

**The Study on the Integrated Tourism Development Plan in the Republic of
Lebanon
Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)**

**Group Interview on Strategies and Projects for Tourism Development
In Anjar
Municipality
Tuesday, 14th October 2003**

1. Objectives of the meeting

The meeting was the second one with the group in Anjar. Its objective was to get feedback from the group on strategies to promote tourism in Anjar, as well as on specific projects that had both been developed by JICA after the first meeting in Anjar and that were presented to the group for discussion.

2. Methodology

Because of its participatory approach JICA intends to get the input from the communities at each stage of the Study. The second group meeting in Anjar was held in order to get the group's input with regard to strategies and projects before the elaboration of the masterplan and the final selection of projects. The meeting was three hours long and divided into three sessions: Introduction, Strategies, and Project Ideas. Among the group were members from the municipality, including the mayor, as well as people from the private sector. All discussions were held in plenary and participants were asked to write their comments on papers that were glued on card-boards. The meeting was facilitated in Arabic and translated into English consecutively. From the JICA team Hideo Sakamoto and Sandy Chesrown were present. Tanja Tabbara facilitated the meeting, and Karen Mneimne translated.

3. Session One: Self-Introduction

Name	Organization	Role/Profession	Favourite Tourist Spot and why
Tanja Tabbara	Save the Children	Youth Advocacy Coordinator	Anjar because of natural beauty, nice restaurants and ruins
Hideo Sakamoto	JICA	Specialist in social development	Penang
Wajdi Barbari	MAE Production Co. (Computer Service)	Director (Agricultural Engineer)	Anjar (general atmosphere)/Baalbeck(ruins) /Bcharre (Gibran heritage)
Misak Boyadjian	Hotel owner	Manager	Anjar because beautifully situated
Garo Andonian	Member of municipality	Landscape architect	Anjar (strategically situated between Beirut and Damascus) and Baalbeck for sites
Talin Sinabian	Committee of Red Cross Akhtamar in Anjar	Member of committee for tourism development	Armenia because home and natural beauty

Zohrab Batouzian	Member of municipality	Souvenirs for tourists production	Anjar and Baalbeck
Vahe Sakajan	Restaurant owner	Member of municipality	Cyprus (tourism infrastructure) and Lebanon (climate and hospitality)
Hera Tchaparian	Red Cross Akhtamar	Member of committee for tourism development	Beirut and mountain area/metn because of activities for kids
Hakub Aintablian	Member of municipality Anjar	Agriculture and Armenian history	Armenia (climate and lake area)
Boughous Taslakian	Private sector	Painter and sculptor	Italy (art works and art history)
Siboh Sakian	Mayor of Anjar		Anjar and Baalbeck for their historic documents

4. Session Two: Strategies for Tourism Development

The JICA team presented 5 strategies, the participants were asked for their comments on those strategies and/or to suggest other strategies.

Strategies presented by JICA:

- Strategy to encourage visitors to spend more time in Anjar (example of virtual reality museum). This strategy was welcomed by all.
- Strategy to promote local Armenian culture. Participants indicated strong agreement with this strategy and pointed out that they have finalized plans for an Armenian museum adjacent to the church. The museum is supposed to exhibit the history of the Armenian people of Anjar only. They still need funding for the project.
- Site management strategy including preservation and interpretation. This strategy was also agreed upon. It was mentioned that the coordination between different administrative levels (locally and nationally) needs to be improved.
- Strategy to link the Ummayad site with the retail area. This was strongly agreed upon by participants.
- Strategy to promote touristic development in the town of Anjar. Participants also strongly agreed and mentioned that it would be important for Anjar that tourists stay over night in Anjar.

Strategies developed by participants:

- More coordination with tour operators to create tours including Anjar. All participants mentioned the problem of commission that staff is given in certain areas and retailers. In this context it was also suggested to create a tourist company in Anjar that would increase the promotion of Anjar.
- Festivals and expositions in order to increase attractiveness of Anjar for tourists
- Strategy to promote the excavation of other sites. Probably there are Byzantine and roman ruins that would also enhance Aanjar's attractiveness as a touristic location.
- Strategy to establish continuous promotion of Anjar. There is already a website for Anjar established.
- Strategy to promote eco-tourism in Anjar

- Strategy to create a “symposium” that should increase attractiveness for families by creating a public garden with facilities for children as well as exhibitions of fine art.

Concerns mentioned by Hideo Sakamoto:

- Private Bed & Breakfast as a model in Anjar or not culturally acceptable? Participants felt that it was no problem to accommodate tourists in private houses as long as there would be a separate entrance and not the same rooms used by guests and locals. However, to accommodate tourists in the same rooms, together with a family would probably not be acceptable by most families.
- Could too many tourists disturb life in Anjar? Participants strongly neglected and seemed to agree that they would love their town to become more busy and crowded.
- Is there a problem of private excavations in Anjar? Participants agreed but noted that this was a problem not only in Anjar but all of Lebanon. It was suggested to establish a system of authentication to stop illegal sales and instead, produce copies for official sale (as in Egypt).
- How to solve problem of the Syrian soldiers? So far, the historic site of Anjar is “occupied” by the Syrian army. It was mentioned that the municipality is building rooms for the Syrian Army to move off the site.

