BANUU

Designing new pathways for employability and entrepreneurship of Iraqi students in Archaeology and Cultural Heritage

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

External Formative Evaluation

(performed between May and August 2022)

Disclaimer

This evaluation is supported and guided by the University of Bologna and presented by Mr. Alessandro Rota. The report does not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the European Commission.

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1. Introduction and Project Background

Over the past four decades, Iraq has suffered through conflict and war, which has severely degraded its society and cultural systems. Every conflict inflicted progressive damages to the country's cultural heritage and repeatedly weakened its cultural infrastructure.

In this context, international support for Iraq's cultural infrastructure and heritage sectors becomes important to enforce a sense of identity and belonging: cultural heritage preservation and protection is, indeed, a critical and integral part of the larger post-conflict recovery and could play a pivotal role in the post-oil economy in Iraq. Even though it will not be the answer to the many challenges facing Iraqi society, it can be an important entry-point towards fostering national discussions, help transition Iraq to a sustainable economy, and move the needle towards building an Iraqi society based on knowledge.

BANUU - Designing new pathways for employability and entrepreneurship of Iraqi students in Archaeology and Cultural Heritage is a three-year (2020-2023) international project funded by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) of the European Union in the frame of the Erasmus+ Capacity Building Key Action 2 in the Field of Higher Education (Project Number: 610191-EPP-1-2019-1-IT-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP).[1]

The project has been built up on an EU-Iraqi long-term international partnership, originated within the experience of WALADU[2], a CBHE project financed in 2016, aiming at improving the teaching quality and structure of BA courses in Archaeology in Iraq.

At the end of the WALADU project, the so-called *WaLink Network*[3] was created from the initiative of an initial consortium of Iraqi, European and North American universities, research centres and public institutions. Different members of the WaLink Network are part of the BANUU consortium. Here is the list of all project partners:

- P1 - University of Bologna, Italy – Coordinator
- P2 - Koç University of Istanbul, Turkey
- P3 - Centro Ricerche Archeologiche e Scavi Torino, Italy
- P4 - University of Baghdad, Iraq
- P5 - University of Kufa, Iraq
- P6 - University of Qadisiyah, Iraq
- P7 - University of Mosul, Iraq
- P8 - Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Iraq

The project is also supported by 8 associated partners (including 2 national organisation, 2 international organisations and 3 private companies):

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[1] BANUU website: https://site.unibo.it/banuu/en.
[2] WALADU website: https://site.unibo.it/waladu/en.
[3] WaLink page on the WALADU website: https://site.unibo.it/waladu/en/walink-1.

- State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH), a division of the Iraqi Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Antiquities;
- UNESCO Youth Committee;
- AlmaCube – Start-up Incubator founded by the University of Bologna;
- AARU - Association of Arab Universities Association of Universities.
- Sana Al-Amar Company – Oil & Gas Company;
- TreviGroup – Construction Company;
- Tareek Al-Ofuk Co. – Travel and Tourism Company;

BANUU's main objective is to contribute to the improvement of the students' employability in the field of Humanities in Iraq by creating new pathways of cooperation between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the public and enterprise sectors. The project has been drafted taking into consideration several governmental plans, including the *Iraqi National Development Plan 2018-2022* (NDP 18-22), the *Iraq Reconstruction and Investment Plan* (February 2018) and the preliminary draft of the *Iraqi Vision Project 2030* issued by the Iraqi Government. In addition, reports from international governmental and non-governmental organisations (UNESCO and the World Bank, as well as NGOs like IREX) have also been analysed while designing the project.

The project, initially planned to last 36 months, has 6 specific outcomes:

1. Creation of a national framework for designing and implementing internships in Archaeology and Cultural Heritage in Iraq;
2. Creation of new pathways to enhance Iraqi students' transversal skills (focus on entrepreneurial skills);
3. Piloting of the new frameworks and pathways in 3 specific sectors: Preventive Archeology, Cultural Tourism, Cultural Heritage Management;
4. Re-drafting of the learning outcomes of Iraqi BA and MA degree programs involving external partners as co-producers of knowledge;
5. Strengthening of the relations between HEIs (Universities, Ministry) and the wider national economic and social environment;
6. Creating a favourable legal, administrative, and financial environment in which HEIs can draft comprehensive agreements and contracts with external partners.

To achieve the above-mentioned objectives and outcomes, BANUU involves a broad spectrum of activities that are encompassed in ten work packages (WPs) interrelated with each other:

- WP1 - Analysis of issues and needs
- WP2 - Internships framing: training and establishment of dedicated database and offices
- WP3 - Pilot internships and their structuring in degree courses
- WP4 - Design and planning of activities that can foster students entrepreneurships
- WP5 - Pilot entrepreneurship activities

- WP6 - Frameworks of internships and entrepreneurial paths at national level
- WP7 - Operational and financial management
- WP8 - Quality control in action
- WP9 - Dissemination of project results
- WP10 - Ensuring project exploitation and sustainability

