



## **GAME DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK - ACTIVITY 3.2.2 WP3**

### **LEBANON**

#### **Description of Destinations and Sites**

Three sites in three different destinations were selected for the development of new interactive experiences that would be offered to tourists and locals alike using analog and digital games.

The destinations and sites are as such:

#### **1. Mseilha Castle, North Lebanon:**

Located at the bottom of the newly built dam in Batroun, the Castle of Mseilha controls the valley where the river of Nahr Al Jozz flows. The building thus made it possible to monitor this strategic place between North Lebanon and the city of Tripoli and Batroun then Byblos and Beirut and to block access to it with a reduced garrison. The first structures must have existed since Antiquity, but they have disappeared with the exception of certain blocks of stone that have been reused. However, during Antiquity, its importance was minor as crossing points made it possible to bypass it via Ras el Chékaa. However, the collapse of part of the cliff during the famous 551 Earthquake after JC interrupted this axis. The first mention of the castle of Mseilha occurred in 1106. This first construction is attributed to the constable of Tripoli, Guillaume de Farabel. In the 13th century, the Mamelukes regained control of the Castle of Mseilha, then it was the Ottomans in the 16th century, just like they did for Smar Jbeil Castle. However, its current structure is more recent: The current building was refurbished by Emir Fakhr-al-Din II, around 1624 during his revolt against the Sublime Porte. The Castle of Mseilha, however, retains architectural elements typical of the Crusaders period, such as shooting slots.

#### **2. Fidar Tower, Mount Lebanon:**

Watchtower located on the coast near Nahr el Fidar and therefore Byblos, from which it takes its name, also called Burj Mouheish, Burj el Fidar is a remarkably preserved construction of a set of towers built in the time of the Crusaders distributed along the coasts from the South of Lebanon to North Lebanon. Located on the side of a cliff about ten meters from sea level, this tower was recently restored by the Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA). The masons at the origin of this defensive structure would have been probably the same as those of the crossed castle or the cathedral St Jean-Marc de Byblos. As proof, some architectural features, resembling those of the baptistry of the religious building and sharing many characteristics, date from the 12th century. According to other sources, the tower dates from the 14th century and is part of a group set up by the Mamelukes and not by the Crusaders. The interior consists of 2 levels with characteristics of local architecture from the 12th century. It opens on its eastern facade via a low door formed by a single block of stone. On its sides, some loop-holes remind us that the building was built for defensive purposes, and not a place of life. Finally, from its rooftop, one



can have a panoramic view from Beirut in the south to Aamchit in the north, which was ideal for the guards who used to communicate from a distance, particularly by using lights in the event of an alert.

### 3. Saida Sea Castle, South Lebanon

In the 13th century (specifically between the years 1227 and 1228), the Crusaders came and built a castle on a small island dominating the sea. It is said that this island was formerly the site of a Phoenician temple. Intending to defend Sidon's harbor, the sea castle (also known as the sea fortress) is one of the most prominent archaeological sites in the city. It is connected to the mainland by a narrow but fortified 80 m long causeway built on nine arches, that was later added by the Arabs to provide access to it. To protect against the swelling of the sea, the Sidonians built walls along the natural rocky reef. The typical architecture of the Crusaders, however, was mostly represented by the Roman columns that were used in the outer walls to reinforce horizontally. Primarily, the sea castle consists of two chambers, one of those chambers in the West tower, which is best preserved today. Sadly, the East tower is not very well preserved. It was constructed in two phases where the lower part was built by the Crusaders and the upper one by the Mamluks. The two towers are connected by a wall. To the right of the porch lies a small domed mosque whose origin is probably Ottoman. Known as "Masjed Qalaat el Bahr," the mosque is a simple cubic form topped by a central dome. However, the most important element of the dome is the cantilevered part that indicates the correct direction of prayer. Finally, a staircase connects up to the roof, which offers, in turn, great vistas of the fishing harbor and the old part of the city. Unfortunately, the sea fortress was destroyed by the Mamluks in 1291, when they took over the city from the Crusaders and was later on renovated by Prince Fakhreddine in the 17th century. When the water is calm, one can detect the remains of the rose-granite columns, recovered from Roman buildings, sinking in the shallow seafloor. Additionally, around the fortress, statues, cisterns, and structures of walls, columns, and stairways buried under the sea show evidence of the Old Phoenician city.

## Reasons for Selecting the Destinations & Sites

Three destinations were selected: North Lebanon, Mount Lebanon, and South Lebanon. The various destinations were selected based on geographic diversity, proximity, and accessibility. When it comes to geographic diversity, the goal was to have the gamification initiative not centralized in one location, but instead have a greater reach. As for proximity, all three of the destinations are more or less close to Lebanon's capital, Beirut. If an individual is transporting from Beirut, it would take a maximum of 1 hour to reach the furthest destination. Lastly, accessibility; all destinations are accessible using public and private transportation.