5. Session Three: Project Ideas

Participants were asked to comment on the projects proposed by JICA with cards that would explain their agreement or disagreement and/or suggest other projects. The following projects were discussed:

- Most important project discussed was probably the creation of a “souk area” in Anjar. This should be a market for handicrafts and other works of art and a farmer’s market next to it. This area would comprise most of the smaller projects listed below. It was suggested to create this area close to municipality and main road. However, after looking at the old wind-mill next to the restaurant area that was suggested to be transformed into a museum, it seemed that the area next to the restaurants could be more convenient for the creation of such a market.
- Expansion of Agro Processing Akhtamar.
- Water Park. Hideo Sakamoto criticised the seasonality of such a project but most participants felt that the long summer season would bring enough income to compensate for the winter months.
- Museum of water and gold. Participants first did not understand the idea of the project and how to display “water”, in addition to the fact that they are much tuned into the establishment of the Armenian museum. However, they got more excited about the idea after they understood the concept of a “thematic” museum and the link of water to Anjar as a tourist attraction. The old wind mill next to the restaurant site was suggested as a suitable location. All participants thought that it would be very difficult to find private sector investment for the museum.
- Jewelry festival. The foundation of an association for goldsmiths and handicraft professions was suggested. They should be responsible for organizing such a festival.
- Music festival in the ruins. Municipality should be responsible. That festival should be in the summer months, ideally August.
- Handicrafts and Gold workshops. (part of planned souk area). Committees should be responsible for their establishment.

- Farmers market. (next to planned souk area). Should be seasonal market.
- Campsite at spring area. Project should be organized and supervised through municipality. Seasonality of the project was mentioned as a negative point.
- Committee of tourism in Anjar. This committee should be organized to address multitude of project ideas and liaison with community and MOT.
- Organized playground for family tourism. As explained by participants, this project should be part of the symposium (as mentioned under strategies). The symposium should include the playground and a sculpture garden and invite artists to exhibit their work and organize exchange through conferences etc. Municipality is already implementing this project along the primary entrance boulevard to encourage tourism-plot#3172 on French master plan.
- Expansion of 14-15 September “festival” (commemoration of the martyrs feast). There was confusion whether to expand this “festival”. Most participants mentioned that there should be another festival in Anjar that would attract more tourists but the 14-15 September was a religious feast and should only serve that purpose. After that clarification it seemed that there was no need to expand the commemoration of the martyrs.

6. Conclusion

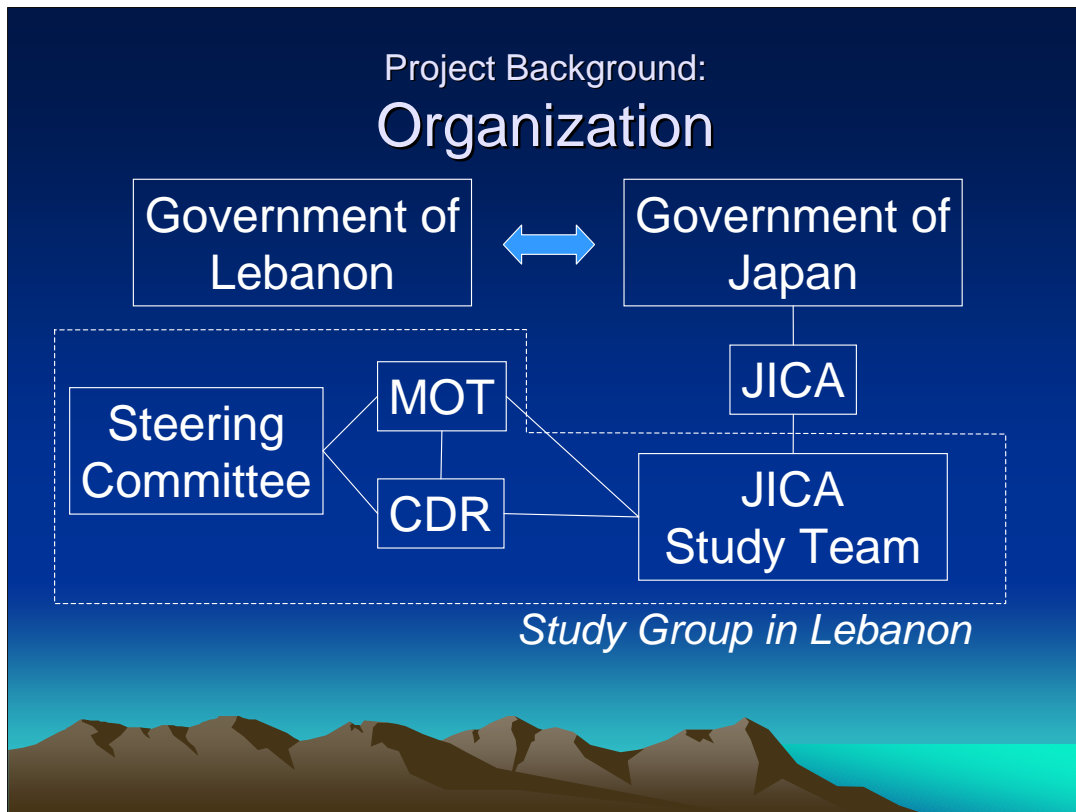
As far as contents was concerned, it can be stated that there were no major disagreements among the group, they seemed to be a very harmonious group, and public and private sector both were excited about working together towards the promotion of tourism in Anjar. They did not at all have negative concerns with regard to the increase of tourists in Anjar but excitement about the positive aspects of tourism prevailed.