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a no-cost extension of 9 months was granted by the EU. This is the updated timeline of the project, as reported on the official website:
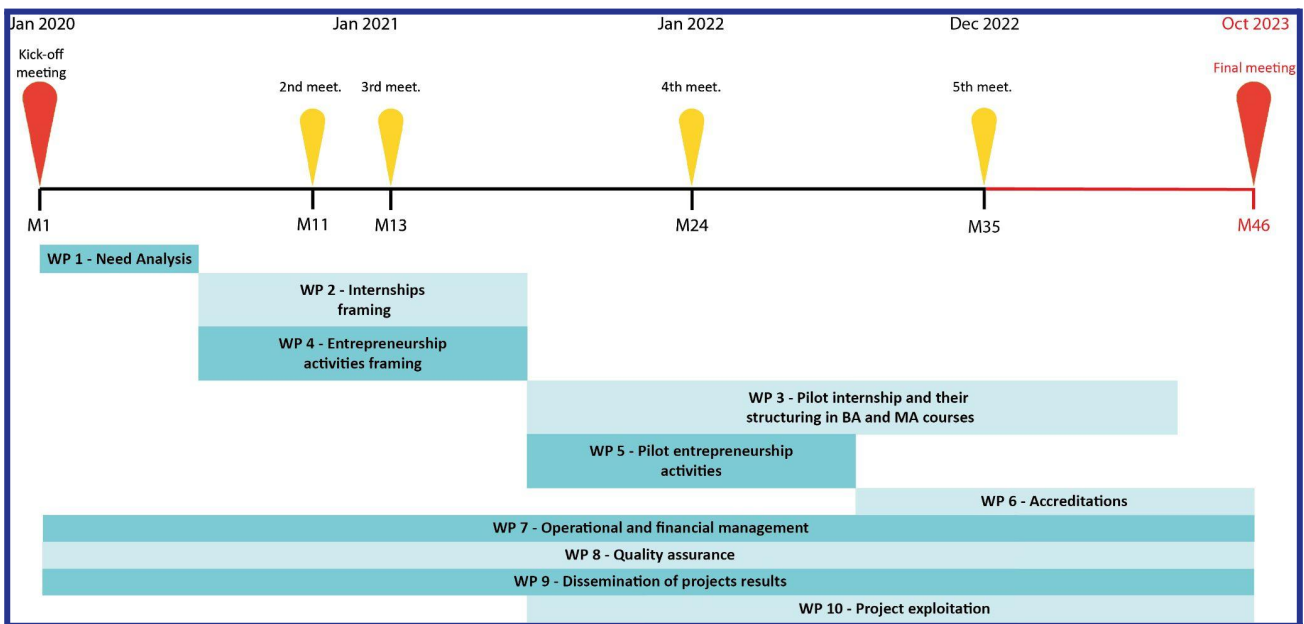
2. Scope and Methodology of the Evaluation

As foreseen by the project's Quality Plan, this report aims both at assessing the quality of the already implemented activities, and at suggesting corrective actions, should the foreseen outcomes not be in line with the set indicators and quality standards:

> **3.2 External Formative Evaluation (EFE)**
>
> The Consortium will subcontract 2 External Evaluation Experts (EEEs), to assess the quality of the implementation through external evaluations.
>
> The first EEE will evaluate the general quality of the project implementation during the activities, focusing on each WP and its objectives. As a result of this External Formative Evaluation (EFE), the EEE will be required to produce *a report, which will be discussed with the QMC and the Operational Committee, and finally distributed to the Consortium Assembly.*
>
> In this step, the appointed EEE will also have the *responsibility to suggest corrective actions*, should the foreseen outcomes not be in line with the set indicators and quality standards.[4]

The evaluation was focused on the activities foreseen for the first half of the project (WP1, WP2, WP4 and WP5, since the activities WP3 "Pilot internships and their structuring in BA and MA courses" were postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic), and consisted of four different phases:

a. Desk review	The project's technical documentation (see Annex I) has been reviewed by the evaluator and discussed with the coordinator of the project
b. Data gathering	Through an online survey (see Annex II) opened to the project's partners and some follow-up questions, qualitative data on the project implementation have been remotely collected between the months of June and July 2022.
c. Data analysis	The collected data have been analysed through the identification of relevant trends and themes
d. Synthesis	Finally, the findings have been summarised in this report, providing recommendations to the partners of the Consortium

Four principal aspects were taken into consideration while carrying out the evaluation:

1. Relevance of the project;
2. Efficiency of the implementation;
3. Effectiveness and impact;
4. Dissemination and sustainability.

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[4] Extract from the BANUU Quality Plan, italic added. The Quality Plan is available at the following link: https://site.unibo.it/banuu/en/results/wp8-quality-control-in-action.

Some limitations and constraints were encountered during the data gathering phase, mostly due to the activity being performed remotely. Despite the partners being repeatedly invited to fill out the survey, the number of responses remained very low. In particular, this was the case of Iraqi partners. Additionally, some of the follow-up questions did not receive any answer. However, this must not be automatically interpreted as a lack of interest toward the project and/or its activities, but more probably as a lack of familiarity with evaluation tools.

Finally, it is important to note that this External Formative Evaluation was carried out shortly after the Internal Formative Evaluations (IFE) performed by the consortium. To avoid repetitions, and to integrate the data collected during Phase 2, the findings of the IFEs have been taken into consideration during the drafting of the *Effectiveness and Impact* section.[5]

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[5] The results of IFEs are available at: https://site.unibo.it/banuu/en/results/wp8-quality-control-in-action.

