

Storytelling, Self, Society

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Digital Storytelling: Youth's Vision of Beirut's Contested Heritage

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This article presents a framework for strengthening the capacity of youth to participate effectively in preserving the heritage of Beirut, Lebanon. We facilitated ground-testing methodologies, best practice examples, and new avenues for collaboration that brought education development into play in addition to facilitating a series of capacity-building workshops with the youth that comprised digital data gathering and presentation methods for designing online digital platforms to raise their engagement with and awareness of the city's contested heritage. The tool kit provides an opportunity and guidelines for developing an effective participatory approach that enables youth to tell their stories.

Introduction

Contested cities are often rife with cultural tensions—whether religious, modernizing societies versus traditional cultures, economies and ethics based on the individual versus the community, or democracy versus authoritarianism (Bollens). These tensions impact the physical existence and memory of a city's heritage. Heritage is a “theatre of memory,” where the past and present are negotiated; it is a dynamic process of remembering and making sense of the past (Smith). Salibi argues that the past is a legitimate vehicle for connecting with the

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uncertain future of post-cities, which emphasizes the importance of studying its contested heritage. Nora's *lieu de mémoire*—sites of memory—behave differently than in an intrastate conflict, in which contested claims to local powers are bolstered by remembrance practices. At a societal level, there is an apparent tendency to disregard the past and its memoryscape. Increasing youths' awareness of the need to create a better reality and future is the main target of many local and international organizations. The Middle East region is a permanent site of political conflict, which threatens people's lives and their cities, each with its own distinct cultural heritage.

This article is based on a collaborative project titled "(Re)Contextualising Contested Heritage: Building Capacity and Designing Participatory Approaches to Preserve Cultural Heritage by the Youth—ReConHeritage." The University of Leeds, in the United Kingdom, and Beirut Arab University (BAU), in Lebanon, worked in collaboration on the project, which was funded by the Research England Global Challenges Research Fund. The project develops a framework for interrogating the contested heritage of Beirut, Lebanon, by arguing that, despite the sectarian politics at play, allowing youth to voice their narratives of lived everyday contestation could represent their essential contribution to the city's urban reconciliation and making peace with the past. Through live storytelling, the youth participants in Lebanon were able to engage with Beirut's contested tangible cultural heritage through four case studies along with Beirut's green line. The project used arts and humanities participatory research to form a specialized task force of academics and nonacademics (NGOs, civil society groups, and cultural institutions).

Lebanon was selected as one of the project's case study cities because of its extended civil war in the last quarter of the twentieth century; the conflict resulted in Beirut's destruction, which is yet to be fully resolved. The international community's response to the destruction and erasing of social memory was mostly reactive, with no long-term strategies in place to address the situation's underlying causes and implications. Indeed, Lebanon's insecurity has resulted in intolerance and contentious discussions concerning youth and cultural identities. As a result of contextual factors such as a divisive past, the youth tend to seek a sense of belonging to a large group. They accept images of historical events as their own from their larger group and use them to expand their internal worlds in relating both to their own small groups and, as they grow older, to their larger groups (Volkan). For many young people in Lebanon, the

events since 1975 and their associated violence remain the point around which all modern narratives revolve, which dwarf all preceding and ensuing events. Even if it were possible to escape the culture imprinted on every group and family, it is hard to escape its imprint on the public space through the few standing buildings and the surrounding context (Haugbolle). Even when the reconstruction began by introducing Solidere as a model of heritage engagement, the reconstructed downtown of Beirut rarely represents an actual lived experience; it is more a site of imaginative and expressive investment, as envisioned by the Lebanese youth (Larkin). This finding was confirmed by Scott Bollens, who interviewed twenty-four planners, officials, architects, and academics in Beirut.

Little attention has been paid to how the next postwar young generation of Lebanese is negotiating the rehabilitation of Beirut and remembering, imagining, and engaging with their city spatially (Larkin). That is why it is critical to understand how people interact with the city, what narratives they tell, and how the vestiges of conflict in the city may contribute to their sense of identity and pride in the past. This research raises the important question: how do participatory approaches promote youth-centered methodologies to create innovative digital platforms as a means of plural participation that enhances cultural exchange and establishes channels for rebuilding the nation following the conflict? The question also arises: how can we create new cultural exchange venues that enable young people and institutions to share and translate cultural responses to ideological conflicts and developmental challenges?

In the following sections, this article sheds light on previous initiatives for engaging the youth in Beirut and the methods employed during the ReConHeritage project. We consider four case studies and explain the capacity-building approach for engaging youth with their heritage. The four cases are Martyr's Square, the Egg Building, Beit Beirut, and Beit Merei. Based on their moderate familiarity with the selected four case studies, ten youths were recruited from the BAU undergraduate and postgraduate student populations. The youths were not involved in any current or previous activities aiming to preserve these four projects. This procedure was followed to ensure that they have neutral relations with the selected cases at the beginning of the project, to build the momentum of engaging and measuring the interaction with their heritage through the steps of capacity-building. Finally, the article discusses the suggested framework, together with its advantages and limitations, to inform future research. The paper uses a coding system that refers to the expert participants as A(x), and the

youth participants as Y(x) to highlight their quotations and ideas that emerged during the project's activities.