As to the methodology of using cards for comments, it proved to be difficult to get written comments back, as most participants preferred to express themselves orally. In addition, probably more cards with simple but concrete questions should have been used. This shortcoming made documentation of the discussions more difficult.

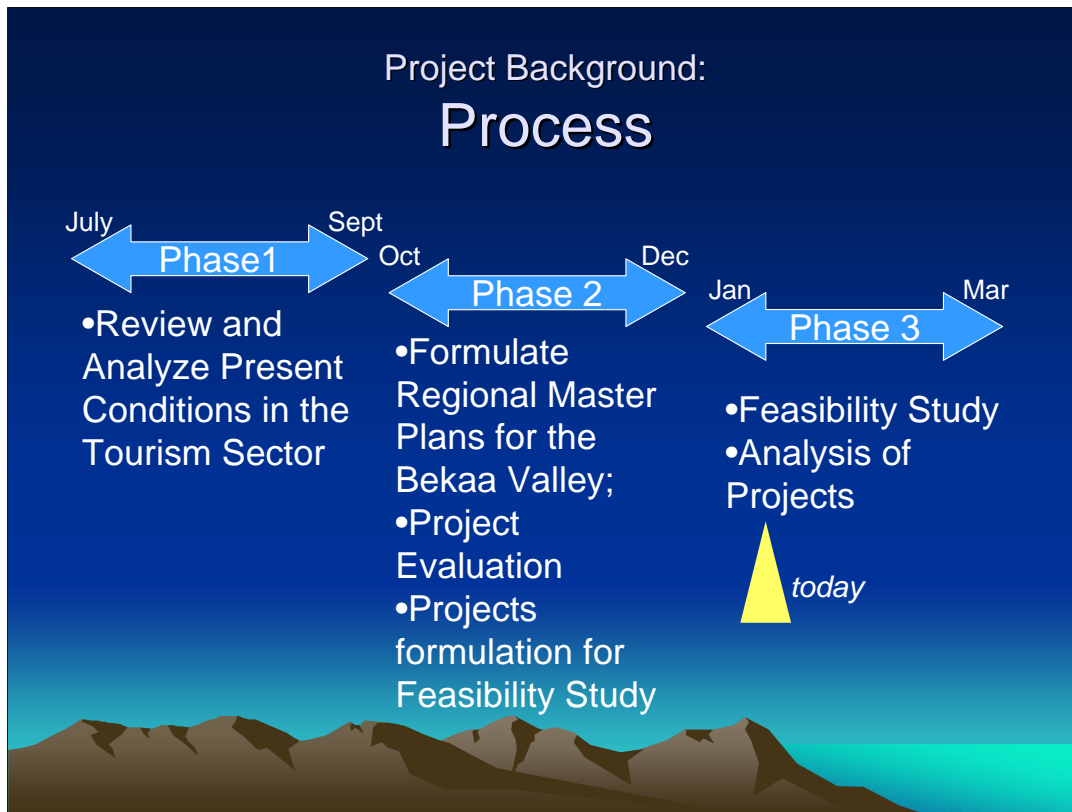
Focus Group Interview ~Aanjar~

10 AM, JANUARY 15, 2004

Sandi Chesrown, JICA Study Team, welcomed the participants and thanked them for coming. She particularly thanked Mrs. Mona Fares of the Ministry of Tourism, and Dr. Jaoudat Abou Jaoude, CDR, for participating in the focus groups and working with the JICA Study Team every step of the project. She also thanked President Sakaian and the members of Aanjar's informal Tourism Development Committee for being so helpful and providing the JICA Study Team with a window on their fascinating Armenian culture and delicious local food, noting that the process of working with them has been a great pleasure.