3. Findings

3.1 Relevance of the project

The BANUU project is part of the Higher Education and Cultural Heritage Programme established by the University of Bologna, in cooperation with its Iraqi partners. As anticipated in the *Introduction*, the programme started with WALADU, which was funded between 2017-2019 within the framework of the Erasmus+ Capacity Building Key Action 2 in the field of higher education. Its key objective was to modernise and restructure BA courses in archaeology, in line with EU standards, and increase opportunities in the labour market for graduates.

		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
WALADU		████	████	████				
BANUU					████	████	████	████

Moreover, some BANUU partners were also involved in EDUU, a cooperation project funded by the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) – Local Authorities (LAs) Programme in Iraq, aiming to increase the knowledge of pre-Islamic societies and promoting interest in the common cultural heritage and identity of Iraqi society among younger generations, through courses in secondary schools and rural communities.

The BANUU project was developed by the consortium to address some issues emerged during the implementation of WALADU and EDUU, and specifically:

- The lack of internships and practical placement opportunities for the students in the field of Humanities, mostly due to the poor connections between Universities and the private sector;
- BA and MA learning outcomes being focused on students' theoretical skills, with no place for the enhancement of students' transversal skills, also due to the impossibility to participate to archeological excavation;
- The lack of positive best practices to follow, leaving students few opportunities to find innovative spaces for individual or collective initiative that can be coherent with their educational background.

These issues are in line with the challenges identified, during the previous decade, by the Iraqi government (National Development Plan 2018-2022; Reconstruction and Investment Plan 2018), UNESCO (Revitalising Science, Technology and Innovation in Iraq 2011-2020), and IREX (Labor Market Report 2017).

The presence of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research within the consortium, despite the country's political instability, gives strength to the project in two respects: on the one hand, it increases the relevance of the project activities, which can thus be revised and updated as the project progresses (also with regard to the measures to contain the pandemic), while on the other hand, it maximises the project's impact, as it ensures greater applicability and replicability of the results obtained by BANUU.

To reach the specific outcomes of BANUU (see *Introduction and Project Background*), the consortium identified 6 target groups:

TG1) Iraqi students;
TG2) Iraqi teaching staff;
TG3) Iraqi administrative staff;
TG4) Iraqi ministerial officers;
TG5) Entrepreneurs;
TG6) Civil society stakeholders.

The actions implemented under WP1, WP2, WP4 and WP5 were oriented to meet the needs of all groups, with the only exception of TG6, which is intended to be involved mostly during the last phase of the project. Therefore, TG6 has not been taken into consideration for the purpose of this evaluation report.

The following scheme summarises how the single tasks relate to the different target groups:

WP	Task	TG1	TG2	TG3	TG4	TG5
WP1	T1.2 - Target groups feedbacks collected and analysis on existing legislation constraints		(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)
	T1.3 - Analysis of the first pilot sector: Preventive Archaeology (PA)	X				X
	T1.4 - Analysis of the second project pilot sector: Cultural Tourism Guides (CTG)	X				X
	T1.5 - Analysis of the third project pilot sector: Cultural Heritage Management (CHM)	X				X
	T1.6 - WP1 report				X	X
WP2	T2.1 - Selection of Iraqi administrative staff to be assigned to the newly established internship offices			X		

WP	Task	TG1	TG2	TG3	TG4	TG5
	T2.2 - Training and transfer of know-how of the selected administrative staff			X		
	T2.3 - Drafting of an action plan for the internship offices			X		
	T2.4 - Internship database activated in each HEIs	X				X
	T2.5 - Opening of first call for applications for the selection of internees	X				X
WP4	T4.1 - Training: focus on how to include transversal skills and external stakeholder inputs in curriculum design	X	X			
	T4.2 - Training: focus on how to design a society-oriented teaching and research methodology	X	X			
	T4.3 - Training: focus on how to foster students' possible entrepreneurships paths including start-up	X	X			
	T4.4 - Workshops for Iraqi students aiming at developing new start-up projects	X	X			
	T4.5 - Start-up projects drafted	X	X			
WP5	T5.1 - Organisation of the start-up days	X	X	X		
	T5.2 - Start-up projects selected for intensive training to further improve their feasibility	X				
	T5.3 - Students Intensive Training	X	X			
	T5.4 - Presentation of the WP4-5 outcomes to the MOHESR to highlight the importance of transversal skills enhancement		X	X	X	

After the completion of the four WPs, the consortium unanimously[6] agreed on the coherence between the implemented activities and the needs of the TGs. The generally positive feedback (see *Internal Formative Evaluations* on WP1, WP2 and WP4), and the participation level in the trainings, despite them being carried out online, seems to confirm that the BANUU correctly addressed the needs of the TGs, particularly those of students, administrative officers and the teaching staff.

Concerning the ministerial officers and the entrepreneurs, a lower level of engagement has been highlighted by the partners:

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[6] Answers to questions A1 and A2 of the survey. Only one respondent disagreed, even though a misunderstanding of the question is highly possible, considering that the answer was 'No' in regard to all TGs.

