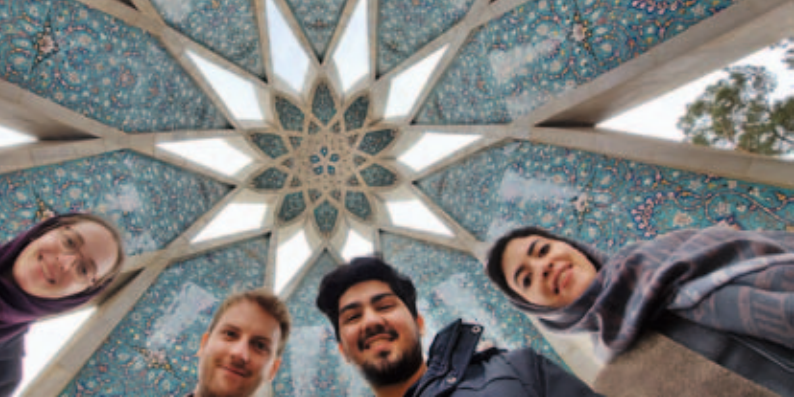


Building Global Partnerships

A Report on the
DAAD-Funded Project

The Quest for a 'Good Life': Livelihood Strategies in Iran and Germany



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A Report on the DAAD-Funded Project **The Quest for a 'Good Life': Livelihood Strategies in Iran and Germany**

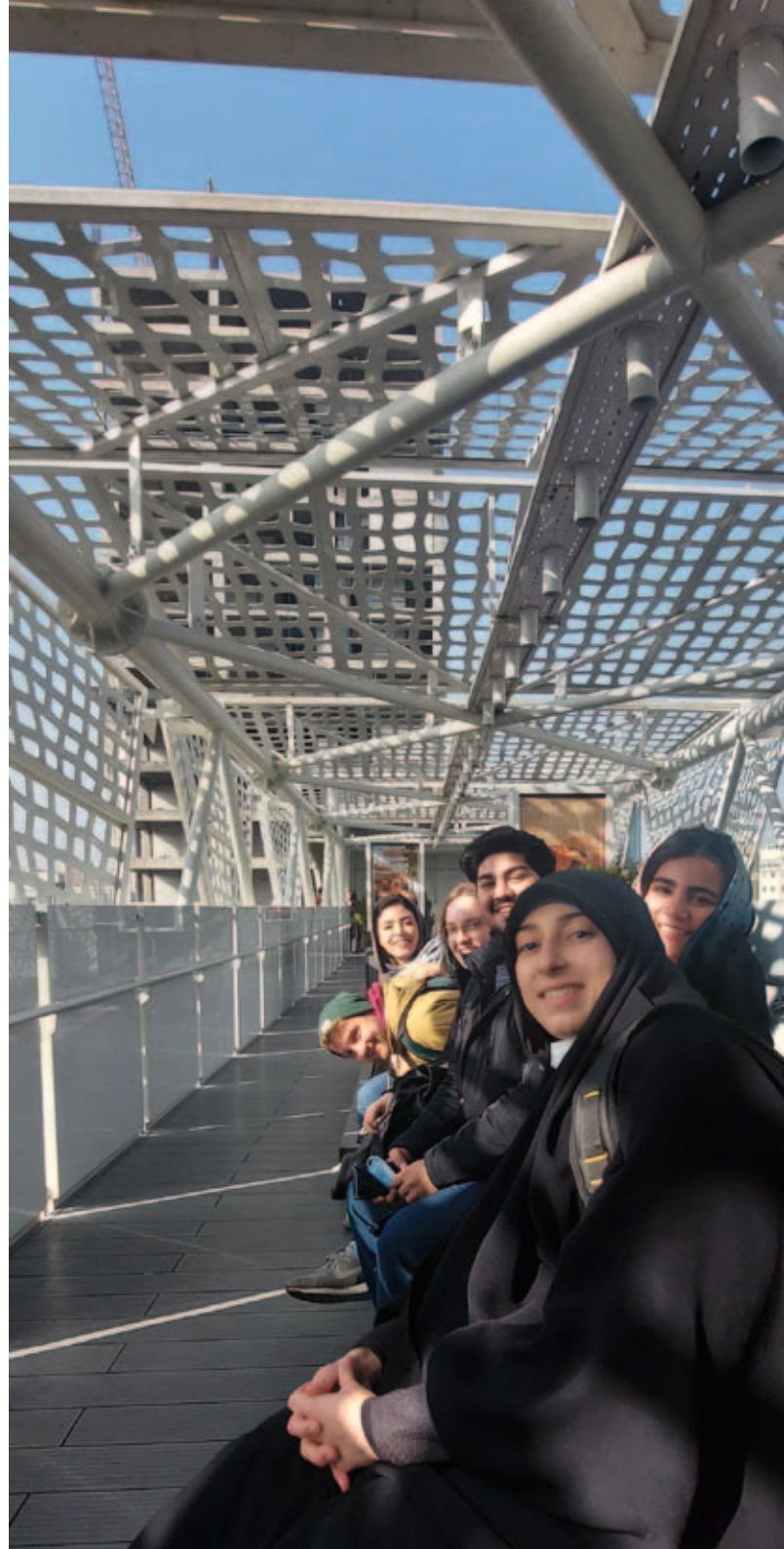
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Introduction

