

PROJECT PROPOSAL
"ZAHLE GASTRONOMY INSTITUTE"

Zahle's Project
Building Alliance for local Advancement,
Development and Investment

I – Applicant and Partners information:

Municipality of Zahle-Maallaka and Taanayel

Other non- municipal partners:

- Partner 1: ZaGA "Zahle Gastronomy Association",
Legal accreditation: 1630, 11/ 09/ 2019
- Partner 2: **Lebanese Diaspora**

Applicant's contact for the purpose of this project:

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II – Project Executive Summary

Title: Establishment of Zahle Gastronomy Institute

Brief description of the project, including its objectives, Beneficiaries and Anticipated results.

The project objectives are as follows:

The “Zahle Gastronomy Institute” project is part of the general strategy of the Municipality of Zahle-Maallaka and Taanayel, which joined in 2013 the UNESCO Network in the Art of Gastronomy by preserving the culture of traditional products and the Zahle heritage and raising the standard of living of local producers and thus to different segments of society.

Work for young people and qualify women to enhance their productive capacities and capabilities through improving the quality, mastery and marketing of traditional Zahle products.

The beneficiaries:

This project will benefit all those wishing to empower themselves and enter the labor market as professionals or producers in the entire municipal range which includes Zahle-Maallaka and Taanayel.

This project will take in charge the fact to empower youth, women and young people with special needs.

The council of the city, as usual, encourages the NGO’s to take care of marginalized people and support them.

- For example:

Social and Medical Centre of ALSEP

legal accreditation 319/AD, 15/12/1995;

The anticipated results:

- Stressing the study conducted by the Municipality, which results in the urgent need to establish this institute to provide specialized education on the hand and empower local producer, restaurants in order to create groups capable of highlighting the city as a City of Gastronomy and to preserve the historical heritage of the city on order to create jobs and stimulate economic growth.
- Working with the local community and NGO's concerned with women, youth and people with special needs and providing various continuous training courses to empower their abilities in order to reduce poverty, unemployment and safe food.
- Providing university degrees to enable women and youth to find jobs in the fields of hotel services and restaurants, especially that the economy of Zahle is based on the tourism sector.
- Creating a quality mark for the city of Zahle issued by the Municipality by creating an International recognition for food or food industry producers.
- Helping producers to export their production, which will provide them with a financial income and improve the quality of life of their families and thus contribute to the renaissance of the society.

III. Technical Approach and Methodology, Impact, and Sustainability

- a. Technical Approach and Methodology
- b. I. Project Concept

I.1 Background

Zahlé, with a population of approximately 150,000 inhabitants is known in Lebanon and throughout the region for its pleasant climate and traditional cuisine. The capital and largest city of the Beqaa Governorate in Lebanon, Zahlé is proud of its well-known gastronomy as well as of the fifty poets and writers born in the city over the past century. The Lebanese Mezé (Maza) had its origins in Zahle who made its reputation all over the world throughout the Lebanese diaspora.

Known as the "Bride of the Beqaa", and the "Neighbor of the Gorge", due to its geographical location and natural beauty, Zahlé is also known as the "City of Wine and Poetry". Zahlé's culture has long revolved around its grapes, wine and arak, the distilled anise-flavored drink that has traditionally been served in cafés at any time of the day. Zahlé's most important cultural event is the Festival of the Wine, traditionally held each September, during which concerts, plays, poetry readings and artistic exhibitions are organized daily over the course of several weeks. A famous historical site in Zahlé, the Berdawni River is recognized for its many waterside restaurants. These institutions have a strongly rooted reputation of delivering excellent traditional food.

Zahle is considered the third most important city in Lebanon - after Beirut and Tripoli - both in terms of size but also with respect to economic, cultural, and political influence. Due to its relative geographic isolation from the local centers of power in Mount Lebanon and Syria, the city benefits from a certain degree of autonomy.

Administratively, Zahle gathers the main central administrations of the casa: the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture, the various departments of the ministries, in addition to the Palace of Justice, and other public institutions. There are 129 cultural, sports and charity clubs and associations established in Zahle.

Starting from 1880, the emigration of Zahliots to America, Canada, Brazil, Europe and Australia, encouraged the culture to penetrate the history of Zahle. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, Zahle expanded its cultural clubs and established the first “literary salon” in Lebanon, where poets, politicians, writers and intellectuals gathered to recite poems. In 1898, had been established the Oriental College which was the most important venue of education in Zahle as many poets, writers, politicians and intellectuals graduated from this college. Since then, many schools have been built in Zahle transforming it to the city of poetry and intellects and the most important educational center of the Bekaa. It is also worth mentioning that there are 491 schools in Bekaa today of which 49 are in Zahle beside the schools for people with special needs. Zahle is the center for universities and higher education in the Bekaa. It hosts branches of the Lebanese university in addition to six other universities.