[A3] After the realization of WP1, WP2, WP4 and WP5, to what extent has the BANUU approach demonstrated to be useful for the following target groups, in your opinion?
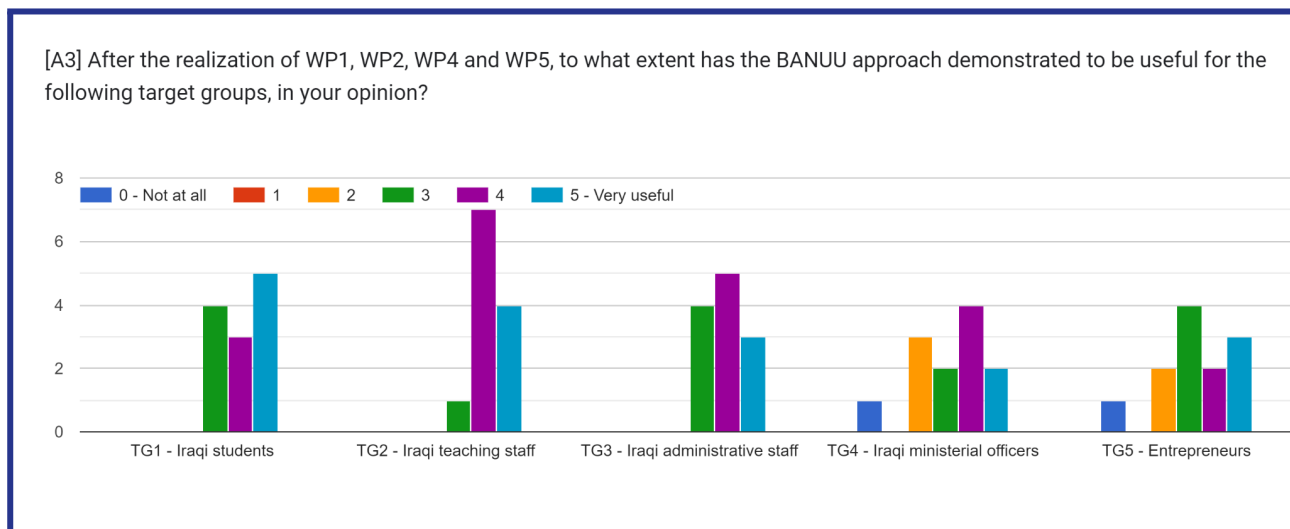
The causes of such findings cannot be related directly to the quality of the project's design, since two external factors deeply influenced the implementation of the activities: on the one hand, the Covid-19 pandemic, which may have discouraged participation in online events for private stakeholders; on the other hand, the political instability, which surely affected the work and the availability of the ministerial officers. However, both TGs - as well as the civil society stakeholders - will be involved in the postponed activities of WP3 and in WP6. There is room for the Consortium to consolidate their relationships with both TGs before the implementation of WP3 and WP6, in order to ensure a stronger interest and a more sincere engagement towards the project's objectives.

Finally, when interrogated on further potential target groups, the partners identified at least four categories:

- Travel Agencies and Tour Operators
- NGOs
- Students from other related fields
- University Alumni

The first group is, indeed, is a subcategory of TG5: it has been explicitly considered in the writing of the proposal, by involving the Tareek Al-Okuf company, a travel agency in Najaf, as associated BANUU partner. Moreover, in the WP1 report (*Improving Private Entrepreneurship in the Humanities*, p. 44, Table 1) around 150 travel agencies have been identified in the Najaf-Kufa and Hilla regions. A confrontation with them would prove very useful for the development of Cultural Tourism, which is one of the three pillars of the project.

Similar reasoning could be made with regard to NGOs working for the preservation of Iraq's cultural heritage. In this case, the aim would be to extend the possibility of activating internships also in the not-for-profit sector. Establishing a dialogue with such organisations would allow the MOHESR and the SBAH, as well as the Iraqi Universities, to identify further

cooperation opportunities also on the international level. However, this seems to go beyond BANUU's range of action, at least in the short run.

More interestingly, the last two categories could be involved during the last phase of the project, at least as dissemination targets. The development of the start-up projects, indeed, should require different kinds of skills; to this effect, the teaching staff of the degree programs taken into consideration for BANUU's activities could try to involve their colleagues and students from other related fields. Moreover, this could trigger a virtuous circle, in line with WP6's objectives, and more specifically with Task 6.2 ("Internship offices fully established in partner HEIs as a national model for replication").

Finally, the involvement of the Universities' alumni has already been put in place by at least one partner on other projects.[7] Taking into consideration the alumni's point of view may help the Universities to develop more practice-oriented training and internships programs. At the same time, the alumni may be involved in the start-up projects and, more generally, share their experience, thus encouraging the students to undertake an internship.

3.2 Efficiency of the implementation

The second analysed aspect within this evaluation is the efficiency of the implementation. To this effect, the allocation of responsibilities, the financial management of the resources, and the response to the pandemic and to other risks have been taken into account.