German-Iranian bridges

Despite the pandemic and the long way in the digital world, we have managed to build bridges, partnerships and friendships between Iranian and German students and lecturers. Time and again it showed, that anthropologists depend on colleagues worldwide with whom they can exchange ideas and criticism, break new ground in theory and methodology, and ultimately present their results to the public.

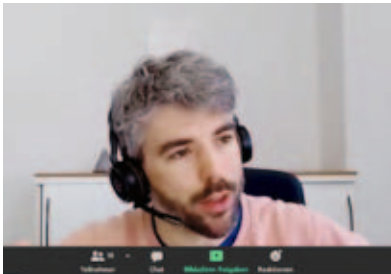
For a long time, however, it was uncertain whether this exchange would be possible in the midst of rising infection rates. The fact that it worked out in the end is also due to the passion for the common interests and topics on all sides. The mutuality and reciprocity of the exchange brought to light new mixtures of ideas that should make us look forward to future Iranian-German cooperation. The experiences that we gained during our stays are central precursors for working in international and interdisciplinary teams.



Building a common foundation

The reading workshop

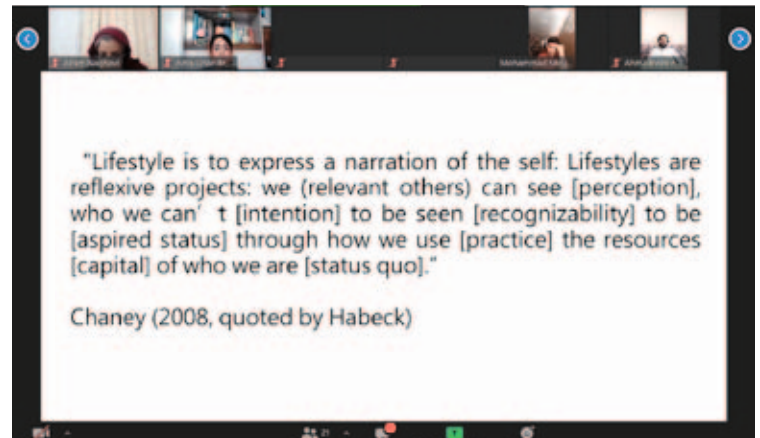
But what do we mean by the “good life” anyway? By “livelihoods”, “equity” or “sustainability”? In order to find our way through the thicket of these big words, we were given texts to discuss critically at the beginning of the program. Under the guidance of Professor Göpfert, the newly found German-Iranian tandems met in four 90-minute sessions. First, the livelihoods approach of DeHaan was scrutinized. It became clear that research on sustainable livelihoods needs to be thought multidimensionally, multilocally and globally. In this context, globalization has increased the range of Sustainable Livelihoods in all corners of the earth. Rather than categorizing people on the



Prof. Dr. Mirco Göpfert
Institut für Ethnologie

basis of access to land or ownership of livestock, local development is better understood by paying more attention to the ways in which they respond and the diversity of coping mechanisms they use.

In the second session, a text by Leach et al. promoted complexity enhancement with references to dynamic socioecological systems (SES). Central to this was the shift from seeing humans and nature as separate parts that occasionally interact, to seeing them as intertwined SES across the planet. This offers opportunities to articulate equity and sustainability within an innovative complex systems framework. One aspect became more than clear: There will be diverse (and changing) ideas of what constitutes a good or at least acceptable future in the Anthropocene.



