

**LOCAL ACTION PLAN ASSESSMENT
ACTIVITY 3.1.3**
The operative plans revised after 3 years of project

Association for the Protection of Jabal Moussa (APJM) The Adonis Route

The site and its natural and cultural relevance

Jabal Moussa UNESCO Biosphere Reserve (JMBR) protected by the General Directorate of Antiquities of the Ministry of Culture (DGA) and managed by Association for the Protection of Jabal Moussa (APJM). The Reserve is located in the Kesrouan-Jbeil area, 50 km away from the capital Beirut and 25km from Byblos. Bounded by the historical Nahr Ibrahim and Nahr Ed-Dahab rivers, the core area of Jabal Moussa covers an area of 1,250 ha in Mount Lebanon at an altitude ranging between 350m and 1700m.

Jabal Moussa presents an exceptionally rich biodiversity. It was designated a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) for the CEPF (Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund). Jabal Moussa was also designated a Global Important Bird Area since 2009 by BirdLife International and a Protected Natural Site by the Lebanese Ministry of Environment since 2012. The mountain presents geological particularities and was described as being at the center of the formation of the mountains of Mount Lebanon, featuring the oldest outcrops in Lebanon.

Jabal Moussa and Adonis Valley are adjacent sites that hold unique natural and cultural heritage. They have been jointly designated as an IPA (Important Plant Area) for their significant floral diversity and pronounced endemism, which gives the site a unique value.

Renowned for being the birth site of the Phoenician myth of Adonis and Astarte, Adonis Valley provides the region with unique cultural, archaeological and natural values.

In addition to the site's exceptional environmental value, Adonis valley contains evidence of a comprehensive spectrum of Lebanese history within and around it, starting with remains of the Middle Paleolithic. Haber (2013) in her report of the area confirms, *"All civilization times are depicted in the valley allowing a complete sequence of human history."*

Socio-economic context

In the recent years, rural depopulation increased, and the residency tends to become seasonal. Of a total of 8379 people documented as living in Jabal Moussa area, around 4715 are permanent residents. People living permanently in the region suffer from the deficiency in job opportunities and from the low income generated by their jobs. 24% of the inhabitants don't have any economic activity and at least 12% of the families have a monthly income lower than the minimum wage. In Ebreh village, 60% of families suffer from such low incomes. Consequently, people are forced to leave their hometowns and move to the cities where job opportunities are available.

Most of the permanent residents are small scale farmers relying mainly on agriculture and related activities to ensure some income for their families, such as charcoal production, animal husbandry, and small-scale agriculture.

Existing tourism initiative and potentialities:

The first and only effective tourism initiative in the area was initiated by APJM in 2009, following the findings of the Survey. What started as a project funded by the Italian Cooperation was soon transformed into a self-sustainable growing program, attracting more partners and benefiting more locals.

APJM's ecotourism infrastructure is completely community-based, comprising, as direct contributors, 3 dedicated office staff, 18 guides, 7 guards, and 7 guesthouses.

Through its community-based ecotourism infrastructure, APJM managed to attract an increasingly growing number of visitors, reaching 40,000 in 2020.

The main cultural sites in the area protected or expropriated by the DGA, and where research or conservation actions have been taking place jointly between APJM and the DGA are:

- The Roman Stairs
- Qornet el Deir
- The Byut site
- Afqa site
- Machnaqa site

Other cultural sites that are of cultural value:

- Ghineh site
- Yanouh site
- Broqta site (recently protected by the DGA, following research conducted within CROSSDEV project)

