



Final Evaluation: Executive Summary

Tourathi “My Heritage”

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Introduction

In Lebanon, cultural heritage is threatened by ongoing political tensions and historical sectarian conflicts: due to social and political fragmentation along with a lack of public investment, significant historical sites in Lebanon have been severely neglected and are rarely visited by people who would have to cross sectarian dividing lines to access them. In addition, heritage contained in oral histories, song, dance and other customs is no longer regularly passed down to youth who have left their communities to study or work in urban areas. For these reasons, a great deal of cultural heritage in Lebanon is not protected, preserved or promoted, but is severely neglected and at risk of being lost with each passing generation. Tourathi (“My Heritage”) sought to address these issues by reaching across dividing lines and providing spaces for Lebanese youth from varied backgrounds to come together to learn more about, reflect upon, and promote the rich cultural heritage and history of their country, ultimately contributing to bridging geographic and sectarian divisions through the promotion of a shared Lebanese cultural heritage.

This was done through (1) capacity-building on cultural heritage mapping and documentation to increase the knowledge of the youth on the importance of protection and promotion of cultural heritage; (2) youth-led heritage mapping, documentation, and celebration to equip the youth with tools to increase the awareness of their communities on the importance of protecting cultural heritage, and valorize and celebrate local cultural heritage elements; and (3) field visits and public events to promote dialogue and break stereotypes of the youth and their community by gathering them around the celebration of their shared history.

Supported by the British Council's Cultural Protection Fund with funding from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sports, Tourathi was implemented from July 2017 to February 2019, by Search for Common Ground Lebanon (Search) in partnership with Arcenciel, Biladi, and NAHNOO, in six geographical areas in Lebanon: Zahle, Sarafand, Tripoli, Salima, Beit Chabab, and Bekfaya.

Evaluation Findings

The final evaluation was commissioned by Search and conducted in March 2019, with the overall objective to assess the Tourathi project, to identify elements of future interventions, examine the project's achievements of its intended outcomes and impact(s), and to further investigate key areas of sustainability, effectiveness, and relevance using a mixed method approach.

Key results include

Increase in skills, knowledge, and empowerment in cultural heritage documentation and promotion. This training program provided youth from the six target areas with a common understanding of cultural heritage and the role it can play in local development. The evaluation highlights that this capacity-building scheme helped the youth to know and value their local heritage. In addition to better understanding the role cultural heritage plays in the construction of their identity, the youth also thought about the ways they would like people from their own, and other communities to perceive it, through learning about communication and storytelling. A male participant from Zahle said: “I am an engineering student and I had no idea what heritage was, beyond archeological sites, but now I am more interested and the training helped me gain a lot of knowledge on that topic.”

- 40% increase in knowledge about cultural heritage
- 38% increase in storytelling skills

Strengthening ownership through youth-led mapping and guided tours. The mapping process and the organization of local visits for outside visitors increased the youth’s ownership of their newly acquired knowledge, as well as of the history of their regions: “I started to value local heritage, got to know more about my region, and appreciate it better,” said a youth participant from Sarafand.

- 5 local cultural heritage sites were identified in the 6 localities + production of a map and a booklet for each locality

Disseminating change: a shift in local perceptions and perspectives. Through the youth-led organization of local festivals and guided tours, the project helped participants to look at the various Lebanese regions from a different perspective, and supported them in engaging and raising their community’s awareness on the protection of their cultural heritage.

Increased interest and engagement. The survey conducted as part of the project’s final evaluation highlighted an increase in understanding of cultural heritage as an income generator, identity provider, or factor in the development of a feeling of belonging. The respondents also expressed a higher sense of individual responsibility in protecting their local heritage, notably translated by a rising interest in participating in local projects and activities. For instance, in some localities, community members expressed their desire for local events to be repeated on an annual basis. These events also offered an opportunity for the youth participants to celebrate and further promote the mapped heritage. In total, the public events gathered 2,500 youth and community members throughout the country.

- 63% increase in understanding and interest of cultural heritage and its protection.
- 65% of respondents believe they have a role to play in maintaining and protecting cultural heritage

Perceived increase in local cultural dynamism. Reflecting the spiking interest of community members, the survey respondents also noticed a rising number of activities (festivals, exhibitions, and others) and visitors in their localities, as well as an increased visibility of their region in the media.

- 68% had noted more activities in recent years.
- 72% of the respondents in the final survey saw an increase in visibility of their region on social media.
- 68% of respondents also observed an increase in the number of articles written on the regions.
- 72% noticed an increase in posts and pictures posted on social media about their regions.
- 63% of the respondents observed an increase in the number of visitors to their area.

