

PROJECT REPORT BREAKING NOON



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Purpose

The project aimed at not only acknowledging one of the cultural heritages of Iran, in danger of extinction, but also aimed at promoting and encouraging one of the traditional skills and crafts of Iranian women living in the countryside: bread baking. Through modern and social media, *Breaking Noon* intended to document and promote the trade methods of female bakers operating in rural areas of Iran.

Scope

In order to, foremost in Sweden, but also other countries, increase the public awareness about Iranian culture a website was launched. The website, in addition to active participation in various social media, was intended for publishing the documented and collected material from the interviews, personal stories from visitors and articles on traditional bread baking.

Breaking Noon would also result in substantial attempts at long-term contribution to preservation of the art of bakery operated by women in rural regions of Iran.

Time and progress frame

A feasibility study was carried through during April 2011 in order to build a network of guides and contacts to female bakers and accordingly planning the itinerary.

Between September and December 2011, five provinces were visited for the purpose of compiling the material while publishing them on the website, Facebook etcetera.

By the end of December 2011 a draft of micro-financing project was composed and set to action and is currently on its pilot phase.

In spring 2012 a series of lectures and photo exhibitions are to take place in Umeå and region of Västerbotten in north Sweden.

Organisation

The project was administered and executed by LoreDoor, an ethical media production cooperative aiming to promote the female artisans and artists in the Majority world. The working team consisted of an ethnographer, a journalist and a photographer who was also in charge of financial management.

PROJECT PROCESS

Prior to the feasibility study the idea of Breaking Noon was introduced at LoreDoor's website, offering a preview of the outline of the project and inviting others to share their ideas and suggestion. The visitors have also enjoyed the possibility of contributing with longer text and their bread related stories on the website.

The feasibility study trip in April 2011 resulted in an SWOT analysis. The means and access to regularly publishing and updating the website in different languages and the cross-exchange between the project's Facebook and other social media accounts, were closely examined and prepared. Besides an expanded network of contacts, the feasibility study endowed the project with a more accurate understanding for the living terms and conditions that the female bakers in rural regions dealt with. This was ensued by visits to different villages in Isfahan province.

Back from the feasibility trip interviews were held with press in Sweden, preceded by extensive contacts with media and press calling for further interaction with public. Through formal (e.g. on the website) and informal means the organisation was soon contacted by people often of Iranian background, but also individuals with interests in Iranian culture. LoreDoor was offered advice and information of interests for the project purpose, mainly contacts details for household scale bakeries in countryside. The preparation for the autumn trip was arranged and altered accordingly and based on the results from the SWOT analysis. The number of regions to be visited was significantly narrowed down and the duration of each planned visit was prolonged. The focus shifted from few contacts in many provinces to identifying numerous contacts in few regions. This change would allow for revisits to same contacts within short span of time, providing a steadier ground for mutual trust between the operating team and the artisans. Furthermore, the financial stress for travelling costs would reduce noticeably due to this re-planning. By the end of August 2011 four study circle groups on different aspects of Iranian culture, such as handicraft of nomads, Pre-Islamic and Islamic architecture, roots of cuisine by Caspian Sea and life on countryside of Iran, were arranged in collaboration with Studieförbundet, the Study association for adult education.



Progression of reality

In the beginning of September 2011 the project started its documentation in Gilan and then travelling southbound anti-clockwise. Despite continued positive and sincere response from website visitors, encouraging an inclusion of different provinces into the itinerary, only five provinces were visited. Prolonged visit at each region rendered a valuable insight into local life and lent new depth to the importance of bread baking trade for the women. When viable, regional lore was collected and documented to provide a further background to the lives of artisans involved in the project. The common factor in the encountered life stories was the set of hardships encompassing the rural life. The slow process of improving the infrastructure, an accelerating urbanisation, continuous drought and crop failure was in some villages compensated by introduction and launching of a semi-industrial *nanvai* – a bread baking facility. In outskirts of Hamedan in a smaller settlement all the traditional well-shaped ovens – *tanūr* were filled with cement by the local authority due to high number of accidents. At the owner's request the filled *tanūr* was replaced with a rotating metal platter resembling the device now frequently in use at semi-industrial bread bakeries in cities. These were some of the elements transforming the state of practising the art of traditional bread baking.