Digital Storytelling

Why tell stories? . . . Stories are what we do as humans to make sense of the world. We are perpetual storytellers, reviewing events in the form of re-lived senses, nuggets of context and character, actions that lead to realizations . . . [it is] a process by which we best make sense of our lives and our identity. (Lambert and Hessler).

The above quotation shows the important role of storytelling. Throughout history, storytelling has facilitated learning and teaching, the exploration of alternate realities, the formation of meaning, and the preservation of culture (Podara et al.). By connecting the community members through a shared archival history, personal stories can serve as a means of community-building. When the community is allowed to participate in the sharing of one person's experiences, a dialogue can be initiated. A sense of place and identity can be built by telling stories about how people and communities have lived their lives. This encourages people to interact with and participate in cultural heritage. By giving old content new life, a sense of social cohesion can be created (Davidson and Reid).

It is possible to produce the most appealing stories to the audience in today's digital world. The forms of narratives change as the technological resources available to storytellers evolve (Podara et al.). In the 1980s, Atchley used multimedia items to support storytelling performances, giving rise to the term "digital storytelling" (Davidson and Reid). However, its practical usage dates back to the 1990s, when the Center for Digital Storytelling began organizing workshops for individuals interested in telling their own personal stories (Gregori).

Digital storytelling is a versatile, adaptable tool that can be used for almost any purpose and subject (Gregori). The term *digital storytelling* may be defined as the process of creating a personal narrative from a variety of media, such as images, audio, video, and text. These stories are then shared in a public setting to show how similar and diverse these people's experiences are (Podara et al.). By combining multimedia elements, a story is created that usually has a theme or topic and frequently a point of view. These digital stories are also usually posted

online, where they can be accessed via any popular web browser (Robin; Podara et al.). Due to their interactivity, cultural projects gain a social dimension that allows the viewers to participate in the story rather than simply watch it. They can comment, express different viewpoints or share them on social networks (Podara et al.).

Because digital storytelling can be used to present “counternarratives,” or alternative interpretations of the world, it has huge potential for use by young people, who can choose what story they wish to tell, the manner in which the story is told (e.g., how they wish to tell it), and the data that best represent their story (Davis et al.). The former point is critical and was the primary reason for considering it in this project as a vehicle for disseminating youth perspectives on Beirut’s contested heritage.

Previous Initiatives That Sought to Promote Youth Engagement

There is a growing scholarly discussion about the role of youth in Beirut’s revival. Both in terms of physical urban redevelopment and national collective rebranding. It goes beyond the continuing narrative that paints the city as a nostalgic longing (Khalaf) with no management of its cultural legacy. Previous civil society projects in Lebanon emphasized public forums and research activities to engage the general public in conversation, promote awareness, and inform action. The majority of these efforts were primarily aimed at better understanding the youth’s vision in a postwar city. Using interviews and collaborative maps, Lefort marked places with a special meaning for thirteen Lebanese students. Other initiatives generally involve stakeholders sharing diverse perspectives associated with youth engagement (Mohareb et al.). For example, UNESCO Beirut organized MOST school activities involving field visits and interactive sessions that gave the youth participants, alongside selected experts, a platform to share their experiences. As an additional initiative, “the youth engagement index” in Beirut implemented a collaborative method for measuring youth participation in the affairs of Beirut city (Chemali et al.). One of the interesting projects was initiated by Craig Larkin and published in 2010. Larkin highlighted that many students are not yet convinced of the positive informative function of Beirut’s “negative heritage,” warning of the danger of remembering disgrace, pain, and persecution. Rather, they seem to favor less visible, more ambiguous

forms of commemoration, such as the statue *Memorial of the Martyrs*, marked by bullets, located in the central square of the city. This opinion was also reflected in Beit Barakat's (Beit Beirut) rehabilitation project, as their responses varied from total rejection to poignant realism, although one of the students, according to Larkin, highlighted that the project enables the youth to imagine their own story allowing multiple interpretations of the war.

"Imagining their own story" is a critical point, considering that the absence of a Lebanese national history curriculum and lack of educational tools for addressing the civil war period have contributed to the youth's marginalization in the dialogue about how to deal with the past, as each political party offers its own interpretation of the war, attempting to force the younger generation to accept it as fact. Therefore, there is a need for the youth to document and discuss this memory themselves. Most of the previous approaches depended on conducting short interviews and discussions to engage the youth, the majority of which failed to give the youth the necessary tools to interact with the buildings and disseminate their ideas and reflections. Hence, this project tried to fill this gap.

