



Lebanon 2010: Mediterranean Opportunities for a Middle Eastern Nation

A presentation of the 2010 Babel Initiative project

This is Babel Initiative

Babel Initiative is an official Sciences Po association, driven by students for students. We aim to promote ties among countries of the Mediterranean and MENA region, by acting as a platform for student-led projects spanning from humanitarian initiatives to academic or artistic endeavors. The objective of each year is to organize, with the help of our partners and of Sciences Po Paris, a study trip to a country of interest in the MENA region and an official symposium organized in order to share our work with the other students of the campus and the inhabitants of Menton.

The Board

Babel Initiative is run by a seven-member board, comprised of students from Morocco, France, Spain, Brazil, the United States and Norway. They have experience in various kinds of voluntary work, including being on the exclusive board of the NGO "One World Youth Project", founding the UNICEF partner NGO "Nucleo ICA", and helping to organize Barack Obama's presidential campaign in Pennsylvania.

Our Accomplishments

Since its founding in 2006, Babel Initiative has successfully carried out four similar projects, involving study trips to seven Middle Eastern countries for over 70 students. The countries visited range from Turkey and Egypt to Kuwait and Iran, and research papers on themes as diverse as culture, the economy, the blogosphere, and international relations, to name a few. Last year, Babel Initiative sent 24 students to Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar in order to study the Gulf monarchies. The trip was funded by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science and BNP Paribas.

For more information on our accomplishments and previous sponsors, please visit our website:

<http://babelinitiative.wordpress.com>

Lebanon 2010

This year, the students of Sciences Po Paris in Menton have elected Lebanon as the Babel Initiative country of interest for 2010. The participants have submitted their project proposals, and work is underway to conduct a successful study trip and symposium. This brochure aims to outline the basis and background for "Lebanon 2010", as well as our plan for organizing and financing such an endeavor.



Babel Initiative is located at the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean Undergraduate Program in Menton.

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Lebanon 2010

Located at the crossroads of the Mediterranean Basin and the Arabian Hinterland, Lebanon is an ideal country for a Babel Initiative project. Its unique location has dictated its rich, sometimes turbulent history, and shaped its unique cultural identity of religious diversity. By studying Lebanon, we will experience firsthand the position that Lebanon holds in the two regions of which it is part: the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

Lebanon's dynamism and complexity allows for a wealth of research topics and makes it a fascinating country to study. Another inspiring aspect of studying Lebanon is the revival that it is going through at this very moment, as Beirut is regaining its status as a bustling international metropolis with a financial sector that has managed to weather the global crisis. Lebanon is happening, and Babel Initiative wants to be there!

Our study of Lebanon will focus on one main theme, and three sub-themes called "guiding questions".

This year's theme: Mediterranean Opportunities for a Middle Eastern Nation

It is clear that countries around the Mediterranean would benefit from closer cooperation. EuroMed and the Mediterranean Union are examples of this, as both organizations seek to bolster cooperation among European and Mediterranean countries in terms of energy, security, immigration and trade, amongst other things. We believe that this is the right way to go forward, and through our studies we want to show the opportunities that exist for such cooperation in Lebanon today.

This year's guiding questions:

Does Lebanon remain a model society for the Middle East? Using a multi-faceted approach covering politics, media and issues dealing with human-rights, we will examine whether Lebanon is still a bastion for political liberalism and religious tolerance, and what other Middle Eastern countries can learn from the Lebanese experience.

What role does the Lebanese economy play in the Regional System? With a banking system that managed to survive the worst of the financial crisis, Lebanon has proved that it has an important role to play in Middle Eastern financial markets. Does its economy, in the larger sense of the term, also have such a distinct role?

What relationship do young Lebanese have to art? Because Babel Initiative also promotes cultural understanding and artistic expression, several meetings and debates organized with local students will assess how Lebanese youth's relationship with art and culture manifests itself today.

What is a Babel Project?

A Babel Initiative project is a personal endeavor which reflects the interests and identity of each participant. In this sense, Babel Initiative capitalizes on the great diversity within the Menton campus. The project itself can be constructed in one of three ways: Either as a scientific project in the goal of writing a mini research paper, as an artistic project, or as a humanitarian project with or without a partnership with a local NGO. Of course, this list is not exhaustive, and many of our projects touch upon several of these three categories. The projects can be conducted individually or in a group of up to three members.