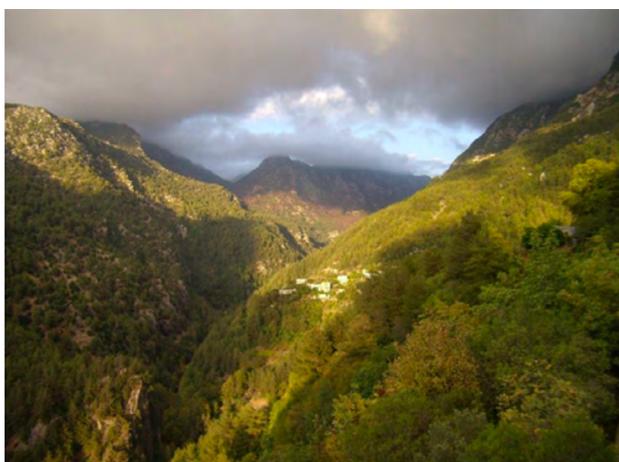
Currently (2020), Qornet el Deir and Roman stairs sites receive around 1,192 visitors per year, the Byut site received 3,966 visitors in 2020, while no data is available for the other sites. It was estimated by the guards appointed by the DGA that each site receives a bus per week during summer season, and a bus per month during winter season, accounting to 1,500 visitors per site per year.

The Hoda Nader's guesthouse is located in Mchati, by the entrance of the Roman stairs and it is the most active guesthouse of the villages surrounding Jabal Moussa. Hoda welcomed 621 visitors for lunch in 2019, out of about 850 visitors to all guesthouses. About 80% of the lunches at guesthouses occur in spring and summer seasons. In 2019, less than 150 visitors stayed overnight at a local Bed&Breakfast: at 5Km from the entrance of Mchati, Murielle Dimitriades guesthouse received 88 visitors in 2019 for an overnight stay, while Rita Keyrouz, in the more distant village of Eebreh, received 39.

- APJM launched in 2011 its line of Food and Handicraft products, manufactured by local women in a central kitchen. These products are mainly marketed at the reserve entrances and in specialized outlets.

- APJM also commissioned and supported research studies in a wide variety of areas, which led to breakthrough discoveries in the natural and cultural fields.

The resulting reports and articles are published online: jabalmoussa.org/articles



HOW?

A detailed socio-economic survey was commissioned by APJM and conducted by the Anthropology Department of Saint Joseph University (USJ) in 2009 on 7 villages surrounding JMBR, considered also part of the Valley of Adonis.

Further, the results from the in-depth context analysis provided data and insights on the socio-economic situation and the touristic sector with its potentials and needs.

THE MAIN NEEDS IN THE AREA

- Need to build more visibility on the route
- Need to attract visitors and turn them into tourists
- Need to develop occasion for local development through innovation in cultural tourism
- Need to transform archaeological findings and local talents into tourism products and experience
- Need to find new actors and do capacity building with the local ones to satisfy the visitors and have an accessible, attractive, guaranteed and safe product
- Need to market and advertise the cultural assets and cultural experience within the route

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

The SWOT analysis summarizes a series of focus groups, meetings and questionnaires conducted during the first phase of the CROSSDEV project. It entails an appraisal of the current tourism offer and the related products and services, including welcoming, guiding, accommodation, food and handicraft products.

Strength

- International certifications: UNESCO Biosphere Reserve; Global Important Bird Area
- Presence of local protected areas: Natural Site by the Ministry of Environment; Historic sites by the Ministry of Culture; Protected Forest by the Ministry of Agriculture
- Richness in biodiversity, archaeology, heritage sites and trails
- Rural, authentic skills and traditions
- Engagement of locals in the tourism value chain (guides; guards; guesthouses; B&Bs...)
- Good knowledge and data on the socio-economic situation, cultural and natural heritage
- Motivated & talented team
- Local Products marketed under a registered trademark
- Existence of a well-maintained tourism infrastructure
- A destination for all seasons

Weaknesses

- Negative perception of some locals about the restrictive aspect of conservation
- Previous and current risk of looting of cultural sites (lack of monitoring of visitors and management from authorities)
- Very few accommodation facilities and limited accommodation space
- Lack of a consistent branding across infrastructures, products and services
- Inconsistency in quality and shape of products and services
- Little understanding of the market by APJM and local stakeholders: demand; pricing; selling edge
- Lack of trained personnel in marketing, sales, storytelling, about archeological attractions
- Inappropriate length of cultural trails (Trails of Qornet el Deir and the Roman stairs are short)
- Limited number of cultural and outdoor activities
- Little diversity in the menu offered at local guesthouses
- Lack of local knowledge of the rich heritage
- Roads leading to guesthouses are narrow and not well maintained
- Limited number of local eco-friendly initiatives and of direct beneficiaries of the ecotourism and agro-food initiatives
- Poor equipment for agro-food processing

