

# MAPPING THE TOURISM SERVICES, SKILLS, ASSETS, AND STORIES OF MADABA GOVERNORATE

AUGUST 2023



## ABOUT THE ACCELERATOR LAB & ITS WORK ON TOURISM

The UNDP Jordan Accelerator Lab is part of a network of 91 labs serving 115 countries launched "to change the way UNDP does development by learning what works and what doesn't in sustainable development". The Accelerator Labs "is the world's largest and fastest learning network on wicked sustainable development challenges" and "taps into local innovations to create actionable insights and reimagine sustainable development for the 21st century." (1)

In 2022, the Accelerator Lab participated in the design of the Country Programme Document (CPD) 2023-2027, leading the surveys and interviews that shone a light on the priorities of various stakeholders. From this process, UNDP Jordan learned that tourism was one of the top topics of interest. Not long after, a member of parliament representing Madaba requested the support of the UNDP Jordan Country Office (CO) to develop tourism in the municipality, as it had been named the Arab Tourism Capital for 2022.

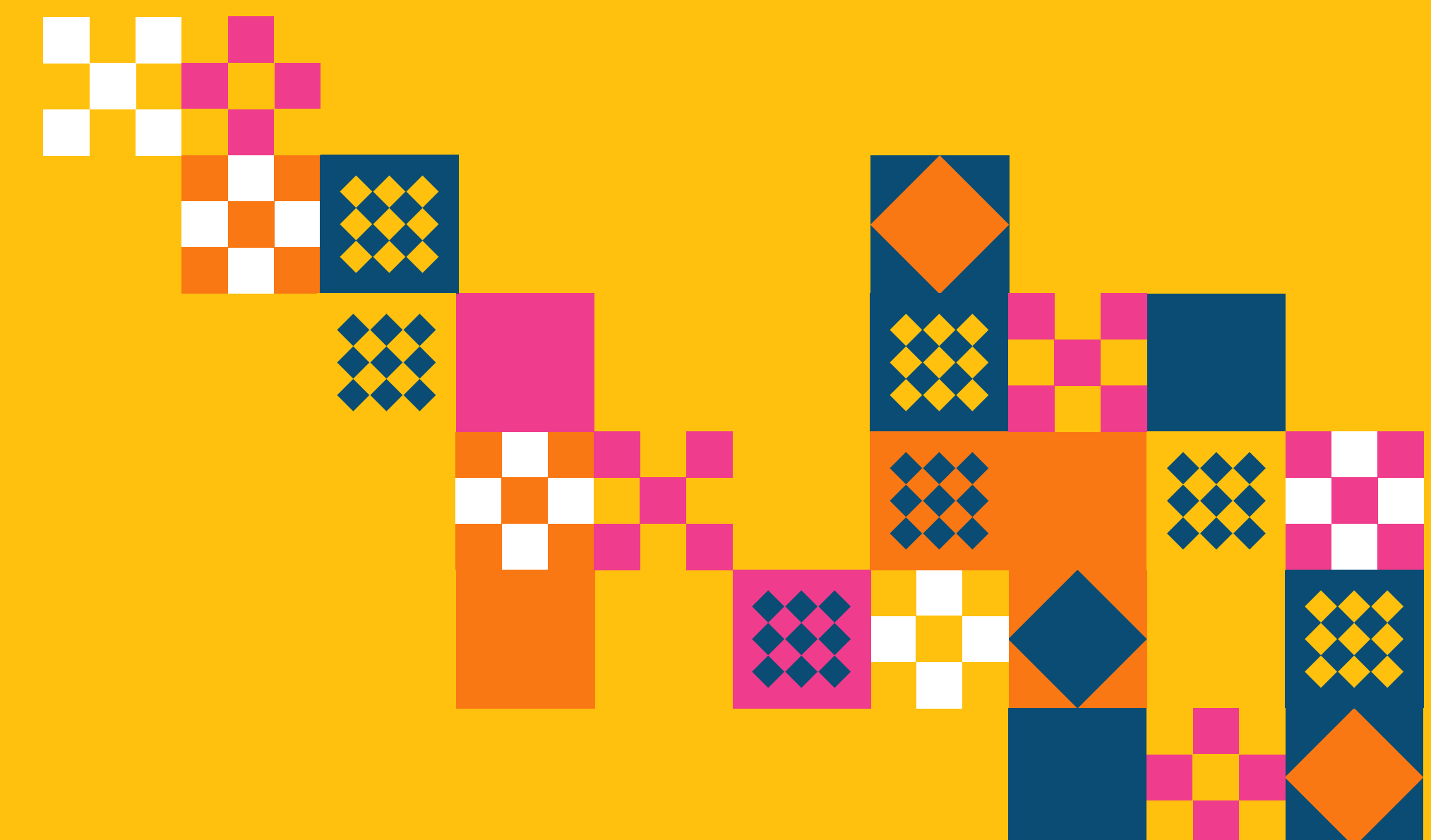
When the CO asked the Lab to support this effort, we decided to make tourism in Madaba the focus of our work, given that it aligned with the findings about the priority areas from the CPD process. In June 2022, we launched a series of initiatives to understand the challenges, opportunities, and potential local solutions. From this data, one of the main insights was that Madaba and Jordan, in general, could use more stories to bring a human element to the tours and make the experience richer. We also learned that local skills, assets, and services could be better utilized and be part of tourism experiments.

Therefore, we decided to map the tourism services, skills, assets, and stories in Madaba governorate in 2023. We discovered that a German Jordanian University (GJU) class was conducting field visits and interviews around Madaba governorate, so we collaborated with them to do a collective mapping exercise.

The mapping was not only beneficial for the work on Madaba, but it was also the first time we tested an extension of the Lab through a group of students who became an arm of the solutions mapping function of the Accelerator Lab. To read more about how we tested the philosophy and methodology of the Lab beyond the team at UNDP, read [this blog](#).

This publication summarises the effort of the Accelerator Lab at UNDP Jordan in mapping the tourism services, skills, assets, and stories in Madaba governorate, namely the purpose, methodology, results and data analysis, potential experiments, and reflections on working with GJU.

(1) "About Us", UNDP Accelerator Labs, UNDP, December 19, 2022, <https://www.undp.org/acceleratorlabs/aboutus>.



## PURPOSE

In mid-2023, based on insights on tourism in Madaba from 2022, the Accelerator Lab at UNDP Jordan mapped existing tourism services, communities' skills and assets, and stories of communities that could serve the tourism sector in Madaba governorate. The purpose of this effort was threefold:

1. To deepen our understanding of Madaba's tourism potential by finding people with tourism services, skills, stories, and assets that could benefit both tourism development and the person if utilized innovatively.
2. To co-design and support tourism experiments in collaboration with locals to determine what projects could benefit tourism development in the long term.
3. To design a win-win opportunity with the GJU to carry out the mapping: the Accelerator Lab gained the support of creative and skilled students to help with our research, and the students gained practical experience, which could help them in their careers.



## METHODOLOGY

The Accelerator Lab conducted the mapping in collaboration with the GJU with shared responsibilities. The Accelerator Lab was responsible for preparing plans, data collection tools, and training related to data collection and analysis. To facilitate the data collection process, we provided a small stipend for the two field visits to cover the costs of mobile phone data to access the online data collection tools, field packets prepared as drawstring bags, each containing a cap, water bottle, and stationery, and a meal with drinks. We were also present on the data collection days to support the students and provided multiple rounds of feedback in writing and in person. Finally, we designed and granted students Certificates of Participation.

As for the GJU, the professor arranged all the logistics, including transportation for the students, and was present to support students during the data collection.

Students were responsible for the data collection itself, which entailed finding and recruiting people, interviewing them, taking photos, videos, and audio, getting consent from the interviewees, and through their mobile phones, uploading the data (text, video, audio, and images) into the online data collection tools designed by the Accelerator Lab on Google Forms.