The respondents to the survey unanimously agreed that the responsibilities were fairly distributed among the partners during the implementation phase. Indeed, this reflects the project proposal, which foresaw a leader and a co-leader for each WP. Moreover, a governance structure was established, resulting in the following bodies:

- Consortium Assembly: composed by the members of the BANUU Local Teams, it is the main decision-making body and it should gather 7 times along the project duration;
- Operational Committee: composed by the project members, it is held every 3 months (online) and it is in charge of the operational decisions providing constant support and advice to the WP leaders in charge of the different activities; the minutes are available online[8];
- Quality and Monitoring Committee: chaired by the WP6 Quality Plan leader (KU) and composed by the project members, it meets during the Consortium Assembly meetings and is in charge of the overall internal and external quality evaluation;
- BANUU Coordination Team: based at UNIBO and composed by the project coordinator, 2 researchers and 2 administrative staff members, it is in charge of the project deliverables, follow-up and financial management of the project. It guarantees fluid

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[7] The University of Mosul, through its Career Development Centre, has developed a network of alumni, which are involved in training courses and other projects, such as one joint project with ICCORM, also supported by UNESCO.
[8] WP7 section on the website: https://site.unibo.it/banuu/en/results/wp7-operation-and-financial-management.

communication between the BANUU partners and EACEA, while also coordinating and providing logistics for the Consortium Assembly meetings;
- <u>BANUU Local Teams</u>: they have been established in every partner Universities. BLTs are composed of 6/7 staff members, including a local manager/coordinator and an administrative officer that guarantees the correct reporting of the expenses;
- <u>Associated Partners</u>: they were involved in the realisation of specific activities.

Concerning the administrative and financial management of the project, several difficulties were encountered by the coordinator, as pointed out in the Intermediate Report submitted to EACEA. In particular, they were caused by a delay in the signing of some Partnership Agreements by the Iraqi institutions. To date, all PAs have been signed, although some amendments will be needed for the Iraqi Universities: the procedure for the transferring of the financial resources cannot be followed as originally outlined in the agreements, due to a lack of autonomy of the Universities in the management of their bank accounts. In order to resolve this situation, the coordinator has established a dialogue with the MOHESR, despite its political instability, and with EACEA. Some progress has been made, although no financial resources have been transferred to Iraq until now.

Moreover, the travel expenses have exceeded the resources provided by the grant, due to the rising costs of flights between Italy and Iraq. For this reason, the coordinator used the resources provided for exceptional costs to cover them. Other expenses, such as books and equipment purchases for the libraries and the internship offices, have been done as foreseen in the project proposal and were managed by CRAST.

As for the consequences of Covid-19 on the implementation of BANUU, the interviewees concur that the situation was well-managed by the Consortium.[9] Even though some of the activities were postponed, the project never came to a complete standstill. In particular, the foreseen meetings (Consortium Assembly, Operational Committee, etc.) were held online, and the communication among the partners was smoothed by the use of e-mails and of a shared Google Drive folder.

When interrogated about other risks potentially endangering the project, the following have been identified:

- Generic troubles and obstacles deriving from working on the BANUU topics in Iraq;
- A flare-up of the Covid-19 pandemic, which could result in further delays;
- A protracted political instability, which consequences could be partially resolved by maintaining the same staff members in the Local Teams.

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[9] Answers to question B5. One respondent disagreed, although their answer to question B6 ("I have not followed up with this issue") suggests that the pandemic has not affected their specific role in the project, hence the negative response.

3.3 Effectiveness and Impact

The third section of this evaluation focuses on the effectiveness of the four WPs taken into account, in order to determine whether the project is impacting on the target groups as originally foreseen. The respondents to the questionnaire, i.e. the representatives of the BANUU partners, were generally satisfied with the outcomes of the four WP's surveyed[10]:
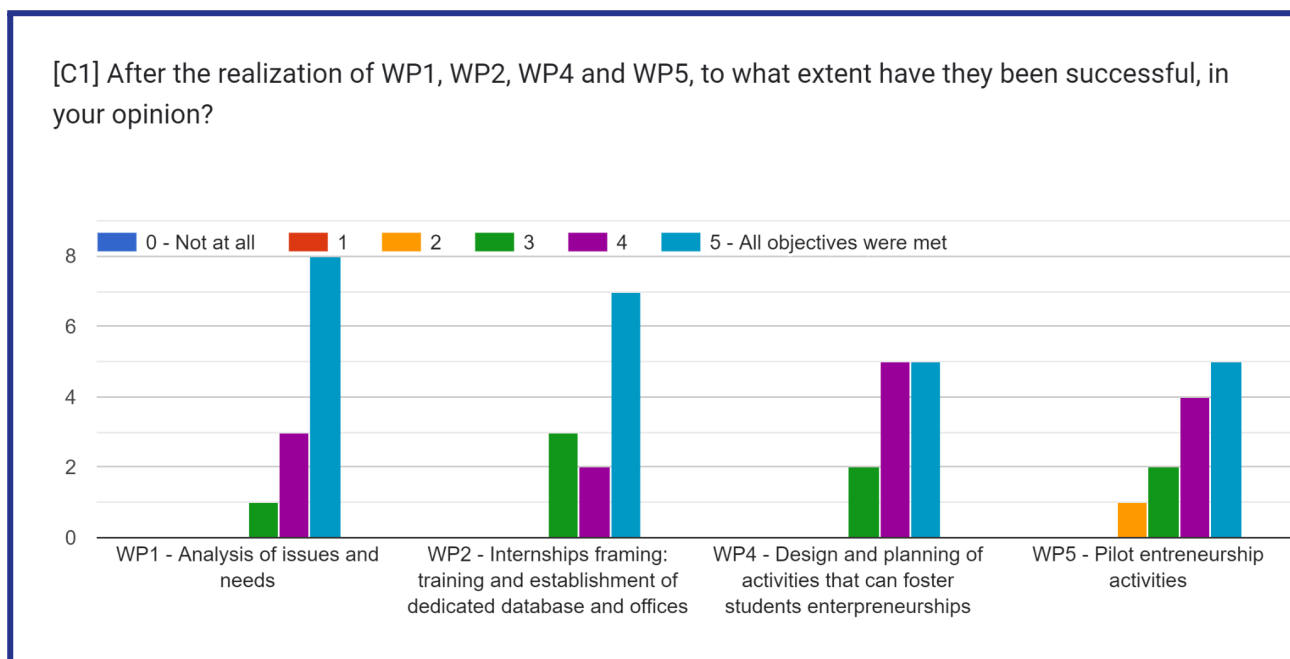
When asked to comment, once again the respondents highlighted the consequences of the pandemic and the online realisation of most activities, especially training sessions and workshops (WP2 and WP4). To this regard, the postponement of WP3 was not perceived as a risk to the achievement of project goals, but mostly as a recoverable delay.[11] The real impact of the postponement, however, cannot be really measured until the conclusion of the project.