Memories and Methods

Wiping out totally [the] past and just saying, "Let's look at the future and forget about anything that happened before"—that, [is] a truly dangerous statement because it might lead to a general amnesia and . . . disconnection between the younger generation and what happened. . . . It's really about connecting. A (1)

Today, the cultural heritage is vanishing, thus, how can we recall and re-center the discourse of heritage throughout the self, and what architectural forms can empower this legacy? What meanings does heritage have in the modern societal contexts? We do not have to live in the novelty of a bright future any more than we must hide behind reassuring pastiches of the past. We must live in a perpetually evolving present, motivated by the possibilities of change, with the baggage of the past and the experience as a safeguard. Y (1)

In Beirut, discussions about civil war memories, especially among older people, occupy a lot of space. They form part of this group's engraved memories, and they do not wish their kids to witness another civil conflict. The above

quotation embodies the fear among older people that the younger generation will care little about their history and might approve decisions that lead to the random, or even intentional, demolition of their heritage as most of the city's memories are wiped out; that is why there is a need to find appropriate methods to reconnect the youth with the city's history. Since memory plays a significant part in Beirut's collective identity and psyche, a profusion of the literature concentrates on the memory of the city's public places (Harb; Larkin). A sense of loss is an enduring narrative that has become embedded in the city's identity and history. The sectarian boundaries are far more complex today than the ethnic geographies of the civil war. The sectarian identity fragments the urban system as a functional policy, giving rise to a set of ethnic subsystems working without a center. No alternative to the youth is offered, apart from an adherence to sectarianism in order to find an education and future work (Bollens "An Island").

One of Lebanon's most remarkable but tragic memories developed along the green line (figure 1), where much of Beirut's contested legacy is located. During the Lebanese civil war, the green line separated Muslim West Beirut from Christian East Beirut (1975–1991). According to Möystad, this divide "turned identities into territories." The majority of the neighboring buildings along the green line were severely damaged during the conflict. Many of the buildings were reconstructed after the war, but the conflict had a profound psychological impact on the Lebanese people.

Taking action and drawing up a conservation list of historic buildings and areas in Lebanon has had several drawbacks. The process started in 1996 by identifying 1,000 structures constructed before the 1930s, followed by a study that covered another four areas (Ain el-Mreisseh—Spears, Zoqaq el-Blat—Bashoura, Achrafieh, and Gemmayzeh—Sursock). Following another study, 551 houses were removed from the list, which indicated the demolition of 250 buildings (Puzon). In addition to the extensive damage caused by the explosion at the port of Beirut in 2020, historical buildings have been severely affected. As a result, along the green line stand a few remaining features that are considered central to Beirut's contested heritage, and these were selected by the Lebanese team of the funded project.

Although they never experienced the war itself, Lebanese youth are still experiencing the ongoing repercussions and the reproduction of conflict accounts. They have been experiencing the war's imprint for a long time, not just via sectarian and political enmity but also through the city and its architectural



Figure 1. The geo-location of the four selected case studies.

form. Youth might become vulnerable to political manipulation and are more likely to participate in violence if they are not involved in reconciliation initiatives and establish trustworthy, dependable narratives to interpret their history.

This project also considered the challenge Tim Winter described when he argued that complex, multifactor challenges require interdisciplinary modes of engagement. As a result, there is a real benefit if those involved in heritage in

the social sciences and humanities fields engage more directly with issue-based research to study heritage more critically (Winter). To avoid repeating the same mistakes, scholars from various backgrounds and disciplines, such as historians, artists, architects, and psychologists, believe that future generations should be informed about and engage with their contested pasts. The youth need memories from the past: “Images from the past are reaching our generation in a diluted form. The youth ought to save these images in the hope of saving them from being erased.” Y (2). “But there is always a concern about the type of memory they might gain”; “the amnesic Phoenix memory is crucial when you speak about heritage. We wrongly feel very proud that we will rise again like a Phoenix from the ashes, well, but we rise without any memory and that’s a big problem.” A (2).

Therefore, this work is concerned with how the Lebanese youth might use digital tools to reconstruct the narratives of their past to narrate and visualize their heritage through their own lenses. The project uses four main approaches. First, general discussions and workshops to highlight the importance of contested heritage from both the youth and various experts’ perspectives. Second, digital training on using affordable tools to collect and disseminate their thoughts about the four selected case studies. Third, an opportunity to display the youths’ work in two general assemblies to discuss their projects’ outcomes, in addition to a physical exhibition. Finally, the publication of the youths’ work on an online platform, which enables them to make wider connections.

Building a Participatory Cultural Heritage Framework

The “Building Participatory Heritage” framework was codesigned to strengthen the capacity for heritage protection in conflict societies. It is the result of activities held through an entire year in Beirut Arab University in Lebanon, including public webinars with eight speakers, youth participants, and an audience with over sixty-five members, who took part in various discussions. The main parameters extracted from the public webinar, representing the views of NGOs, governmental agencies, educators, researchers, youths, and others, are summarized in figure 2. The framework aims to involve the youth in preserving cultural heritage. It is recommended for use when guiding young people’s engagement in general and designing specific programs to support youth-led cultural engagement.