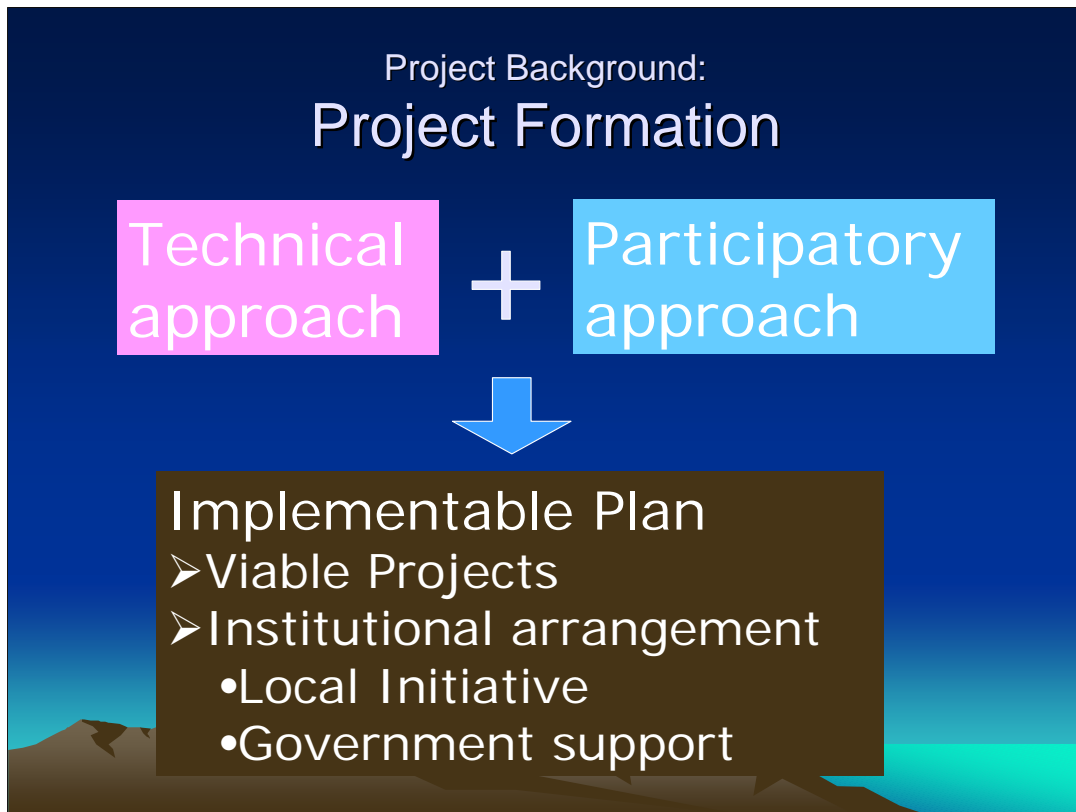


Ammar Abboud, Focus Group Facilitator, explained the project background and organization.



Ammar explained the completed Phases 1 and 2 of the project. Sandi noted that our study process has always presumed that tourism planning should be locally driven and focused on the linkages between natural and cultural resources and the life of the community itself, the living heritage, to ensure protection of the resources and local economic vitality and sustainability. She explained that the study is in the third and final stage. From a list of 21 projects, 4 were chosen for feasibility study, including 2 in Bcharre and 2 in the Bekaa. Of the 2 in the Bekaa Valley, what the team is calling the “Aanjar Site Management and Village Tourism” and the “Niha Eco-Tourism and Site Management Plan” will undergo feasibility studies.

She also explained that a cultural heritage development project in Zahle and a rural tourism development project in Qaa will receive in-depth analysis. The Zahle project would include a Museum of Wine, Poetry and Gastronomy which is important in terms of economic linkages to Aanjar.



Ammar explained the project formation, using a technical and participatory approach to arrive at sustainable implementation. He added that the sustainability and successful implementation of the final projects depend on the good balance of the approaches and the participation of all actors (local/national; private/public; profit/non-profit).

Participatory approach

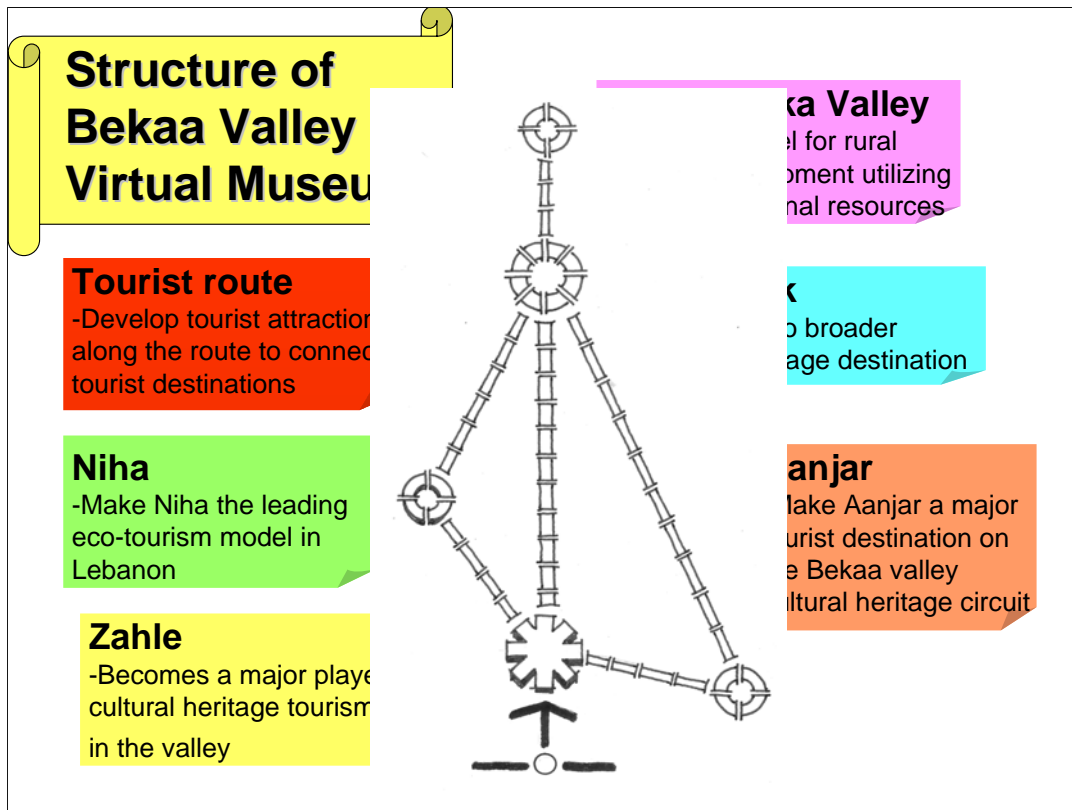
- Listening to the Community through Focus Group Meetings
 - September 5th Focus Group,
 - September 17th Tourism Development Committee meeting,
 - October 14th Focus Group
- Encourage visitors to spend more time in Aanjar
- Promote local Armenian culture
- Preserve and improve the Umayyad site
- Create attractions, such as a souk, or reasons for tourists to visit and stay longer
- Develop festivals – music, jewelry
- Develop a formal committee to organize and promote tourism

