of Middle Eastern social and economic research who were later appointed as professors at several German universities. They in turn have encouraged a subsequent generation of geographers to work on the region.<sup>8</sup>

#### Research Outside Universities

In the academic landscape outside the universities, the large, independent, mostly policy-oriented German institutes for economic research only occasionally study developments in the Middle East and North Africa (Wurzel 4-5).<sup>9</sup> Yet, in the field of development politics, researchers

at the German Institute for Development Research in Bonn have regularly published on Middle Eastern-related issues. Again, research on Middle Eastern economies is also done at institutions that do not have a predominant focus on economics, but are mostly oriented toward the non-Western world. This was the case, first, with the German Orient Institute in Hamburg, established in 1960 with support from the business-oriented German Near and Middle East Association. In 2006, it was re-institutionalized as the Institute for Middle Eastern Studies at the German Institute of Global and Area Studies where it cooperates with other regionally specialized departments on several cross-regional axes. However, the institute has a strong focus on politics and to a large extent serves public information. In 1996 the *Zentrum Moderner Orient* in Berlin was established as another institution with a transregional focus on the Middle East, Africa, and large parts of Asia. But with its predominance of historians and anthropologists, only a very few fellows with a pronounced economic background have worked there.

Other institutions that conduct research on developing countries, such as the Center for Development Research in Bonn, and that give policy advice on international politics, such as the *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik* in Berlin, also extend

their activities to the Middle East, but cover specific economic topics often unsystematically or on an individual basis. German academic institutions abroad, such as the Orient Institute in Beirut, founded in 1961, and German universities in the Middle East that have been established since 2003, too display virtually no specific interest in economic issues in their host region. It is thus very important to point out that economic research on the MENA region in academia consists mostly of non-institutionalized (funded and non-funded) research activities: many researchers are doing continuous work on Middle Eastern *and* economy-related issues only on the basis of their own initiative. Outside academia, a broad political spectrum of German political foundations for example, have published a considerable number of papers on socio-economic issues, often from an applied and engaged research perspective.

#### Research Topics: Changing Fashions and Continuous Themes

According to Wurzel, who also gives a comprehensive literature survey, research on Middle Eastern economic issues shows changing fashions as well as some recurrent topics.<sup>10</sup> Without being comprehensive, in the 1950s and 1960s, the field was dominated by a universalist moderniza-

tion discourse. In the 1970s, the oil problem for Western economies had become a central question. In the subsequent decade, interest shifted to effects of rents on oil-rich countries and blockages to their internal development. Studies of cultural factors of development were emerging and, among other things, “Islamic economics” started to find considerable interest which was, perhaps, along with rentier theory the most region-specific topic and attracted much interdisciplinary attention. Parallel to that, the need for economic reform and the consequences of current stabilization and adjustment programs became increasingly important. With the demise of the communist command economies, some comparative studies of system transformation also materialized; simultaneously, expectations regarding the beginning of the Middle East peace process became an emerging topic. Disillusion about substantial structural reforms also led to research on the role of political authoritarianism with some newer publications (see for e.g. Roll) paying explicit attention to the crucial and changing roles of political and economic elites. Several recent studies included the economic catalysts of the more recent “revolutions” in the Arab world, as well their potential consequences for future economic policy (e.g. Zorob, “Zusammenbruch”).

Beyond these themes triggered by ongoing evolutions and events, other themes have emerged that have ongoing importance such as tourism, labor migration, and water scarcity. Issues such as trade liberalization, innovation strategies, technology transfer, and, finally, the challenges of globalization arrived later. Notably, regional economic cooperation has been a central and constant topic for over three decades. Sector studies, evaluation of cooperation projects, and surveys of developmental prospects, in particular, have often been part of consultancy activities. In the Arab world, research has a clear focus on Egypt, along with Syria and on the region as a *whole*, whereas the Maghreb countries are still of minor concern.<sup>11</sup> With the advancement of the Arab Gulf states, more critical assessments of their success emerged in the 2000s, including of the impacts of the recent economic crises (e.g. Rohde).

#### **Theories and Methodologies: Caught between the Disciplines**

A major problem is the relation among researchers working on Middle Eastern economies, conventional economics, and other social science disciplines (Wurzel 20-27; Wippel, “Wirtschaft” 14-17). In contrast to other academic disciplines that deal with social, cultural, political, and eco-

nomic aspects of human life, mainstream economics is almost completely constrained by neo-classical orthodoxy. Since the late 18th century, economics increasingly separated from geography (Ritter 1-21) and later from sociology; the German tradition of comprehensive *Staatswissenschaften* (political economy including law and administration) had by the mid-twentieth century largely been abandoned (Drechsler).<sup>12</sup> With the pretense of formulating universal laws and a tendency to quantitative modeling under heroic assumptions, social and historical contexts have largely been eliminated from the analysis. Until the recent crises, economics thereby seemed the discipline most reluctant to pick up poststructuralist considerations, to take part in ongoing “cultural turns” (Bachmann-Medick), and to start critical self-reflection about its own epistemological presuppositions.