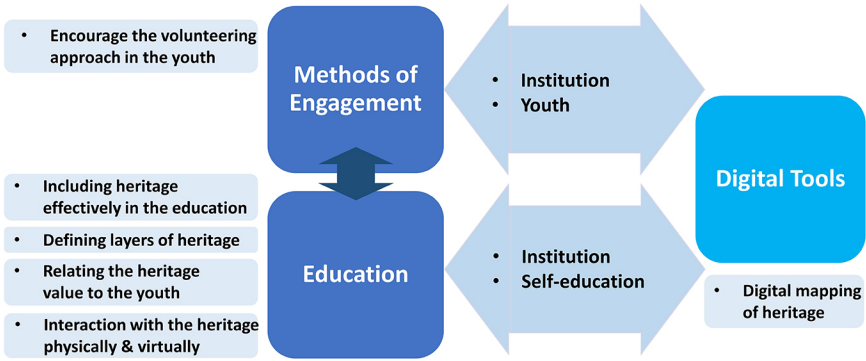


Figure 2. The key parameters and main themes arising from the webinar discussion and workshop training held in Lebanon.

In connecting young people with their contested past, youths and institutions play an important and interconnected role. For the youths, the tools should reflect their need to engage with the past and communicate with their surrounding context simply and directly. Employing free tools/applications (if needed) to interact with others and to share their thoughts with the greater community is preferable to using complicated technology. Projects, personal reflections on areas/buildings, or initiating online campaigns/events might all be means of engagement. The institutions’ roles range from facilitating capacity-building for teenagers through the organization of seminars and events to engaging youths in decision-making regarding conserving or utilizing heritage buildings and their surrounding context. Institutions have a critical role in expanding and coordinating youth participation, which boosts the youths’ sense of belonging and appreciation of their cultural heritage (figure 2).

We posed four significant questions to the individual youths and/or groups of youths as the core of the framework co-design. Their responses were gathered during the webinars and workshops held in Lebanon. The first question was related to the definition of cultural heritage and its significance for different groups. The experts (academics and NGOs) highlighted that cultural heritage is “the place where people come from, lived once, and how this place defines them.” Without heritage, “people lack that anchoring, identity, sense of community” A (3). The cultural heritage is a mixture of traditions, customs, habits, buildings, clothes, and food. “The turmoil for the Arab countries, and particularly Lebanon, is that the past and the more recent past are the only certain

things from which to understand, learn, and initiate a better future from them” A (2). Hence, understanding and documenting the heritage and grasping what it means may provide an opportunity to make a fresh start, as the youths need, more than ever, to adhere to their heritage (table 1).

The second question was youth led, concerning youth engagement. From the discussions, it emerged that the younger generation has become disconnected from the context they live in due to globalization. Following the war in Lebanon, there was a “memory hole” and general amnesia among the youth, resulting

Q1. HOW DO YOU DEFINE CULTURAL HERITAGE (TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE)? WHY IS CULTURAL HERITAGE IMPORTANT TO YOU AS AN INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP (MEMORY, IDENTITY, ETC.)? WHY DOES HERITAGE MATTER?

Main goals of Q1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Defining cultural heritage from the personal and official perspective - Highlighting how heritage is important to the youths and the community - Identifying the essential aspects of heritage that interest the youths to initiate their passion for taking the next steps
Process of Q1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General open discussion - Brainstorming with experts from different fields related to cultural heritage - Field survey (supervised, semisupervised, nonsupervised) - Selecting general case studies based on the youths’ interests and highlighting the reasons for this - Identifying which part of heritage attracts the youths in the case study and identify the reasons for this - Tangible heritage: style, usage, scale, method of construction, location, and others - Intangible heritage: surrounding sounds, odor, sense of enclosure, and others
Tools to respond to Q1 by the youths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Asking relatives and older people about the selected case studies - Gathering stories and memories from the inhabitants inside or around the case study - Searching the available online archives and documentaries - Comparing people’s stories and memories; physical or online archives and documentaries; and the personal experience of using/walking past/interacting with the heritage case study - From the above, identifying why this heritage has value for the youths
Tools to respond to Q1 by institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enabling an authentic archive platform - Establishing a heritage catalogue that defines and locates the cultural heritage - Offering incentives to encourage youth participation - Providing appropriate training on data gathering using traditional and digital methods - Offering various discussion platforms with experts in the field of cultural heritage

Table 1. Table 1 highlights question 1, which is related to the definition of heritage and why it is essential. The table summarizes the goals, processes, and tools that both youths and institutions can use to fulfil the main goals of Q 1.

in a schism between the young people and their cultural heritage. Also, there has been a rupture between the youths and the older generation, with a clash of ideologies between the past, present, and future. The older one constantly criticizes the younger generation’s point of view for containing shallower values and beliefs, leading the youth to adopt a defensive state of denial, culminating in a clash between the two. One of the advantages noted was that “the COVID-19 pandemic has helped the youth to reconnect with their villages by learning about their roots.” A (4). Heritage actors and supporters have notably shifted to the younger generation, with the likes of Save Beirut Heritage, Nahnoo, and other NGOs in Lebanon. A (2). According to experts, digital acts can be used to document and disseminate information regardless of physical separations. Their extensive reach may prove a tremendous asset in conserving history. For young people, participation fosters new skills, interests and aspirations and provides opportunities to connect with their wider community (table 2).

Q2. WHY SHOULD YOUNG PEOPLE ENGAGE IN PROTECTING THEIR HERITAGE? WHY WILL THEIR VOICES AND ACTIONS MAKE A DIFFERENCE? WHY NOW?