In the third reading course, the participants focused on the concept of “lifestyle”. With Habeck, they grasped the concept as a broader topic and defined it not only as various forms of obvious consumption patterns.

Bourdieu’s distinction through taste played an important role here: seemingly a domain of individual choices, it actually follows socially established patterns. The DAAD participants concluded from the open discussion of Habeck’s texts: the study of lifestyles should explicitly address the norms, preferences, orientations and beliefs on the basis of which a person makes decisions about how to cope in and with life, with whom to associate and how to present him or herself in public.

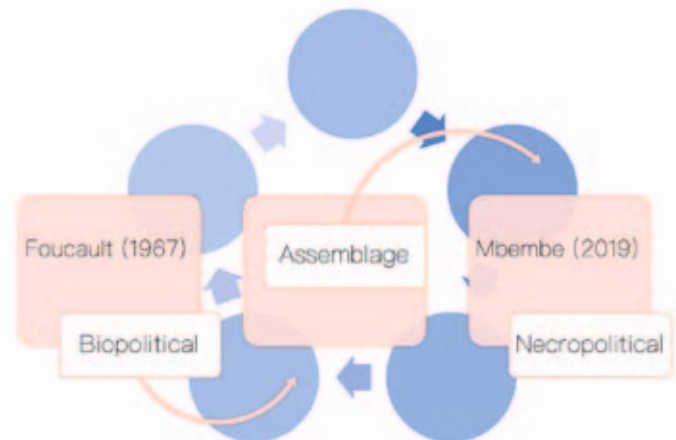


The topics discussed in reading course session can be classified into three groups of

- Ecology
- Alternative Lifestyle
- Aesthetic practices

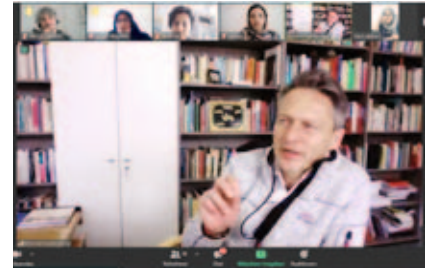
The fourth date of the reading course was intended to round off the initial preparation and usher in the phase-in German-Iranian tandems. With texts by Alexandrakis and Shehata/Schielke, we focused on the area of “aesthetics”. Participants concluded: developing broader horizons of imagination requires resources, training and support. No less work is needed to constrain and direct one’s imagination to fit within the moral-aesthetic horizon of, for example, a social-literary milieu.

In Alexandrakis’ text on graffiti sprayers, the aspect of “doing the Good Life” became clear: Indeed, graffiti writing came up again and again in conversation with the interlocutors as a “commitment,” “inspiration,” “obsession,” an “escape,” and ultimately a “way of life”. Through graffiti they curated the ongoing story of a public being remade.

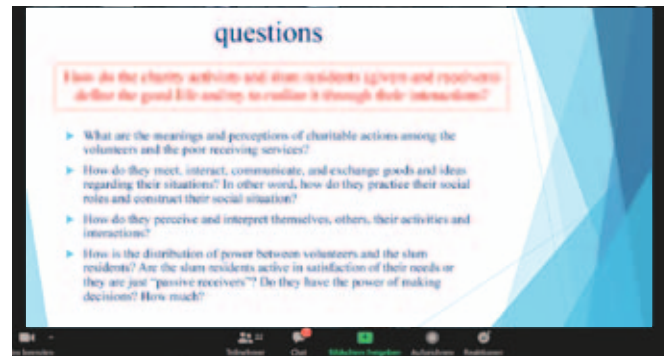
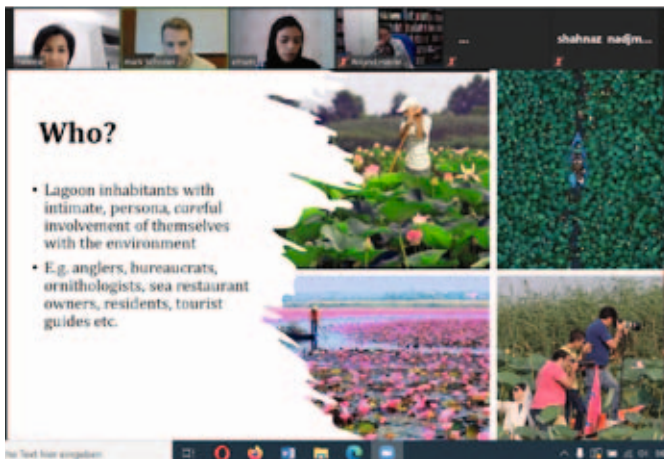


Tandem group presentation Final reports

All tandems presented their final projects on 21st and 22nd of January 2021 and received feedback from other members. There was a great deal of interdisciplinary discussion that led to an efficient exchange of information.