In terms of the overall plan, after conducting a 1.5-hour training session at the German Jordanian University, the students visited four locations in May; Madaba City on one day and the rural areas of Libb, Dhiban, and Mleih on a second day. They were divided into pairs focusing on various topics and distributed to different locations (as shown in the diagrams), where they spent two hours doing interviews. Each location also had a Lab member or professor to support the students. Based on advice from stakeholders from Madaba governorate, services were only mapped in Madaba city as the rural areas lack tourism services.

For a brief look at how the fieldwork went, [watch this video](#).

### Mapping Topics

#### TOURISM SERVICES

- Airbnb
- Guest house
- Tourism experiences (food, walking tours, day immersions)
- Guides

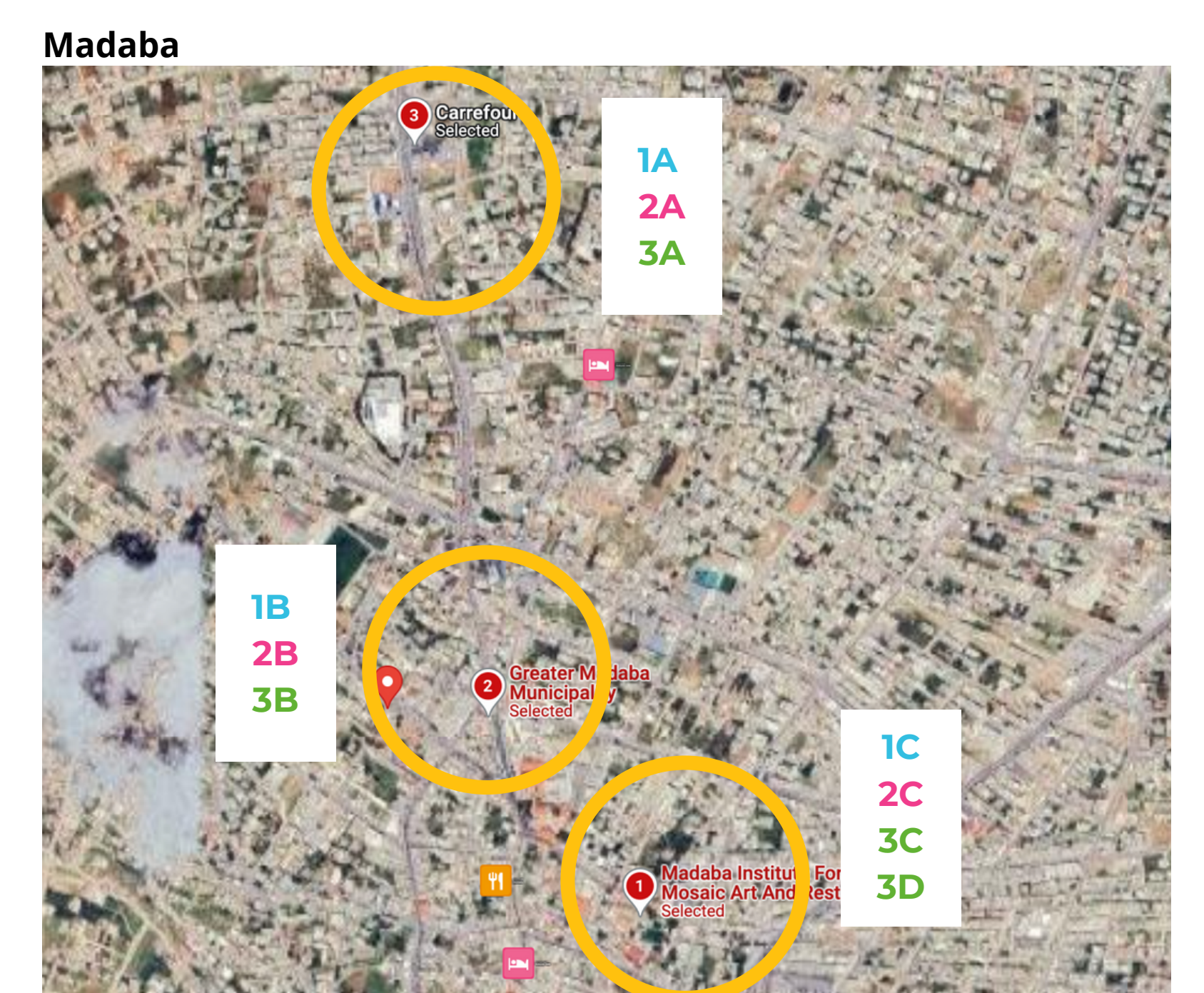
#### SKILLS AND ASSETS

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Skills:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• music</li> <li>• singing, playing an instrument</li> <li>• handcraftsmanship : pottery, embroidery, mosaics, weaving, crochet, fashion</li> <li>• cooking</li> <li>• writing</li> <li>• storytelling</li> <li>• photography</li> <li>• videography</li> <li>• visual art</li> <li>• languages</li> </ul> | <p><b>Assets:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• natural materials</li> <li>• livestock</li> <li>• produce</li> <li>• farms</li> <li>• house of someone important or of an important era</li> </ul> |
|---|---|