Main goals of Q2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preserving the local cultural heritage from demolition (tangible/intangible) - Encouraging the youth to understand and appreciate their cultural heritage more (tangible /intangible) - Engaging the youth in protecting their heritage - Involving both genders in protecting their heritage - Including youths living in unreachable or rural areas
Process of Q2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Highlighting the various local categories of cultural heritage available - Supporting talented youths to promote their local heritage - Offering training courses and capacity-building programs - Providing incentives for unreachable youths to acquire related skills
Tools to respond to Q2 by the youths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exploring the history of buildings/areas from various archives (digital/printed/personal memories, and others) - Promoting their fundamental culture heritage items online - Sharing their interests with their peers, nationally and internationally - Seeking funds to develop small, entrepreneurial projects related to cultural heritage - Developing their skills through the available capacity-building training
Tools to respond to Q2 by the institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing entrepreneurship training and skills development programs - Offering youths easy access (virtually and onsite) to all heritage sites - Offering a social platform that facilitates youth participation and allows their voices to be heard

Table 2. Table 2 discusses question 2, highlighting the youth’s engagement methods and why they need to be engaged. The table summarizes the goals, processes, and tools for both youths and institutions to use to fulfil the main goals of Q2.

Q3. WHAT IS THE CURRENT ROLE OF THE YOUTH IN UNDERSTANDING THE VALUE OF THE PAST? WHAT SKILLS AND PRACTICES ARE IN PLACE? WHAT CHALLENGES DO THEY FACE? WHAT TOOLS DO THEY NEED TO SUPPORT THEM?

Main goals of Q3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Including appropriate educational content about cultural heritage in the educational plan - Overcome the challenges that prevent the youth from engaging with their heritage - Offering appropriate training on digital skills to enable the youth to publish their ideas about the local heritage
Process of Q3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reviewing and updating the current educational courses in schools/ universities related to heritage - Defining various challenges associated with youth participation - Constructing a strategic plan for youth intervention
Tools to respond to Q3 by the youths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Using the available, inexpensive tools to document the local heritage - Gaining new digital skills related to documents and interacting digitally with their heritage
Tools to respond to Q3 by the institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Initiating interactive campaigns that highlight the important value of local cultural heritage - Offering heritage courses at different educational levels - Offering summer camps/competitions related to the cultural heritage - Providing affordable digital tools to the youths to enable them to interact with their heritage

Table 3. Table 3 highlights question 3, which is the role of the youth and the challenges they face. The table summarizes the goals, processes, and tools for both the youths and institutions to use to fulfill the main goals of Q3.

The third question highlighted the necessary skills and challenges associated with young people. Most of the webinar participants have acknowledged that “their voices are not being heard” and that they (the youth) “hear” about their heritage, but do not “live” it, which creates a feeling that heritage is imposed on them Y (1). As a result, they become detached from their heritage, “like something pulling them down.” Y (1). Although they [the youth] are interested in exploring their heritage, “it would be interesting to expose and relate to the meaning of living, conceiving, and perceiving space in relation to heritage.” Y (4). Cultural heritage should be experienced rather than inherited. The challenge is to link cultural assets (tangible and intangible) to stories and living values—to connect young people with them (table 3).

According to experts, academics’ primary obligation is to raise awareness about the significance of the past by using tutors’ expertise. The Lebanese education sector makes a minor, inadequate contribution A (6), A (2), A (4). From the youth’s point of view, “heritage learning needs to be interactive and easily accessed.” Y (5). They should start “to understand the actual worth of the

heritage through startups related to the heritage that are appearing notably in these challenging times in Lebanon.” A (5). Adaptive reuse studios are also a good model for creating new programs at architectural schools that might be used in other fields. Depending on the availability of professional teachers, a few university electives are given in heritage-related institutions; hence, this issue requires a new intervention strategy. A (2). Teaching at the time of COVID-19 reveals that it is a potential platform that links more youth with professionals from anywhere concurrently at a low cost, using only mobile phones and the internet. As today’s generation relies increasingly on digital devices for learning and communication, it is preferable to equip them with supportive tools that fit their current lifestyle.

The fourth question explored the motivational methods for engaging the youths with their heritage. The Local NGOs in Lebanon are more active and energetic than government institutions in motivating young people to participate in a range of heritage-related activities. These activities result from individual efforts by NGOs and international organizations such as the United Nations, where the international organization’s vision is often applied. The government lacks a defined youth participation plan, and there is no centralized archive that documents accomplishments and maps problems or gaps in activities. A (5). As a result, a wide variety of stakeholders, including educational institutions, museums, ministries, and local governments, are urged to advertise projects, funding, courses, and other relevant opportunities as well as to establish a local network that may document present and historical activities. When this network is linked to the relevant international network, it becomes more effective. Today, digital media provides a more efficient means of reaching out to a broader spectrum of young people. Youths must be able to learn about their heritage in an engaging and user-friendly manner. For example, employing application-based software to incorporate heritage in the gaming world (table 4).

Application: Youth Capacity-Building: Enhancing Storytelling Capabilities

In our time, we might be looking at travel becoming more expensive or complicated [even within the same country], so these experiences [visiting historic buildings] will be more difficult. Digital data are a good alternative in this case. Y(6).