Moreover, these factors entailed considerable impact on the life of the female bread bakers in the countryside. The majority of women whom we met, were sole breadwinners of their household. Many of them were widowed while the others alone shouldered the role of wage earner since their husband were of various reasons marginalised from labour market. Introduction of one single and more efficient semi-industrial *nanvai* – always run by men – naturally discouraged and prevented the small scale business of bread baking run by women. This made the project agenda more acute than expected.

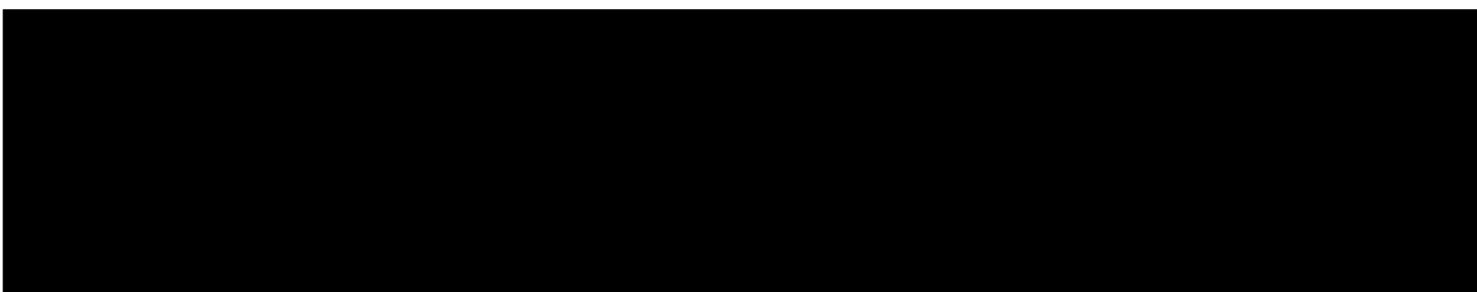


Outcome

Breaking Noon was completed within the scheduled time and defined budget frame. A total number of 23 artisans were interviewed in five different provinces. The set scopes for the project were met in terms of digital forums and social media operating for raising the general awareness about traditional Iranian bread.

The evaluation of the deployed methods for documentation, carried through during and after the project pointed out certain unanticipated weaknesses and supported some of the initially recognised strengths. Using digital forums and social media fulfilled the expected purpose of reaching out to a wider community, of both those with vast and others with meagre knowledge on Iranian culture. However, usage of these channels suffered a democratic deficiency since many of the women involved in the project – due to number of reasons – had no or very limited access to these media. Consequently they were not able to part take in the forums, but rather excluded from it.

Concerns about restrictions regarding photographing women were dismissed since many of the artisans were widowed and hence declared that they “were in charge of themselves” and happy to be photographed and proud to demonstrate their skills. Most of the women explicitly indicated that documenting their trade – acknowledging their art – shed rays of hope and encouragement in facing a future which did not look bright for their trade.



One parameter of concern in *Breaking Noon* has been to contribute to a sustainable promotion and encouragement of the artisans who have shared their stories. Improvement of the *nanvai* and/or equipment could change the course of livelihood for these women. Through minor sums of money addressing the financial obstacles, evident changes can be achieved in the business. Therefore, LoreDoor together with affiliates planned and a micro-credit pilot project was launched. The project is to be operated in couple of settlements in province of Isfahan via already established network which so far has had a charitable character.



The collected data of *Breaking Noon* will be presented in a number of forms. A series of lectures in collaboration with City Library in Umeå and scholars from Umeå University are due in April-May 2012. The photo exhibition is in process of printing and framing which will both accompany the lectures and also be exhibited separately in different venues such as public library and Västerbotten Museum. A radio chronicle along with an article in the regional press is scheduled in April. Moreover, there are currently two study circles running; one on Iranian Gastronomy and the other on women's rights issues in Iran. The results of the project are available on the website at www.loredoor.se and Facebook for public to access.

Project financial report

Expenditures

Trips to and within Iran	2 582 GBP
Accommodation in Iran	230 GBP
Print/photo developing*	548 GBP
Web domain/space*	140 GBP
TOTAL	3 500 GBP

Posts marked with * are higher in actual amount but these posts were partially covered with grant from Region Västerbotten. The amounts above, present how the Iran heritage grant was disposed.



LoreDoor would not have been able to carry out this project without the generous support and indispensable funding from Iran Heritage, Region Västerbotten and all the people who contributed with their kind help and ready advice throughout the project.