Opportunities

- Growing interest in ecotourism, eco-friendly crafts, and all-natural dried fruits and nuts
- Institutional support of the Ministry of Tourism; the Ministry of Culture; the Ministry of Environment
- Interest in tourism paths and historical sites both from tour operators and on regional level (Union of the Municipalities of Kesserwan-Ftouh)
- Tourism trends evolving towards authentic, experiential tourism
- Themed festivals and events attracting hundreds and thousands of visitors
- Launching of the Phoenician route in 2016 by the Ministry of Tourism of Lebanon and the Council of Europe
- Inauguration of the Phoenician center in Byblos, Lebanon
- Proximity of Jabal Moussa to major tourism destinations, mainly Byblos

Threats

- Violations: illegal quarrying; hunting; logging; uncontrolled grazing
- Presence of, mostly imported, handicrafts in the market with competitive prices
- Urbanization
- Fire risk
- Solid waste unmanaged in several villages
- Economic crisis
- (Ephemeral) COVID-19 spread and consequences on travel and tourism

OBJECTIVES OF THE PLAN

The Vision of the Adonis Route is a cultural route around mythical god Adonis emphasizing history, natural beauty and socio-economic development, particularly of the less privileged strata of local communities.

Objectives:

- A. Develop the **first archaeological** cultural route product in the region of Adonis Valley / Jabal Moussa Biosphere Reserve (Adonis route)
- B. **Enhance the performance** of tourism actors and foster **quality standards of services and products**
- C. **Improve** knowledge, security, accessibility and state of cultural sites
- D. Attract a growing **number of visitors** to cultural sites to reach 4,000 visitor days per year
- E. Establish a sustainable, well-coordinated and managed **network** for the route
- F. Enhance **visibility** of sites through **communication and promotion**
- G. **Raise** awareness of local communities on the importance of conserving their heritage

PRODUCT DESCRIPTION

The product is called the Adonis Route: between Myth & Reality, where the claim is to visit the birthplace of the Adonis Myth.

The vision is: Adonis Route: a cultural route around Mythical god Adonis emphasizing history, natural beauty and socio-economic development, particularly of the less privileged strata of local communities.

The product consists of a 5 day program where one can visit the Adonis Valley and Jabal Moussa's surrounding villages and cultural sites, to experience the natural and cultural heritage in this area and meet the locals. Tourists will move from a 1-day visit, to a 5-day experience in the mountain and its surroundings. The product consists of a variety of experiences: hiking in a variety of mountainous and river landscapes and getting to know about the natural heritage of the mountain; visiting archaeological sites and cultural places in local towns and getting to know more about the myth of Adonis and Astarte and its local influence; staying overnight at local Bed & Breakfasts; experiencing local culinary heritage, while learning about local recipes and peculiarities, and making of a local spirit - the "arak" -; participating in traditional arts performance and crafts making, such as the traditional dance -dabke - , the traditional improvised poetry competition - the zajal -, the making of the traditional hats - the lebbede -, and charcoal production.

PARTNER ROLE

APJM is the managing organization of the Jabal Moussa UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. In doing this, APJM is associated with, and follows the strategies of the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Programme, and coordinates with the relevant Ministries and Local Authorities within their field of competency as well as regional and international institutions, such as the Phoenicians' Route. The Association has also a close relationship with all the local stakeholders operating and living in the Reserve and in nearby villages. APJM also works closely with researchers and universities to develop a better understanding of the local assets and context, such as archaeologists, geologists, ecologists, anthropologists, and tourism experts. Therefore, APJM oversees all the governance and operative activities to implement the Adonis Route. Also, given the connecting and good knowledge of local actors, is the one selecting, training and coordinating tourist service providers connected to the Route. There is no formal Destination Management Organization in the Area, giving the described context, but APJM is regarded as a DMO for the area surrounding the Biosphere Reserve.