Q4. HOW CAN WE WORK IN A MORE INTERDISCIPLINARY WAY TO MOTIVATE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT? WHAT ARE THE MAIN RESOURCES NEEDED (EDUCATIONAL/NONEDUCATIONAL)? WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES, AND WHO ARE THE POTENTIAL PLAYERS IN THIS (INSTITUTIONAL, SOCIETAL, ETC.)?

Main goals of Q4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Informing the youth about existing volunteering opportunities - Creating new opportunities for volunteering - Mapping different levels and variations in the skills gained from volunteering - Encouraging the government and NGOs to host more youth activities - Creating synergy between the youths and heritage stakeholders - Designing more courses of varying levels and duration related to the cultural heritage - Providing capacity-building opportunities and creating new jobs for youths related to the cultural heritage - Promoting the local cultural identity and community resilience in the protection of the cultural heritage - Developing new visions for local museums to attract the younger generation - Raising funds to support the youths/organizations to conduct activities related to the cultural heritage
Process of Q4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishing various educational online channels - Promoting the local cultural heritage using new digital methods (gaming/arts/programming/VR/others) - Campaigning for collaboration between local/local and local/global stakeholders - Introducing new interactive online virtual tours of local museums - Campaigning for various fundraising initiatives - Establishing an online platform that links local museums
Tools to respond to Q4 by the youths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Searching for new learning opportunities - Learning new skills (digital/traditional) - Teaming up with peers from different parts of Lebanon and abroad - Volunteering to participate in various campaigns related to cultural heritage
Tools to respond to Q4 by the institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting the cultural heritage and diversity through arts capacity-building - Providing technical assistance to the NGOs and the youths for activities related to the heritage - Establishing online courses related to branding the local heritage - Creating an online channel to explore various aspects of the local cultural heritage - Supporting projects targeting the youth through national and international funding - Encouraging and supporting the youth to travel to different local and international heritage sites

Table 4. Table 4 discusses the methods for motivating the youth. The table summarizes the goals, processes, and tools for both the youths and institutions to use to fulfill the main goals of Q4.

Based on the concepts and discussions raised above, the ReConHeritage project delivered research activities mainly with a documentation purpose, such as recording oral history, collecting testimonies, and producing documentaries, to allow the youth to engage in a dialogue around the city and its contested visible built environment. To enable young people in Lebanon to interact with their past and built heritage, we aimed to combine historical research with the establishment of digital platforms. This project relied heavily on the coproduction of online content, which varied from 360 imaging, making short films, and developing digital story maps. Our goal was to establish a virtuous cycle in which heritage is investigated by building cultural bridges involving youth as key actors, which would be reinforced by promoting the value of cultural heritage.

Ten youths between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-four years were selected (seven from Beirut and three from Tripoli), all of whom were students at BAU. A series of workshops were delivered to strengthen the role of the cultural institutions as the promoters of human equality and social justice by opening up new channels for the youth to express their voices, following years of challenge in fragile states. The youths engaged in training, documentation, and coproduction as a mean of plural participation to generate a public memory that will enable a growing proportion of the younger generation to revisit the assumptions about the past and share these experiences via social media platforms and public displays. The methodology we implemented also enabled our young participants to go beyond the “collective memory” and become more critically analytical of the bases for the identities they already hold. Co-designing a digital tool kit provided the flexible framework that is essential for communicating with the wider community, at either the individual or institutional level. In addition, the digital content is more durable, reaches a wider audience, and offers individuals an opportunity to interact and provide their feedback, using simple, well-designed tools and methods.

The training started by introducing a set of digital tools (figure 3), which have been designed to capture the current situation regarding cultural heritage and help to disseminate the youth’s storytelling to their audience. Presenters from the United Kingdom and Lebanon held a series of online lectures and discussions about state-of-the-art photogrammetry modeling (photogrammetry entails converting a series of 2D images into a digital 3D model) using simple tools, such as mobile phone cameras. The tools then became more sophisticated, such as 3D scanners. In addition, other methods were used to publish

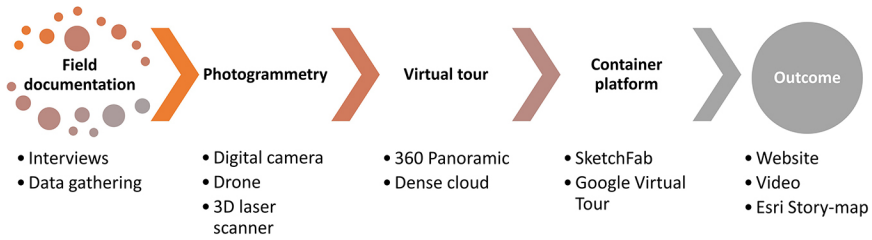


Figure 3. The framework for using digital tools and techniques in Lebanon's workshop. The purpose was to provide the youths with various digital tools for capturing and presenting their case study. The lighter colors mean affordable digital tools, while the darker colors indicate more expensive but more accurate tools. Source: modified after (Selim et al.).

