

## **DIASPORA TOURISM IN LEBANON: A STRATEGY TO MAINTAIN TOURISM EFFICIENCY DURING CRISES**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Tourism constitutes a major activity in the Lebanese economic system. Being by its nature a fragile sector, tourism is severely affected each time Lebanon is facing a crisis. The last one was a multidimensional crisis that derived from the geopolitical turnarounds in the Middle East region, particularly the war in Syria. Yet, tourist arrivals to Lebanon have not dip as expected, on the contrary they are increasing steadily. This is due to the surge of diaspora tourism where reconnection with ancestral homelands and solidarity with their nationals prevails over other considerations. This article studies the rise of diaspora tourism in Lebanon during the period 2014 – 2017. It relies on the survey method to set a profile for Lebanese diaspora tourists and highlight the importance of resorting to diaspora tourism during crisis.*

**KEYWORDS :** Diaspora Tourism, crises, Lebanon, descendants, homeland.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

“Immigration” is a word stapled into the history of Lebanon. Historically, Lebanese have witnessed persecutions and wars that obliged them to flee their homeland. This resulted in several migratory waves; the first dates back to as early as the year 1860. Hence, a Lebanese diaspora was formed worldwide where members largely surpass the number of Lebanese citizens.

The Lebanese diaspora played an important role in the reconstruction of Lebanon once the calm got back to the country after the stop of its civil war. Investments, transfer of technologies, commerce, and other economic activities were in part conducted by Lebanese diaspora and expatriates. Their contributions helped the Lebanese economy to relatively recuperate after more than 15 years of recession.

Nowadays, Lebanon is constrained by a chronic crisis that impacts its environment, economy, social fabric and political system. Once again, Lebanese diaspora seems to have a role to play, but this time during the crisis and not after it. Indeed, diaspora tourism is on the rise and it is maintaining the Lebanese tourism industry from collapse. This intrigues us to inquire about the importance of diaspora tourism for a country hit by a crisis, set a profile for these diaspora tourists and understand their motivations. Also, the role of stakeholders in pushing these tourists to get engaged in tourism at their ancestral country is a major issue of investigation for this research.

### Research Problematic

Since its Independence in 1943, Lebanon – a country located at the eastern shore of the Mediterranean - has witnessed two major moments that shaped its contemporary history and political system. The first was considered a “civil war<sup>1</sup>” in 1975 that lasted for about 15 years, while the second was the assassination of the Prime Minister, Rafic Hariri in 2005 at a time where Lebanon was still trying to recover from its injuries.

The country was then destabilized by a series of unfortunate events; the most important being the war in Syria and the huge number of Syrian refugees that entered its territory. To that, waves of terrorists’ attacks shook Lebanon in 2015 and 2016, taking advantage from the internal political dissidences between Lebanese parties. In turn, a number of Arab Gulf countries boycotted Lebanon in response to its neutral policy in the international summits towards Arab geopolitical issues, mainly the war in Yemen. This resulted in an acute crisis at all levels. The Lebanese economy, based on the tertiary sector, was severely affected. In this context, the tourism sector should theoretically fall back. But this does not happen. Actually, the official figures released by the Lebanese Ministry of Tourism show a progressive increase of tourist arrivals between 2014 and 2017 (fig. 1).

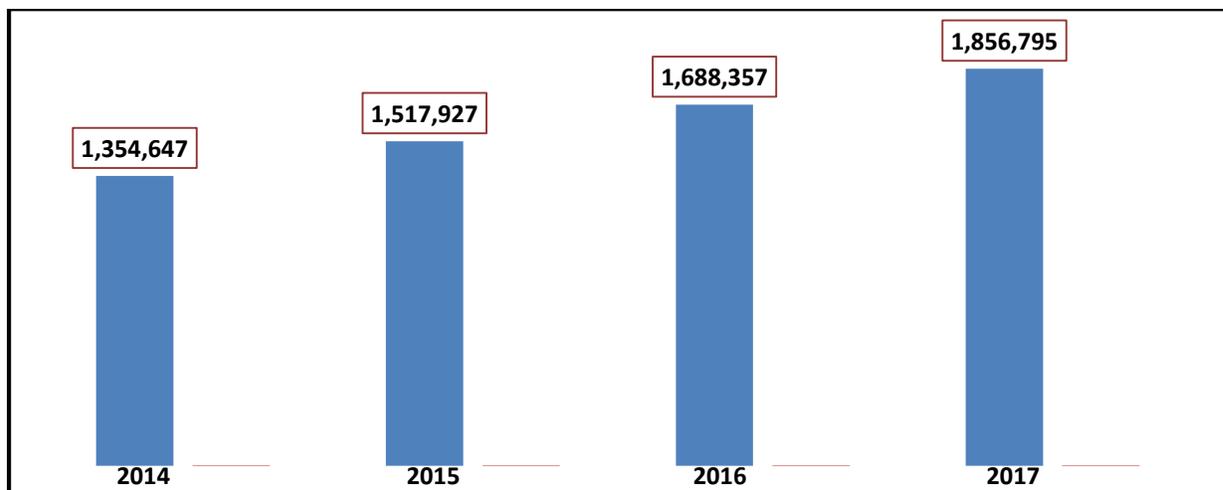


Fig. 1: Total Arrival of tourists to Lebanon from 2014-2017(Source: Lebanese Ministry of Tourism, 2018)

This increase of international tourist arrivals during these instable years raises questions about the origin of these tourists and their motivations. A look into the originated continents (fig.2) shows that these tourists are mainly coming from Europe and America.

<sup>1</sup> A Series of armed conflicts between militias, each claiming to be a protector of its religious community. Their extra-national obedience suggests that it was the war of others being waged on the Lebanese territory.