Ammar explained the JICA Study Team's participatory approach, and that through a series of 3 meetings, the Team heard and utilized the community's priorities, as detailed in Slide 5.

Strategy

- Aanjar as Part of Bekaa Valley Virtual Museum
 - Weaving the Thread of Local Attractions to Expand Tourism Development and Alleviate Poverty
- Enhance the Well-Being of Local People through Increased Tourism Jobs and Markets

Ammar explained the joint strategy of creating a Bekaa Valley Virtual Museum and adhering to the national strategy of increasing tourism-related jobs and markets to benefit local people and enhance their well-being.



Ammar used Slide 7 to illustrate how the Bekaa Valley Virtual Museum framework encourages a clustering of sites in Niha, Zahle, Aanjar, Baalbeck and the North Bekaa, to become an expanded tourism route that increases the visitors' length-of-stay including time and spending in local communities. He emphasized the creation of "a road map" for tourism creating a large circuit for a prolonged tourism experience, where each focal point serves as an attraction as well as a starting point leading to another location.

Demand

- Aanjar Demand Driven Tourism
 - Cultural tourists: general interest and advanced academicians, archaeologists
 - Beirutis – Lebanese and Expats
 - Local Lebanese/regional Arab leisure tourists (spring, restaurants, festival, etc.)
 - Armenian Diaspora

Ammar explained that the JICA Study Team believes that, although supply throughout the Bekaa requires expansion, tourism is demand driven. In Aanjar, the primary tourism market for the Umayyad archaeological site is seen as tour groups of sophisticated international cultural heritage tourists and Lebanese and expats arriving individually from Beirut, as well as some regional tourism (reflecting the Umayyad heritage of Jordan and Syria).

The market for the proposed gold souk and water mill visitors center would be the above as a second stop, as well as a separate local Lebanese and regional leisure market and the returning family members of the Armenia Diaspora.

Proposed Projects

- Aanjar (World Heritage) Site Management and Village Tourism Project

[Objectives]

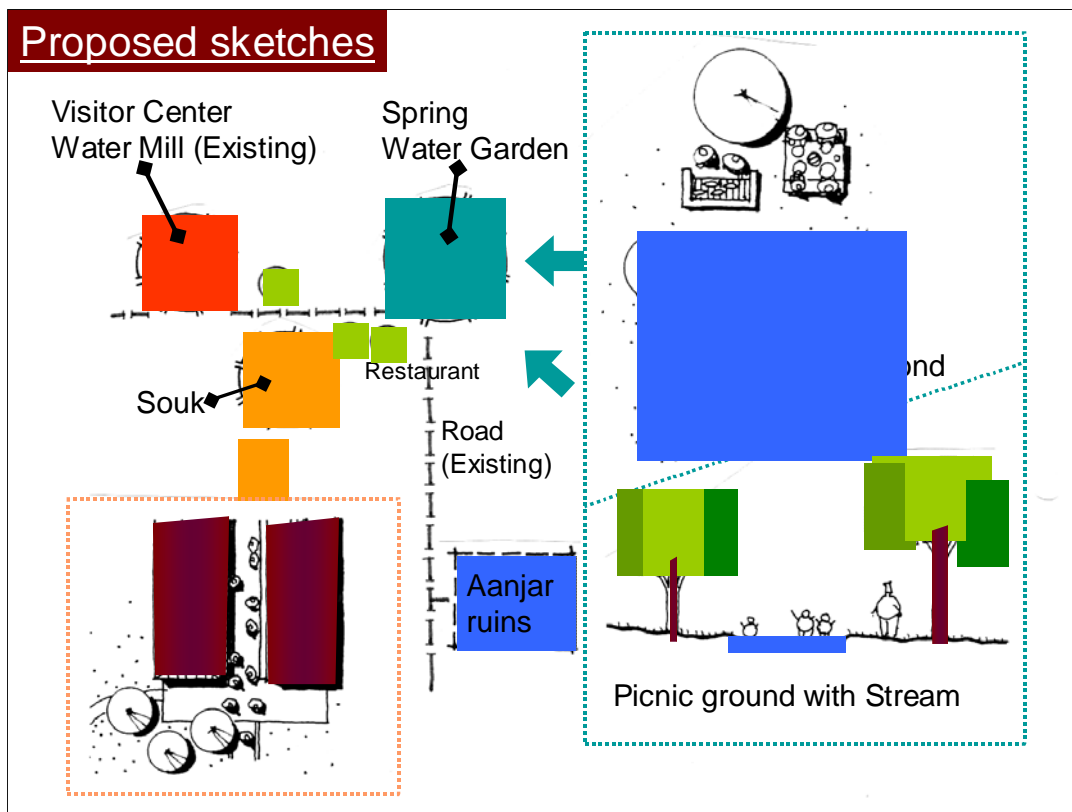
- Sustainable Conservation and Presentation