For a fair effectiveness and impact analysis, it is necessary to integrate the graph above and the other answers to the survey with the results of the Internal Formative Evaluations conducted by the Consortium, which will be indicated as IFE-A (focusing on WP1 and WP2), IFE-B (focusing on WP4, with staff members as respondents) and IFE-C (focusing on WP4, with students as respondents).[12]

Concerning WP1, the positive remarks tend to be confirmed by the results of IFE-A, which emphasises the "good quality" of the WP's outputs (the report on private entrepreneurship in

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[10] Answers to question C1. The only explicitly negative vote – 2 out of 5 referring to WP5 – was justified in the answer to question C2 by a lack of knowledge about the implementation of WP5 ("I don't have much knowledge on WP5").
[11] Answers to question C7.
[12] The IFEs are available on the project's site: https://site.unibo.it/banuu/en/results/wp8-quality-control-in-action.

the humanities in Iraq, and the preliminary list of Iraqi cultural institutions), their "proper dissemination", and a high collaboration grade among the involved parties.

On the other hand, WP2 saw a greater involvement of staff members, for a total of 26 employees selected by the Iraqi HEIs, since its goal was the establishment of the Internship Offices. The outcomes, such as the two-day training session, the drafting of an Action Plan and the creation of an internship database, were mostly appreciated by the target groups. A slightly lower rating (mean of 3.89 out of 5, whereas all other ratings are above a mean of 4) has been registered on the IFE-A question "The WP2 trainings offered have improved relevant skills of the staff involved". This can be attributed, once again, to the online modality of the training session, as the optional comments on IFE-A point out.

An even greater number of staff members (11 for each Iraqi university, for a total of 44) and students (13 for each Iraqi university, for a total of 52) were involved in the 10 trainings realised for WP4. The 5 frontal lessons and the 5 workshops were held online between January and March 2021. The Consortium took into account the internal organisation of Iraqi universities, in order to facilitate the presence of both target groups. According to IFE-B and IFE-C, WP4 activities been appreciated by the participants[13]:

	Staff members (average grade, out of 5)	Students (average grade, out of 5)
You have been constantly and correctly informed about the WP4 activities and the work progress	4,02	4,13
You have been accurately informed about the WP4 goals	3,86	3,75
The WP4 activities strengthened the fruitful collaboration between students and academic staff members	3,88	3,97
The contents of the training activities have been comprehensibly explained	3,74	3,88
You are satisfied with the organisation of the WP4 activities	3,72	3,88
The final assessments of the entrepreneurial projects by experts in the cultural heritage have been useful for the future improvement of the projects	3,67	4,21

Moreover, more than 75% of the academic staff members involved concur that the necessary tools for leading the students in the elaboration of the projects and the support by experts were provided to a good extent during the training. Some criticisms have been raised in the optional comments, mostly regarding the online modality and the selection of the projects.

Even higher levels of appreciation were stated by the students, concerning the improved knowledge about the work opportunities in the cultural sector (around 76%), the improved skills

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[13] Extracts from IFE-B and IFE-C, highlighting the effectiveness and the impact of the training sessions.

for the development of new ideas (around 82%), and the grade of encouragement and involvement (around 84%).[14] Both target groups highlight that they would have better profited from the training if the sessions were held in presence and/or enriched with visits on the fields.

At this point, it is worth mentioning the selection criteria for academic staff and students. The members of both groups were selected among archaeologists, art historians, researchers in economics and administration, researchers in education, and engineers. As stated in the WP2 report, in some cases a partial revision of the selected personnel was necessary, in order to choose staff members directly relating to the subject matter. According to the project partners[15] the following criteria were used for the selection:

- Academic and/or professional performance;
- English language skills;
- Gender (aiming at a balance between male and female participation);
- Level of engagement and interest about the subject.

Despite their efforts, female participation finally stood at 30%. However, the Consortium, in response to EACEA's comments on the interim report, stated that it will continue to encourage gender equality in future BANUU activities.