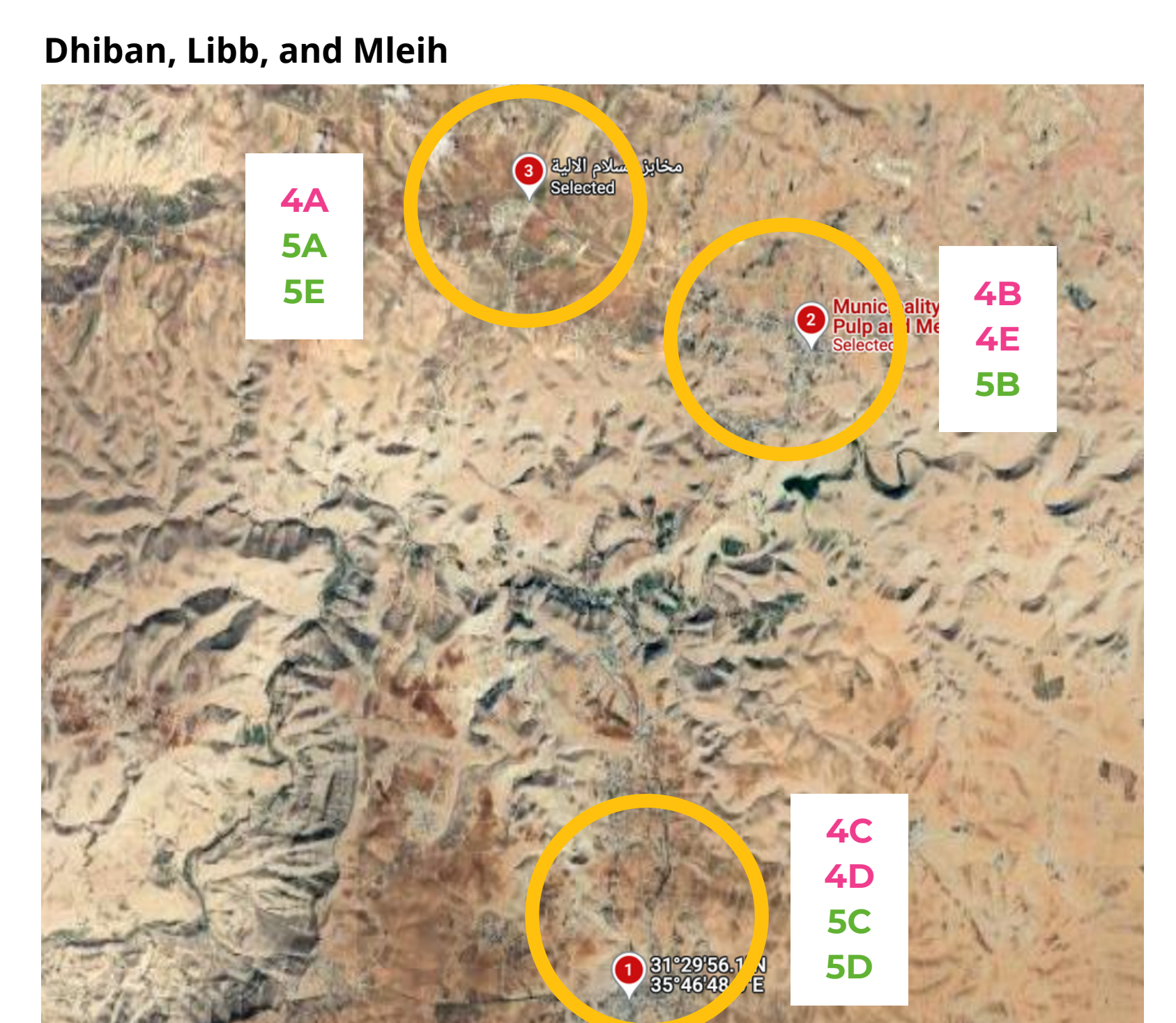
#### STORIES

- everyday human stories
- stories of place
- legends and folklore
- stories of notable people

### Distribution of Groups



The distribution of groups for day 1 in Madaba City.



The distribution of groups for day 2 in Dhiban, Libb, and Mleih.

# RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

This section provides **quantitative and qualitative data** about the different topics (services, skills and assets, and stories), **photos** from the students' data collection, and **general insights**.

It also presents **ideas for potential experiments** that the Accelerator Lab developed. The Lab may be proceeding with one or more of these ideas. Still, we remain open to exploration by UNDP, and we welcome any entities or groups to adopt and further develop any proposed ideas and develop new ideas based on these insights.

## SUMMARY STATISTICS

### # of people interviewed

Services	16
Skills and Assets	49
Stories	31
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>96 people interviewed</b>
References for interesting stories	33

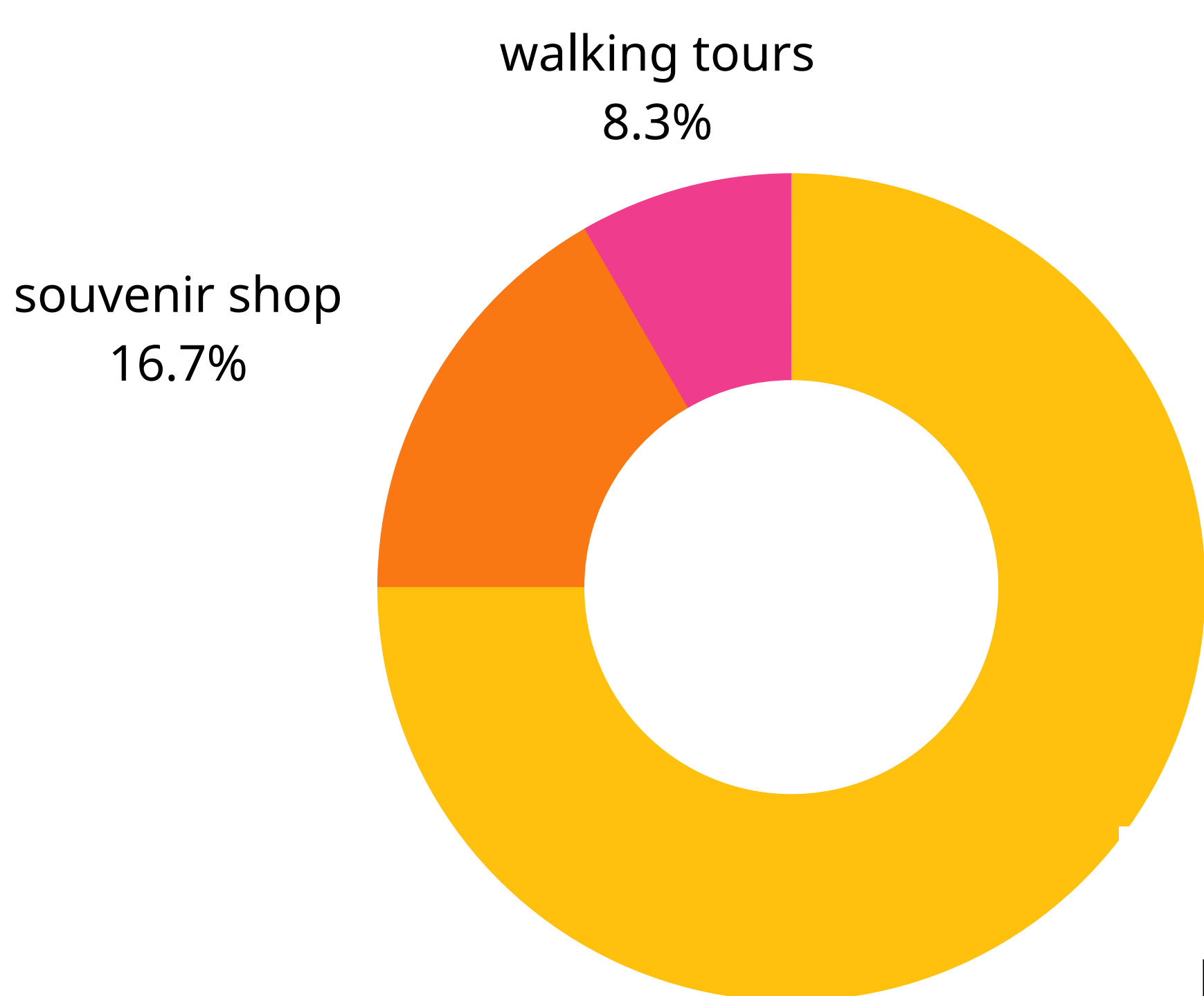
## SERVICES

16

total # of interviews

75%

interviewees mentioned hands-on/ learning tourism experiences.



## TOURISTIC SITES MENTIONED

Barta Waterfalls

Ma'in Hot Springs

Oyun Musa (fresh water springs)

Al-Wala Dam

Mujib Dam and Wadi

Wadi Mukhairis

Uyun Al Dhib (agricultural area)

Ataruz (ancient site)

Mukawir (ancient site)

St. John the Baptist Roman Catholic Church

Baptism Site

Omar bin Al Khattab Mosque

Haret Jdoudna (restaurant)

Mrah Salameh Restaurant

Kawon Bookstore

## Main Insights

### VARIETY OF SKILLS

Many skills fall under the following categories:

- mosaics
- food making (mainly cooking and baking)
- arts and design
- photography and filmmaking
- languages

There is also a wide range of skills, including:

- theatre
- fashion design and embroidery
- calligraphy
- music
- baking and confectionery
- wood carving
- horseback riding
- interior design

### PLACE-BASED TOURISM

There is potential for packages of themed place-based tourism experiences such as food, art, and history experiences, especially in rural areas.