In contrast, it is noteworthy that those German researchers with an economic background who rather continuously work on Middle Eastern economies often do not adhere to neo-classical mainstream economics, but to other research traditions. As Wurzel explained, they either refer to non-orthodox theoretical strands of economics or to conceptual backgrounds originating in other social sciences or in cultural studies (20-22). Their approaches

are mostly pragmatic, eclectic, and multifaceted and include social and political processes, institutional arrangements, and socio-cultural value systems. With the theory of rents, even a region-specific approach has (re-)emerged, which was then applied to other parts of the world.

Even if they do not on principle exclude the processing of statistical data, these scholars are aware of the limited informational value of statistics, particularly for the countries under scrutiny.<sup>13</sup> There is a preference for qualitative research based on substantial regional knowledge and field research (for the FU, Büttner and Weiss; Trenk and Weiss). But researchers with an economics background still rarely relate to more postmodern theories, question established presentations and categories, or analyze texts and discourses. As already highlighted, due to the very limited openness of economics to regional and transdisciplinarily embedded studies, it is very often—or even mostly—non-economists, notably scholars in political science and geography, but to a certain extent also in anthropology and Islamic studies (e.g. Ebert and Thießen on Islamic finance), more often interested in historical and legal aspects, who work on economic issues in the MENA region and have a wider range of dimensions in view.

### **Substantial Structural and Practical Problems**

This distance from mainstream economics and the interdisciplinary positioning of research on Middle Eastern economics entail a range of institutional and individual problems (for details see, once again, Wurzel). Economics, in particular, but also specifically German social research, still exhibits boundaries less permeable to trans- and post-disciplinary research than do many other disciplines and countries. Among economists in particular, a regional specialization is regularly considered “peripheral” and “exotic”. The understanding for extended field research is rarely guaranteed. In general, area studies have for a time been discredited because of problems such as the danger of essentializing and containerizing world regions and the loss of contact with developments in mother disciplines (cf. below).<sup>14</sup> But the integration of new professorships into faculties of Economics hardly seems favorable either, when candidates are expected, first, to be firm in quantitative modeling and orthodox theory.

The closure and estrangement of orthodox economics, however, seems mirrored to a certain extent by the reservations of social and cultural scientists toward obviously “hard” economics and its restricted approach to social phenomena, but also,

in a more general manner, toward macro-perspectives and the use of quantitative data. In fact, even open-minded economists have to struggle with at least a *de facto* triple qualification that is economic, regional (and often multilingual), and transdisciplinary. This issue is also reflected in the task descriptions of centers for area studies and in calls for applications for research programs, which rarely explicitly mention economics. Likewise, current graduate schools, such as the prominent Berlin Graduate School for Muslim Cultures and Societies, either include very few economists or do not explicitly mention the economy as a research area,<sup>15</sup> whereas the current economic PhD program at Erlangen concentrates on Iraq alone. Thus, most doctoral students still have to write their dissertations on an individual basis and with a limited choice of potential supervisors.

All this constitutes a considerable handicap for one’s academic career, including the quest for discipline-oriented project funding.<sup>16</sup> It hence discourages young scholars from engaging in such a specialization; in general, they have to expect precarious job opportunities in temporary projects—which in fact is very typical of German research careers in general (Kreckel). A few scholars, therefore, now conduct research and teach abroad. As

Wurzel has already, and correctly, stated, this insufficient institutional structure considerably limits the possibilities for consistent and systematic economic research on the MENA region. In fact, as we have seen, the number of researchers in Germany continuously investigating Arab economies is small. Thus, for example, the number of economists who are members of the German Middle East Studies Association (DAVO) in fall 2014 was only 49, a proportion of 3.5%, compared with 21% for political scientists and 6% for geographers (based on Meyer, *Statistics*).