A similar problem was pointed out by EACEA with regard to the inclusion of religious and cultural minorities and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The project partners promised greater commitment in the second reporting period. In this regard, it is therefore suggested to record the cultural or religious minorities of the participants in the activities, anonymously if necessary. Concerning the economic conditions of the participants, it would be advisable to encourage the presence of students benefiting from scholarships or other forms of economic support, acting in this sense at the time of the selection of the participants by consulting with the administrative offices of the HEIs.

3.4 Dissemination and sustainability

The fourth and last section of this evaluation concerns the dissemination of the project and its sustainability. Both aspects seem to have been taken very seriously by the Consortium. As foreseen, the partners set up a Dissemination Plan and an Exploitation and Sustainability Plan. Both documents are available online[16], and both have been updated in the month of April 2022 after the intermediate report presented to EACEA.

As seen repeatedly in the previous paragraphs, BANUU has its roots in a strong partnership between Iraqi, European and North American universities, and particularly in its predecessor

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[14] Percentages obtained by aggregating the answers 'To a good extent', 'To a great extent' and 'Absolutely yes'.
[15] Question C5 of the survey.
[16] Dissemination Plan: https://site.unibo.it/banuu/en/results/wp-9-dissemination-of-project-results and Exploitation and Sustainability Plan:
https://site.unibo.it/banuu/en/results/wp10-ensuring-project-exploitation-and-sustainability.

WALADU. This dense network of relationships and joint activities allows a greater dissemination of the project outcomes among experts in the field of archaeology. According to the respondents, the project was presented during numerous meetings, seminars and conferences, increasing the curiosity of other Iraqi universities[17] about taking part in future CBHE projects.

Until now, however, the most important occasion of dissemination was the 12th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East (ICAANE), which took place in Bologna in April 2021.[18] During the congress, the start-up projects developed during WP4 were presented to the attendants in poster form.[19]

Printed materials have been produced and distributed, together with copies of the WP1 report. The project seems to have broader margins of improvement concerning the dissemination to a wider audience. BANUU social media accounts, for example, do not show a great engagement of the public. One reason for this could be the low frequency of new posts, in addition to the lack of contents in local languages – although nowadays all social media dispose of automatic translations for each written content. Therefore, it is highly recommended to enhance the Dissemination Plan with a strategy more focused on the digital contents and on the means to target the students, particularly to prepare for a successful distribution of the promotional videos that will be produced.

Concerning the sustainability of the project, the Plan delineates a roadmap in five steps:

1. Set up of a "National Incubator" for start-ups;
2. Enhancement of public-private cooperation to foster internship opportunities;
3. Creation of a national network of public and private enterprises dealing with the themes of the project;
4. Set up of a Permanent Interministerial Commission, composed by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Antiquities (which is responsible for the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage – SBAH);
5. Promoting the replicability of BANUU in other countries of the Arab world through specific actions and the involvement of the Association of Arab Universities (AARU).

Most of these actions will be carried out during the final phase, therefore it is not possible to evaluate their implementation at this point of the project's timeline. However, the Plan clearly shows the interest of the Consortium in fully involving the associated partners (especially the institutional ones, such as SBAH and AARU) to ensure the exploitation of project results.

The survey results showed the willingness to continue on the path taken as well. In particular, the questions D2–D4 focused on the outcomes of BANUU and the possibility to sustain and foster them in the future:

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[17] As an example, the University of Babylon was cited in one answer to Question D1.
[18] ICAANE official website: https://eventi.unibo.it/12icaane.
[19] "Start-up projects", on BANUU website: https://site.unibo.it/banuu/en/start-up-projects.

Question	Themes emerged in the answers
[D2] Is your Institution planning to integrate the BANUU outcomes into other projects? If yes, please provide details.	• Integration of the selected start-up projects with other initiatives supported by the university, in order to motivate and involve a greater number of students • Integration of the BANUU results within the implementation of the KALAM project[20] • Creation of further projects and/or initiatives to foster scientific cooperation
[D3] For Iraqi partners: is your University planning to further strengthen the Internship Offices? If yes, how?	• Increasing the number of private actors, such as agencies and entreprises, to sign partnership agreements • Integrating the activities of Internship Offices with those of the Career Development Center
[D4] For Iraqi partners: is your University planning to further strengthen the Libraries? If yes, how?	• Enhancing external partnerships for new services to the users • Increasing the number of staff members • Increasing the number of available books and materials • Activating a digital section within the Libraries

Although both the Plan and the answers show a good grade of commitment toward the project's exploitation and sustainability, it must be noted that few details about the financial coverage after the end of BANUU have been provided. In order to grant the feasibility of such actions also in the eyes of potential future partners, the Consortium could enrich the Plan with more precise proposals and previsions.

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[20] KALAM is a project involving, among others, the University of Bologna and the University of Mosul, in addition to cultural institutions such as the Iraq Museum in Baghdad. Official website: https://site.unibo.it/kalam/en.

4. Conclusions & Recommendations

This intermediate evaluation, consisting in a review of the project documentation and key informant feedback, shows that the BANUU project is able to operate consistently in a complex context such as Iraq, which proves the relevance of the initiative. The project is based on a thorough understanding of the difficulties and the gaps deriving from a lack of interaction between the educational institutions and the actors involved in the cultural heritage sector.

