

Sites of commemoration – towards a better understanding of the past

1) Context

After the end of the Lebanese civil war, the country was in a state of amnesia about what took place during the civil war. At that time, it was thought that by suppressing memory, the Lebanese can move forward and unify the nation. However, the past 25 years have shown that tensions and divisions continue to shape the Lebanese society.

Recently, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) issued a guide for “civic service projects at secondary schools”, according to which teachers will design and implement community projects that will help to develop and reflect inter-Lebanese relationships.

2) Our approach

The project is part of a more comprehensive project that involves the mapping of commemoration sites that concern Lebanon's civil war. Secondary school teachers are empowered to use commemoration sites to generate a conversation with their students as well as within their schools, and to share their findings with the public in the form of an exhibition. The aim is to generate a better understanding of the civil war and an acknowledgement of the different existing narratives, by starting a critical reflection/examination on commemoration sites. In parallel, the project aims at providing alternative methods for teachers and promoting research as an important dimension for studying history towards a lasting peace.

3) What we do

Twenty-five teachers from public and private schools received two trainings on research and communication skills as well as on critical thinking. Through projects designed by or with their students, they studied commemoration sites representing different narratives of the civil war period.

Destroyed room inside Barbir hospital



Photo courtesy of Barbir hospital

Programme area	Dealing with the Past
Partner organisations	LAH (Lebanese Association for History)
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Students documented their research, either in a written form or in a film about the sites. An exhibition was held at the Barbir Hospital in Beirut, where the students' projects were shown to the public. The hospital is itself a commemoration site, located on the Green Line separating the Muslim West from the Christian East of the city during the civil war. The exhibition included interviews with people living in the area, descriptions of the sites and the reflections of the students about them as well as background information about the project. The exhibition is to be presented in the municipalities of the commemoration sites as well.

4) Our theories of change

If we train teachers in research, communication and documentations skills with a focus on culture of commemoration and accompany them through mentoring, this will lead teachers to encourage students to examine commemoration sites by critically reviewing different perspectives and interpretations. By exhibiting their products, students will generate a discussion among a wider group of people about the past, commemorative cultures, and multi-narratives; this contributes to an increased mutual acceptance of different narratives and better acceptance of the other and better understanding of the importance of teaching and learning about the past.

CONTACT US

-  facebook.com/forumZFDLebanon
-  lebanon.forumzfd.org
-  lebanon@forumZFD.de
-  +961 1 422 351