For example, in Libb and Mleih municipality, there is potential for a food experience that combines:

- storytelling
- traditional dishes
- livestock
- dairy
- baking

### INTERESTING STORIES

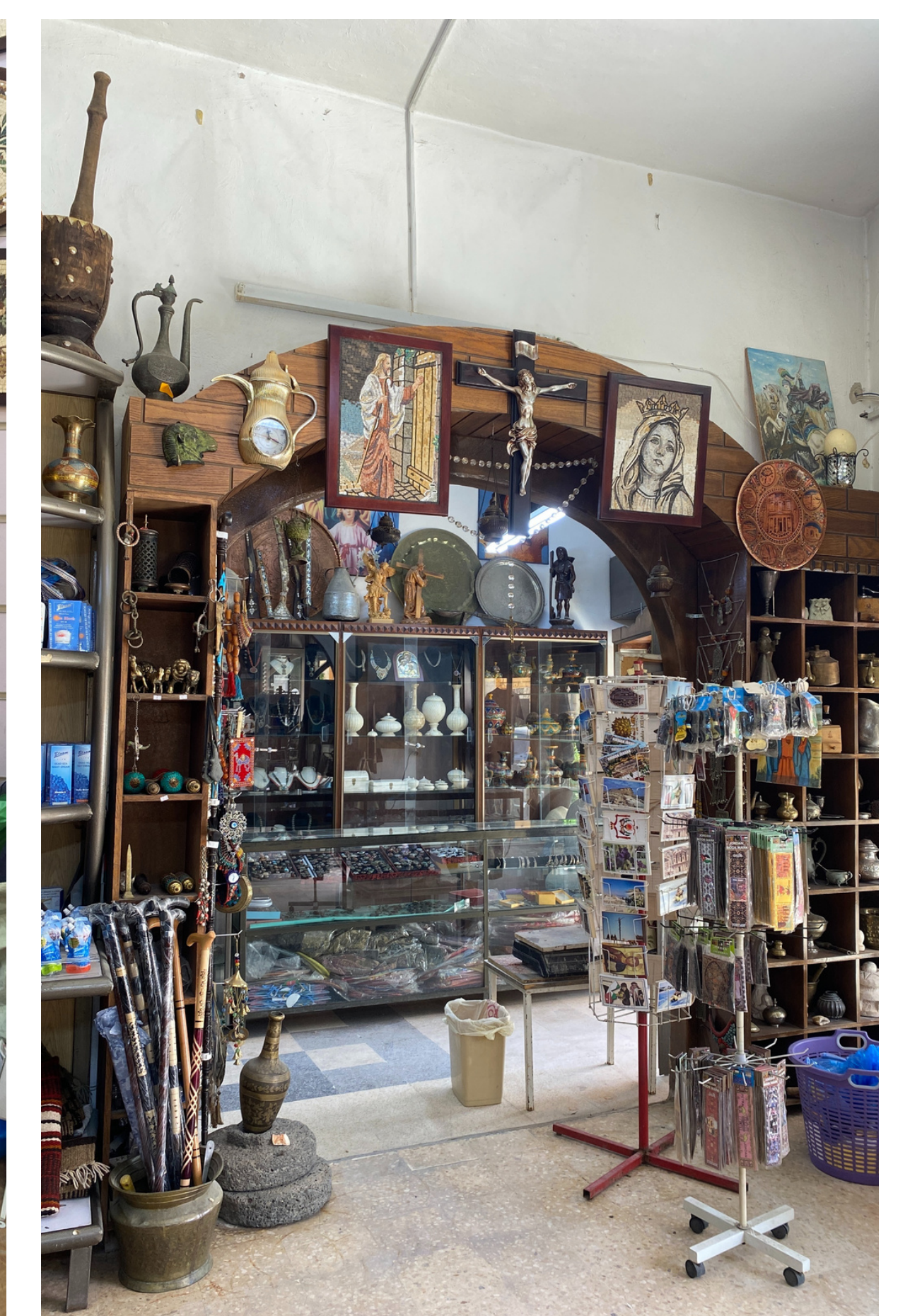
There is rich story content, especially legends, folklore, and stories of place, which could be used in various ways; for example:

- marketing material
- walking trails
- immersive experiences

Based on advice from stakeholders from Madaba governorate, services were only mapped in Madaba city as the rural areas lack tourism services. Therefore, this research produced less data on services than on skills, assets, and stories. We met **mosaic craftsmen, a tour guide, a chef at a farm-to-table restaurant, shop owners, a dairy product maker, and bakers.**

Overall, the **highest mentioned topic was hands-on tourism experiences.** However, due to a misunderstanding from the student data collectors, we cannot conclude that experiences are the top available tourism service. Although the intent was to map existing tourism services by interviewing service providers, students interviewed people who do not have a service or product. Therefore it's not clear if interviewees asked about existing services or, for example, about personal opinions on existing or desired tourism services.

Although we did not intend to learn about touristic sites, interviewees mentioned several in their answers. So, **we documented which sites were mentioned and how many times each was mentioned, as this could indicate which sites are most interesting from the locals' perspective. Interestingly, some of the top most mentioned sites are not the famous, well-known locations that tour guides include in trip itineraries.** The most recurrent mentions were: Barta Valley, known locally for its flora and waterfalls; Mukawir (Machaerus), the site of a 1st-century fortress; St. John the Baptist Roman Catholic Church; and Haret Jdoudna, a traditional well-known restaurant in Madaba city. While less frequently mentioned, it is worth noting that **eleven out of twenty-one places mentioned (including Barta Valley) are natural attractions** like wadis (canyons) and natural springs, which is not what Madaba governorate is traditionally known for.