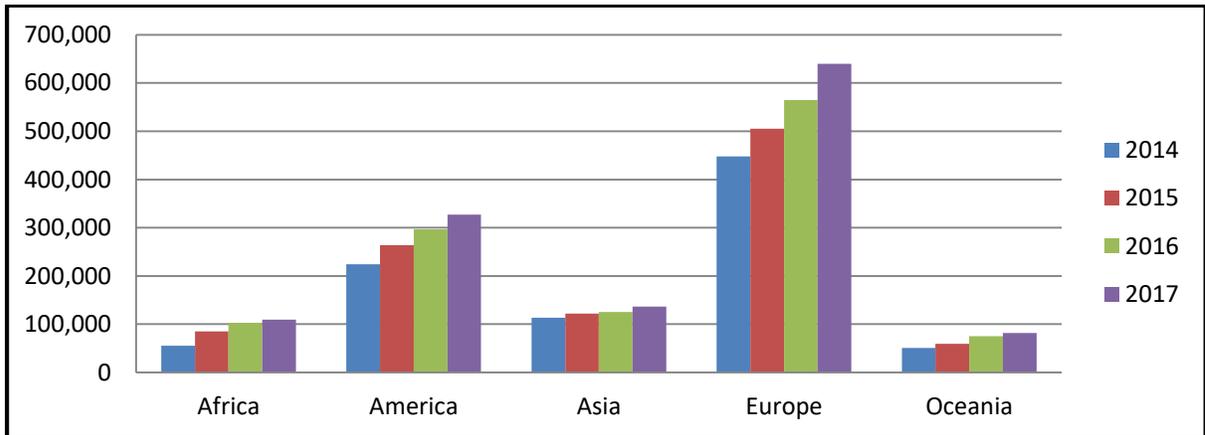


Fig. 2: Total Arrivals by continents from 2014 to 2017 (Source: Lebanese Ministry of Tourism, 2018)

Or, European and American tourists are usually sensitive to safety and security issues when choosing their destinations. Therefore, it would be interesting to identify these tourists and study the purposes of their visits to Lebanon. To do so, a deeper look into their nationalities was useful. As per the figures from the Lebanese Ministry of Tourism, the American tourists are mainly coming from USA, Canada, Brazil and Venezuela (fig.3), while the European ones are coming respectively from France, Germany, England and Sweden (fig. 4).

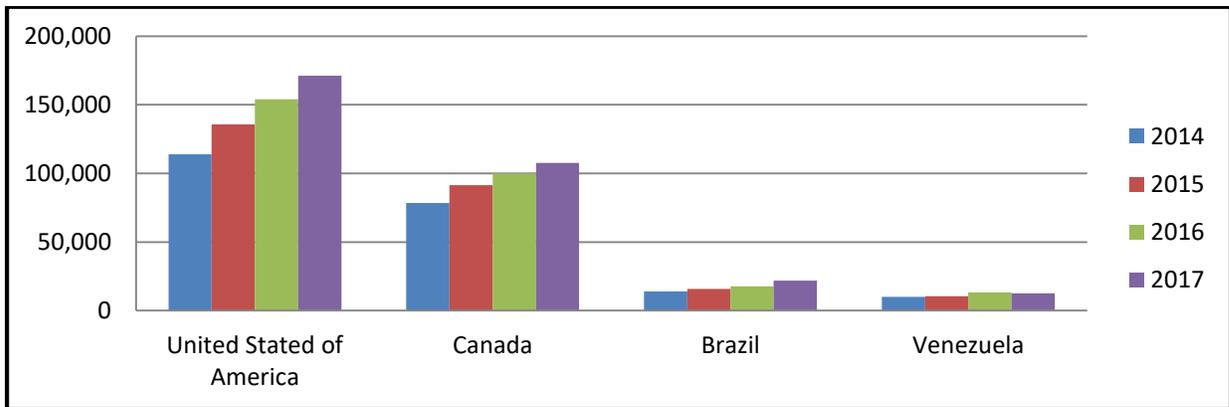


Fig. 3: Nationalities of American tourist arrivals from 2014-2017 (Source: Ministry of Tourism, 2018)

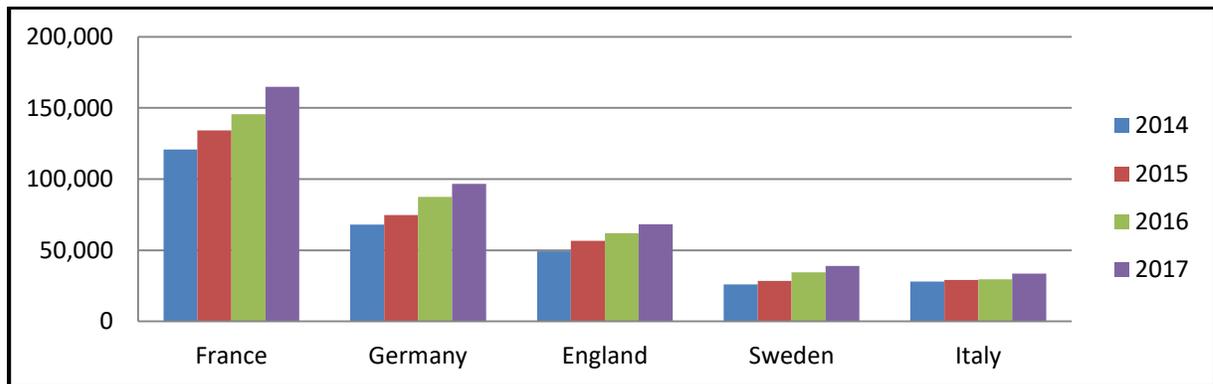


Fig. 4: Nationalities of the European tourist arrivals from 2014 - 2017 (Source: Ministry of Tourism, 2018)

In parallel, the records of the General Directorate of Emigrants – a unit of the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants – show that the highest concentrations of Lebanese diaspora in the American continent are respectively in Brazil, United States of America, Venezuela, Canada and Argentine. For the European countries, the Lebanese diaspora is considerable in France, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Italy and England (Table 1).