3D models or virtual tours of the buildings. The final step was to encourage the youths to choose any suitable outcome method, such as building a website using maps, voices, videos, or a new container. To share their stories, the majority used an online platform provided by Esri Company called ArcGIS Story-maps. The youth could create their media and link to other online sources using this digital interactive platform. Their training and follow-up with the youth took more than four weeks.

The four case studies were selected with different typologies: a square (Martyrs' Square); a sculpture form, which is a part of an unfinished building (The Egg); and two residential buildings standing opposite each other on the green line (Beit Beirut; Beit Merei). The selection was based on a general discussion with the entire Lebanese project team and the participating youths about which building/s or place/s was most interesting and was worth telling a story about from the youths' point of view.

Martyr's Square, known as Al Burj or Place des Cannons, is Beirut's main central public space. It was named after the executions ordered by Djemal Pasha in 1916, during World War I. The square often symbolizes a revolution in the heart of every Lebanese citizen because of the many revolutionary events that have taken place there.

This case study is an urban-scale case. Most surrounding buildings have either been reconstructed using their past architectural image form (Solidere project), or represent new, modern projects. The youths found it challenging to relate to this space as a historical square that witnessed various historical

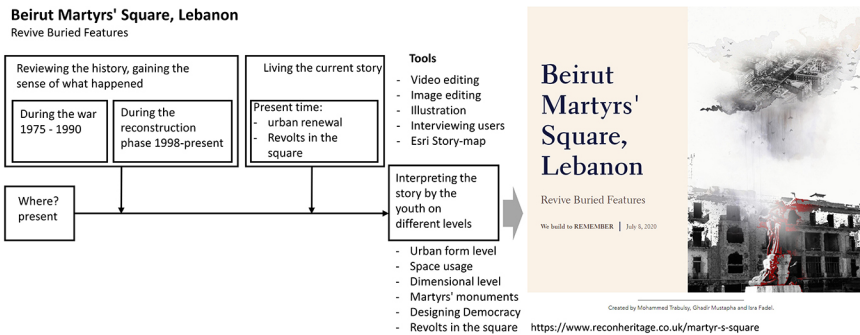


Figure 4. Beirut Martyrs' Square in Lebanon; the youths' work can be found at: www.reconheritage.co.uk/martyr-s-square.

events, but their engagement was through the revolution lens. The youths are connected to this case as a symbolic place that unites all Lebanese people on rare occasions, and they call it “designing democracy.” They wanted to tell the story of their engagement with their fellow protesters in that place as the main focus, in addition to considering the square’s historical evolution and adaptation to different usages through war, peace, and revolutionary times (see figure 4). All of the data gathered from the videos, historical images, illustrations, and interviews with passers-by were aggregated into Esri story-map. This platform allows the mapping and design of an interactive interface to disseminate the youths’ stories.

The Egg Building, or “Dome,” is an unfinished facility on which the building began in central Beirut in 1965, ten years before the civil war broke out. Its construction was interrupted during the civil war, and the horseshoe-shaped dome became a landmark in Beirut. Along the green line in Beirut, this old, abandoned cinema had a second unofficial life: it became a site for underground raves and art exhibitions in the 1990s. The Egg remains for now but is largely abandoned, except for a recent art show and demonstrations held on its roof.

This case study is unique and its preservation is based on the youth’s actions during the recent revolution. As Arbid stated, “places like the Egg will never be preserved if the elite intellectual architects only call for this. It will only be preserved almost by force by the revolutionary people [mostly the youths], who will stand there and force those in charge to keep it.” A (2). The youths approached this case by understanding the intended use of the unfinished building and its

evolution to the present day. They expanded their tool knowledge to include 3D modeling to display the building's inner functions and also interviewed other youths to explore their ideas about its future usage and how they value the building. This group of youths also used Esri story-map as a digital platform (figure 5).

Beit Beirut is a magnificent, elegant, yellow residential house, despite its external bullet holes, that occupies a notable corner in central Beirut on the former boundary between East and West Beirut during the civil war. Formerly, the Barakat house was a family home, but it became a sniping bunker during the war. Originally a residential building, it has now been transformed into an art gallery and cultural center without any formal administration, which makes this a unique case.

The project's webinar participants invited the architect Youssef Haider, who was the head of the project team that restored this building, to discuss his work with the youth participants. He informed them, "this building [is] like a real living human being with wounds [and] traces of time and the idea was not at all to do any lifting but the idea was really to preserve all of these layers and give it a new life."