[Activities]

- Umayyad Site Management Plan
- Clustered New Facilities Including a Gold Souk
- Visitors Center/Armenian Heritage Exhibition Gallery

Sandi explained that the objective of the Aanjar Site Management Plan is sustainable conservation and presentation of a very important World Heritage site. She noted that successful site management plans are a combined effort of meetings between local communities and government, in this case DGA, MOT, and UNESCO, and that the various parts of a typical site management plan include a statement of significance assessing the inherent or assigned values of the site; an inventory of the cultural resources, a list of management goals and objectives, and a management program. With regard to Aanjar, the JICA Study Team is proposing a series of measures to educate visitors about the importance of the site, including a revised brochure, educational conservation activities, and interpretive signage.

With regard to Aanjar's proposed visitor attractions, Sandi noted that the study's goal is to expand the current visitor's stay and to draw visitors from the WH site into Aanjar proper. She walked the participants through visitor circulation: first stop a well preserved and presented archaeological site providing a clear understanding as to why the site is important and valuable. The site entrance would be changed, so that visitors would be ticketed at the restored Umayyad market to the left of the entrance, which would become a visitors center. Visitors would continue to the crossing of the primary roads, the Cardo and Documanus Maximus, where interpretive signage and shade would be provided, and they would turn left to the restored market buildings, now rotating exhibition galleries.

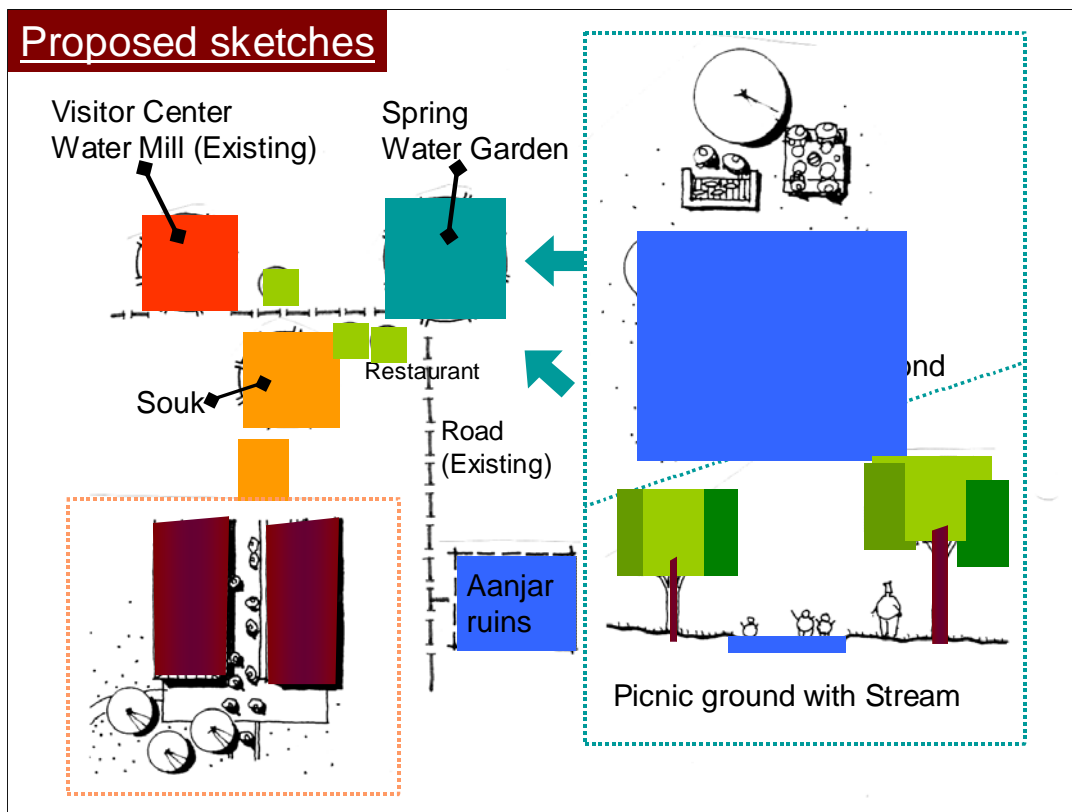


Continuing the circulation pattern, visitors would proceed (either by car, tour bus, or horse and buggy) into town to the restored Water Mill Visitors Center for a look at the Armenian cultural heritage exhibition galleries, perhaps a coffee and local pastry by the waterfall, and shopping at the gold souk across the street, envisioned as a rustic building with approximately 52 gold jeweler small studios or workshops. There they could watch local jewelers at work. The souk might also house some of Rashiya's silver jewelers. A souk gift shop would offer jewelry and other local products, including Akhtamar's agro-products, for sale.