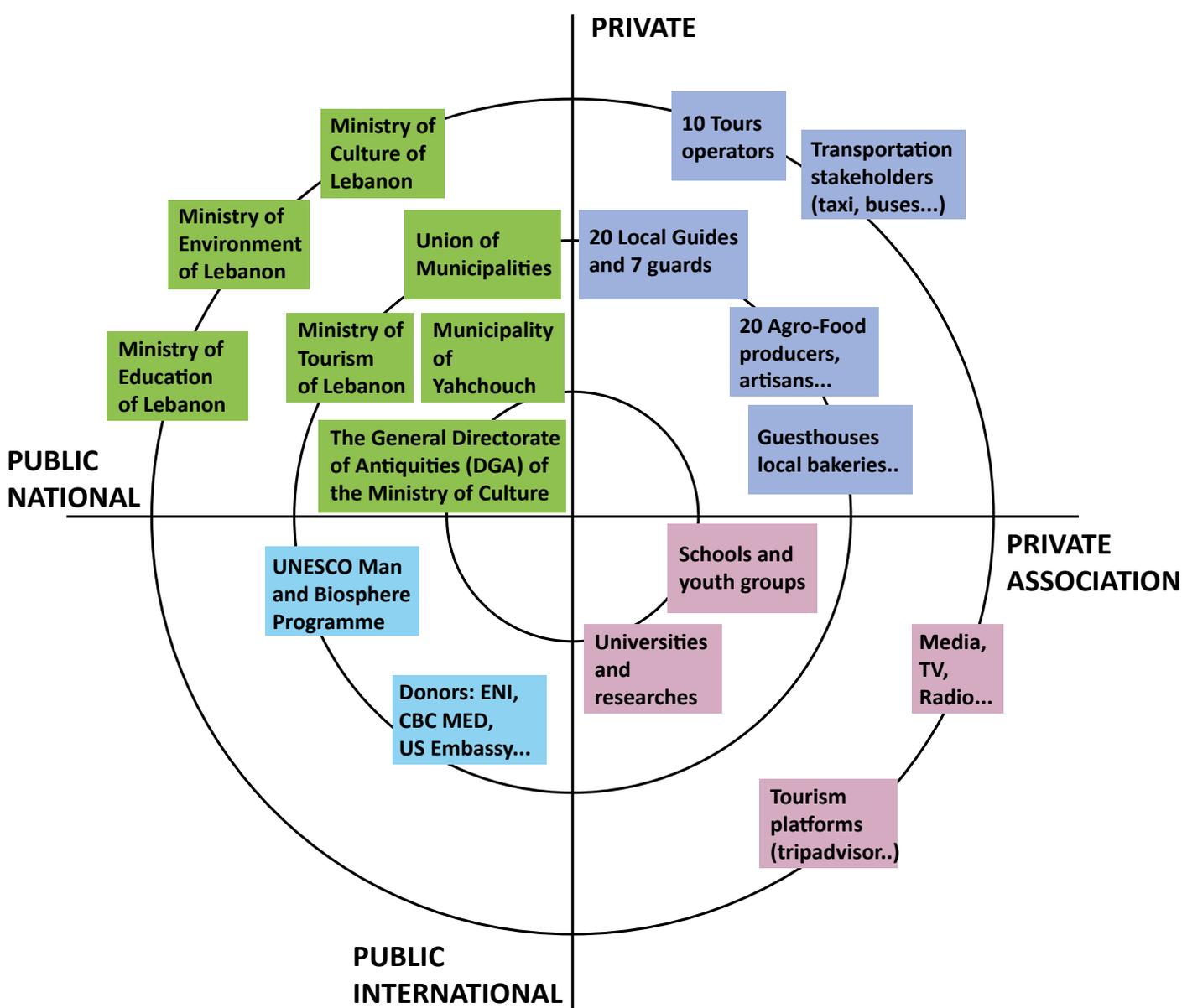
Other than National Ministries, the Association needs to be engaged with donors and projects at international level to maintain and nurture the international relevance and shared values of the reserve.