# SKILLS & ASSETS

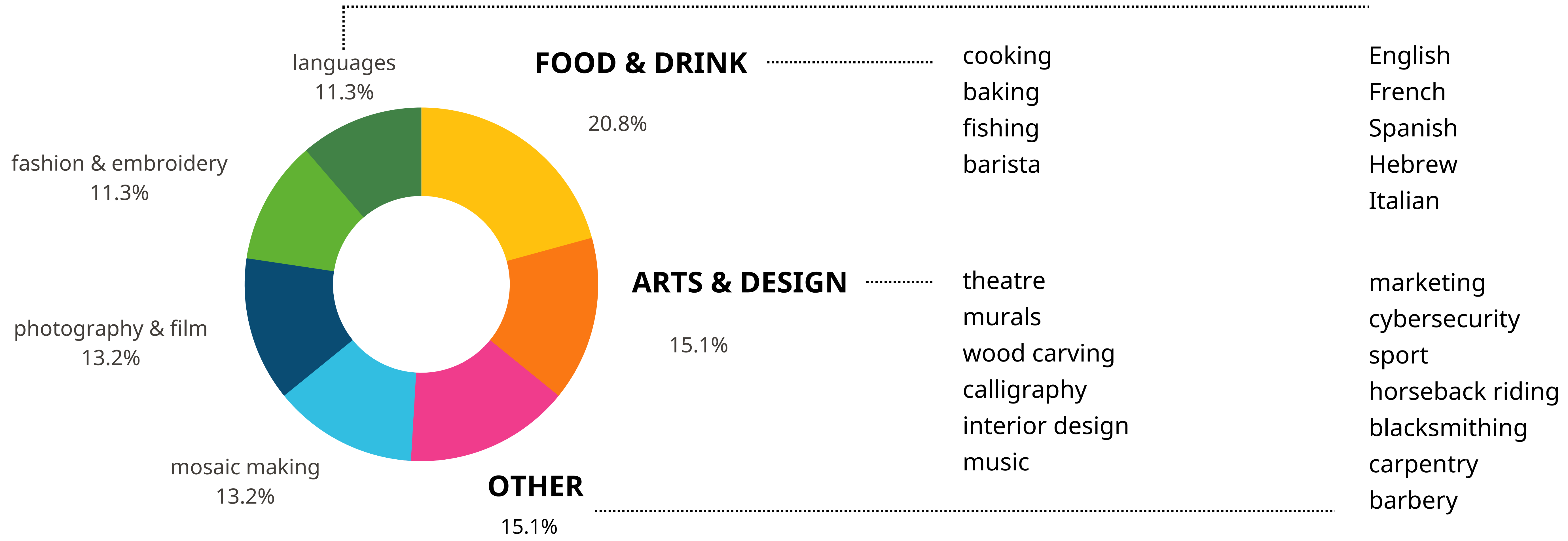
49

total # of interviews

≈ 50%

have skills in food & drink, arts & design, or other skills listed to the right

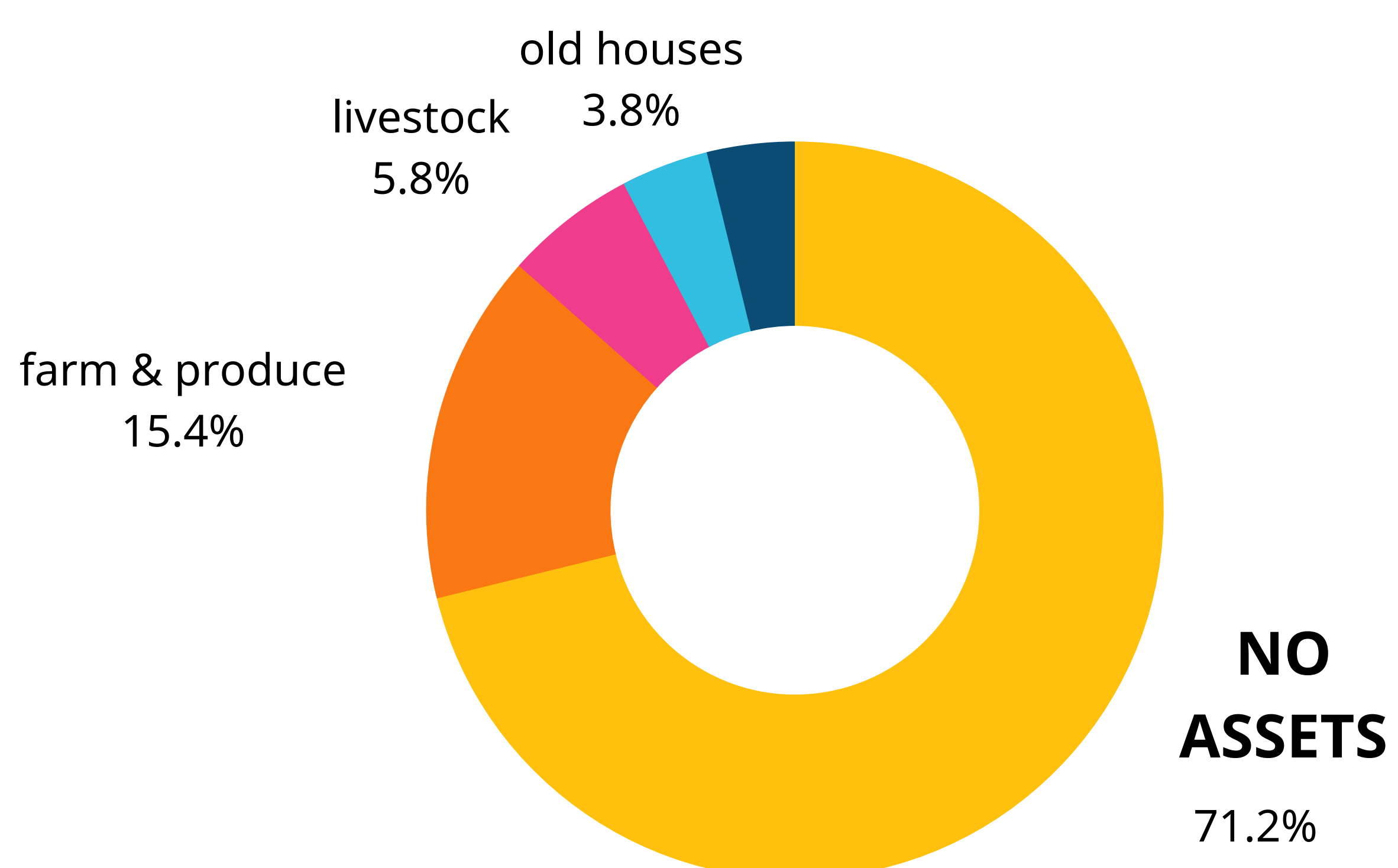
The top skills among the interviewees are food and drink and arts and design. In addition, many interviewees mentioned various skills not noted in the survey options, including marketing, acting, and horseback riding.



≈ 70%

no assets

Very few tourism assets were found, with around 70% of interviewees saying they have none. Of the 20% who did have assets, the top two kinds are farms and farm produce, followed by livestock. Other types of assets mapped are architecture, a productive kitchen, and a dairy workshop.



# STORIES

31

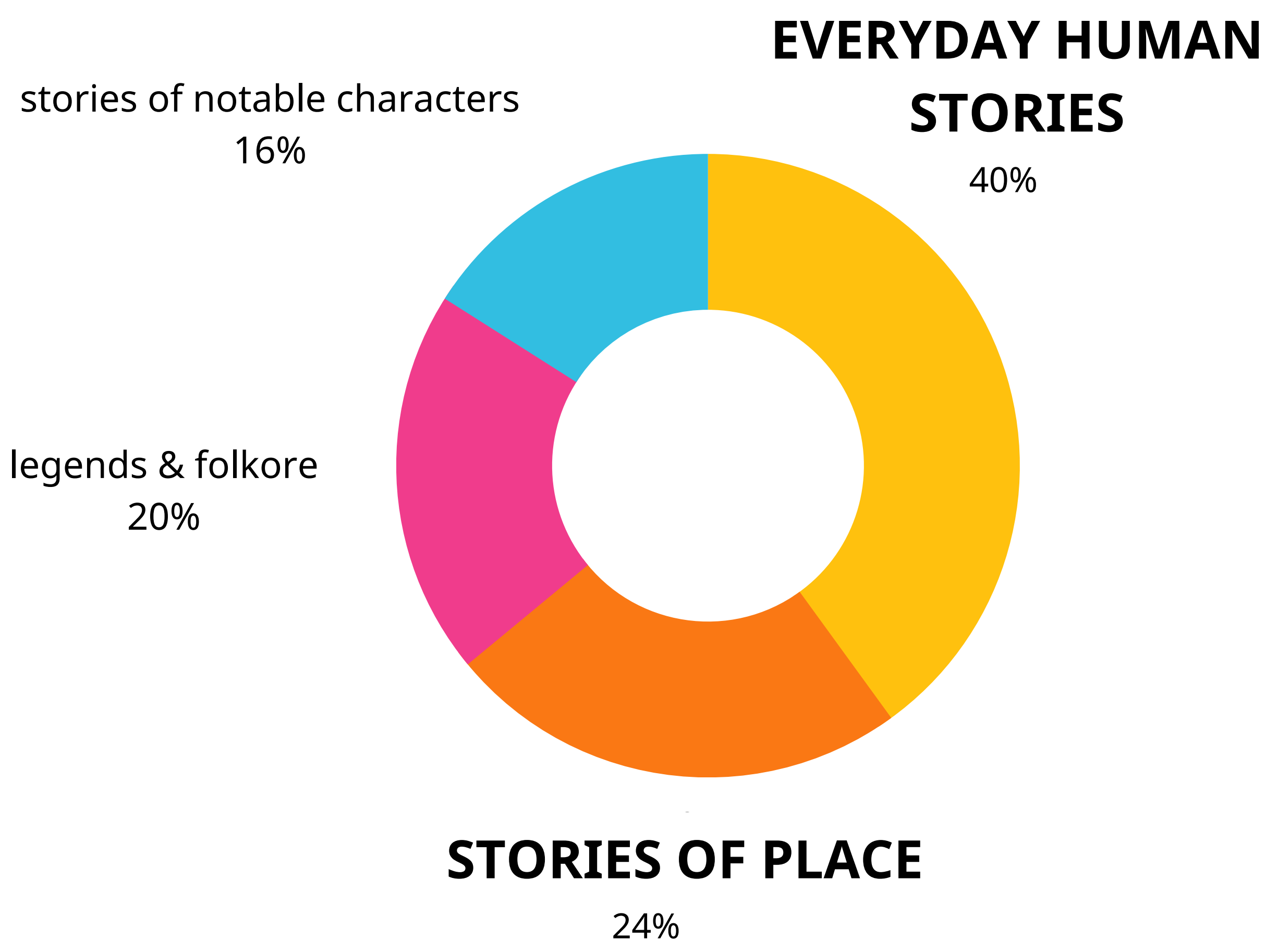
total # of interviews

40%

everyday human stories

Four types of stories were mapped: everyday human stories, legends and folklore, stories of notable personalities, and stories of place. The most recurrent type of story was everyday human stories, followed by stories of place.