After multiple discussions with the DGA, the three sites- Mseilha Castle, Fidar Tower, and Saida Sea Castle- were chosen for gamification. The selection of the sites was based on popularity, the number of visitors, history, and the state of the sites. When it comes to touristic sites in Lebanon, some sites are widely popular among locals as well as tourists. Thus, when selecting sites for gamification, those chosen were made sure to be not as popular as some of the mainstream ones. Moreover, data provided by the DGA regarding the number of visitors per year helped in selecting sites that had low influx of visitors and needed exposure. Also, even though the selected tourist sites were visited throughout the year, the history and information about them are not widely known. Furthermore, these sites do not have tour guides available on the premise, thus visitors do not usually get rich and in-depth knowledge about the history and architecture. Finally, the selected sites had to be restored, preserved, and in good condition so that visitors can walk safely around the castle and its surrounding areas.

It is worth noting that AUB and the DGA discussed other tourist sites which ended up being discarded. These include Beaufort Castle in Nabatieh located in the Far South of Lebanon, Umayyad Ruins in Anjar in Bekaa, and Crusader Castle in Menjeh in the Far North of Lebanon. These sites were later on abandoned because they are



located too far away from the capital and coast. Moreover, the sites were difficult to reach using public transportation, making them not as accessible to the public as they should be.

## Game Development

### 1. Sites and Games

When it comes to the conceptualization and the development of the gamified ideas, multiple factors were taken into consideration. Key factors were chosen to help narrow down the ideas and create a compass for the brainstorming of the gamified experiences. Important factors included: physical characteristics of the sites, type of visitors, visitor's nationality, cost of game development, cost of operation and maintenance, and linking the games to local businesses.

Physical site characteristics encompassed whether the site was indoors/outdoors, the infrastructure of the touristic site, access to wifi, security of the site, etc. When it comes to the Mseilha Castle, the characteristics included the architecture of the site, the surrounding outdoor fields, the river nearby, and the mill located behind the castle. As for the Fidar tower, the size of the building along with its interior design and wall structure were taken into consideration. Lastly, for Sidon Sea Castle, the castle's fortification characteristic, and its unique location near the sea were the main factors to consider when developing gamified experience.

A specific audience was pre-defined when brainstorming for games. The gamified experiences were agreed to be targeted towards families, young adults, and groups. As for the nationality of the visitors, Lebanon has always been famous for the widespread use of three languages among its people (Arabic, English, and French). Thus, the developed games would have those languages incorporated making them suitable for diverse nationalities.

When choosing game ideas, it was important to take into consideration the costs that would mount up to have them achievable. Three types of costs were considered, 1) cost of game development which included the cost of equipment and human resources, 2) cost to maintain hardware, software, costumes, and other physical components, and 3) cost to operate the games, including human resources (if any).

The last factor considered when choosing games was the ability to link them to local businesses in the future. This would widen the spread of gamification and have a bigger impact. This was mainly aimed for the games in Sidon Sea Castle as the site location makes it possible to expand gamified experiences to incorporate the local market nearby.

### 2. Methodology

Diverse stakeholders from AUB and DGA were involved in the decision-making for the in-house games. Stakeholders included owners of tourism sites, managers/operators of tourism sites, technical game developers, creative game developers, and historical experts. Conducting group brainstorming sessions and having diversity in stakeholders (age, gender, the background of expertise, etc.) among members, helped in having a variety of ideas, allowed the piggyback of ideas, and boosted creativity.

Multiple ideation sessions were conducted which resulted in a wide list of ideas for gamification experiences. The ideas were ranked based on favorability and those that ranked the highest were later on further discussed, developed, and expanded upon.



As for the subgrant games, two Hackathons and Creative Labs were planned and executed to select 5 gamified experiences to be developed in Lebanon. The Hackathons and Creative Labs targeted game designers and had them propose innovative, original, and creative ideas, under the theme of discovery and gamified experiences. The Hackathons were a 2-day event that incorporated one-on-one mentoring sessions with the participating teams, as well as included training sessions on diverse topics to help participants hone their ideas. At the end of the second day, teams got the opportunity to pitch their ideas in front of a pre-selected jury that evaluated the games based on pre-set evaluation criteria. The jury was composed of individuals from different backgrounds and experiences so as to have diverse opinions brought to the table.

### 3. Strategy

The strategy for gamification in Lebanon was centered around mixing history with gamification and targeting historical castles. All sites were castles or towers and had historical significance. For the actual development of the games, the plan of action was to encourage individualized development of games without a unified theme. The overall aim was to create diverse experiences and not be restricted with limiting themes or scenarios. The strategy was applied across both, in-house and sub-grant games.