Stakeholders are identified and categorized according to the typology (public national, public international, private association and private business). Further, stakeholders identified are then prioritized according to the level of involvement and proactiveness in collaborating to achieve partner's objectives.

The **most involved** stakeholders have a good balance between the four categories of stakeholders. APJM have strong bonds with Universities and schools, International donors, local Municipality and The DGA of Ministry of Culture and several local stakeholders such as guides, guesthouses, food producers and local guides.

At an **intermediate level**: there are private businesses and associations such as all the transportations stakeholders that connect the Reserve and 10 tour operators, local TV, radio and media in general; among international public actors there is the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Programme and among the national's ones there is the Union of Municipalities and the Ministry of Tourism of Lebanon.

With a **limited level** of involvement, in the context of this Local Action Plan pertaining to culture and tourism, there are just National Public organizations.



The stakeholders that we will need to get involved in the future are:

- Travel agencies
- Corporate companies to attract them to do activities in the Reserve (e.g. team building activities)
- International media
- International web tourism platforms

How we consulted the stakeholders to develop and endorse the LAP

The present draft of the action plan was developed in consultation with people and entities who have been active in cultural heritage or tourism fields around the “Adonis route”, or will be active stakeholders within the route.

1. **On-line survey for tour operators:** selected tour operators with experience of the area were selected, 15 responded. The survey provided ideas and recommendations to improve the route and served as inputs for the Action Plan.
2. A **workshop** was held with a renowned sustainable tourism expert (Pascal Abdallah) to refine the actions listed in the Action Plan.
3. A **focus group** was organized with local guides to reflect on the tourism situation, their strengths, weaknesses and needs, and their suggestions for activities within the LAP. A questionnaire followed the meeting.
4. **Focus groups were organized with local business owners** (i.e. artisans, guesthouse owners and agro-food producers), to jointly reflect on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to their respective tourism-related products and services.
5. **Online feedbacks form for visitors**
6. **Questionnaire** and presentation of the project for **local youth groups and schools**, to test their level of knowledge of the site and preferred educational tools.
7. Constant **information and consultation** with **The General Directorate of Antiquities (DGA) of The Ministry of Culture**
8. **Meeting with the Ministry of Tourism** representative was held prior to the development of the LAP to receive her feedback and ideas.
9. **Meetings** to review and endorse the LAP with **Rotta dei Fenici, Union of Municipalities, researchers**
10. **Socio-economic survey & study** of households in Jabal Moussa’s surrounding villages



July 2020

Magical Mystery Tour



July 2020

Including the local community from guard to guesthouse owner to guide in the tourist product



September 2020

Archaeology research studies and excavations + Media dissemination



June-July 2021

Training guesthouse owners and agro-food producers:



July 2021

Presenting the Local Action Plan and the Crossdev project to the Local authorities



April-September 2021

Guides training and ceremony



October 2021

Adonis Route test tour with involved stakeholders.



How we engaged the stakeholders during the whole project

- Magical Mystery Tour, July 2020
- Socio-economic survey in some villages, summer 2020
- Activities to include the local community – from guards to guesthouse owners – to contribute in the development of the tourist product
- New archaeology research studies and excavations, and media dissemination of the results and outputs, September 2020
- Launching of the 3rd edition of the Tabsoun book, an environmental education tools for children and families
- Trainings with guesthouse owners and agro-food producers, June- July 2021
- Award of sub-grants for enhancement of local guesthouses and artisanal bakeries (December 2021-ongoing)
- Presentation of the LAP and Crossdev project to local authorities, July 2021
- Guides training and ceremony of opening of the hiking trails, from April to September 2021
- Adonis Route test tour with the involved stakeholders, October 2021

