

The First Conference on Tourism for the district and city of Byblos A vision for sustainable tourism for the district and city of Byblos

The First Conference on Tourism for the district and city of Byblos concluded its works at the Lebanese American University (LAU) in Blat, Byblos, two days after it started, during which inputs were given and exchange of experiences were carried out by fifty participants, in the presence of more than three hundred people, in addition to many ministers, MPs, mayors, accredited ambassadors, experts, NGOs, tourism service providers, and stakeholders.

The Conference, entitled “Vision for Sustainable Tourism” and sponsored by the Minister of Tourism - Engineer Walid Nassar - in cooperation with *Via Appia Byblos*, accompanied by a number of international organizations and donors, was the first conference hosting these facilities post-Corona Pandemic; it appeared as a beacon of hope and optimism about the return of stability and growth, as well as a contribution to preparing for a future revival stage through an integrated plan for sustainable tourism development. This plan acts as a road map for aspirations and projects to be carried out with the participation of the tourism sector in general, as well as official institutions, local authorities, stakeholders, investors, specialists, active NGOs, art festivals, donors, tour guides and operators, universities, schools, the private sector, media and social media, in a view to put all these experiences in the service of a modern and developed work program in line with the requirements of the development of the tourism sector and the needs of domestic and expatriate tourists.

During the Conference, participants demonstrated the extent of the richness of the city and district of Byblos in tourist, heritage, religious, and cultural sites, as well as the institutions and individuals active in the field of tourism. Accordingly, they discovered the diversity of human and natural resources affecting the development of tourism, and the extent of the possibilities of positive interaction between these resources, if the means are available.

The participants were informed of Lebanon's accession to the Enlarged Partial Agreement with the Council of Europe (EPA), as well as ways to preserve heritage cities and natural sites during peace and war. The Conference also highlighted the economic and social impact of tourism resources and their contribution to creating job opportunities, empowering women and youth, and preserving the “Social Fabric” of towns.

Interventions emphasized the importance of collecting and preserving information in a comprehensive information database, the need for cooperation and coordination between the various sectors of tourism services, as well as benefiting from the studies and projects that have been previously prepared. They also stressed on the essential role of interaction between central administrations and local authorities as an example of Collaboratory Governance.

Participants were briefed on the Ministry of Tourism's plan for the administrative decentralization of tourism, and on the projects sponsored and organized by the Ministry in various Lebanese regions.

The ways of integration between the city and the district through tourism programs and packages were discussed, along with the need to monitor and improve the quality of tourism services and adopt the correct measures to achieve sustainability.

The participants valued the initiative of the Lebanese American University (LAU) in following up the implementation of the conference's decisions, especially in the field of collecting and disseminating information through an electronic platform to ensure the continuity of information management, as well as the initiative of the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies – CIHEAM - IAM Bari – to provide support for regional cooperation projects between the countries of the European Union and Lebanon for sustainable development. They were also briefed on the possibilities of cooperation with French cities to support tourism projects.

The Follow-up Committee discussed the observations, recommendations and decisions presented by the participants, to be finalized and published by the Ministry of Tourism, in order to follow up their implementation.

Accordingly, the following recommendations were made:

1- Information Database

- 1.1. Following-up on collecting and preserving information in a comprehensive and detailed information database, as well as publishing, updating, and managing it in a sustainable way.
- 1.2. Involving content creators on electronic platforms, including producers, directors, and bloggers.
- 1.3. Following-up on the implementation of the conference's decisions in cooperation with the Lebanese American University (LAU) in the field of collecting and disseminating information through an electronic platform to ensure the continuity of managing the information database.

2- Local Tourism Business Group

Establishing a Tourism Authority in the form of a representative local business group from the public and private sectors under the title of Collaboratory Governance, one of the tasks of which is to adopt a regional action plan to develop, promote, and empower the tourism sectors, preserve the tourism heritage in the region, and coordinate between the stakeholders.

3- Means of Achieving Sustainability

Adopting measures and means that achieve sustainability through objective cultural, environmental, and economic criteria that ensure the monitoring of the safety and quality of services, as well as clearly identify and define these services and their categories.

4- Creation of Job Opportunities

- 4.1. Promoting income-generating activities for women and youth through gender equality.
- 4.2. Encouraging creative design, innovation, business and social models, the development of small emerging enterprises, and targeted tourism initiatives.
- 4.3. Empowering small and medium craft enterprises, cooperatives, and civil societies through specialized programs in food safety, quality assurance, financial knowledge, readiness to export the product, creative communication, and attracting new customer segments.

5- Legal Texts

Updating and developing the legal and regulatory texts that govern the public and private tourism facilities.

6- International Cooperation

- 6.1. Strengthening cooperation with the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and with regional institutions concerned with tourism activity.
- 6.2. Securing means of communication between local projects on the one hand, and local and international institutions, organizations, and associations with experience in studying the assessment, financing, and monitoring the implementation of tourism projects through the local tourism authority and coordinating between studies, plans, and projects on the other hand.
- 6.3. Briefing the participants on the renewal of the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies – CIHEAM - IAM Bari's commitment to provide support for regional cooperation projects between the European Union and Lebanon for sustainable development. They also learned about the possibilities of cooperation with French cities to support tourism projects.

7- Religious Tourism

- 7.1. Developing religious tourism paths.
- 7.2. Seeking to integrate the culture of religious tourism into the educational curricula.

8- Maritime Tourism

- 8.1. Working to include Lebanon into the maritime tourism routes through the institutions operating in the Mediterranean, which will secure additional incomes, reorganize the service providers sector, and contribute to the development of coastal regions.
- 8.2. Setting the applied frameworks for Byblos Marine Reserve.
- 8.3. Seeking to study and implement the *Escale à Byblos* project for Maritime tourism, and put forward the floating port project north of the city of Byblos, in accordance with the recommendations of UNESCO through the BOT system and the public-private sectors partnership. That is in addition to linking the port to a local road network, allocating berths for small boats and a berth for cruise ships, and establishing tourist, recreational, and commercial facilities on the berths of the port.

9- Role of Tour Guides

Cooperating and coordinating between municipal councils, concerned NGOs and relevant ministries, notably the Ministries of Tourism and Culture, and tour guides, as a basic means of developing tourism services.

10- Role of Tour Operators

Cooperating with tour operators to launch tourism packages that include Lebanon and Byblos city.

11- Financial Measures

Re-allocating the income that was deducted from the municipalities to contribute to the management of the local tourism sector; for instance, deducting a percentage of the value-added tax (VAT) on the bills of tourism institutions and transferring it directly to the incubating municipalities of these institutions to contribute to the development and control of the quality of tourism services.

12- Museums

- 12.1. Establishing a national museum for the preservation and good management of fossils as they form part of the national and world natural history.
- 12.2. Encouraging the establishment of specialized art museums and including them in tourism packages

13- Media and Marketing

The need to develop a marketing plan in Lebanon and in the countries of the Lebanese expatriates, as well as in other countries, through social media platforms, specialized applications, tourism programs, and media.

14- Hotel and Restaurant Sector

Creating a framework to support the continuity of the hotel and restaurant sector, especially with regard to infrastructure and energy.

15- Traditional Food Industries

Coordinating between food manufacturers and marketing agencies in Lebanon and abroad and generalizing the implementation of internationally approved standards to facilitate export and to create a distinctive marking of origin.

16- Environmental Protection

- 16.1. Cooperating with the Ministry of Environment and Municipalities to expand green spaces and parks.
- 16.2. Protecting environmentally sensitive sites.
- 16.3. Supporting waste-water treatment projects in tourism projects.