

Bait al Karama - Beatrice Catanzaro

Bait al Karama is initiated by the local activist, Fatima Kadumy, artist Beatrice Catanzaro and cultural manager Cristiana Bottigella.



Project author or developer:
Bait al Karama - Beatrice Catanzaro

Where:

Website:
www.visibleproject.org/blog/project/bait-al-karama/

About the project

During the second Intifada (2000), the Old City of Nablus was one of the harshest flash points for the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) attacks in the West Bank. In the aftermath of the outbreaks the city was put under endless periods of curfew. Until 2008 seven Israeli check-points blocked the main city gateways, making it almost impossible for people and goods to move in and out of the city. Today the city's economic status is equal to that of a refugee camp with an 80% unemployment rate and a large number of buildings that require rehabilitation. Women are certainly the invisible backbone of the community, striving for the survival of family and children in the mist of a brutal occupation and a deeply conservative society. The project aims to:

- create the first space of aggregation for women in the Old City of Nablus;
- initiate social enterprise, combining income generating activities with social/educational and cultural programs;
- shift the representation of Palestine from the political stereotypes to the complexity of its cultural identity.

It was soon understood that food could be a strategy for aggregation, cultural mediation and income generation in Nablus. Women are the holders of gestures and tastes in culinary cultural heritage – a heritage that is quickly disappearing under the economic pressure of the occupation. Bait al Karama, located in an Ottoman building at the heart of the Old City, is home to the foremost Palestinian cooking school run entirely by women. In conjunction with the school, the Centre runs several additional income generating ventures: a shopping corner, cafeteria, beauty salon, as well as other catering services. With the income they generate from these ventures, the women organize educational programmes for the women and children of the community, in response to their concrete needs.

In 2012 Bait al Karama became the first Slow Food Convivium in Palestine, starting a long term collaboration with Slow Food International (Italy). They also have links with Universities such as SOAS in London with their Master in Food Anthropology; Cultural Institutions such as the A.M. Qattan Foundation; local associations, several Slow Food Conviviums in Italy, and tour operators. Bait al Karama appears on the 2013 Lonely Planet for the Palestinian Territories.

In the framework of Bait al Karama, the project *Fatima's Chronicles* – a coral narration of food, taste and gestures is a further step to involve the local community in a process of awareness towards their own food heritage and to actively engage with its preservation. This "recipe book" will emerge from a multitude of voices from the community itself.

The project consists of participatory research into the local food production, recipes, food spaces in the Old City, involving the 50-70 women and youth who already participate in Bait al Karama's activities.