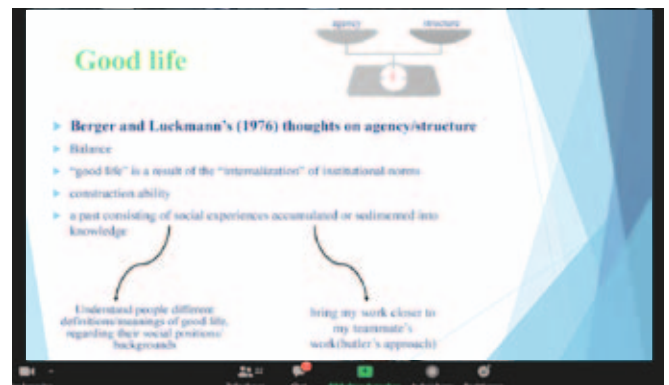


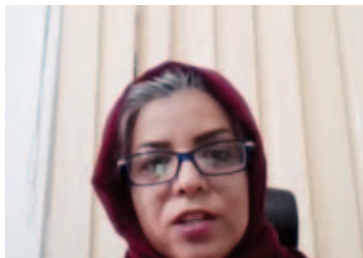
Prof. Dr. Roland Hardenberg
Frobenius-Institut



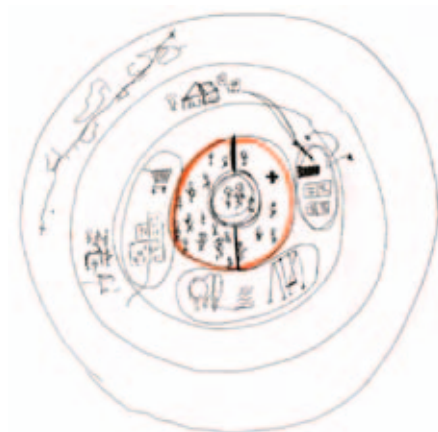
There were four presentations including

- “The meaning of water in sustaining a livelihood”
- “Alternative Lifestyles” – Good life and charity action & perception of the rich by working class”
- “Aesthetic practices presentations and how these fit according to the Good Life” (Good Life through beautification, Why and how people beautify their bathrooms, Facial aesthetics, good life & make up, and Literary aesthetics in a comparative textual analysis, values of the good life in bestsellers)
- “The psychosocial life of shelters”





Prof. Dr. Azam Naghavi
University of Isfahan

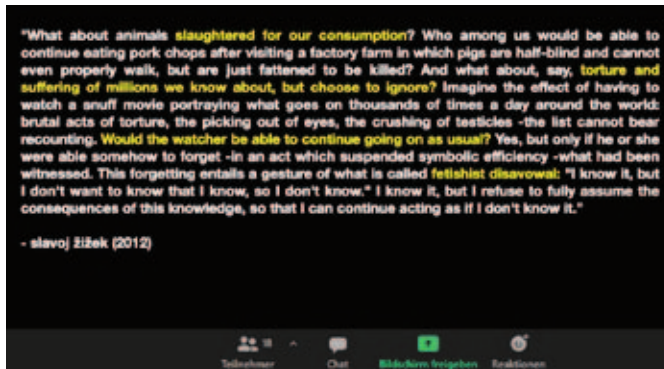


Prof. Dr. Ahmadreza Asgharpour
Ferdowsi University of Mashhad

In spring 2021, the students tested a new format for which the lecturers were also warmly invited, but which is carried out by the former themselves: A Digital Forum on topics of student choice. The Iranian side kicked off by inviting two lecturers – Dr. Papoli-Yazdi and Dr. Veisi-Hesar to share general experiences on “The Good life and Transitions from Tradition to Modernity” and “The General Economy of Happiness in Qalandariyya Cult: a Semiotic perspective”.