From the souk, visitors could stop at one of the local restaurants (adjacent to the souk) for lunch or dinner, perhaps to the local hotel (opening in May) for an overnight. The street would be transformed into an annual street Armenian Gold (Jewelry) Festival with local Armenian food in the spring or fall, drawing visitors from across Lebanon and the region.

Sandi also noted that the JICA Study Team is recommending that the municipality and the Tourism Development Committee or local staff be given training in a variety of areas, including promotion, and that local people participate in training programs for the site conservation and adaptive reuse construction, as well as handicrafts.

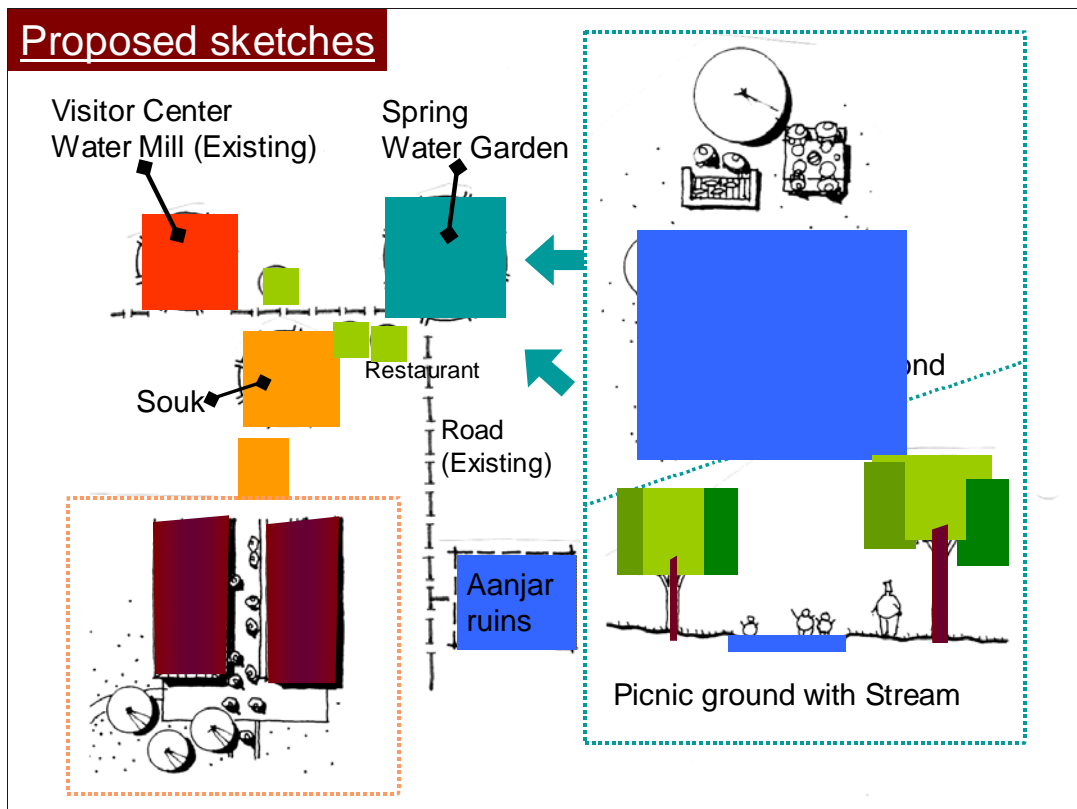
She asked the Focus Group for their comments on the master plan and proposed projects.



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The Mayor expressed concern about the projects not being “in town,” or next to the ruins. Sandi responded that it is important to have buffer zones around World Heritage sites. In this case, it is particularly important as the Aanjar site offers the visitor historical landscape viewsheds in two directions, and the third to the town (rear of the site) could be buffered with transitional screening/plantings. This allows the visitor to be transported back in time. Having the souk at the restaurants area brings the visitor into the town, and transitions the visitor from the Umayyad period and cultural heritage to a contemporary period and Armenian heritage.

Another gentleman thanked the team for their efforts, but felt that the plan was theoretical and did not recognize the need to benefit the people and create jobs. He recommended more hotels. He also asked if we understood that zoning/urban planning issues would be important. Sandi responded that actually the plan would create dozens of local jobs, and that locating the facilities in a cluster pattern with the restaurants would create a “critical mass” of tourism to provide tour operators and tourists with a big enough draw from the site to the town. She said that hotels could be a later phase of their tourism plans, but currently there is a need to increase demand and visitor attractions.