Main activities updates

Activity	Intended Outputs	Changes in respect to the original Plan	State of the Art
Meeting with the Ministry of Tourism (2019).	Present the project, receive feedback and prepare for endorsement.		Done
Assessment with local stakeholders and surveys to consult different stakeholders (2019-early 2020).	The survey allowed to identify the main stakeholders, the needs and resources in place.		Done
Meetings with locals and youth of neighborhood villages (end of 2019).	Further identify the local actors, raise awareness and present the opportunities coming from Adonis Route development.		Done
Trainings (2020-2021) - for local women about food safety and hygiene measures to produce traditional agro-food products, held by experts from the region; - for guesthouse owners; - for local guides and guards about ecotourism, language, history, ethnobotany	Capacity building and improve the services		Done
Publish the 3rd version of the illustrated book and events and workshops in schools.	Awareness raising for schools and children.	All awareness activities are affected by COVID (delays and cancellation)	Book publishing done. Visits and presentations to schools and youth groups in progress, recuperating COVID related delays now that schools are open again
Magical Mystery tour , involving the experts and relevant authorities (2020).	This is the first step to start with the new product development. It was a tour to test the experience and archeological sites and their value. The final result is the 5-days tour		Done
Improvement of cultural sites through archaeological studies, restoration works, trail opening or clearing, and installation of panels	Increase knowledge about the sites, accessibility and conservation		In progress
Marketing and media dissemination: a media firm is selected to improve Jabal Moussa marketing.	Increase knowledge and outreach		In progress, monthly meetings
Development of the Tourism Centers		The place originally chosen for the first center was changed due to the explosion happened in august 2020 in Beirut but there is still delays because of bureaucracy issues.	In progress
Providing equipment for guides, guards, agro-food producers and subgrants planning and implementation	Provide stakeholders with resources to improve the services		In progress
Trails opening & maintenance			Ongoing, Adonis Meditation Trail to be finalized.

Unexpected (especially because COVID):

- The original Plan foresees two new centers to be done with Crossdev. The location of the centers had to be changed due to external factors.
- Due to COVID restriction measures activities were delayed, postponed or suspended. For examples the schools were closed, and the awareness activities postponed.

Still to do before the end of the project

1. Complete the subgrants and other support services in the upcoming months.
2. Complete the tourism centers (finalizing permits & construction).
3. Continue with awareness raising and events and promotional activities also with social media platforms.
4. Planning and development of the exhibit space within the tourism center
5. Deliverables and final booklet for agro-food producers
6. Archeology: further archaeological studies planned (co-funded by a research institute) and publishing of studies related to previous studies done as an official DGA publication
7. Trails infrastructure: Opening of another trail that is already assessed and planned: Adonis Meditation Trail, installation of panels, and mapping of trails
8. Assessment and testing of the 5-day tour by experts and refinement of program

Our future needs towards the sustainability of the LAP

- The Tourism center will continue its activities
- Need to identify and engage new stakeholders for the Adonis Route
- Maintenance activities for the trails infrastructure
- Implement trainings with the sub-grantees
- Promotion of the 5-day tour, its services and products, and generate income to sustain the various activities
- Maintain and further enhance the Jabal Moussa mobile app already launched:(now there is limited financial funds to do it)
- Improve social media outreach and marketing activities.

The resources needed in order to make this project sustainable in the long-term. i.e. Type of resources (finance, human capital, infrastructure, organizational, marketing,...)

- Financial resources: the centers need a higher budget to be able to finalize all the components (e.g. the “museum” component).
- Marketing strategy will be crucial even after Crossdev.
- Human capital: APJM staff will need to dedicate time to follow up on the various activities that will still take place beyond the project
- Support and engagement from local community.

The political and economic situation is difficult now in Lebanon, for example fundraising events are not possible anymore, before this crisis fundraising was a consolidated strategy.

From whom we expect to derive additional resources (e.g.local, visitor tax, project funds etc).

The political and economic situation is difficult now in Lebanon, for example fundraising events are not possible anymore, before this crisis fundraising was a consolidated strategy.

APJM already carried out some activities integrating funds from other ongoing projects, this approach will continue also in the next future.

Archaeological studies will be, in a big part, covered by the university conducting the research.

CROSSDEV | www.enicbcmed.eu/project/crossdev

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v a l u i n g n a t u r e

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