

A report on the 3rd annual seminar of the Abraham Path Initiative addressing: “Cultural Walking Tourism in Palestine” followed by a virtual path exhibition

The third seminar of the Abraham Path Initiative, organized under the patronage of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, took place on Thursday, December 3, 2009 at Bethlehem University in Dr. Sansour Hall.

The seminar focused on the progress and the development of the “Masar Ibrahim Al-Khalil” in Palestine for the year 2009.

A virtual exhibit of the path was made to show the beauty of the different places it passes by so far: Nablus, ‘Awarta, ‘Aqraba, Duma, Kefer Melek, Taybeh, Beitin and Al ‘uja.



The seminar started at 9 am with the welcoming address of Dr. Nabil Mufdi, Director of the Institute for Hotel Management at the University and the professor in charge of the Abraham Path. Frederic Masson, API coordinator in Palestine welcomed everybody in the name of the API Country Team. He was followed by a talk by Br. Peter Bray, Vice Chancellor of Bethlehem University, underlining the importance of the project for the University. Dr. Hamdan Taha, Deputy Director of the Palestinian Department of Tourism and Antiquities, closed the session and expressed the strong support of its Ministry toward the entire project.

Mr. Hhazi Eid presented the achievements of Masar Ibrahim El Khalil in the year 2009. For the first year of the existence of the path, around 250 persons walked it, with most of them spending one or many nights in villages. The walkers were from 7 to 77 years old! coming from abroad as well as from the country itself.

Mr. George Rishmawi, from Siraj center in Beit Sahur, presented the work on the new segment between Bethlehem and Hebron which is now completed. His talk was followed by a seven minute movie made by Rami Rishmawi and Rasan Bannoura, in cooperation with the IMEMC, shown for the first time. The film was following a group of walkers on the path and their journey in the village of Duma.



The next session, entitled “How networking can bring synergies together to create a product”, was presented by Mr Raed Saadeh, an API board member strongly involved in Rural Tourism in the region of Beir Zeit and

co-founder of the Rosanna Association. The presentation focused on partnership synergies and cooperative work.

Dr. Nabil Mufti gave an introduction to the planned Bethlehem University tour guide training program in which local guides will be trained in trekking in close cooperation with European Mountain Guides. Masar Ibrahim Al-Khalil will be a partner for this project.

Another movie made by a young Palestinian artist living abroad, Yasmin Fedda, was presented as well: "The Summer 08 Youth Walk" talks about the first pilot walk on the path which took place in July 2008 and through which the Masar Ibrahim El Khalil was officially opened.

The next spokesman was Mr. Imad Al Atrash, Director of the Palestinian Wildlife Society who gave a lecture about the cultural and natural tourism and the value of the trail in a "green-tourism" concept.

The last session was hosted by Mr. Michel Awad, from Siraj Center who presented the Palestinian Code of Conduct for Travelers, a local initiative made to promote and preserve the already existing good spirit which exists between tourists and local communities.

An open buffet-lunch prepared by the Students of Bethlehem University was offered to the participants.

We have to say that each of the sessions was very interesting and attracted the attention of the locals as much as that of the foreigners.

The lectures covered different aspects of local tourism, such as economical touristic development, touristic infrastructure, rural tourism and flora and fauna. It also showed that after more than two years working together, partners and many individuals as well have kept their passion for the Masar Ibrahim El Khalil and strongly believe in its vision and development.

The virtual path exhibition was launched after the last session. The idea of the exhibition was to walk through a virtual path following the actual order of 10 villages and locations, from Nablus to Hebron.

Each village, and its representatives, had a stand with the name of the village and many pictures of it and its surroundings. The stand provided documentation about the village and local products that visitors could see and buy. Some of the villages were represented through a local association or other partners.

In addition to DED and CCFD that supported the seminar, the following organizations were as well participating: Tomorrow's Youth (Nablus), PWLS and Siraj (Beit Sahur) Rozana (Beir-Zeit), Hebron-France and the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee.



It was important not only to exhibit the path but also to explain the political context in which it evolved in order to give a more definite explanation of the challenges the project is facing.

Throughout the seminar there were over a hundred people from all ages; some were from the villages, others were students, professors and Brothers from the university as well as many visitors coming from the tourism sector.

They were pleased and positively surprised to go through the virtual path and to meet with the people representing the villages. It was a very good way for everyone to learn about the route of the Abraham Path through the available documentation, the pictures of the walks and the landscapes, and through the presence of the villagers themselves.

We are proud to say that this third seminar was a real success and the exhibition was a valuable asset to it.

Events like this one contribute to the promotion of the path in Palestine as we are trying to encourage local people and especially youths to come and experience the joy and the sensation of walking.

We hope to follow this concept in the coming events and we wish to thank the CCFD and the DED for making it possible.



Nizar Halloun/ Frederic Masson
Masar Ibrahim El Khalil Country team Palestine