Under each of these story types, sub-themes and topics also emerged, as shown in the diagram.



## EVERYDAY HUMAN STORIES

- love stories
- quirky/funny stories
- "the good old days"
- friendships

## STORIES OF PLACE

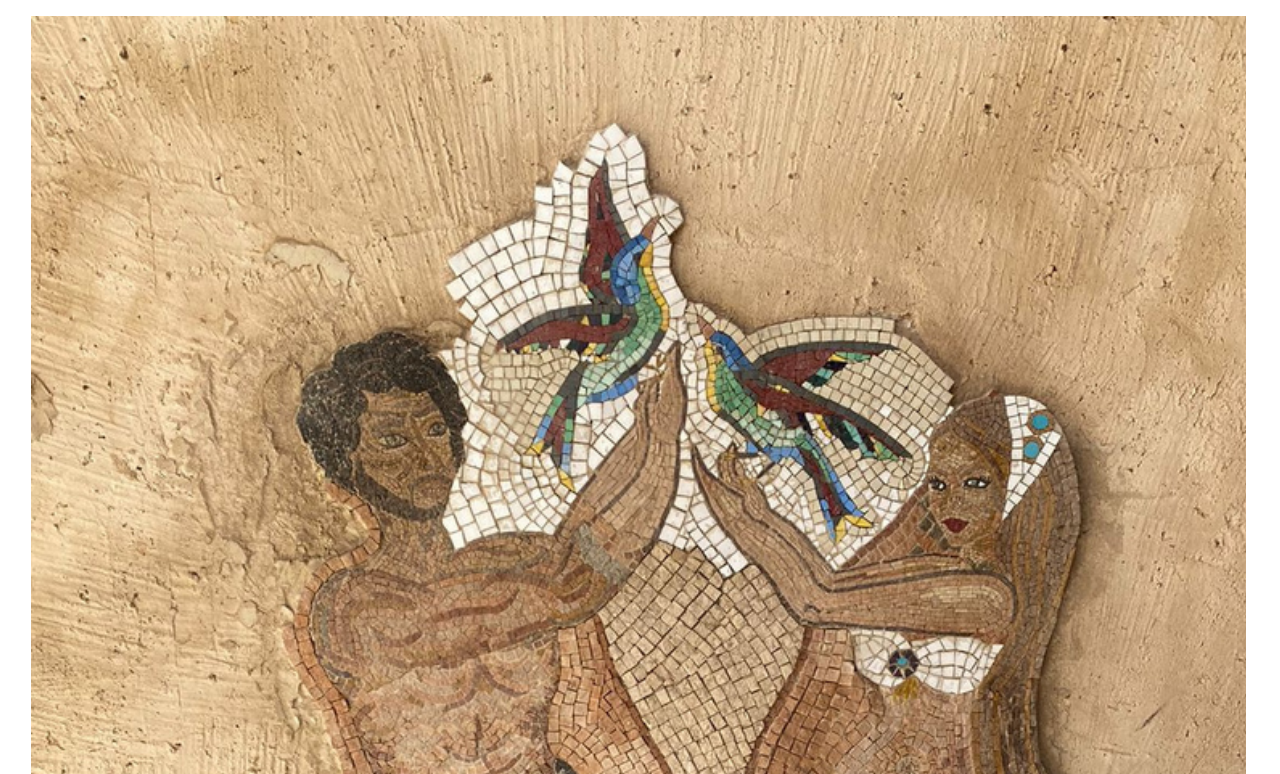
- Haret Jdoudna (restaurant) - the story of the house and its owner
- Graffiti drawn by a couple in Madaba
- Madaba Institute for Mosaic Art And Restoration
- Historically significant places
  - King Maisha Obelisk
  - St. George's Church

## LEGENDS & FOLKLORE

- jinn (spirits)
- Madaba mosaic tree
- The story of naming Dhiban
- Historical characters:
  - The story of Mansaf and King Maisha
  - Story of Maisha's obelisk
  - Story of Salome and John the Baptist
- Uyun Al Dhib

## STORIES OF NOTABLE PEOPLE

- Ahmad Al Amayreh, Dean of Madaba Institute For Mosaic Art And Restoration
- Ibrahim Karadsheh - former Head of Municipality and owner of Haret Jdoudna
- Current Head of the Municipality, Aref Mahmoud Al Rawajeeh

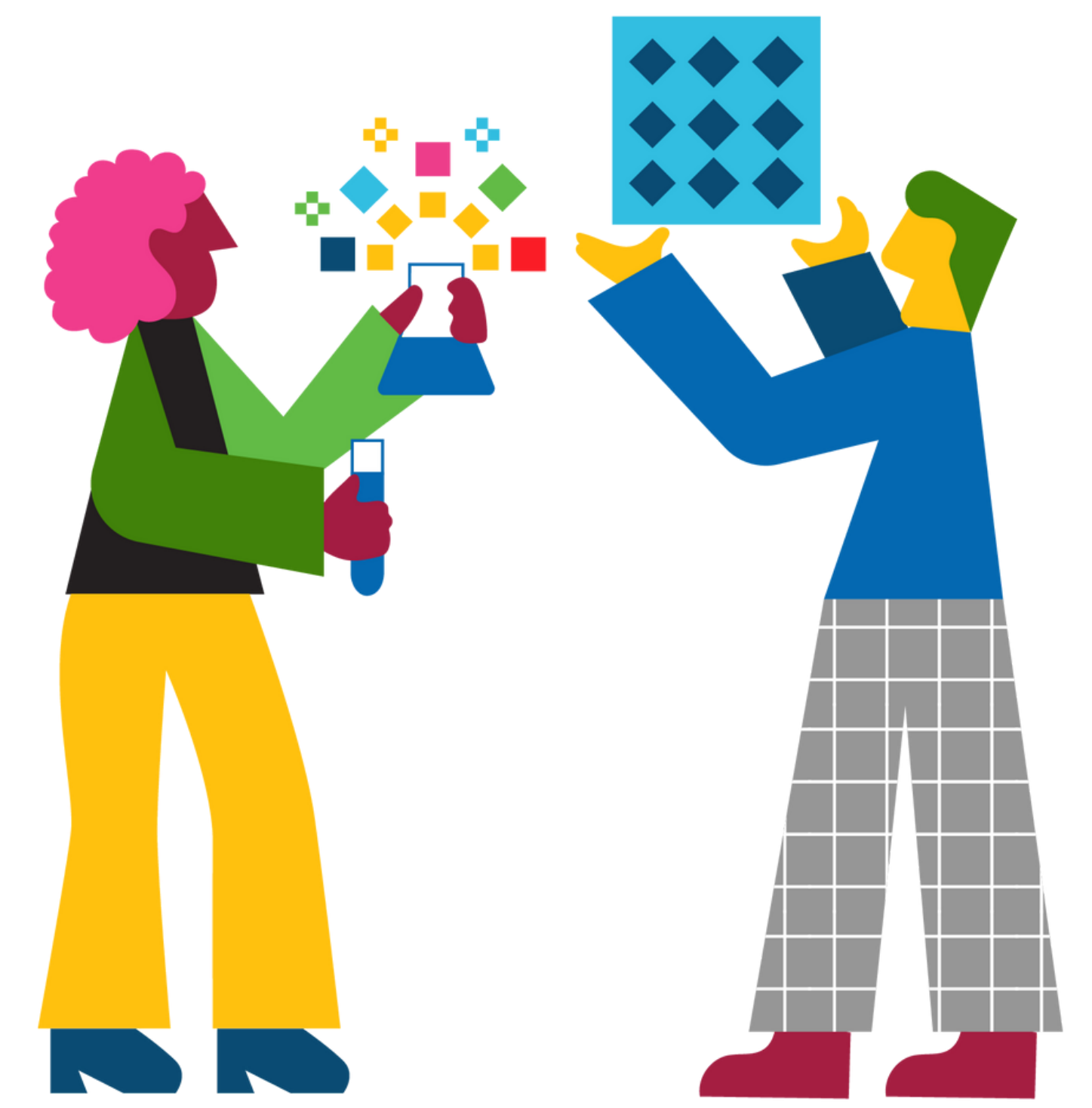


# EXPERIMENTAL IDEAS

The Accelerator Lab developed several experimental ideas inspired by the people interviewed and built off their services, skills, assets, and stories. **They fall into four categories: art and culture, food, stories, and technology. These ideas could also be packaged into place-based experiences along with tourism sites.** Although the experimental ideas emerged from the data in Madaba, some are relevant to the whole country and could be tested in other parts of Jordan.