Creation of connections and relationships across sectarian and geographical divides. The project succeeded in building bridges and strengthening the relationships among the youth participants internally and inter-regionally, and across socio-economic, religious, and geographical backgrounds. Throughout interviews and focus group discussions, the youth groups from the different regions confirmed creating friendships and keeping in touch with each other via messaging, phone calls, and visits. The interregional exchange visits not only helped the youth to know more about the other regions but these interactions also contributed to breaking down existing stereotypes. Indeed, while some participants indicated that they regarded their regions from a different perspective and started to appreciate them more, others said that the exchange visits helped dissolve negative misconceptions concerning safety issues, among others.

Sustainability. Some groups, such as the one in Beit Chabab, received requests of touristic groups from different regions as a result of the mapping, events, and promotion on social media. In Bekfayya, a youth participant was asked to become a member of the local festival committee, as a means of integrating youth in cultural heritage promotion. In Salima, the youth group created their own platform to attract more visitors to their region: “We created ‘Live Love Salima’ and posted pictures on it because we always want to show the beauty of our village to the others”- Youth Female from Salima. Moreover, promotion of cultural heritage is improved through increased media interest in promoting the areas by featuring special reports on these regions on TV, be it MTV or LBCI stations: “We started doing referrals, I did an interview on MTV and nominated my colleague in Sarafand to do a similar thing” explained a female youth from Bekfayya. Finally, the interregional relationships are expected to sustain after the project closes, as bridges were built across dividing lines in Lebanon: “We have created WhatsApp groups and are in touch with each other. Friends of friends are getting in touch to come and visit the area,” explained a female youth from Salima.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Key stakeholders require additional training in online communication. Further technical training and ongoing coaching, especially in social media management, online promotion and communication was requested by the youth participants; these capacities were seen as essential to ensure the sustainability of their work and of the achieved impact.

Building team dynamics among project participants based on shared interests is key to sustained engagement. While engaging participants across socio-economic, religious, and geographic divides, capacity building and teamwork should be emphasized and integrated throughout the project’s lifespan, as youth then feel more involved and committed, not only to reaching the objectives set by the project implementation team, but towards the group of participants and stakeholders as a whole. Although volunteering was identified by the evaluation as a good approach, in order to ensure the sustainability of the networks created, a form of team spirit and accountability between the groups’ members should be built. Team dynamics could for instance be reinforced by a more strategic selection process (youth could be closer in age and share similar occupations), as well through sustained and team-building oriented communications.

Actively including communities in developing comprehensive outreach and visibility strategies increases ownership and sustainability. Although the visibility of the target areas and the overall population’s awareness of cultural heritage increased, the sustainability of the project’s results is somewhat threatened by the limited ownership of the leading youth groups over the developed communication and outreach strategy. An earlier, inclusive reflection, in parallel with adequate training and ongoing tailored support, is strongly recommended to optimize participants’ ownership and community engagement in the continued and relevant dissemination of the outreach materials.

Focusing on smaller, under-discovered regions can increase impact. Including regions, such as Salima or Sarafand where little support has been provided to their local cultural heritage, and that are unexplored by tourists, results in a higher impact and high interest and engagement among stakeholders. Feedbacks were positive among youth

Synergies and solid linkages between community members, local authorities and institutions are key to effective and sustainable results. Engagement of local authorities is crucial to facilitate the protection and promotion of local heritage: dedicating adequate time and resources to the establishment

and cultivation of those relationships is essential to ensure the ownership and sustainability of the action. Engagement with ministries and municipalities fosters buy-in for project objectives and activities, and supports the development of a clear vision for their role during and after the project implementation. Strong linkages between local stakeholders and institutional actors strengthen engagement and commitment, as well as establish relationships that will ensure the action’s sustainability, especially in cases where the expected impact revolves around access to, and maintenance of public spaces.

Although the municipalities were first contacted to help in the recruitment of youth volunteers, they tended not to be very involved later on, leading some youth groups to feel ill-informed and inadequately supported in their efforts, and limiting their access to certain sites and monuments. In contrast, certain synergies were developed in Bekfaya, Beit ChabaBeirb, and Sarafand, where the youth initiated meetings with key stakeholders for local cultural heritage, influential figures in the communities, and both municipalities. These relationships led to the overall increased engagement of the communities around the project activities, leading to an increased motivation and commitment from the youth group. In Sarafand, following the project, the municipality announced its commitment to register the locality on the national tourism map, and to be more dedicated to protect local cultural heritage.