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NAHR EL KELB AS A LEARNING CENTRE*

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Museums need to move away from emphasis on museums as collections and towards people, and to have living and realistic methods to attract and interest museum visitors. So, we can look at immediate possibilities for the Nahr El Kelb site to be developed as a learning centre. Educational institutions are facing the need to change their systems of education in response to rapid social and technological developments. These changes affect the needs of educative learning on the environment with stress and concern for the understanding and preservation of heritage being one of the areas that requires serious consideration. To think critically about our social and physical environment is constantly with us. To aim at inducting people into their heritage, so that they can understand, enjoy, question, exploit, protect, enrich and preserve it requires positive planning and creative initiative.

We do consider very seriously that the Nahr El Kelb site is of such great importance and value in the advancement and needs of education in the country, that it needs to be written about and documented to make educationalists and environmentalists think and to be aware of the museum movement and its growing use as a learning vehicle for education. Do a few ancient, crumbling stones found at the mouth of a river, neglected for many years have such an important significant meaning for education in this country? What must we do about it? Should we do anything about it? Why protect and conserve old stones? We can say that not only do the stelae a service to render for those who have insight and dedication to use them as a means of promoting an educational and cultural centre for the benefit of the youth of the country and for all ages but also as a healing of memories, for those who do not remember their past are condemned to repeat it. Let us, therefore look carefully and objectively at our inheritance and let it become a part of our lives in order to fulfill the inner need of healing, belonging and unifying in whatever we have destroyed or torn apart.

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It is salient and noteworthy to realise that if you believe in the museum becoming the channel through which we pass to protect our heritage then why are we not doing something about it? The site obviously promotes itself as a natural open-air museum. History stands at our front door in one of the most easily, accessible and approachable positions in the Middle East which would also be highly viable as a commercial enterprise as well, as there are so few open-air educational recreation centres where one can learn and discover and enjoy the appreciation or the natural environment at the same time. What better way than to learn «History Alive» through studying civilization provoked by the «stelae» left to us by so many different civilizations. Do we really know many civilizations have left genuine evidence at the Nahr El Kelb?

We have human social development at our doorstep so let us take advantage of this fact and implement a prototype museum to serve as an example of what could happen to other archeological sites and research sufficiently to present documentation about the site. This would be new and fresh research work so as to add to that work that has already been carried out in the past on this site.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

A museum is an educational institution. Why not give our nation the opportunity to enjoy and experience this kind of institution? May be then as educationalists we can open the floodgates of a new area in our educational system. We do admit that we need a break-through in our educational system and programmes. Why not use an open-air museum in a prototype scheme for a network of open-air museums indoor museums as a means of promoting this extension of broadening our educational programme? Why not move forward with the developing museum market and lead the way in museum education? What better educational facility than to have a cultural centre in Lebanon where all peoples, the very young to the very old can come and experience through the «arts» a chance to realise inborn ambitions, needs and hopes. Can we start now? Who will be affected by this innovation to open a space large enough to absorb and promote opportunities for the entire country and show the world around us that education releases the spirit, allows the spirit of man to be, to live, to express himself and to hope? We can then bring forth new birth, renewed visions. Those of us who wish to create unity with justice and peace, and care strongly enough to influence creative projects drawing all peoples together in common interests and goals

and bring to birth the unity among peoples that we so much desire should begin now. Education whatever form it takes whether as an open-air museum or a cultural centre linked up with a museum are agencies suitable for transmission of culture to great masses of people. Initiative and creative ideas are necessary to ally schools and museums, We live in a world of rapidly accumulating technology and knowledge, and our own technological advances, research programmes, universities, schools are far from meeting educational needs. Children and adults need to know their own history and become involved with the culture of their past and present. They need to be helped into this cultural experience. People need to be happy about it. How do we let people be happy about a cultural experience?

To have an open-air museum Nahr El Kelb with an «arts» learning centre is a venture which is forward looking and relates to the new learning situations being tried out in the west. Where students are encouraged to create, to work and think as individuals. In Lebanon, this could be a new departure in education. Education means to prepare each student for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life. This includes not only to train simply for work but to nourish and encourage interests in the arts, in music, in learning for its own sake. All these are part of the adult experience contributing greatly to the richness of the whole life. Human lives will be more or less fulfilled to the extent that the individuals potential has been realised and drawn out by the education in its broadest sense. This means a drawing out and development of a person's potential gifts and creativity, and the realisation of personal wholeness and integrity.