Table 1: Countries with highest estimated numbers of Lebanese diaspora by descending order (Source: General Directorate of Emigrants, 2018)

Continent	Countries with highest estimated concentration of Lebanese diaspora by descending order
America	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1- Brazil</li> <li>2- United States of America</li> <li>3- Venezuela</li> <li>4- Canada</li> <li>5- Argentine</li> </ol>
Europe	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1- France</li> <li>2- Germany</li> <li>3- Great Britain</li> <li>4- Sweden</li> <li>5- Switzerland</li> <li>6- Italy</li> <li>7- Denmark</li> </ol>

Crossing the above data leads to consider that international tourist arrivals to Lebanon between the critical periods of 2014 – 2017 are mainly diaspora tourists. Hence, this research aims at understanding the reasons beyond the increase of diaspora tourists in Lebanon at a time where the country is hit by crises. Its main question is: To what extent diaspora tourism can be an effective strategy to overcome tourism crisis?

Subsequent questions interrogate the profile of diaspora tourists in Lebanon, the actions taken to encourage diaspora tourism and the role of Lebanese stakeholders in reconnecting Lebanese diaspora to their homeland.

- Who are the diaspora tourists interested in visiting their homeland?
- What are the major actions taken to boost diaspora tourism in Lebanon?
- Why Lebanese stakeholders' efforts towards diaspora tourism are not coordinated?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In an attempt to find answers to these questions, a literature review is made. Theories related to diaspora and diaspora tourism, were screened with a particular focus on the importance of relationships between diaspora and homelands.

### Diaspora: A word in motion

#### Defining Diaspora

The word "Diaspora" derives from the Greek composite verb "dia-" and "speirein" which are the synonyms of "to scatter", "to spread" or "to disperse" (Baumann, 2000). The first use of diaspora appeared in the third century B.C. in Alexandria, Egypt, in the translation of the Hebrew Bible into the Greek language<sup>2</sup> by the Jewish Scholars (Dufoix, 2003/2008). It reflected the threat of scattering and dispersion facing the Jews if they refused to obey the will of God or failed to do so. In the New Testament, the word "Diaspora" appears three times to designate the community of dispersed pilgrims awaiting the return to the City of God. The religious uses of the term continues later and diaspora appears again to describe Protestant minorities in Catholic countries and vice versa.

The modern use of diaspora refers to a group of people that were originally forced to quit their territory, but continue to preserve their identity and solidarity. The most classical example is the Jewish diaspora known for their "integrity as an ethno-religious community despite more than two thousand years of existence without political power over their country of origin." (Elazar as cited by Dufoix, 2008, p.8) Another example is the Black/ African diaspora that resulted from the transatlantic African slave trade. Escaping from slavery and returning to their homeland was the issue that marked their Diasporas (Irele, 1965).

Further examples of most recent diasporas were highlighted by Cohen (1997) in his book *Global Diasporas: An introduction*, in which he pointed out to the Armenian diaspora that resulted from the massacre of the Armenians by the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century, the Irish diaspora occasioned by the famine of Irish people between 1845 and 1852, and the Palestinian diaspora caused by the occupation of their territory by Israelis.

#### *Evolution of Diaspora's denotations*

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<sup>2</sup> The language in Egypt at that time was Greek and a large population of Greek Speaking Jews imposed that the bible be translated.

From its Greek inception, the word “Diaspora” was rarely used prior to the nineteenth century. When it was, it referred to the studies of religions and theology. Yet, the twentieth century marked an evolution in the uses, meanings and dimensions of the word diaspora. Drawing this evolution allows to identify five major moments:

Beginning twentieth century, the American historian Simon Dubnov considered that diaspora refer to “a nation or a part of a nation separated from its own state or territory and dispersed among other nations, but preserving its national culture” (Dubnov as cited by Dufoix 2008, p.17). And so did the sociologist Robert Park (1928) who used the expression “living in the Diaspora” to designate the millions of Asians living abroad their countries.

During the Sixties, the word Diaspora was used to describe the commercial and trading of slaves by the merchants of the African continent (Dufoix, 2003/2008). Also the year 1965 witnessed the first mention of the Palestinian diaspora which appeared in the 1965 United Nations report.

In the mid-seventies, the American political scientist John Armstrong (1976) suggested a typology of “Diasporas” as “mobilized” or “Proletarian”, referring to people of the diaspora as the ordinary, the common, the less privileged and who belong to the working class.

In the Eighties, the word has significantly evolved to replace such terms as “foreign community” or “exile”, in scholarly publications and in all the different media.

In the Nineties, the sociologist Robin Cohen (1997) established a classification of diaspora based on the primary reasons of dispersal. This led him to distinguish several types of diaspora. The most important are:

- Victim diaspora which follows a catastrophic dispersions and exodus (e.g. Jewish, African, Armenian and Palestinian diaspora),
- Labor and trade diasporas driven by economic factors (e.g. Chinese, Indian and Lebanese Diaspora),
- Colonial diaspora caused by imperial dominance of a country over another (such as the French, British, Spanish and Portuguese Diasporas).

Based on the above, the nineteenth century witnessed a huge extension in the meanings of the term diaspora well above religious dimensions to include social, political and economic drives of populations’ dispersion.

### **Diaspora or World people?**

In the twenty first century, the term diaspora is used in so many different contexts and put into use to refer to a variety of settings. In his books “Diasporas”, Dufoix (2003/2008) revealed the main usages of the term diaspora today. His new contribution resides in the shift of attention from the drives of diaspora’s formation to the characteristics of diaspora’s living. This means

that diaspora is becoming a community whose members have common roots, share same ideologies and have the same hopes and desires.

Another new scope of diaspora pertains to the growing use of the term “World People” which was first introduced by Bruneau (2001) in his book “*Peuples-Monde de la Longue Durée: Grecs, Indiens, Chinois*”. He used the term diaspora as a major aspect for a nation’s people to be “World People”. This significance was since employed by researchers and international organizations as shown by the latest report by the UN International Organization for Migration (2018). This report stated that the “Indian World People or the Indian diaspora is the world’s largest, with slightly more than 15.6 million people from India living overseas”. Thus, World People become one of the synonyms of diaspora.

