



Reviewing Report on City of Gastronomy Zahle Lebanon

(2017.11.30)



Government and Policies

Lebanon a country that is renowned for its culinary prowess, is today threatened by globalization and its rippling effect on our culinary Heritage. In order to help preserve and restore the public's faith in our roots, we decided to work toward joining world-renowned programs such as the 'Creative Cities Network'.

In order to achieve and later preserve the membership, we formed a committee, which includes the region's major stakeholders. From the municipality to local experts in hospitality, we are today all working together towards the same goal; elevating our city, Zahle, to a whole new level.

In order to reach this goal we have compiled a comprehensive strategy to tackle the challenges that lie ahead.

To protect our heritage we first had to identify its threats. Traditional methods are fighting an uphill battle against efficient, modern and well-marketed products/services that are widely accessible. To keep our traditions relevant, we are working on ways to fuse the old and new, while preserving the core and the essence of our heritage.

Through capacity building, marketing campaigns, infrastructure development and a clear long-term strategy; we are able to revitalize threatened institutions. By working with all stakeholders we are able to influence every part of the value chain, from the farmers to the consumers and the support institutions in between i.e. NGO's, public and private institutions.

One of our main priorities today is to work closely with farmers to ensure that they receive proper training in good agricultural practices (GAP) and support in the production of healthy and nutritious produce. The market is shifting towards healthier products specifically organic produce. Being one of the largest agriculture area in Lebanon it is primordial for us to stay ahead of the trend.

The region has suffered from some setbacks throughout the years due to regional instability; this phenomenon has pushed us to shift considerable resources towards security.

However, once the area regains stability these resources will be redirected to the culinary and hospitality sector.



On a more organizational level we are working with our neighboring sister cities in order to create clear communication channels and networks. By organizing semi-annual meetings, we are able to synchronize our efforts to keep our work mutually beneficial.

In an effort to keep our heritage relevant the municipality with the help of local institutions organizes culinary events e.g. recipe competitions, events, festivals etc. These endeavors attract both local and foreign tourists and are crucial to keep traditional produce relevant.

In order to help substitute some modern products with healthier and traditional counterparts Zahle is starting to use more efficient modern machinery.

A good example is the drying of agricultural produce as a substitute to synthetic sweets and chips.

Marketing and awareness in the 21st century is becoming increasingly relevant. With social media and tourism platforms increases so does competition between cities, for a city to be a strong touristic hub in Lebanon it needs to possess a wide portfolio of services and activities.

Landmarks and the heritage need to be easily accessible and visible, today touristic cities need to offer its services in a form of menu giving tourists a wide variety of options to choose from.

Through proper heritage mapping and awareness campaigns we are working on providing tourists with the eco-touristic, culinary, hospitality and historical experience they are looking for. This process is lengthy by nature but with visible, tangible results from every campaign.

A good example can be an on-going project called “Tourathing” which roughly translates to “Heritagging”, the project is being implemented by 3 Local NGO’s and one international NGO, the project aims to involve the local youth in the protecting and conservation of their heritage through marketing campaigns and proper mapping of their heritage.

Around 40 young men and women are working together to promote their local heritage.

Similar project are happening all over Zahle e.g. training on how to build mud houses, turning traditional houses into artist retreats etc.

At the end of every project, we try to capitalize on its success story to replicate the model in other areas.



Local Business and institutions

Zahle's livelihood stands on two major foundations: agricultural and tourism (our tourism is directly related to gastronomy). Blessed with warm summers and cold winters, the regions climate and soil has given fruit to world renowned produce from exquisite wine to delicious chick peas.

Zahle today produces the country's finest arak and wine along with the produce needed to make the world's best mezze.



The municipality is today working on creating a local NGO entirely dedicated to the UNESCO-City of Gastronomy program.

The NGO will be comprised of major stakeholders whom share one common goal and vision for the city of Zahle. Through this NGO we will be able to widen our network to ensure that nobody sharing the same interests is left out.

Organization such as Arcenciel one of the municipalities strategic partners, a local NGO that manages a 280 hectare of agricultural land in the Domain of Taanayel, are using their resources as pilot plots to provide local farmers with the tools and expertise they need.

The Domain of Taanayel is home to modern smart irrigation systems, efficient irrigation systems, water treatment plants, recycling and the countries first Biopesticide.

Our strategy for the upcoming years relies on successful business models that cover the entire value chain, by ensuring that all services providers and producers benefit equally from the activities.

It is only through the commitment of all stakeholders that this project will remain sustainable.