THE ARTS AS AN EXPRESSION OF NATIONAL CULTURE

It is necessary in our educational system to enrich the curricula by including the «arts» especially wherever it can be related to other subjects, in teaching humanities, in including art history and art appreciation and even more specifically, in teaching students how to look at works of art, natural heritage and to learn how to relate what they observe and discover in their own immediate worlds. A visit to any museum whether outdoors or indoors can become an exciting venture. It has the element of personal discovery, of competition. Which involves the students and draws him/her into an experience which is not easily forgotten. It is not a matter of listing names and dates, but of learning to recognise, visually, with the help of technological visual aids, characteristics which differentiate centuries of civilizations and countries or the works of individual artists. This visual

approach to learning is a special contribution of museum, it applies to all age groups at all stages of development. How do we allow this visual and discovery approach to education come into our schools? Here in Lebanon. where are our museums? What is being done about building up relations between schools and museums? How do we cope with the growing numbers of museums springing up like mushrooms and wonder why this particular phenomenon is happening? What if there are insufficient museums available for the people? What are we doing about this?

THE PAST AND THE PRESENT MEETING AT NAHR EL KELB

Lebanon has had its own experiences of different civilizations. They have contributed much to man's knowledge. The young people should know their history and accept the challenge to emulate it. Nothing can help more than an open-air museum, the first of its kind that could be developed all over the country using the Nahr El Kelb as a prototype for the initial example of such a museum and consolidated by a permanent site in the form of a cultural centre among other necessary areas to cater for the different needs of the «arts». We can ask ourselves how can this be done? What would it entail and what financial difficulties would have to be met? How do we educate large number of adults and students? How do we associate modern techniques and methods with existing traditions so that regardless of the subject or the learning situation everyone becomes interested in the actual process or learning? The open-ended approach to museum education, with its insistence on visual as well as conceptual teaching, has much to offer. Solutions and methods of how we can work this out is a matter of enlightened adaptation in pedagogical programming to overcome the difficulties that one is bound to face and to work out together with those with the pedagogy of good learning in education. We would have to have the determination, courage and perseverance to carry through such an educational project, not for any personal gain but with the image and vision of a collective role which would bring to a developing world traversed so often by inner conflicts, disunity and of harmony in ideas, a greater good through education to the destiny of a small but not insignificant country of the Middle East. How can we dare to suggest that the Nahr El Kelb site with its historical evidence in the form of a number of stelae found at the mouth of a river be used in the development and progress of education in Lebanon? Can it be a prototype for every archeological site in this part of the Mediterranean area? We can and do dare to raise the issue that not only is it important to carry out such a project but

also to stir up such enthusiasm that would turn the site into a power-house of learning and culture. How can this be done? The answer to this question is so vast and with endless depth that we can but hope to spark off the initial moves to be taken to turn this site into an open air museum and cultural centre. It will become a national initiative in which the use of such an open-air museum as an educational project will become a matter of interest to many and eventually be accepted as a major project.

A museum is there for us to pass on knowledge and appreciation of our past history and culture. By leading children, students and the general public to experience an open-air museum we awaken and develop their critical faculties, the educator can build on this and so through such rich stimulation, the stimulation to enjoy and learn life more richly, to know more of oneself, ones inheritance and to know of other through direct experience and so discover further worlds of learning. Museums are living institutions that can offer invaluable educational services. They can bring peoples to know their own past and present it in the present as if it was only yesterday. For museums establish respect for and understanding of the past and offer encouragement to create progress in the future.

WILL THE NAHR EL KELB PROJECT RAISE THE STANDARD OF EDUCATION?

The integration of the special educational work of museums with the curricula of educational institutions would enhance the prestige raise the standards and improve the methods of teaching both in having museums and educational institutions wishing to support and develop this field of education, it would lead on to the creation of a cultural centre linking up with further cultural and museum activities opening up unimaginable space for the use of the «arts». Few of the still existing museums are useable or within safe reach and accessible to most peoples. Does the Nahr El Kelb site have the answers for such needs in education? We have so many opportunities with the setting up of a new museum to do research work which plays a predominant role in developing museum programmes; to explore conservation and restoration workshop and it can above all contribute to the advancement of knowledge. The field of conservation and preservation has still far to go in technological methods as how best to repair, restore and preserve existing monuments of archeological value and treasure belonging to the nation. This would create the opportunity for scientific research in environmental conservation.