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There was discussion of the “spring water garden” on the plan. Sandi noted that it was a secondary idea for a camping site in a picturesque location. The local people said the area is very swampy, and again there was mixed support for the concept (will drop it). The local people recommended that the conceptual drawing be re-done to be more representative of the actual locations, which Sandi promised would occur in Phase 3.

Discussion focused on the parking area for the gold souk. The mayor said that the municipality owns both the water mill (400 sq m of land) and a portion of the parking lot where the souk would be located, and both land uses are acceptable. He said the remainder of the parking lot could be purchased. Another man recommended that the parking be off-site about 100 m from the restaurants (direction of the hotel and archaeological site), so that people could walk into the area. Sandi mentioned there could be an interpretive trail to encourage walking, although there is benefit to having the parking right at the site (allows operators better visitor control).

Implementation Discussion

- What are necessary conditions for implementation?
 - Who carries it out locally?

Sandi noted that the “local champions” to date have been the Mayor/baladya and his unofficial Tourism Development Committee. The Mayor noted that in 2 months they will form a formal Tourism Development Committee, and he and they would be the point of contact for future projects. One member recommended that local churches be involved in implementation.

Funding

- Do you have any idea for fund raising for the project?
- Discussion of donors team will visit.

With regard to funding, the Mayor said the municipality can contribute a small portion/land, and that the Tourism Development Committee could do fundraising. Dr. Abou Jaoude asked if any part of the current budget is allocated for tourism development? The Mayor responded no, as budgets have been focused on infrastructure which they have just completed, including sewer and water.

Discussion focused on souk ownership, which Sandi said the JICA Study Team perceived to be private, perhaps a coop of the gold jewelers in Aanjar who would move their workshops from their homes to the souk. One participant noted that there is a Jewelers Syndicate in Lebanon, and that a portion of their money might be invested in the souk. (After the meeting, one member Wajdi Birbari said that he has heard private individuals have formed a gold souk development group.) All agreed that jewelers would be interested in expanding from their current wholesale base into retail sales, depending on the legalities and costs involved.

Sandi explained that the JICA Study Team will take this project to a number of international donors to try to persuade them to fund it, noting that there is some indication that GEF might be interested in funding the site management plan. The Mayor said that many people would like to see DGA restore the church and the mosque on the Umayyad site and excavate the ancient baths.

Sandi responded that much of the World Heritage community is pushing for site management rather than continued excavation, to ensure that cultural fabric that has already been exposed is protected and presented rather than increasing the inventory without adequate conservation.

Funding

- Do you have any idea for fund raising for the project?
- Discussion of donors team will visit.

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The Mayor also said that the Syrian Army is expected to move outside the Citadel next week, and that they, too, are interested in being relocated so that the site can attract more tourists.

Mrs. Mona Fares explained the many years of project preparation and thought behind the JICA Study project. She said that MOT is ready to participate with the municipality and the local community, and that Aanjar is a priority. She promised that the report will mention that due to the local community's hard work, Aanjar has become a primary tourist attraction and beautiful community, and that the JICA Study Team and MOT will follow up with the donors to see that the project is implemented.

The Mayor then distributed a memo to the Parliament's Budget and Finance Committee, questioning why the World Bank's CHUD project did not include Aanjar, and that this decision should be reconsidered. He noted that the letter states that Aanjar's three most important projects are: 1. site excavations, 2. a handicraft market (?) next to the Citadel, and 3. a museum (which the community is planning behind the church).

Dr. Abou Jaoude explained the history of the CHUD project, and that it is too late to be included, but he recommended that the Mayor send CDR a memo to be included later. The Mayor thanked the JICA Study Team for its hard work and hoped for implementation of the project.

Invitation

Tele-seminar for communities

- JICA Study Team prepares a seminar to share the experiences and knowledge of tourism development in Japan.
- Two seminars will be held on separate days.
 - 26 Jan (Mon): Eco-tourism development
 - 30 Jan (Fri): Partnership among Private and public
 - 12:00~15:00 (the seminar begins at 13:00)
 - At Berytech, Mar Roukos
- Transportation fee can be reimbursed. Snacks will be served.
- Language: Arabic based lecture
- 4 members from Aanjar are invited for each seminar. (We need the participants' name.)

Ammar explained the community tele-seminar and requested that Aanjar forward its name to the JICA Study Team (Naheda or Yoshi) this week.

Theme of the seminar

- 26, Jan: Eco-tourism Development
 - History and definition of eco-tourism
 - Potential of the compatible Eco-tourism development with the local agriculture industry.
 - Case study: Hoshino-resort.
- 30, Jan: Partnership in tourism
 - Typical and Desired organizations
 - Two main objectives in partnership:
 - To achieve sustainable and safe development
 - To share the development
 - Case study: Kusatsu town





Photos in Tele-seminar
For NGOs
On 16, Nov., 2003

The system connects
between
Lebanon and Japan.



Sandi noted that this is the first example of implementation by JICA/MOT/CDR, as this training seminar is a direct result of the project.