Zahle has a large number of hospitals, Ministries offices and governmental monuments, old hotels, restaurants and wine caves that allow her to mostly rely on tourism.

Thus, the fact that Zahle is considered a model city in terms of the comprehensiveness and integration of its cultural, economic, scientific, hospital and tourism components, and being at the top of the heart of Lebanon in terms of geography, and, especially because it is characterized by a decent and respectable life for all its citizens and guests.

Zahle was adopted on October 21, 2013 a creative “City of Gastronomy” within the UNESCO Network of Creative Cities.

On November 23, 2016, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution establishing 18 June of each year as a “Sustainable Gastronomy Day” .

Since then, the municipality has established a special committee from its members that contributed in activating this step with Zahle citizens and with similar cities in the UNESCO network on the one hand.

This committee has participated in all international conferences related to this goal.

On the other hand, believing in the leadership and creativity of the community, the municipality encouraged the establishment of a NGO with specialists from the civil society. This NGO, called “ZaGA- Zahle Gastronomy Association”, members take upon themselves the sustainable development of Gastronomy in all its aspects.

I.2 Description of the problem

In 2008, a local economic development study in Zahle, showed that the percentage of poverty in Zahle governorate is 22% whereas all over Lebanon is 28.6%. (Lebanese Local Economic Development, ICMA, 2008)

In 2023, more than 80% of the Lebanese population is below the threshold of poverty and the situation is worsening, this is what prompted the Lebanese people to rise up and demand the lowest human rights that have been robbed of it for years and decades.

The Municipality of Zahle, as a local governance, and sensitized to these humiliating conditions for the human being, saw itself in front of several options to face this crisis and to find solutions that enable it to support its citizens in the face of poverty, unemployment and bad conditions.

Several studies, dialogues and meetings were held between the Municipality and the various community segments affected by this reality.

Especially after the wheel of business stopped and some institutions closed, causing the loss of a significant number of citizens their jobs, which has a very negative impact on the quality of the family life.

When society waits in all parts of the earth from the officials of their countries to guide and pursue the sustainable development goals 2030, the Lebanese people see the crises chasing them in their living as in return of their work.

Looking forward to a better future and contributing to get out of this painful situation, encouraged the Municipality to develop a clear-cut strategy, as well as attention to the priorities of its work to maintain the sound infrastructure, rehabilitation of transportation network and sub-roads, and secure basic needs must take the initiative to improve the situation of its citizens.

The main objectives of the current city council are:

Promote the local community through the implementation of projects and proposing plans for rehabilitation and development:

- The first major project is the rehabilitation and modernization of the tourist area around the Berdawni River and turn it into a landmark that attracts investments and thus provides job opportunities and economic renaissance,
- The second major project is the establishment of the Zahle Gastronomy Institute, which will create jobs, qualify existing professionals and guide local producers to develop and preserve the historical heritage of Zahle
- Activate the role of the citizens and civil organizations; mobilize everyone, in particular women and youth, to participate in those projects and to bear the responsibility of their success.

I.3 Beneficiaries

The Municipality aims at engaging Zahle community in generating innovative solutions for local economic development and to built trust and allow the local capacities to contribute in it.

The sponsors of the project “Zahle Gastronomy Institute” are keen to participate and benefit all gender, age and cultural groups.

Target groups

The following groups are exposed to particular constraints in Zahle:

Women have very difficult living conditions in Zahle. A great number of them are unemployed.

In Zahle society there are a significant number of young women working in several educational, banking or other sectors, but the largest number of them do not work and in the past periods only the husband was working but because of the current economic conditions it became necessary for husband and wife to work together to meet the basic level for a decent life of their family.

Young people aged between 12 and 35 years. Most of them have low educational achievements. And some are illiterate, due to early school dropout. This group works informally in low skilled and underpaid jobs.

Disabled persons. This group is partially excluded from Zahle social, educational, labor market, economic and cultural life.

The poor living conditions are directly affecting women and the young population. These two groups face numerous challenges: unemployment, educational underachievement, lacking perspectives, feelings of exclusion.

The project is based on a local development research to assess the local community needs out of which resulted several options to adopt. Mainly youth and women, will be trained at creating social innovative projects. Furthermore, specialists will be assessing those beneficiaries' capacities to enable them on strengthening management capacity and formulate an integrated social strategy development.