#### **Studies in Regionalization: An Example of an Important Field of Research**

Research on economic cooperation in the MENA region is a central field of study and has been undertaken, repeatedly or sporadically, at most of the institutions and by most researchers already mentioned. Essential dimensions are, in particular, the challenges emanating from the Euro-Mediterranean partnership project, which are sometimes contrasted with the rather ineffective process of Arab economic integration (Zorob, "Mittelmeerforschung").<sup>17</sup> At the same time, this field of research reflects the diversity of approaches, conceptual limitations, and opportunities for transdisciplinary understanding. In particular, the study of cross-border regionaliza-

tion is connected to a set of problems that have to do with regional conceptions in area studies and their tension with economics tending to be a universally oriented, "systematic" discipline (cp. Middell). Criticism of region-based studies is based on a "spatial turn" in social and cultural studies and new insights into the constructedness of space (e.g. van Schendel; Mielke and Hornidge; Glasze et al.). Proponents like Lewis and Wigen criticized rigid mental "meta-geographies" that crucially influence spatial understanding. Among world regions, the "Middle East (and North Africa)"—or the "Arab(-Islamic) world", "Near East", etc., in accordance with varying perspectives, times, and languages—already overlaps with continentally defined regions. The multiplicity of denominations and their vague definitions also contradict the fundamental character often attributed to the region. In particular, behind its "invention", we find Western geopolitical interests in the nineteenth and twentieth century, in addition to the secular "othering" of the Orient in the Western world (e.g. Scheffler, "Fertile Crescent"; Krause). Evolutions, relations, and movements of all kinds tend to be analyzed only within such spatial containers and at best in relation to "the West" or, more recently, the global context. However, this sometimes obscures rather sig-

nificant socio-economic contexts that exist across established world regions. In contrast, conventional economic explanations are largely abstracted from space. The "New Economic Geography", which emerged in the 1990s as part of international trade theory, attempts to model abstract economic landscapes, on the one hand, but still neglects real physical and human space (e.g. Martin for a critical position), on the other hand. In other respects, an implicit container model of space still dominates, as most economists uncritically assume given spatial entities for their investigations of regionalism. In contrast, a "New Regionalism Approach" (e.g. Bøås, Marchand, and Shaw; Schulz, Söderbaum, and Öjendal) understands regionalization as a multidimensional process that produces a multiplicity of forms on different scales and leads to fluctuating and overlapping spatial constellations. Such macro- and micro-regionalizations do not necessarily constitute continuous areas but rather they often resemble fluid networks, archipelagos, and translocalities. Regions can then result, for example, from (a) different kinds of institutional settings, beyond the clearly defined steps of ever-deeper integration in conventional economics; (b) multiple forms of socio-economic interaction and material and human flows; and (c) regional self-position-

ing, which is often strategically communicated for economic and political ends (cf. also Wippel, *Wirtschaft, Politik*). Practical solutions to these problems can be found in studying regional links from a more global perspective, including actor and discourse centered approaches. As this requires additional competency from the individual researchers, expert committees recommended more pluri-regional and pluri-disciplinary cooperative research (e.g. Rudolph; Middell). This has already begun at some of the institutions mentioned above, in contrast to other tendencies on the *Länder* level to locally separate institutes specializing in certain world regions. However, the study of economic issues still needs to emerge from its secondary role in these centers.

Consequently, despite lasting calls to unite an Arab “fatherland” and Pan-Arab ideologies, studies of regionalization which constitute an important field in Middle Eastern economics do not have to be confined to intraregional (and mostly formal) processes but can consider alternative spaces, both old and new. In fact, quite a number of German academics have striven to include a broad range of dimensions in their research. The complex regional interrelationships will become clearer when we turn to examples from the long understudied geographical periph-

ery of the Arab world, where the multi-directional processes of regionalization crystallize perhaps most apparently. These empirical cases are based on inter-institutional, international, and interdisciplinary cooperation and illustrate how fruitful it can be to jointly explore the different meanings of regionalization beyond the “meta-geographical trap” (based on Agnew).

#### **Empirical Insights from the Geographical Periphery of the Arab World**

Without going into much detail in respect to institutions, Morocco already integrates numerous regional contexts (Wippel, “Marokko”; for different scales, Breuer and Gertel). In addition to the intense integration in the Euro-Mediterranean process from its early beginnings, the Kingdom is a member of the Arab Free Trade Area and the (rather ineffective) Arab Maghreb Union. With other Arab EU partners, it later aligned itself in the Agadir free trade association. Likewise, more recent developments include its membership in the Community of Sahel-Saharan States and attempts to conclude a cooperation agreement with the West African Economic and Monetary Union (Wippel, *Wirtschaft, Politik*). Across the Atlantic, too, it has free trade agreements (e.g. with the USA) or has

plans for them (e.g. with Canada and Latin America).