The second forum was contested by the German participants with a critical discussion of

David Graeber’s notion of “Bullshit Jobs”. Not only in times of pandemic the discussion about ‘Essential Workers’ and the different valuation of jobs boomed. This was also the starting point for the third forum. The Iranian students presented their reflections on the impact of Covid-19 on tandem projects in Iran in mid-March. The Digital Forum was rounded off with the fourth session on the good life of other species. The topic was explosive: “Life worth living? Non-human Animals and the Good Life”.



The Digital forum session involved four main presentations as the following:

- “The Good life and Transitions from Tradition to Modernity” & “The General Economy of Happiness in Qalandariyya Cult: a Semiotic perspective”
- David Graeber’s notion of “Bullshit Jobs”
- “Life worth living? Non-human Animals and the Good Life”
- “The impact of Covid-19 on the current DAAD tandem projects”

Questions

1. How to provide and improve a **good lifestyle** for the homeless in a pandemic?
2. What services can charities and volunteers provide for the good life of the poor in Iran? How?
3. Considering the impact of covid-19 on rural people's livelihood, are the good life theories efficient and reliable in such challenging conditions?
4. How the problems beyond people's control (such as the covid-19 pandemic and lack of access to the vaccine for example) may affect their perception about the good life?
5. Is it possible to talk about a good life in the case of a catastrophe? In other words, have human beings experienced a good life during crises such as earthquake floods and disease?
6. What is the relationship between good life and rituals?
7. How do rituals change in your culture (Germany) during crisis?



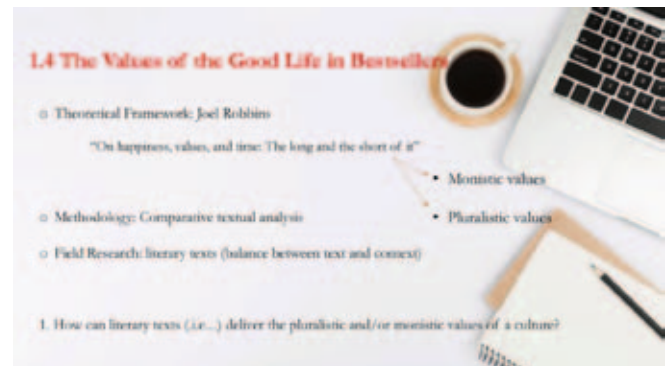
Learning how to write The academic writing workshop

Do you still have to explain to master's and doctoral students how to write? To give them homework again? Yes, you do – because the requirements for a concise, lively academic text are high. Under the close supervision of three trained writing coaches, the tandems' research proposals were analyzed and improved in small groups. In summer 2021, three sessions succeeded in providing an instructive polish of the texts and many eye-opening hints for tips and tricks in argumentation strategies and reader guidance.



With each individual group, academic writing course proceeds as follows:

- Research questions and academic discourses
- Argumentation
- Practical approaches to the revision process



Learning how to apply for funds The research incubator workshop

However, well-written proposals only mark half the way – in the end they must be put into practice. This requires strong applications for financial support from foundations and organizations. Two experts of the Research Support of the Goethe University showed us in the late summer 2021 step by step in two insightful sessions possible ways of funding. Again and again, small tasks were carried out together and weighed up which sponsor support could be considered for which tandem.

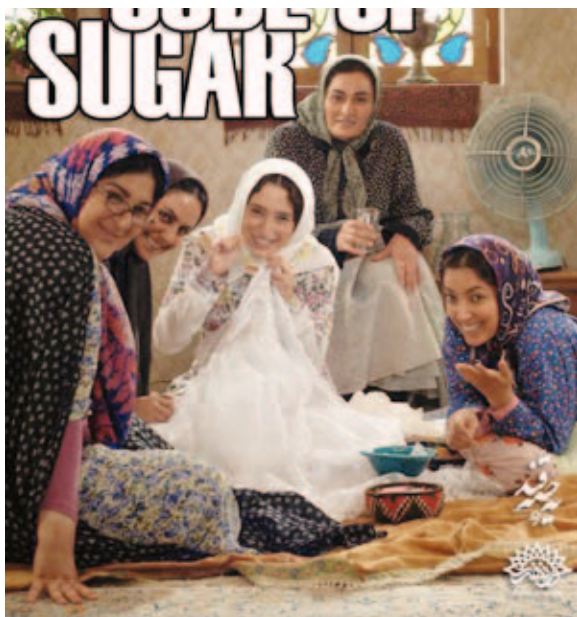


Three main topics were covered during these sessions including:

- Major funding sources (DFG, DAAD, AVH, BMF and etc.)
- Research tool
- Putting together a proposal



Not much less important, and yet far more informal than academic reading, grinding out sentences and preparing for funding applications, was the last part of the digital dry spell in the fall of 2021, before the on-site workshops: movie sessions. The Iranian drama “Bedune Tarikh Bedune Emza” (No date No signature), the German one-take film “Victoria” and the Iranian family drama “Ye Habe Ghand” (a cube of sugar) were viewed and intensively discussed in student online sessions. Again and again, we drew parallels to the overall theme of the Good Life and possible take-aways for our tandem projects.



http://www.impawards.com/intl/iran/2011/cube_of_sugar.html (Ye Habe Ghand / A Cube of Sugar)

<https://controlengineers.ir/اخبار-سینمایی-جدید-انیمیشن-بدون-تاریخ-بدون-امضاء> (Bedune Tarikh Bedune Emza)

http://www.impawards.com/intl/germany/2015/victoria_ver8.html (Victoria)



Practice at last Cultural exchange in Mashhad and Frankfurt

In the past months, numerous bridges were built in theory, between the lines of application letters and academic texts – but when were we able to move on these bridges in a very practical way, in small research projects and in getting to know each other in presence? Finally, at the end of 2021, we got the green light for trips of about ten days each to Frankfurt and Mashhad.

After five days of quarantine, the Iranian participants were able to see the Frankfurt Cathedral, the Main River and many other places. Nostalgic and neuralgic points of contact were found again and again, for example during the visit of the Islamic Center in Frankfurt. Shared religious symbolism or the translations of religious texts into English or German illustrate enormous intersections.

The visit to two solidarity-based organic farms around Frankfurt also deepened understanding of alternative livelihoods and highlighted ways of thinking science and practice together. Something like “Solidarity Agriculture” (SoLaWi) could be an interesting model for Iran, after all? These approaches were then deepened with museum tours, for example in the water system part of the Senckenberg Museum or during a walk through the Palmengarten.

Interreligious dialogues also arose again and again during two visits to churches and because the mother of a German participant – a pastor by profession – invited the Iranian participants to her church. The discussions were appreciated by all, because the exchange could take place in a warm and respectful atmosphere. Again and again, in the reading of biblical texts or in view of the processes of praying, astonishing similarities between Islamic and Christian rituals were revealed.



And be it the visit of the university, the libraries, the greeting of the supervisors or the exploration of culinary worlds: Much of what was experienced in Frankfurt had its Mashadi counterpart. In the second largest Iranian city, the Iranian partners led the German students through the Ferdowsi University, the Holy Imam Reza Shrine, traditional bazaars and had intensive conversations with their German tandem partners in beautiful cafes and restaurants. They also marveled at the differences in architecture and nature and exchanged observations.



The bank towers of Frankfurt and the Main River already visually formed a wide range in comparison with the splendor of the holy shrine and the surrounding mountains in Mashad, which are devoid of vegetation. In visits to the green spaces of Khorasan, the water on the river Main, a homeless shelter in Frankfurt or a migratory neighborhood in the north of Mashad, topics relevant to research about the Good Life were also taken up again and again and methodically put into practice in a variety of ways. The final results of the tandem teams were discussed again digitally at the end of January 2022 and a common horizon of expectations for future collaborations was drawn. The bottom line, however, is that the most important because sustainable aspect stays: Partner- and friendships that will remain beyond the end of the DAAD project. We are thankful for all these opportunities in these regards!





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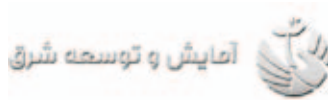
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of Mashhad



Iran Cultural Heritage,
Handcrafts and
Tourism Organization



Amayesh & Tose e Shargh Institute



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For more information about
the project, see

[https://www.uni-frankfurt.de/
72145011/The_Quest_for_
a_Good_Life___
Livelihood_Strategies_
in_Iran_and_Germany___
2020_2021](https://www.uni-frankfurt.de/72145011/The_Quest_for_a_Good_Life___Livelihood_Strategies_in_Iran_and_Germany___2020_2021)