To sum up, the word diaspora was mainly linked to theology and referenced the power of God to scatter and banish people. It was primarily used to refer to the Jewish population following their exodus and forced migration. However, during the past century, the term has been scrutinized extensively and has developed rapidly. Today, diaspora is being used in a variety of contexts and settings that transcend the classical mono drive of forced immigration and dispersion from homeland, to cover multidimensional (economic, political, social, cultural, colonial, etc.) factors and to reflect the globalized status of diaspora, considered as World People.

### **Diaspora Tourism**

All definitions of tourism insist on the aspect of being away from home as a condition *sine qua none* for the tourism activity. Based on, types of tourism could be domestic or international and tourism industry care to provide each type of tourists with its needs and desires. Yet, there is an in-between form of tourism that relates to diaspora tourists. Those in-between tourists are immigrants taking the trip back to their homeland. They are “foreigners” in their country of origin but share similar cultural backgrounds as those of the domestic tourists and locals do. They constitute a niche market and a subsection of special interest tourism (Huang, Haller & Ramshaw, 2013).

### **Diaspora Tourists: The ‘In- between’ Tourists**

According to Butler (2003), the study of the potential motivations of emigrants or people of the diaspora for engaging in travel to their original homeland varies between pleasure and obligation and involves many aspects. No matter what the reason for migration is, whether forced and conflict result, or voluntary in search for a better life and desire for economic improvement, people of the diaspora maintain strong relations and ties with their homelands.

To this, the Anthropologist MacCannel (1976) argued that diaspora tourists travel to their homeland represent - even if temporarily - the desire to be connected to a society or to a community that was once part of, or was born to, and to belong again.

As for Gottlieb (1982), diaspora tourists might wish to play the role of the king or queen when returning to their homeland, by bringing back gifts and money to their friends and relatives. This allows them to enjoy a status they didn't have prior to migrating. In the same vein, Baudrillard (1979/1998) insisted on the importance that diaspora tourists give to prestige and social distinction in their homeland.

In contrary, (Butler, 2003) claimed that diaspora tourists could be willing to go back temporarily, and live in standards that is below the life they are accustomed to, and that can be considered primitive. This is in exchange to spiritual reward and to prove to themselves that they can still exist and belong in their old surroundings and life styles.

The study of diaspora tourists' motivations by sociologists went behind the "taking the trip back to homeland" to tackle the issue of obligations. Poria et al. (2003) indicated that diaspora tourists sometimes take risks in visiting back their homelands, especially in area of severe economic deprivation, poverty and perhaps war torn area of conflicts. The feeling of obligation plays a major role in taking the decision to return and visit the family in such homelands.

Consequently, there is a variety of motivations for diaspora tourists, ranging from pleasure, obligation, heritage, prestige, root exploration, spiritual reward...etc. These motivations draw multiple forms of diaspora tourism.

### **Forms of Diaspora Tourism**

The most classical segment of diaspora tourism is the "Visiting Friends and Relatives" tourism or what is known as "VFR" tourism. Although it sounds simple, this segment is complex and varies in terms of motivations and drives of travelers and tourists engaging in it (Boyne et al., 2002). For example, tourism that is generated from the displacement of a certain ethnic population living in the diaspora, when they take the journey back to visit their families and relatives and friends is known as Ethnic Tourism. Although VFR is the term more used in literature, ethnic tourism is the more profound terminology better suited to describe the type and essence of taking the journey back. Here we are referring more to the motivations and behavior rather than basing our term on accommodation (visiting friends and families) (Butler, 2003).

Huang et al. (2013) consider that Heritage Tourism is a manifestation of diaspora tourism as immigrants often find an urge to go back and return to their ancestral homeland, to places connected to their family history, to explore and discover their personal heritage in relation to their ancestral cultures and roots (Mc.Cain & Ray, 2003).

Furthermore, Russel (2008) claimed that Nostalgia Tourism is a form of diaspora tourism. He considers that many cultural tourists aren't seeking today to investigate or explore other cultures, but rather their own ancestral culture. Hence, he identified two types of nostalgic tourists: real and historic. Real are for example the expatriates returning to visit their childhood cultural sites and relive past experiences. Historic nostalgic tourists are the diaspora tourists who seek to

experience and visit a cultural setting that they have not directly visited before, but one that has been conveyed to them by others.

In view of that, there is a close intertwined relationship between tourism, migration and diaspora, fueled by a variety of motivations, and concretized by a variety of forms of taking the trip back to the homeland and land of the ancestors.

### **Development Potential of Diaspora Tourism**

According to Newlan and Taylor (2010), diaspora populations scattered around the world can help to open markets for new tourist destinations and goods produced in, and associated with, the heritage and culture of their homeland and country of origin. Unlike international tourists, the diaspora tourists are more prone to stay in local accommodation, try local eatery outlets and restaurants, buy local goods and can relatively make more connections with the local economy. Therefore, their expenditures end up locally and induce a ripple effect on the local economy. Furthermore, diaspora tourism is less subject to seasonality compared to other types of tourism, and has the potential to expand geographically more within the country. Indeed, diaspora tourists tend to travel to less visited sites (secondary sites) and participate in more cultural events when traveling to their homeland or ancestor countries (Perez- Lopez, 2007).

To that, Newlan and Taylor (2010) consider that diaspora tourism assists greatly in the development of the homeland by attracting not only tourists, but also investors, consumers, or volunteers from the diaspora. In this respect, Orozoco (2005) claimed that diaspora and migrants populations are heavy consumers of homeland products and goods, particularly food products and artisanal goods that he referred to as Nostalgic Goods. These have generated a very active and profitable trade business for both the diaspora country and country of origin, besides being privileged by diaspora tourists.

Another remarkable potential of diaspora tourism is its ability to cement the national identity of a population. The interest of diaspora tourists in visiting historical and cultural heritage sites in their root country makes them sacred objects capable of unifying their nation although scattered over the world. This sense of sharing a common, calls for solidarity among the members of the nation, who will care to benefit their compatriots by all means (Huang, Haller & Ramshaw, 2013).