For all ideas, we **hypothesize** that if several were tested and proven successful, then the following would happen:

- **Domestic tourism to Madaba would increase.**
- **International tourists would stay longer in Madaba.**
- **Tourists would have a more meaningful and human experience.**
- **Media attention on Madaba would increase.**
- **People in Madaba would benefit financially if any of the experiments succeeded, whether directly as the ones providing a product or service and therefore having a new or improved source of income or indirectly as residents reaping the general economic benefits in the governorate.**



## ARTS & CULTURE

### Mosaic-making

Given that Madaba is well known for mosaics already, and the skills mapping showed that the highest skill amongst the interviewees was mosaic making, we propose testing a **mosaic-making experience for tourists to make and take home their own souvenirs.** Not only did we learn about mosaic craftspeople through this research, but we also know from previous work in Madaba that many people are skilled in this craft. This experiment would evaluate whether such an experience would bring income to the craftspeople and be interesting for tourists. There is a service provider in Madaba called [Sawwah](#), which already provides such an experience, so in addition to the option of working with craftspeople to offer this experience, another option could be to collaborate with Sawwah on building on or scaling their mosaics experience.



### Calligraphy experience

One of the people interviewed is a calligrapher who makes signs and murals, which is quite common in Jordan. However, creating a **calligraphy experience in Madaba could be unique, where tourists can learn calligraphy and create souvenirs to take with them.** There is an arts and culture centre in Amman called [ELHARF House](#) that offers such an experience in Amman, but nowhere else in the country.



### Wood-carving experience or products

One woman in Dhiban, a rural part of Madaba governorate, does wood carving art, a unique skill in this mapping. There could be a **wood carving experience similar to the calligraphy experience, or this artist could be supported to design, brand, market, package, and sell her pieces.**



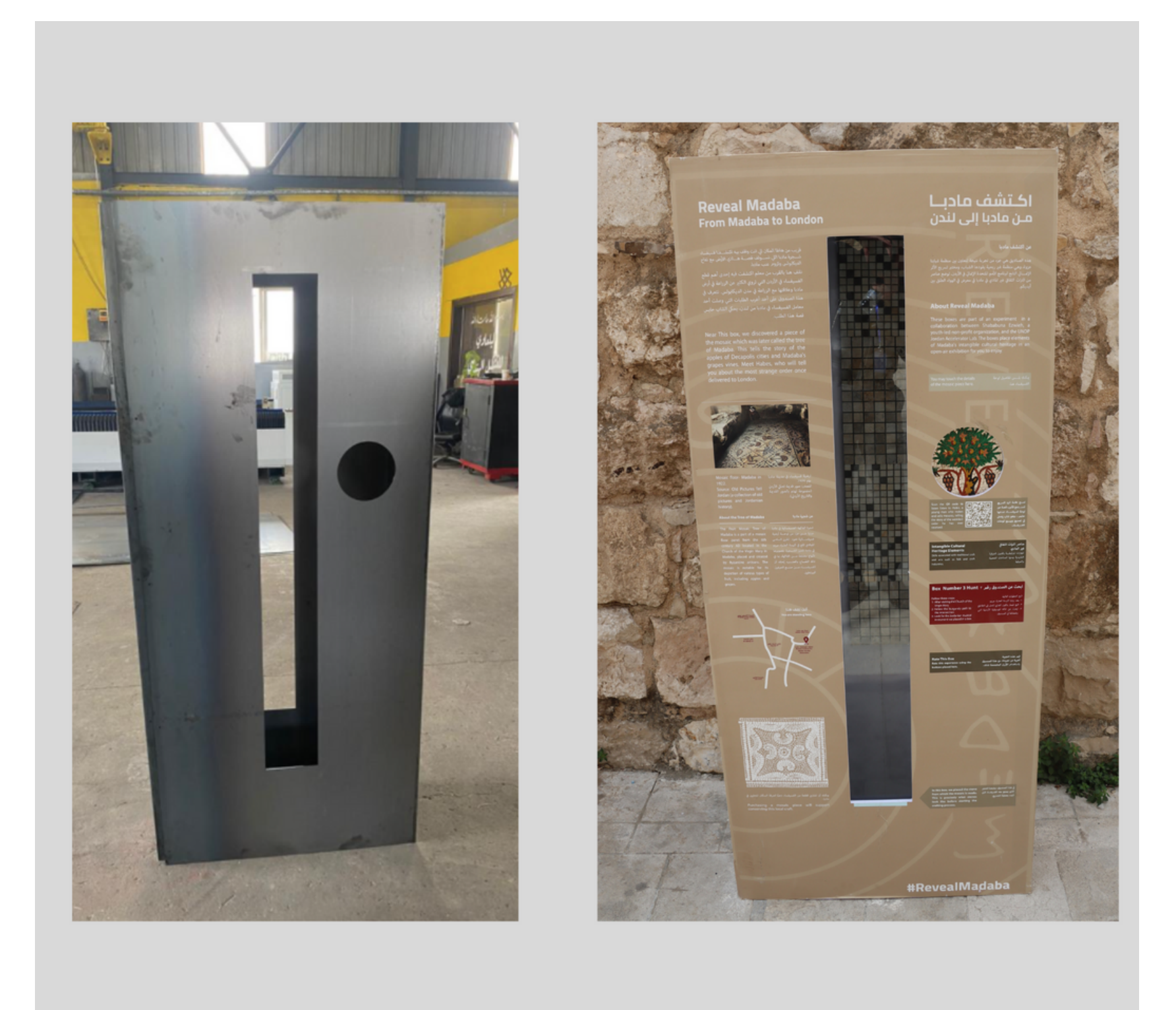
### Fashion & embroidery experience or products

Fashion and embroidery experience or products: several people with fashion and embroidery experience were interviewed, some in rural areas. There could be a **fashion and embroidery experience, or support could be provided to the artists to design, brand, market, package, and sell their pieces.**



### An enhanced Madaba open-air exhibition

Previously, the Accelerator Lab collaborated with a local youth organization in Madaba called [Shababuna Ezwieh](#) to test an open-air exhibition, which proved to be successful ([read about it here](#)). This open air exhibition could be further developed. The mapping showed that several people know various foreign languages, including English, French, Spanish, and Italian. These people could lend their **language skills to translating written and spoken content** so that the walk along the open air exhibition is accessible to more tourists. There are also several interviewees (including elderly folk who may be retired) who have lots of stories to share or have a strong knowledge of history, culture, and traditional remedies. Their **stories and knowledge could be used to create more exhibition boards.** Furthermore, a **custom sticker could be designed to be placed on shop fronts, indicating that there is an interesting person to be met, a story to be heard, something to try, or food to be tasted along the path.** We also have a list of people who were not interviewed about their stories but said they or someone they know has an interesting story to share. This list could be provided to Shababuna Ezwieh or others interested in collecting more stories about Madaba.