Concerning foreign trade, Morocco is heavily dependent on the EU, but is increasingly opening alternative markets. If we consider the relative economic size of trade partners, so-called “trade intensities” reveal a trading area that reaches from Western and Central Africa across the Mediterranean to Southwestern Europe and includes parts of the wider Middle East. In addition, Morocco has demonstrated a strong entrepreneurial engagement south of the Sahara, whereas incoming direct investment originates mainly in Europe and increasingly in Gulf countries.

In the national public debate, many established Moroccan political parties did not discover the “Mediterranean-ness” of their own country until the 1980s. The Maghreb has become conceived mainly as a central part of a comprehensive Euro-Mediterranean area (Wippel, “Tanger”). The current, as well as historical, links with Sub-Saharan Africa now seem to receive more emphasis than Arab orientations. Simultaneously, for a number of years Morocco has underlined its pivotal role as an economic hub between these world regions.

The entire image becomes even more complex if we include prudent attempts at subnational cross-border cooperation, es-

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pecially with Andalusia and the Macaronesian Islands. Also, there are other less visible forms of interrelations which are rather informal and sometimes illegal and which flow across often securitized land and sea borders. This “trans-state regionalization” (Bach) includes petty traders commuting between Moroccan cities and Western Africa (Marfaing); the smuggling of commodities between Morocco and the Spanish enclaves (Berriane and Hopfinger), western Algeria, and the wider Sahara, all linked with wider hinterlands; and the hotly debated, regionally widespread and regularly shifting lanes and networks of migration.

Oman at the other end of the Arab world displays similar multi-regional integration, including a strong belonging to the “intermediate” Indian Ocean area (contributions in Wippel, *Regionalizing Oman*). On the institutional side, whereas Gulf cooperation is the most highly developed, Oman has free trade agreements with the Arab world and the USA (esp. Zorob, “Oman”) and is a promoter of Indian Ocean cooperation. With the latter area, it also displays strong links in trade and investment, and here nation branding situates it at the crossroads of several world regions. But what seems to be quite apparent at the periphery of the Arab world

is, nonetheless, true for more central parts of the region if we consider, for example, Egypt’s different regional orientations between the Arab world, the Euro-Mediterranean area, and Africa (e.g. Afifi). Certainly, this creates numerous contractual incompatibilities which have also been scrupulously investigated (also Zorob, “Intraregional”). But at the same time, it reflects the actual multi-directional, fluctuating, and interpenetrating tendencies of regionalization, which only partially coincide with established meta-regions.

### Conclusion

In the process of increasing German interest in contemporary Middle East Studies, economic issues have also attracted a certain interest. But, after a temporary upturn in the 1980s, this research has remained very limited considering the importance and proximity of the region. This is partly related to insufficient institutionalization at universities and research centers but is also an effect of the mutual estrangement between economists and other social and cultural scientists in terms of methodological approaches and theoretical perspectives. In particular, structural reasons and (meta-)theoretical considerations do not leave room for area-related “pure” economics research. While those actually do-

ing research on these topics largely struggle with the necessity of multiple disciplinary competencies and a broad conceptual toolkit, this currently leaves only one full university professorship officially engaged with Middle Eastern economies and has left a lot of other disciplines contributing considerably and fruitfully to this field. Considering the danger that area studies may tend to regard their objects of study as more or less given and closed entities, transregional and transdisciplinary studies, sensitively based on empirical findings and regional knowledge, are currently additional challenges. Yet, the prospects for having more scholars—working from whatever disciplinary background on economic issues of the MENA region—in institutionalized posts in the near future seem rather gloomy. Finally, the relative negligence of Middle Eastern economic issues calls for a broader comparison with research on other fields of interest in the Middle East, as well as with economic research on other world regions,<sup>18</sup> in Germany and other countries and, in particular, in the Middle East itself.<sup>19</sup> As this latter issue goes beyond the scope of this article this desideratum will be left open for further investigation.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This article owes a great deal to the recent paper by Wurzel as well as earlier intellectual input from Christian Steiner (currently at the University of Innsbruck), Stephan Roll (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin), and Anja Zorob (Ruhr-Universität Bochum). Nonetheless, all responsibility for the content remains exclusively with the author.

<sup>2</sup> Institutions concentrating solely on Turkey, Iran, and Israel are excluded here; but no such academic institution with a strong economic focus exists.

<sup>3</sup> Whether research can and should be undertaken on an interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, or transdisciplinary basis needs separate consideration. It should be noted that in this article these terms are used rather interchangeably.

<sup>4</sup> Direct reference will be limited to full university professors who have shown a sustained interest in a combination of Middle East and economy related issues.

