

Lebanese Diasporic Village Communities and their Practices of Reproduction and Community Development

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In May 2017 the Lebanese-Canadian House was officially inaugurated as part of the Lebanese Diaspora Village in the historic centre of Batroun, a coastal city in North Lebanon. Three successful business people from the Canadian City of Halifax (Nova Scotia) had secured funding for the renovation works and curated the exhibition inside the house. The initiators are also actively involved in the Lebanese community in Halifax holding positions such as the "Lebanese Honorary Consul for the Maritimes" or the "President of the Lebanese Chamber of Commerce." The honorary consul is among the well-known property developers with roots in the Lebanese village of Diman. While the first immigrants earned their income as peddlers, today's so-called "Diman developers" are much involved in the emergence of Halifax's skyline thanks to their large investments and lobbying activities.

Lebanese diasporic village communities have emerged in consequence of intensifying emigration since the end of the nineteenth century. Many Christians left their villages in Mount Lebanon to seek better economic opportunities abroad. Their villages of origin have evolved into points of shared reference and identification for descendants in different parts of the world. Those who live in adjacent neighbourhoods have often formed local associations with specific objectives and strategic orientations (e.g. "Diman Association Canada" in Halifax, "Australian Blouza Association" in Sydney). At the same time, Christian Lebanese individuals have long been socio-economically integrated in traditional Anglophone immigration countries. Building on these observations, the research project explores the following questions: What are the motives that drive individuals to engage in diasporic village communities? Through which practices do members contribute to the preservation, development and local incorporation of these communities? What are the normative directives within Lebanese diasporic village communities?

Marie Karner compiled qualitative data based on a multi-site approach that involved field research in villages of the Qadisha Valley as well as in several cities with established vibrant Lebanese communities (e.g. Sydney, Halifax, Easton). The fellowship at the OIB enabled her to link the data analysis with further empirical research. She conducted interviews and participant observation at local gatherings like village feasts and religious ceremonies. She also gathered supplementary data on seasonal dynamics in the villages of origin, social relations between residents and visitors from overseas as well as on the digital communication of community members and their transnational connections.