NAHR EL KELB AND ITS INFLUENCE ON EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

The educational function is, above all, of great importance and can have far reaching influences on all our schools, at all levels, our colleges, universities and the public in general. We all have the personal responsibility of improving ourselves through education and if we so wish and if we believe in education as the betterment of mankind doing our utmost to see that it has the space to grow and become a national influence on all peoples. Can it be done by our nation? That is the question. The Nahr El Kelb offers us one of the ways and means of drawing peoples of all ages into a national project to open up further channels of advancement in educational needs. Faced with such opportunities for rich, real and worthwhile educational progress far beyond anything that we have actually imagined before in the history of education in Lebanon. The Nahr El Kelb project could be the beginning of a new phase in our educational development programme thus breaking the shackles that for so long have held us back. Let us take the challenge of looking at the Nahr El Kelb site as a prototype of an open air museum and thence seeing that other sites of similar importance around the country will follow suit in such an experiment in promoting education. A museum has proved throughout the world to have the general public as its most worthy patron. Why don't the people of this country who have so little but could so much in education create a united effort to forge ahead and accomplish such a project. the Nahr El Kelb as a prototype project in education is an answer to promoting and encouraging if we could only appreciate the fact, that by using a natural site as the stepping stone to move in line with the innovations being made around the world, especially in developing countries to promote a means for better and worthwhile education for all our citizens of this country. We can take advantage of this unique landmark and utilise its potential as a viable and possible site to encourage and create from these «old stones» an out-door museum where one doesn't exist in Lebanon; where there is no Open-air recreational site for the youth; where there is no centre for the general public on a larger educational scale and where there is no cultural centre with facilities of all ages.

It shows how a cultural centre and open-air museum answers the needs of the peoples through the opportunity of a healing experience, a healing of memories, learning about the past to understand the future. We are in the age of leisure studies, tourism and cultural studies. We can ask how does

museum education stand today? What are we looking for in the museum field here in Lebanon? We want to conserve them? We have to ask, what is it that people want, or need, or how can the people and their culture and heritage be best served both now and in the future? We shall have to as educationalists help people fit into this museum experience of the Nahr El Kelb. How can we help people to accept and be helped by this project? The museum holds real things and there are many ways to interpret what is actually there but we have to let the people take into their own hands and learn through direct involvement and through discovery to come to know and understand the Nahr El Kelb. Research is part of the museum experience. What is there to research at the Nahr El Kelb?

CONSERVATION AND PRESERVATION OF NATIONAL SITES

Last but not least, we need to protect this site and other sites importance to cultural environmental preservation for the enhancement of mankind. Why do we need to protect this site? Why not find out and what better way than to do it but through a planned and organized open-air museum and cultural centre. Let us rebuild the past for the future. This site if it is developed can be a prototype for further similar projects on the numerous historical/archeological sites situated at strategic places around the country. Such a wide network of outdoor museums which would include walks and excursions would become an added attraction to peoples of all ages. It would be the necessary lever to open up channels of educational facilities far beyond our limited vision to the realms of the possible so great and far beyond our imagination. Let us pay tribute to those who in their own destiny have paved the way for the continuing growth in education in this part of the Middle East - Lebanon.

OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

To preserve and conserve the Stelae at the Nahr El Kelb site.

To be a centre for the promotion of education in educational institutions.

To have a professionally organized museum service established throughout Lebanon with the Nahr El Kelb site a prototype in education and museum studies.

To have an educating and popularizing medium through which accumulated knowledge of things Lebanese collected over several centuries can be shown to the general public.

As a centre where people can approach, and identify with their cultural heritage.

As a stimulus to integrity and authenticity in the fields of art and craft, where the example of past genius can be studied, appreciated and to generate imagination, inventiveness and experiment in the hand of today's artists and craftsmen.

As a theatre where people can express themselves through demonstrations of craft, dance, song and drama.

As a place where an image of Lebanon is presented to outsiders who come to the museum for a summary of its history and tradition and who accept that what they are seeing is the authentic version.

The museum has a duty to try to show the Lebanese that they have something to offer for themselves and the world.

A place that provides opportunities to learn which is not at school.

The opportunity to experiment with new methods of communication and fulfilling the role of becoming a popular learning centre.

To create a cultural change in museum styles and let it take place here in Lebanon.

To provide educational resources through a museum and museum programme.

Learning from real things and real places.

How to work outside the book and the classroom.

Promoting adult learning and leisure.

To encourage in-service training for teachers and other educators.

Research Centre.

Leisure and Pleasure.