<sup>5</sup> For overviews on the current research landscape, see Rudolph; Wippel, "Wirtschaft"; Centrum für Nah- und Mittelost-Studien; Weiss; Wurzel; Rang. Information on institutions and persons has also been retrieved from institutional as well as drawing on personal websites and the existing knowledge and direct relationships of the author. The survey attempts to be comprehensive, but cannot claim to be complete.

<sup>6</sup> A few graduates from Arabic Studies with a focus on economy and social geography now temporarily integrate the transregional and interdisciplinary Center for Area Studies at Leipzig University, an institution established through the recent initiative of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research to promote regional studies.

<sup>7</sup> Currently, this position is also being advertised.

<sup>8</sup> A non-exhaustive list of professors with continuous (non-exclusive) or important temporary interest in the economic, tourism, and social and urban geography of the Middle East, already shows the contrast in numbers: Herbert Popp (Bayreuth), Fred Scholz (FU Berlin), Horst Kopp (Erlangen), and Konrad Schliephake (Würzburg), all recently retired; Günter Meyer (Mainz) and Hans Hopfinger (Eichstätt), with successors imminent; Anton Escher (Mainz), Hans Gebhardt (Heidelberg), Detlef Müller-Mahn (Bonn), Carmella Pfaffenbach (Aachen), Georg Glasze (Erlangen), Andreas Kagermeier (Trier), Nicolai Scherle (Iserlohn), and the late young colleague Heiko Schmid (Jena). For Jörg Gertel (Leipzig), cf. above. For a good overview of geographical research, see Meyer, *Die arabische Welt*.

<sup>9</sup> In 2012, a search for recent publications on their websites resulted in only a few papers or short notes on energy issues and the development of the oil market.

<sup>10</sup> Due to his extensive publication, it is sufficient to summarize Wurzel's detailed and balanced explanations of research topics and approaches in the following. Cf. also Wippel, "Wirtschaft".

<sup>11</sup> Important research has been done mainly in economic geography on Morocco (e.g., Breuer and Gertel). Outside the Arab world, except for Erlangen (e.g. Schuß), economic research on Turkey became rather limited in the aforementioned institutions, contrasting with long-lasting excited debates, e.g. on its EU accession process. Research on the economic development of Iran is presently done at the CNMS. To the author's knowledge, economic research on Israel (such as by Hofmann at FU Berlin) is also very limited.

<sup>12</sup> The department in Erlangen, however, has been initially integrated into such an institute.

<sup>13</sup> This contrasts with sporadic work by mainstream economists who developed rather formalistic models without any deeper knowledge of the region. This type of quantitative modeling was prominently done, for instance, in the 2000s at the Institute for Growth and Economic Cycles, University of Hamburg, under Bernd Lucke, now the leader of the anti-Euro political party AfD, on macroeconomic impacts of trade liberalization and regional integration in the Middle East (for a heated discussion of examples, see also Wurzel 19-20, 25-27).

<sup>14</sup> Against this background, continuous regionally specialized research also seems to be recognized less and less in disciplines like geography. See in contrast Verne and Doevenspeck defending the cause of (re-conceptualized) regional studies.

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→ <sup>15</sup> In contrast, the doctoral program in Contemporary Research on the Middle East that existed from 1990 until 2000 at Erlangen had a strong economics component, and the 1993 to 2004 PhD Program "System Efficiency and Dynamics in Developing Countries" at Bochum included important research on the Middle East. Today there are very few PhD schools that include some Middle East- and economy-related research topics, e.g. at the Research Academy Leipzig.

<sup>16</sup> Whereas the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* has a very refined categorization of disciplines (excluding area studies) for its funding programs (<[http://www.dfg.de/dfg\\_profil/gremien/fachkollegien/faecher](http://www.dfg.de/dfg_profil/gremien/fachkollegien/faecher)>.), e.g., the Danish Council for Independent Research defines five broad cross-disciplinary fields of research (<<http://ufm.dk/en/research-and-innovation/councils-and-commissions/the-danish-council-for-independent-research>>. Web 25 Feb. 2015).

<sup>17</sup> For the sake of space, extensive bibliographical referencing will again be avoided. For the country cases, below, insights are drawn largely from the author's own research experience and close cooperation with colleagues at various institutions.

<sup>18</sup> German economic research seems to have been comparatively more intensely focused on Latin America under the "dependency theory" paradigm around the 1970s, and for a long time now on economically emerging Eastern parts of Asia.

<sup>19</sup> Important work, yet overwhelmingly in the frame of the orthodox, predominantly quantitative research paradigm, is done, for example, in the context of the Cairo-based Economic Research Forum and the international Middle East Economic Association.

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