Hence, diaspora Tourism generates development in the homeland, through creating an economic dynamic nurtured by national sentiments and sense of common heritage. Therefore, diaspora tourism should be a strategy for countries witnessing crisis because of its plural positive impacts on the territory.

### **Barriers to Diaspora Tourism**

As any form of tourism, diaspora tourism can be impeded by a number of constraints. Safety and security represent a fundamental one. However, Newlan and Taylor (2010) argue that this issue is approached differently by diaspora tourists as they tend put threats into proper perspective, and at many times, regardless of risks, feel called upon to take the trip back home.

Another limit for diaspora tourism is the visa requirements, particularly for diaspora descendants who don't have official documents attesting their belonging to the visited country. They need to ask for a visa to enter their root country and this could discourage them, especially if the visa procedure is heavy and time consuming.

Similar to other tourists, diaspora tourists spending patterns and amounts are subject to their disposable income. The hospitality of their family and friends might help to save some expenses incurred in the visit. However, this advantage might be differed by the obligation to give cash presents and other gifts.

At times, diaspora tourists experience less of a welcoming and hospitality treatment than that provided to international tourists and foreigners. They are sometimes resented for expecting such an equal treatment in that they are above the status of the locals or looking down on them.

To that, the tourism needs and desires of diaspora generations vary within a single diaspora and across different diasporas. This means that developing diaspora tourism requires a careful planning that takes into account the different motivations, attitudes and changing interests amongst different diaspora generations.

This literature survey allows retaining that diaspora is not a recent term; it is ancient and holds basically a religious significance. It has been a subject of intense interest among sociologist, anthropologists, historians and other social and human sciences researchers. Diaspora represents an object of study that calls for two spaces, the host space and the homeland space. Its understanding necessitates a multidisciplinary approach across social, political, cultural, economic and anthropological traits. The perception of diaspora from a tourism perspective focuses on the development potential of this type of tourism for the homeland country. Diaspora tourists spend more than other tourists and their consumption is locally oriented. They tend to stay longer and visit rural areas and unclassical attractions. Yet, alike any other form of tourism, diaspora tourism is constrained by safety and security issues.

Our review of literature revealed that the relation between diaspora tourism and crisis in the home country have not been a subject of interest for researchers till now. Therefore, the significance of our research is that it mobilize the case of Lebanon to investigate diaspora tourism as a strategy to maintain tourism activity during crisis.

### **Research Hypotheses**

In light of all of the above, three hypotheses can be formulated. The first one suggests that the majority of diaspora tourists in Lebanon are first generation descendants. Actually, this generation of diaspora has strong national feelings towards its homeland and ceases occasions to reconnect with it.

The second hypothesis relates to the actions held by the Lebanese Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants. Both invite Lebanese diaspora to connect with their homeland and support it economically.

The third hypothesis refers to the absence of collaboration between Lebanese stakeholders involved in the diaspora issues. Each stakeholder has its own plans and projects that may match accidentally but are not coordinated.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

To test these hypotheses and answer the questions of this research, we followed the survey strategy. Actually, survey enables the collection of both primary and secondary data, and thus allows the crossing of different sources to ensure the reliability of the information. Primary data was collected through interviews and questionnaires, while secondary ones relied on national reports, statistical figures, archival data, journals and other existing documents related to diaspora tourism in Lebanon.

Our research methodology followed respectively two approaches: exploration and verification. The exploration consisted of describing the studied phenomenon first and then searching the elements that explain it. The verification approach mobilizes interpretive, analytical and synthetic methods to validate or reject the hypotheses. These approaches were realized through a simple mixed method design combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques and analysis procedures.

### **Primary data**

For interviews, four key people were purposively targeted because of their involvement in diaspora tourism issues in Lebanon. Two of them work in the public sector (Director of Research & Studies department at the Lebanese Ministry of Tourism, and a senior officer at the Directorate of Emigrants – Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants), the third is the general manager of a private tourism agency “Libano Tour” specialized in diaspora tourism, while the fourth is the chairperson of the World Lebanese Cultural Union Youth (WLCUY), a branch of WLCU – an international non-governmental organization that “strives to unite descendants of Lebanese origin and friends of Lebanon into one worldwide organization with the aim to promote and preserve Lebanese culture and heritage and to ensure its spirit for generations to come” ([ulcm.org](http://ulcm.org)).

The interviews were of a semi- structured type and included questions that allow further probing. Data gathered through interviews provided mainly information that assisted in understanding the history and current status of diaspora tourism in Lebanon and the different initiatives undertaken by the public sector and the private sector to encourage it. The four interviews were analyzed through the content analysis method.

As for the questionnaire, it targets a population represented by the Lebanese diaspora members living in the American and European countries that have visited Lebanon at least one time during

the period 2014 - 2017. A snowball sampling method was followed because direct access to the targeted population was almost impossible. Therefore, indirect access through virtual social networks was privileged; it enabled the sample to be built up according to the chain referral process.

Besides, the identification of the sample size was a challenge in itself and favored the selection of the virtual snowball sampling technique. Actually, the absence of accurate information about the tourists entering Lebanon, particularly whether they are Lebanese descendants or not, obliged us to rely on the figures from the Lebanese Ministry of Tourism (cf. fig. 2). These allowed us to estimate the average number of American and European tourists that entered Lebanon during the past four years. Or, these tourists are not all from the Lebanese diaspora; therefore the snowball sampling technique appeared to be the ultimate choice. The survey was conducted electronically over 13 months, mainly via social media channels. It ended up with 10.000 validated questionnaires.