Other international organization such as ACF (action contre la faim) are working closely with local farmers in order to help provide nutritious produce to refugees and marginalized

population. Through economies of scale and modest prices, zahles culinary heritage plays a major role in feeding the marginalized communities. Women empowerment is becoming increasingly popular, through aids and trainings in 'mouneh' production; these women often form cooperatives and sell their produce across the country. This phenomenon is helping women become autonomous in rural areas and reduce overall agricultural waste and its stress on the environment.

Public institutions such as the Lebanese agriculture research institution (LARI) located in Zahle Region, are working closely with the regions farmers, by providing affordable tests and strategic input for the farmers in its Zahle laboratory. LARI is a governmental organization under Minister of Agriculture Supervision. The institute conducts applied and basic scientific research for the development and advancement of the agricultural sector in Lebanon. LARI also works through NGO's as a research center to help guide most of the projects being implemented on the field to ensure proper management and sustainability.

The municipality is collecting samples from both suppliers and restaurants and sending them to accredited LARI laboratories.



International Exchanges

Committed to the city of Zahle means being committed to its sister gastronomic cities as well. In order to keep a fresh perspective on the ever-evolving field of hospitality we were thrilled and honored to participate in the following events:

- The IX UCCN Annual Meeting in Kanazawa, Japan, May 2015.
- International Forum on Gastronomy, Macao 2016.
- The Phuket Gastronomy International Symposium 2017 in Phuket.
- The XIth UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) Annual Meeting from the 30 June to 2 July 2017 in Enghien-les-Bains, France.
- Meeting of UNESCO Creative Cities OF Gastronomy - "D'NA GASTRONOMIC FESTIVAL", Dénia (Spain) from 29th September to 2nd October 2017
- Meeting of UNESCO Creative Cities of Gastronomy- "*Amazonia's Exotic Flavours: From Local, to Regional, to Global*" 7th - 12th November, 2017



We have also appeared in numerous articles that depict the Zahle Gastronomy experience, with famous photographers, bloggers and reporters that use their artistic medium to share their journey in Zahle.

The latest article published was from Gary Paul here is a link to the article from edible Baja Arizona.

<http://ediblebajaarizona.com/mirror-images>

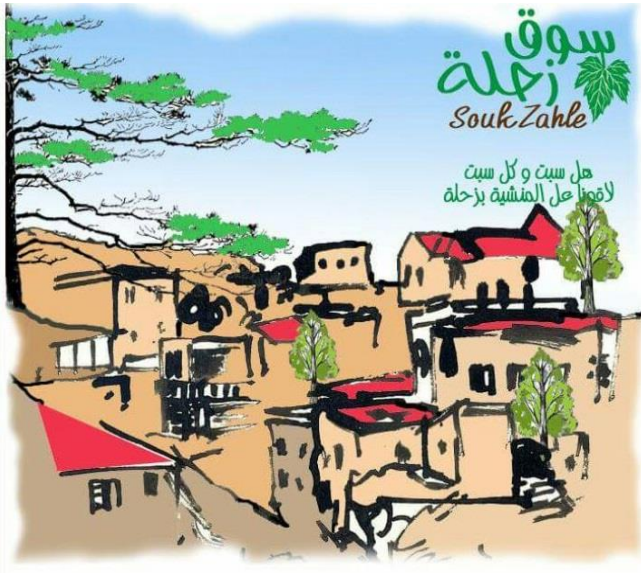
Long Term Strategy

As the political turmoil slowly loses haste, we are witnessing a slow but increasingly growing rise in tourism; specifically eco-tourism. Following a long and devastating garbage crisis the urban communities are looking for weekend retreats in the countryside where the air is clean, the fields are green and the food is good.

This demographic is however hard to please, finding themselves in the middle of a tug war, with every rural village trying to pull them in. For Zahle to stay relevant it must adapt, our heritage is today threatened by both local and international forces that use two main weapons: the new and the cheap. With most traditional methods obsolete, we have no choice but to fuse the old with the new to offer products and services that stand on top of the competition.

This is made possible by uniting all stakeholders to work together towards the same goal. Easy in theory harder in practice, one would even say impossible.

However through strong partnerships and collaborations we have been able to achieve just that.



What we still need to focus on:

- Increase the involvement of the community in the heritage protection and awareness
- Develop institutions specialized in Zahle gastronomy heritage (culinary schools)
- Develop a clear agricultural strategy for the region and help farmers implement the change
- Better the cities infrastructure in order to reduce the strain on Zahle's inhabitants and business owners
- Research, Document and promote both tangible and intangible heritage in Zahle
- Increase and better the trainings for all stakeholders
- Develop mapping opportunities with sister cities

As a member of UNESCO Creative Cities Network, Zahle will keep evolving and adapting to everyday challenges protecting its status of international City of Gastronomy by combining culture, history, values and heart and offering them to both its inhabitants and the world.

We remain committed to our mission to protect, preserve and share our heritage with anyone and everyone.