II. Project Objectives

II.1 - The project aims to raise awareness about the importance of traditional products of Zahle and raise the standard of living of the local community, through:

a – Matching the socio-economic needs in Zahle, especially providing opportunities that benefit young people and women;

b – Enabling the capabilities of the young energies to acquire the necessary expertise and skills and activate the role of women and involve the special needs in the preservation of traditional cuisine in order to activate the role of Zahle as a creative city in the art of gastronomy;

c – Establishing the centre of sensory taste and manufacturing of traditional products in order to enhance the productive capacities of local producers and adopt traditional methods of manufacturing in order to preserve the historical heritage of Zahle;

d – Providing three levels of learning and training:

Providing University qualifications for young women and men in different specializations in hotel management;

Providing training courses for women and owners of institutions dealing with food processing and restaurants in all areas entrusted of them;

Providing continuous learning for professionals and adults in order to keep up with and update professional requirements.

e – Training local producers on modern methods of production and adoption of sanitary methods through the application of the principles of quality systems;

f – Promote traditional products through local exhibitions and markets of producers, social media and media.

II.2 - The main activities of the project revolve around the following points:

2.a - Establishing a center for sensory taste and manufacturing of various traditional products in order to enhance production capacities;

2.b – Establishing a special tasting pavilion aimed at training the new generation on flavor recognition and quality standards;

2.c – Training of interested professionals, women and youth in order to develop the professional performance entrusted to the art of taste;

2.d – Cooperating with the creative cities in the art of Gastronomy in the UNESCO network in order to exchange experiences and benefit from their development in this area.

N.B.: In terms of environment, the municipality, in cooperation with local partners, will monitor the raw materials used in the food chain from the field to the consumer.

The municipality will initiate consumer cooperation through the development of a booklet on production and processing, which will contribute significantly to the reduction of chemical deposits in the raw materials and to reduce waste and energy consumption in manufacturing.

II.3 - To meet the above listed objectives, a three-phased project:

1 – The first phase, which is to be coordinated with the Diaspora and other local and International organizations, will lay down a clear basis for cooperation with the municipality and then, work to secure the contract with specialists and develop university programs and training materials that will be provided at Zahle Gastronomy Institute.

2 – The second phase, leasing the building, carrying out the renovation and the rehabilitation and providing the necessary equipment for it, as explained below:

A - Rent the building.

The development of engineering studies and maps to rehabilitate the building.

B – Providing the equipment:

- Kitchen equipment and cooking tools for the food industry, for display or taste.
- Buy restaurant supplies of tables, chairs, plates...
- Purchase of classroom fittings, desks, chairs....
- Buy electronic equipment: computers, e-boards, sound system, mediatheque ...
- Buy air conditioning systems.

Request the donor to take on all this equipment and secure their purchase directly between this donor and the suppliers.

3 – The third phase is to announce the opening of the Institute and start registering students in university programs or those who wish to benefit from the diverse training that the Institute will offer as part of the continuing learning program.

III – Community Involvement:

The municipality has been cooperating with the local community since taking office on May 17, 2016 through committees of citizens and specialists in the municipal area.

They participate in the study of needs of the community and propose solutions and the establishment of effective projects in all areas through meetings or seminars and dialogues, which resulted in the identification of priorities and walk them for the development of the city.

IV – Project management:

1 - Project management and operation

The project will form a steering committee, comprising a committee from the municipality and the donor, as well as local and international experts in cooperation with international organizations, institutions and universities within the UNESCO Creative Cities Network.

2 – Alliances, cooperation and partnerships:

The Municipality will cooperate with:

- ZaGA, the NGO'S composed by local producers of food industry, experts and specialists,

- The local Universities which will provide the legal accreditation, the programs, as mentioned above in II. 3. 1 and providing students for the university program.

- Associations that will provide trainees with continuous learning program:

A - NGOs concerned with supporting the needy in the municipal area.

B - Associations dealing with special needs affairs:

a – “Days of Hope” is taking care of seventy children, youth and adults with special needs and supporting their families.

b - “Ray of Hope” is taking care of 170 children, youth and adults with special needs and supporting their families.

c - “Lebanese friends of patients with Multiple Sclerosis”- ALSEP, which includes dozens of sick women and their families, which seeks to empower their abilities and maintain their productive efficiency and continuity of their family responsibilities, this in order to improve the quality of life of patients, especially women, as this disease affects three times more women than men.

d – “Circle of Handicapped”: which taking care of young and adults with special needs and their families.

3 – Financial contributions:

Because of the expertise in the municipal system, we found that the total cost of this project is approximately one million USD, The Municipality can secure the location which is estimated at 200,000\$, and hope to get from the donor approximately 800,000\$ for the rehabilitation of the site and the equipment.

the main equipment:

- **Kitchen equipment and utensils for the food industry, for display or taste.**
- **Buy restaurant supplies of tables, chairs, plates...**
- **Purchase of classroom fittings, desks, chairs....**
- **Buy electronic equipment: computers, e-boards, sound system, mediatheque ...**
- **Buy air conditioning systems.**

4 – Sustainability:

The Municipality of Zahle-Maallaka and Taanayel will be entrusted with the sustainability of this institute through direct financial and moral support and looking forward to support some donors to enable and develop the activities of this center.