

Waldorf education in Egypt: "Everyone is amazed that such a thing is possible."

Nathalie Kux



After a cultural trip through Egypt in the summer of 2015, I got to know farmers in the Luxor area who were looking for a better school education for their children. I could not ignore such a beautiful wish without checking whether it could find its way into reality. I return soon - with Roland Steinemann, the world-traveling Waldorf teacher from Switzerland, and we visit the state schools for a week.

In Egypt there is compulsory schooling, but only about 1/3 of the children go to school. Seventy children sit in a class, the teacher stands in front with the stick in his hand, children in the chorus roar, and are hit if necessary. The educational level is one of the lowest in the world. At the age of 3 or 4 the children are sent to kindergarten. There they sit on small chairs for up to four hours with their arms crossed, say ABC's or English vocabulary without ceasing, or watch TV. They have to know Arabic and English letters before they go to the 1st grade. Some of the frustrated teachers we talk to want to try something new, something where the relationship between teacher and student is assumed, where learning is fun, where the child is respected.

Two months later I bring Marina Meier, the young dynamic kindergarten teacher from Basel, with me. We start working artistically with young teachers, introducing them to anthroposophical anthropology and pedagogy. Everything is enthusiastically received by the very open and sensitive souls and immediately tried out with imagination. Much is familiar to them from the Koran. They are now happy to find a concrete implementation for it. And then everything goes very fast.

The NGO association "Hebet el-Nil Foundation for Development" is founded. In summer 2016 a villa with 4 rooms is rented and permission for the kindergarten is granted. As soon as it is decided that children will be accepted, they come with their parents from all corners. With a heavy heart we have to limit ourselves to 60. Half of them come from Fellach families, the others from city-like populations. All of them are very poor in financial possibilities.



Every day is a feast!

A celebration of the discovery of development possibilities. Everything is new, the painting, singing, dancing, balancing and swinging, the building blocks, dolls, stories, the sand with water ...

The surprised parents are invited to parents' evenings, where they are shown through pictures how the child's development takes place over a longer period of time and that it is not yet necessary to be able to write and read at the age of 4, but that as a basis many other skills can be learned through playing, which will be beneficial to their children throughout their whole life. Soon they will be amazed at how their child develops as a personality and socially. A hiking day is introduced to the banana plantations. When the cheerful crowd of children moves along the Nile, all the villagers come out of their stables and fields to wave to them. In the evening the parents ask the teacher about the imaginative stories of their children and ask "where there are giraffes and lions here" ... Even the inspectors are amazed that something like this is possible in Egypt. The school permit is given.

Today a total of 125 children attend the kindergarten and the 1st, 2nd and 3rd class of the Hebet el-Nil (in Arabic "Gifts of the Nile") school. In the kindergarten there is a group for the 4- to 5-year-olds and one for the 5-6-year-olds. In each group, 25 children are looked after by 2 kindergarten teachers.

Of the initial 8 teachers for the 2 kindergarten groups, 4 grow into the school. All have a degree (Islamic Studies, Mathematics, English), a state teacher diploma and pedagogical experience. The further education takes place daily - in the afternoon as well as on Saturday morning there is a review and preview, artistic practice and deepening of a topic to the anthropology and pedagogy.

In the whole year there are about 10 intensive weeks with Karin Eckstein, a Waldorf teacher from Basel, Marina Meier, other guest lecturers like Christian Hitsch, Johannes Greiner, Bruno Sandkühler and myself. With a young Egyptian teacher, Mohamed Mawazini from Cairo, a student at the teacher seminar in Stuttgart, the teachers began to translate the first lectures from Rudolf Steiner's "Study of The Human Being" into Arabic. A world premiere. Now they are penetrating the contents of anthroposophical pedagogy and anthropology in a completely different way, much more intensively. Islam, Sufism, Christianity, Anthroposophy ... everything is related to each other in a very touching way.

Thus in the kindergarten the Muslim festivals are celebrated, but also the Christian festivals are in their consciousness, because there are many Coptic Christians in Luxor. And since Muslims like to



celebrate together with Christians, the Egyptians have made Easter the common celebration of the fragrance of spring. On this day they all go together to the water, throw themselves into the floods of the holy rising Nile, have big picnics on its banks, go singing and dancing in the boats and look out for the Nile bride. People often drown on this day. Most Egyptians cannot swim.

In the recent summer holidays there was therefore a swimming course for the children in the Hebet el-Nil school. The Egyptian 5-month-long summer holidays have shortened at the Hebet el-Nil teachers this year again by a "summer school", which found very much approval. And the mothers too stayed to paint.

"Hadanti je Hadanti - halas ja tipki hagiga - habniki tuba tuba - wa el helm hajibga hagigaa"
"Kindergarten! My kindergarten - soon you are finished - brick on brick I will build you - my dream will become reality!"

The kindergarten children move to the new school grounds between the sugar cane fields to sing for courage and thanks to the construction workers and dance for them. In the glowing sun, all the little hands enthusiastically help out, carrying the beams for the wooden scaffolding from here to there, throwing the bricks from top to bottom into the construction pit, spreading the mortar and laying the next row of bricks. They are blessed and proud to help build their new kindergarten! In spring 2018 the construction of the surrounding wall and the kindergarten could be started.

Soon thereafter with the small building for the administration and the school kitchen, which will serve as a temporary solution for the 1st and 2nd class, until the primary school will be built in autumn 2020. On November 25, 2018, all the children moved along the Nile to their new school by donkey cart. Singing and with rising peace doves they celebrated the move.

The hammering and plastering continued as before. The children experienced the workers, the workers experienced the kindergarten and school activity, and in mutual respect a large family grew together.



The Austrian architect Christian Hitsch has designed a small school village in the style of the Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy (1900 - 1989), which is completely in the style of the country and at the same time an expression of the intended pedagogy. All buildings have a triad in them, each is unique in its form and all together form a common style.

May these rooms promote the development cooperation of small and large people. May their courage and faith continue to find the indispensable support and help of European friends!

Only half of the 125 children can pay the annual school fee of 140 euros. One teacher's salary is 110 Euro per month. The investments for the construction of the school are not yet fully covered.

Nathalie Kux, Nathalie Kux, born 1967, attended the Rudolf Steiner School Vienna Wall. Actress, speech therapist and stage director in Switzerland. Since 2015 she has accompanied the development of the Hebet el-Nil School in Luxor. nathalie.kux@gmail.com www.hebet-el-nil.org

Donations for the further training of teachers: IASWECE, Bank for Social Economy, IBAN: DE83 6012 0500 0007 7076 00BIC: BFSWDE33STG. Intended use: Egypt

Donations for the construction:

- Friends of Waldorf Education, Weinmeisterstr. 16, D-10178 Berlin at GLS Gemeinschaftsbank, Bochum, Germany, IBAN DE47 4306 0967 0013 0420 10 BIC GENODEM1GLS. Intended purpose: Luxor/ Hebet el-Nil + your address for the donation receipt

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