The questionnaire was structured around three part. The first one draws a profile of the participants, the second investigates their willingness to get engaged in diaspora tourism in Lebanon, and the third examines the effectiveness of actions taken by Lebanese stakeholders towards reconnecting Lebanese diaspora to their homeland. In profiling diaspora tourists, the questionnaire used demographic and socio-cultural variables (age, gender, marital status, educational level, profession, monthly income, nationality and the kinship with the family's first immigrants). The willingness of participants to visit Lebanon as tourists is measured through motivational and attitudinal variables (number of previous visit(s) to Lebanon, drives of this(ese) visit(s), accompanying people, place(s) of stay, use of tourism intermediary services, and types of practiced tourism activities). As for the evaluation of actions aiming to get Lebanese diaspora closer to their home country, it focused on diaspora tourism related actions through four appraisal variables (Marketing campaign for diaspora tourism, diaspora networking, travel & tourism incentives and tourism crisis relief actions). Quantitative analysis of results relied on descriptive and correlational statistics, using SPSS version 21.

### **Secondary data**

To understand the role played by the public sector in developing diaspora tourism, we studied the projects held by the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants respectively. Among them, we focused on three major actions undertaken by the Lebanese Ministry of Tourism (The National Plan to Boost Diaspora Tourism, the "ANA" initiative and the "Visit Lebanon" forum), and another three by the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants (Lebanese Diaspora Energy (LDE), Libano Connect and Diaspora Cedar project).

The study of these projects was conducted in respect of three determinants: starting year of the action, its objectives and its contents. The aim was to correlate between the actions of stakeholders from one hand, and the phenomenon of this research, i.e. the increase in number of tourists in Lebanon during the upheaval period 2014-2017 from another. This would help in evaluating the effectiveness of diaspora tourism as a strategy during crises period.

Our survey articulated primary and secondary data to set the profile of diaspora tourists in Lebanon, study the actions of Lebanese stakeholders involved in diaspora tourism and understand their logic from developing it.

## **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **Public Sector: A pivotal role**

The analysis of the projects undertaken by the Ministry of Tourism during the last decade shows that the interest in diaspora tourism started effectively in 2014 with a diaspora tourism plan entitled “The National Plan to Boost Diaspora Tourism”. The launching of this plan took place during a press conference where the minister of tourism at that period, Mr. Michel Pharaon, claimed that three long-term plans are set to face the tourism crisis, one of them is targeting diaspora tourists<sup>3</sup>.

This plan aims at (re)connecting Lebanese diaspora to their homeland through tourism. To achieve this objective, the considered strategy focuses on mobilizing municipalities to market their locality abroad as tourism destinations. This bottom-up strategy empowers municipalities by getting them involved in the marketing process of their localities. It also considers municipalities as direct stakeholders in tourism development at both local and national levels. This marks an interesting shift in an administratively centralized country where municipalities (local authorities) have very limited competencies concerning planning and marketing of tourism in their territories. It indicates that tourism decision makers in Lebanon realized that diaspora tourists can best be sensitized through their originating communities. Nostalgia and back to roots are pull motivations that can be instigated by the “family” to which belongs the tourists.

The plan was followed one year later by the “Ana initiative”. *Ana* is an Arabic word that means “I” in English. The choice of such a word<sup>4</sup>, that reflects the identity of the speaker, indicates once again that tourism decision makers in Lebanon invites Lebanese Diaspora to connect with their roots, their history and their land to complete the missing part of their identity. The project is an internet platform through which Lebanese diaspora members fill in a registration form and then they can benefit from the wide range of tour packages offered to them. They will also receive a welcoming personalized email that presents information about the village and the family of the registered member.

In parallel to these actions, the ministry of tourism enhanced its abroad tourist offices, particularly in countries of high presence of Lebanese diaspora. It also made a series of FAM trips to tourism intermediaries operating in these countries. Yet, the remarkable marketing action is the “Visit Lebanon Forum”, an event which is still under preparation and which will

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<sup>3</sup> The two others are the religious tourism plan and the rural tourism plan.

<sup>4</sup> Ana is a word in Arabic, not a letter.

take place in May 2019. This forum will be the first international Business-to-Business (B2B) encounter for the tourism and hospitality sector in Lebanon. The selection of participants takes into consideration the presence of Lebanese diaspora in their countries. The forum aims at introducing Lebanon as a MICE tourism destination, and to promote leisure tourism as well. It is also expected to pave the way for further economic cooperation between Lebanon and hosted countries.

In turn, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants took a set of measures to bridge between Lebanese diaspora and their homeland. These projects are not diaspora tourism oriented, but they intersect with it. The most important being the Lebanese Diaspora Energy (LDE). Launched in 2014, LDE is a multipurpose project headed by the minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants. It consists of organizing events in countries of high concentration of Lebanese diaspora. These events are sponsored by the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants and aim at increasing meeting opportunities between Lebanese expats themselves from one hand, and between them and their compatriots from the other. LDE is therefore a networking project that seeks to connect Lebanese diaspora spread around the world and to incite a solidarity relationship among them. It promotes the belonging to the “Lebanese nation” and strives to strengthen ways of collaboration between Lebanese diaspora and their home country. Since 2014, LDE holds events on yearly basis in countries of high Lebanese diaspora presence, such as Brazil and Mexico for LDE Latin America, USA for LDE North America, France for LDE Europe, and Ivory Coast for LDE Africa.

Table 2: Diaspora related projects held by the public sector in Lebanon

	<b>Project</b>	<b>Starting date</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Content</b>
<b>Ministry of Tourism</b>	National Plan to Boost Diaspora Tourism	July 2014	Connect Lebanese diaspora to the homeland through tourism.	Encourage municipalities to market their localities as tourism destinations through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The creation of tourism offices in countries of Lebanese diaspora.</li> <li>- The engagement in ICT means (Websites, virtual tourism, e-tourism, m-tourism, etc.).</li> <li>- The provision of incentives and special offers for diaspora tourists.</li> </ul>