In their documentation project, the youth tried to imagine (from historical documents) the sounds of the lives of different users of Beit Beirut throughout history, starting from the traditional family who lived there to the war period, when it was occupied by soldiers and militia, up to the present, when it is a public building, partially open to the public (figure 6). The youths also interviewed several passers-by regarding how much they knew about and interacted with

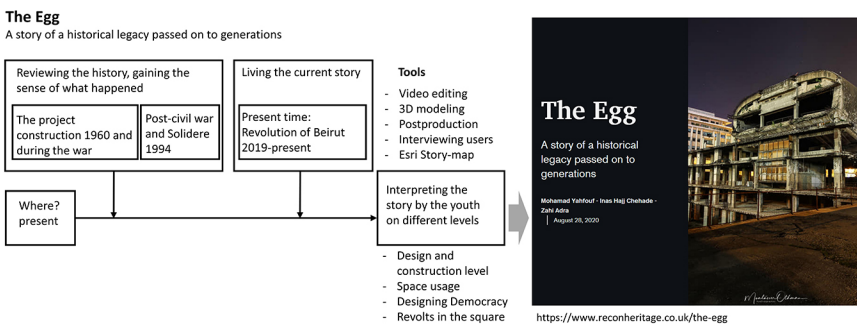


Figure 5. "The Egg" in Lebanon; the youths' work can be found at: www.reconheritage.co.uk/the-egg.

Beit Beirut

The Museum of Memory through the sounds of its users

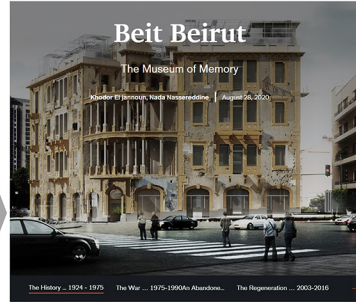
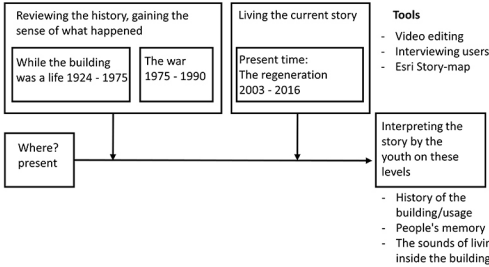


Figure 6. Beit Beirut in Lebanon; the youths' work can be found at: www.reconheritage.co.uk/beit-beirut.

Beit Merei

A city called Beirut

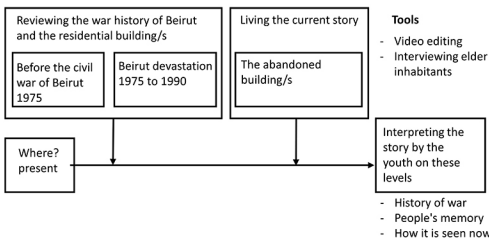


Figure 7. The case study of Beit Merei, Lebanon; the youths' work can be found at: www.reconheritage.co.uk/beit-merei.

the building. The final product is a video that includes all of the gathered data in addition to the youths' own thoughts and ideas.

Beit Merei: there are three residential blocks on the green line with a remarkable architectural style. These are among the few buildings that are still unrenovated. The third building represents a typical Lebanese house, with triple arches on its main facade. The youths interviewed the elderly people who used to live close to these buildings and linked the war history of Beirut with the buildings' condition over time (see figure 7). This building was on the Muslim side of the green line, almost facing Beit Beirut, which represents a challenge to the youth to know the other side of the story. In their interviews, the youth were interested to know the typical Lebanese lifestyle before, during, and directly after the war. Currently, walking along the green line and passing the selected

cases would never reveal any historical connection to the past, as most of the old buildings in this area have been replaced with new, modern ones.

The outcome is a video that narrates the story of Beirut's civil war and its impact on buildings in general and Beit Merei in particular, including all of the gathered information and the youths' own reflections.

Discussion

Now is a better time than ever to disseminate the words and ideas of youth to a wider community across all boundaries thanks to the availability of digital networking especially after the spread of COVID-19 at the end of 2019. Since the youth did not witness the Lebanese civil war, at the beginning of the project they found it difficult to connect with the historical buildings remaining on the green line. The discussions during the webinars and workshops among the youths, experts, and academics revealed a number of essential issues that need to be addressed. The primary point is the challenge related to the existence of multiple versions of the same recent history from different political parties, whose stories affect the youths' perception of what really happened in these places and how they should react and interact with them. This point is omitted from the majority of undergraduate and school educational materials.

Although there is a gap of more than twelve years between Craig Larkin's project, which included youth interviews, and our current one, which included common examples such as Beit Barakat, the youths' vision about removing or keeping the historic buildings that witnessed extreme violence in the civil war is almost the same, even though less heritage now remains. One difference is the increased curiosity to know what happened in this place according to different sources and political parties rather than from a single monopolitical point of view. This represents a huge change in the political game and may explain the recent revolutionary movement or what some parties called an antigovernment protest that aims to bring down the political elite, started mainly by the youth in 2019.

This project not only gathered the ideas and thoughts of youth but also provided tools and frameworks for both youth and relevant stakeholders to bring youth closer to their cultural heritage. Digital learning workshops assisted them in spreading their stories based on real-world examples and publishing their

work on well-known digital platforms. The proposed framework is divided into two sections: the priorities for cultural heritage research and an overview of particular “areas of intervention,” and the instruments that should support the findings of this research to achieve actual innovation, impact, and growth. Listening, talking, sharing, and learning from professionals from various cultural and educational backgrounds can benefit the youth.

Individuals from younger age groups, such as high schools, cultural centers, and NGOs that include youth in their activities, will be needed in future work. Collaboration with youth entrepreneurs will also improve the quality of the outputs and attract additional youth to participate.

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