Based on the findings of the evaluation, the following recommendations have been formulated and submitted to the Consortium:

1. To recover and consolidate the relationships with entrepreneurs and ministerial officers before implementing WP3 and WP6: due to the pandemic, some activities have been postponed and/or held online, which may have lowered the level of interest of both TGs, negatively affecting the project's impact on them;

2. To record, in addition to gender information, the cultural or religious minorities of the participants in the activities (also anonymously, if necessary), in order to better understand the barriers and inequalities faced by academics, archaeologists and workers in the cultural heritage sector, and to overcome them while implementing the activities foreseen for the second half of the project and/or future projects;

3. To encourage the participation of students benefiting from scholarships or other forms of economic support (for example: consulting with the administrative offices of the HEIs during the selection procedures) in the future activities;

4. To update the Dissemination Plan with a more sound digital strategy (social media, translations, etc.), in order to prepare the ground for the dissemination of the promotional videos and other materials;

5. To update the Exploitation and Sustainability Plan with suggestions and/or previsions about the financial sustainability of project results after the end of the eligibility period.

Annex I – List of consulted documents

- Project Proposal and Evaluation Letter

- Grant Agreement and Amendment (Extension of the Eligibility Period)

- Partnership Agreements

- Intermediate Technical Implementation Report, Evaluation Letter, Integration

- WP1 Reports and outcomes:
    - Report "Improving Private Entrepreneurship in the Humanities in Iraq"
    - Report "Preliminary List of Cultural Institutions in Iraq"

- WP2 Reports and outcomes:
    - Trainings Report
    - Action Plan for Internship Offices
    - Internship database

- WP4 Training reports

- WP5 Outcomes:
    - List of start-up projects
    - Start-up projects posters

- WP7 Reports:
    - Minutes and lists of attendance of the project meetings
    - Updated version of the budget

- WP8 Reports:
    - Quality Plan
    - WP1/WP2 Internal Formative Evaluation
    - Report of 1st Quality Monitoring visit to Iraq
    - WP4 Internal Formative Evaluations (staff members; students)

- WP9 Outcomes:
    - Dissemination Plan
    - Printed materials
    - Social media accounts

- WP10 Outcomes:
    - Exploitation and Sustainability Plan

Annex II – Survey Structure

The survey sent out to the BANUU consortium was composed of 24 questions, divided into 4 sections aiming at assessing as many aspects of the project's implementation. For most questions, the respondents had the possibility to answer freely.

Section	Question	Notes
A - Relevance of the project	[A1] After the realisation of WP1, WP2, WP4 and WP5, have the objectives of BANUU proved to be in line with the actual needs of the following target groups, in your opinion?	*Yes / No* for each Target Group
	[A2] If you selected 'No' to one or more questions, please briefly explain why.	-
	[A3] After the realisation of WP1, WP2, WP4 and WP5, to what extent has the BANUU approach demonstrated to be useful for the following target groups, in your opinion?	Scale from *0 - Not at all* to *5 - Very useful* for each Target Group
	[A4] Please briefly comment on your previous answer	-
	[A5] According to you, could other target groups benefit from the BANUU project? If yes, which ones and to what extent?	-
B - Efficiency of the implementation	[B1] Do you believe that your Organization / University has the right amount of responsibilities within the BANUU project?	*Yes / No*
	[B2] If not, should it have more or less responsibilities? And why?	-
	[B3] Have you encountered any difficulties concerning the administrative and/or financial management of the project?	*Yes / No*
	[B4] If yes, which one? How could they be managed, in order to meet your needs?	-
	[B5] Do you believe that the BANUU consortium managed efficiently the consequences of Covid-19 pandemic on the project?	*Yes / No*
	[B6] If not, please briefly explain why.	-
	[B7] Do you believe that other risks may endanger the BANUU project? If yes, please explain which one, and how they could be managed.	-
C - Effectiveness and Impact	[C1] After the realisation of WP1, WP2, WP4 and WP5, to what extent have they been successful, in your opinion?	Scale from *0 - Not at all* to *5 - All objectives were met* for each WP
	[C2] Please comment on your previous answer.	-
	[C3] Which WP(s) had a strong impact on the following target groups, in your opinion?	Possibility to select one or more WP for each Target Group
	[C4] Please comment on your previous answer, if you wish.	-

Section	Question	Notes
	[C5] For Iraqi partners: Please briefly describe the criteria used for the selection of the staff members and students that are taking part in the project.	-
	[C6] To what extent the participation of disadvantaged groups (women, cultural minorities, religious minorities, students from economically disadvantaged communities) may be increased in the second phase of the project, in your opinion?	-
	[C7] WP3 (Pilot internships and their structuring in degree courses) was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. How has this affected the effectiveness of the BANUU project, in your opinion?	-
D - Dissemination and sustainability	[D1] Did you or other members of your Organization / University talk about the BANUU project during public events, lessons, conferences, etc.? If yes, please provide details.	-
	[D2] Is your Organization / University planning to integrate the BANUU outcomes into other projects? If yes, please provide details.	-
	[D3] For Iraqi partners: is your University planning to further strengthen the Internship Offices? If yes, how?	-
	[D4] For Iraqi partners: is your University planning to further strengthen the Libraries? If yes, how?	-
	[D5] For Iraqi partners: has your University already signed any cooperation agreement with private enterprises? If yes, please provide more details.	-