	ANA Initiative	February 2015	Encourage Lebanese diaspora to visit Lebanon at least once in lifetime.  Create a database about Lebanese diaspora.	ANA website that calls Lebanese diaspora to register in order to benefit from the special diaspora tourism packages.
	Visit Lebanon- (under process)	To take place on May 9th and 10 <sup>th</sup> , 2019	Promote tourism in Lebanon with a focus on Leisure & MICE tourism	Market Lebanon as a business tourism destination.  Invite 150 tourism intermediaries from countries of Lebanese diaspora to participate in the forum and thus to connect with Lebanese tourism stakeholders.  Encourage Lebanese diaspora and expatriates to invest in the tourism field in their homeland.
<b>Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants</b>	Lebanese Diaspora Energy	May 2014	Attract the outmost number of Lebanese expats and diaspora to visit Lebanon and showcase their accomplishments.	Conducting a series of gatherings and events in Lebanon and abroad to establish networks with Lebanese diaspora.  Assisting descendants from Lebanese origins to regain the Lebanese nationality.  Promoting homeland attachment and nation belonging.  Inducing economic cooperation between Lebanese diaspora and their home country

	Libano Connect	2014	Facilitate social and economic communication between Lebanese citizens and Lebanese diaspora.	Mobile and on-line platform that: - creates an active Lebanese lobbying. - provides Lebanese economic stakeholders an opportunity to promote their businesses and products.
	Diaspora Cedar Project	2014	Encourage Lebanese diaspora members to plant and name a Cedar.	Creation of the “Diaspora Cedar Land” in Shatine village (North Lebanon) to motivate Lebanese Descendants to come to Lebanon and plant a cedar and name it.

(Source: Authors, 2018)

Libano Connect is another initiative by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants to connect Lebanese living abroad with their Lebanese fellow citizens. The project refers to m-marketing and e-marketing to establish a mobile application and an online platform that announce business opportunities and vacancies to registered members who are exclusively Lebanese or having a Lebanese origin. Hence, Libano Connect uses the digital technology to establish an effective and active international Lebanese lobby. At the same time, it acts as a medium for social activities and economic collaboration between Lebanese.

While the two previous projects held by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants are not directly related to diaspora tourism, Diaspora Cedar Project, on the contrary, invites Lebanese descendants to come to Lebanon, plant a cedar and name it. For this purpose, a “Diaspora Cedar Land” was created in Shatine village at North Lebanon. Since its inauguration in 2014, the project planted more than 500 cedars and its gaining interest among Lebanese diaspora tourists. The study of the above projects validate the second hypothesis of our research, i.e. the important role played by the public sector to reconnect Lebanese diaspora with their homeland. This was achieved through a series of projects that are either directly related to diaspora tourism or favoring it. The formers are initiated by the Ministry of Tourism, the latter are parts of more global economic projects held by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants.

### **Lebanese Diaspora Tourists: A first generation descendants**

The analysis of data gathered through the questionnaire survey enabled us to draw a profile for Lebanese diaspora tourists who are interested in (re)visiting their home country. Indeed, the participants in our survey are mostly in their middle age (age range 40 -50 years), almost equally divided for their gender (53% male, 47% female), married (92%), fairly to well educated ( 43% are school graduates and 48% are university graduates). Their occupations varies mainly

between civil servant (31%), employees (38%) and technicians (22%), and their monthly income ranges from 2000 to 3000 \$ per month (75%). The majority (71%) considers themselves as belonging to the first generation of lineage to the original Lebanese parent.

Table 3: Profile of surveyed participants through descriptive statistics (frequencies) of their answers

Variable	Variable categories	Frequency in %
Age	< 20 y	1%
	20 – 30	3%
	30 -40	8%
	40 -50	67%
	50-60	12%
	>60	9%
Gender	Male	53%
	Female	47%
Marital Status	Single	4%
	Married	92%
	Divorced	1%
	Widow	1%
	Other	2%
Educational Level	Primary level	1%
	School level	43%
	University level	48%
	Post graduate level	8%
Occupation	Worker	1%
	Employee	38%
	Civil Servant	31%
	Technician	22%
	Liberal	7%
	Other	1%
Monthly Income	< 1000\$	2%
	1000-2000\$	9%
	2000-3000\$	75%
	3000-4000\$	11%
	>4000\$	3%
Kinship with the family's first immigrants	First generation	71%
	Second generation	14%
	Third generation	9%
	Ancestor descendant	6%

Our questionnaire targeted Lebanese diaspora that have visited Lebanon at least once in their life. 90% were accompanied by their families. The motives for their visit(s) varied between VFR (52%), business (21%), religious (13%) and nostalgia (12%). Few of them (17%) stayed in hotels, while the majority (69%) were hosted by family members. Referring to tourism intermediaries to prepare their travel and stay in Lebanon does not seem necessary for the majority of them (94% made their own travel arrangements).

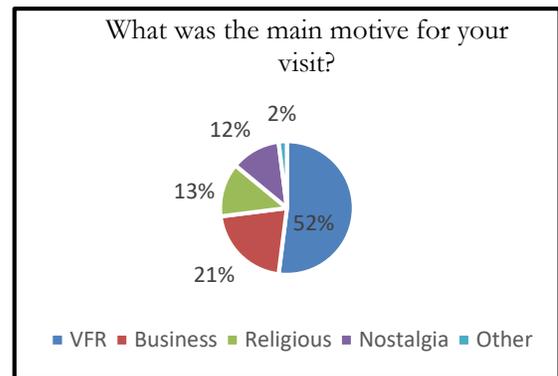


Fig.5: Participants' prime motives for their previous visit(s) to Lebanon

78% of our participants declared being responsive to marketing campaigns held by the Lebanese public instances. Slightly more than half of them (56%) are members in Lebanese diaspora networks initiated recently by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants. Almost all of them (98%) consider that Lebanon is passing through a crisis period and that Lebanese diaspora can play an active role in alleviating its effects (91%). Tourism is approved by 85% to be a way through which Lebanese diaspora can contribute to the economy of their home country. Yet, 75% of participants argue that Lebanese diaspora are not given real incentives to practice tourism in Lebanon.