This year, Babel Initiative has selected 9 student-led projects. A full description of these projects can be found on our website.

The Study Trip

When: Between April 23rd and May 3rd.

Who: Approximately 25 students, consisting of the 9 groups whose projects were selected for participation and the 7 member-board of Babel.

How: The study trip will attempt to deal with three major themes or guiding questions which each provide an angle toward understanding Lebanese society. The themes are selected to correlate closely with the 9 student projects.

Why:

1. **Discovery:** Providing participants with the opportunity to discover and understand the key issues facing Lebanon today, through meetings with important institutions and prominent individuals and decision-makers.
2. **Study:** Allowing participants to work on their groups projects, by organizing meetings dealing with the topics related to the projects and by reserving one or two days for on-site research for each of the groups.

Suggestions for meetings and guiding questions

Does Lebanon remain a model society for the Middle East?

Politics

- Prime Minister Saad Al Hariri
- Speaker of the House Mr Nabih Barri
- MP General Michel Aoun
- Maronite Patriarch Cardinal Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir
- H.E. Denis Pietton (Ambassador of France to Lebanon)

Media:

- Ms Amal Hamdan (Al Jazeera)
- Ms Magda Abu-Fadil (AUB)
- Dr Nabil Dajani (AUB)
- Mr Robert Fisk (The Independent)
- Mr Joseph Eid (AFP)

Civil society:

- UNRWA
- Mr Karim El Mufti (HRW/CICR)

What role does the Lebanese economy play in the Regional System?

Local experts:

- Mr Jihad Azour, former Minister of Finance
- Ms Lamyia Mobayyed, director of "Institut des Finances"
- Lebanese banks

Business:

- Local companies
- International and French companies in Lebanon

What relationship do young Lebanese have to art?

Arts and culture

- Ms Nadine Labaki, film director
- Mr Elie Saab, designer
- Local French-language writers
- Beirut Arts Center
- Local companies

Debates with students concerning theme questions:

- American Uni. Of Beirut
- Lebanese American Uni.
- St. Joseph University

Sights:

- Byblos
- National Museum
- Basta Antiquity Market

Why Sponsor Us?

With our fifth project so far, Babel Initiative offers the opportunity to discover Lebanon for students who would not otherwise have had the possibility to do so. Our approach allows participants to work on and finalize their own projects while meeting with various key individuals and institutions in order to get a broader perspective of the issues facing Lebanon today. In addition, we seek to create links between our participants and the local community, by allowing them to meet with local students, employers (usually our sponsors) and decision-makers, and this constitutes the primary value of our project.

In order to carry out our projects, we depend on the help of third parties. For our sponsors, this does not only grant abstract benefits:

1. Increased visibility

Babel Initiative places great care in the visibility of its sponsors, who may display their logo on:

- our official brochures
- our website
- all material relating to the final symposium (banners, flyers and posters)

2. Constant Association with our Project

Babel Initiative takes pride in its sponsors, and will strive to highlight their commitment when possible:

- We will mention our sponsors to the figures and students we meet during our study trip.
- We will profile our sponsors in Lebanese and French local media (In 2009, more than eight articles were written about our presence in Bahrain and Kuwait, in both English and Arabic).
- An article summing up our experience will be published in the Sciences Po publication "Global Horizons", which is distributed to the world's top 400 universities.

3. Direct contact with potential employees

During our study trip, Babel Initiative will visit any organization that sponsors us. This provides enlightening perspectives of the host country, and helps to foster ties between Sciences Po students and potential employers in the Middle East.

The students of today are the leaders of tomorrow.

Our association allows motivated young students to develop the comprehensive perspectives which future leaders of the Middle East will need in order to address the problems facing this region today. However, the organization of a Babel Initiative project is an expensive endeavor. We are ready to provide a budget that summarizes our financial challenges, and we hope that on this basis you will seriously consider financially supporting "Babel Initiative: Lebanon 2010."