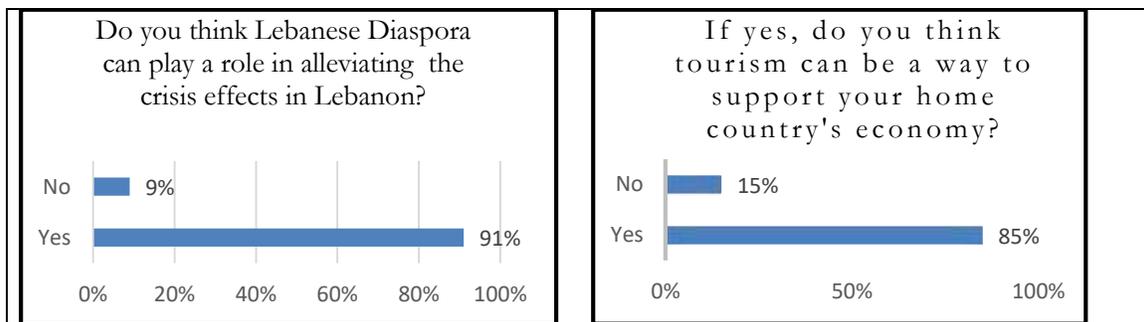


Fig.6: Bar Charts showing the percentage of participants that considers Lebanese diaspora can support the economy of Lebanon, mainly through tourism

The previous descriptive analysis of data generated from the questionnaire survey allows to draw a profile for Lebanese diaspora tourists. They are first generation descendants that still have family/community ties and belongingness to the Lebanese nation. This confirms our first hypothesis stipulating that Lebanese diaspora tourists (or potential tourists) are those who have direct lineage with the original Lebanese parent. Therefore, diaspora tourism planning and marketing efforts should firstly target this segment.

### **Lebanese Diaspora Tourism: the need for collaboration among stakeholders**

The content analysis of the four interviews conducted with representatives of the public, private and not-for-profit sectors shows clearly the absence of formal collaboration between them. Actually, the head of Research and Studies department at the Ministry of Tourism argued that marketing diaspora tourism is a competence of her ministry and it should be strictly reserved to it. In Parallel, our interviewee from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants declared that diaspora Tourism will come as a result of the projects undertaken by her ministry to reconnect Lebanese diaspora with their homeland.

As for the private sector, the General Manager of “Libano Tour” agency, an incoming tour operator specialized in the Brazilian market claimed that there is a high demand to visit Lebanon among Lebanese diaspora of Brazil, but the main constraint is the absence of direct flights to Lebanon. She also pointed out that the national Lebanese air carrier (MEA) does not serve Latin America which demotivates a number of potential tourists. The high cost of living in Lebanon and the absence of special prices and incentives for Lebanese diaspora tourists are among the first challenges faced by her agency.

The interview with the Chairperson of WLCU-Y, the youth division of the World Lebanese Cultural Union NGO, unveiled the considerable role played by the voluntary sector in sustaining the Lebanese identity among Lebanese diaspora. “LEBolution” is the main achievement of WLCU-Y. It is an annual event that started in 2015 and that includes three types of activities: touristic, cultural and social. It gathers youth Lebanese diaspora from all over the world through an internet platform that allows them to register and join the group in Lebanon at a predetermined date. Participants can benefit from accommodations, meals, program activities and transportation within Lebanon at a flat rate for an around 10 days stay.

Our interviewee stressed on the importance of LEBolution in connecting the young descendants to their parents and ancestral land, where they feel they are part of it and have a certain obligation to assist and contribute positively to its welfare.



Fig.7: Announcement of LEBolution 2019 (Source: <http://wlcu.world/ng/youth/lebovolution>)

According to our interviewee, the event is receiving support from the Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Culture and Heritage, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants. Support takes mainly the form of promotion of the event through their communication programs.

Based on, we conclude that Lebanese stakeholders are willing to involve Lebanese diaspora in the Lebanese territorial system. Nevertheless, they are not coordinating their efforts in this respect. Each one has its own plans and projects that are bounded by its competencies. Therefore, there is a need for a steering committee to direct all efforts towards the wellbeing of Lebanese citizens and diaspora. Or, the third hypothesis have assumed an absence of collaboration between stakeholders, hence it is confirmed.

## CONCLUSION

Having barely recovered from the repercussions of its civil war with the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Lebanon is facing again a chronic crisis which affects mainly its economy. This tertiary economy relies to a large extent on tourism, which has been severely affected by the political upheavals that the Middle East region witnessed, especially the Arab countries during the last decade. Indeed, tourist arrivals to Lebanon have sharply declined since 2010, starting year of the Syrian war. Yet, a remarkable increase in tourist arrivals started in 2014 and is still rising in a steady way. This phenomenon certainly raises questions about these tourists, but also about the presence of any planning process that targeted them.

Our first investigation revealed that these “new comers’ tourists” are among the Lebanese diaspora. Therefore, our research aimed at identifying the motivations of these tourists and understanding the reasons beyond their visits to Lebanon during such a critical period. Three hypotheses were formulated: the first one assumed that these tourists are first generation Lebanese descendants that still feel concerned about the issues of their country of origin; the second pointed out to the projects held by the Lebanese public sector, particularly the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants, to reconnect Lebanese diaspora to their national territory; the third one highlighted the role of Lebanese stakeholders in influencing Lebanese diaspora attitudes and behaviors, a role that is limited due to lack of collaboration.

Our methodological plan relied on the survey method to collect data from both a sample of Lebanese diaspora tourists (through questionnaires) and a sample of Lebanese stakeholders (through interviews). Quantitative and qualitative data analysis confirmed our three hypotheses and enriched our knowledge of diaspora tourism, an effective strategy to maintain tourism in a country during crises time.

Yet, we focused our analysis on the touristic dimension of the mobilization of Lebanese diaspora. The political dimension was deliberately set aside. Further research can explore it deeply and investigate the political reasons beyond the “sudden” and unplanned interest in

reconnecting with Lebanese diaspora. It could also scan the political persuasions, community belonging and the touristic curiosities of Lebanese diaspora tourists in search for a politicized form of diaspora tourism in Lebanon.

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