## FOOD EXPERIENCES

### Rebranded healthy bakery

One of the shop owners interviewed in Madaba shared that he runs a **bakery that makes sugar-free and dairy-free baked goods**, which could be a tourist attraction for those with special dietary needs or preferences. The proposed experiment is **rebranding the shop front and interior to see if it would attract more visitors**, as the current branding could be more attractive. A potential partner for this experiment could be [Wajha](#), a Jordanian social initiative that offers free design and branding services to redesign the shopfronts of local businesses.



### Bread experience

Through the mapping, we met several bakers. It sparked the idea of a **bread experience that showcases the many different types of bread in Jordanian culture**. This idea could entail working with bakeries to market a specific kind of bread they are specialized in and crafting a tasting and storytelling experience, which could be an attraction to also market and sell their products. **This idea could be integrated into designing a custom sticker as part of the open-air exhibition that can be placed on shop fronts** to indicate that this is a stop to experience something special.



### Traditional food supply chain experience

We met a man who runs a productive kitchen in a rural part of Madaba. The kitchen makes **traditional Jordanian dishes rarely found in restaurants around Jordan**. It also creates all its food with local ingredients and local men and women, in addition to **running or closely outsourcing all steps of the cooking process**. This could become an immersive food supply chain and traditional meal experience. Similar experiences exist around Jordan, such as [Beit Khairat Souf](#) in Jerash.



### Dairy agritourism experience

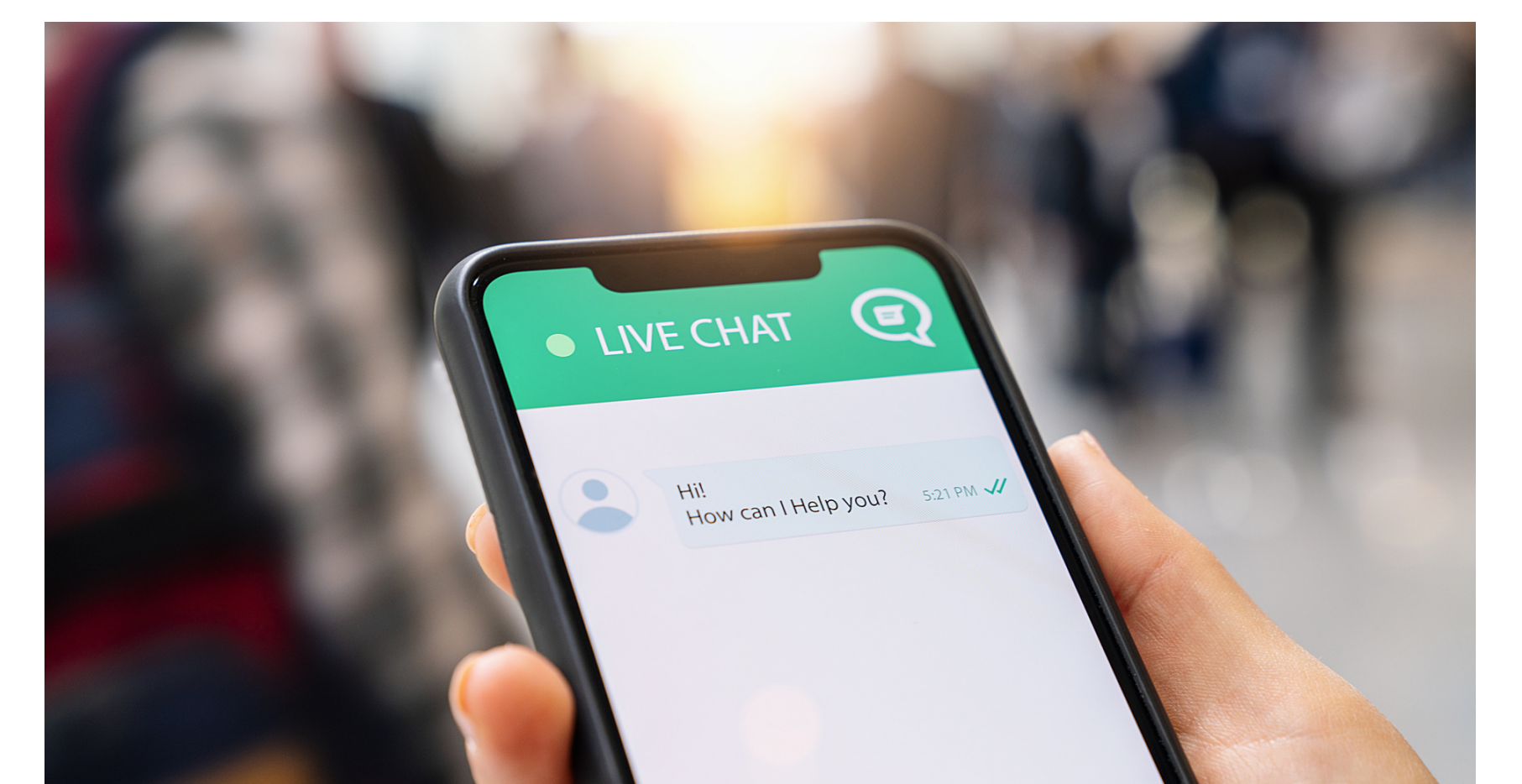
One of the places we found in a rural part of Madaba was a dairy shop with various traditional dairy products. **Support could be provided to the women running this shop to design, brand, market, package, and sell the products or an experience.**



## TECH IDEAS

### Tourism chatbot

Creating a **WhatsApp chatbot which tourists can use to ask about attractions, information, experiences, restaurants, and more in Jordan**. For example, a tourist arriving in Madaba could send the chatbot, "Where can I find the best food in Madaba?". The chatbot would send a list of restaurants and cafes with their websites or social media pages. It could also include people from Madaba talking about important destinations. The chatbot could be scaled to include several services, and there are available service providers to test and build such tech solutions.



### Database platform for creative industries

**Creating an Arabic and English language platform that allows creatives to upload their information to market their services and allows anyone searching for creatives to find people to work with**. Like digital yellow pages, this would target artists, designers, DJs, illustrators, singers, dancers, actors, product designers, photographers, videographers, filmmakers and other practitioners in the creative industries. Such a platform would be helpful for sectors beyond the tourism sector.



# EXPERIMENTAL IDEAS

## STORIES

### Gallery or exhibition

A gallery or exhibition of photos, videos, and voice recordings telling the story of Madaba, which could use the content produced by the students of GJU, such as the stories of the Head of Municipality, owner of a famous restaurant, productive kitchen, dairy shop, and mosaic craftspeople. This exhibition could be a new daytime and nighttime experience telling the story of Madaba's people.



### Radio or podcast episode

An audio episode including stories of Madaba's best places through the voices of its people. This episode could be part of a popular podcast or radio program focused on travel or tourism, such as [Amateur Traveler](#).



### Storytelling night

A storytelling night by a traditional *hakawati* or *hakawatieh* (storyteller) based on the stories of Madaba collected by the GJU students.



### Escape the Room

An Escape the Room experience based on the stories of *jinn* (spirits) and haunted places in Madaba governorate.



### Bazaars

Encouraging organizations running bazaars to contact the people interviewed with services or products and ask them to participate.



## PACKAGES OF PLACE-BASED EXPERIENCES

While each of the experiments mentioned above could be tested separately and each of the tourism sites could be visited individually, we also propose that they could be packaged into place-based experiences, summarized below:

### Libb and Mleih: FOOD IMMERSION

traditional food supply chain experience  
(with a productive kitchen)

dairy agritourism experience

bread experience

### Dhiban: CULTURE, HISTORY, and NATURE

wood carving experience or products

fashion and embroidery experience or products

history: Mukawir Castle and Ataruz

nature: Wadi Barta and Al-Wala Dam

### Madaba: THE URBAN EXPERIENCE

mosaic-making

calligraphy experience

bread experience

rebranded healthy bakery

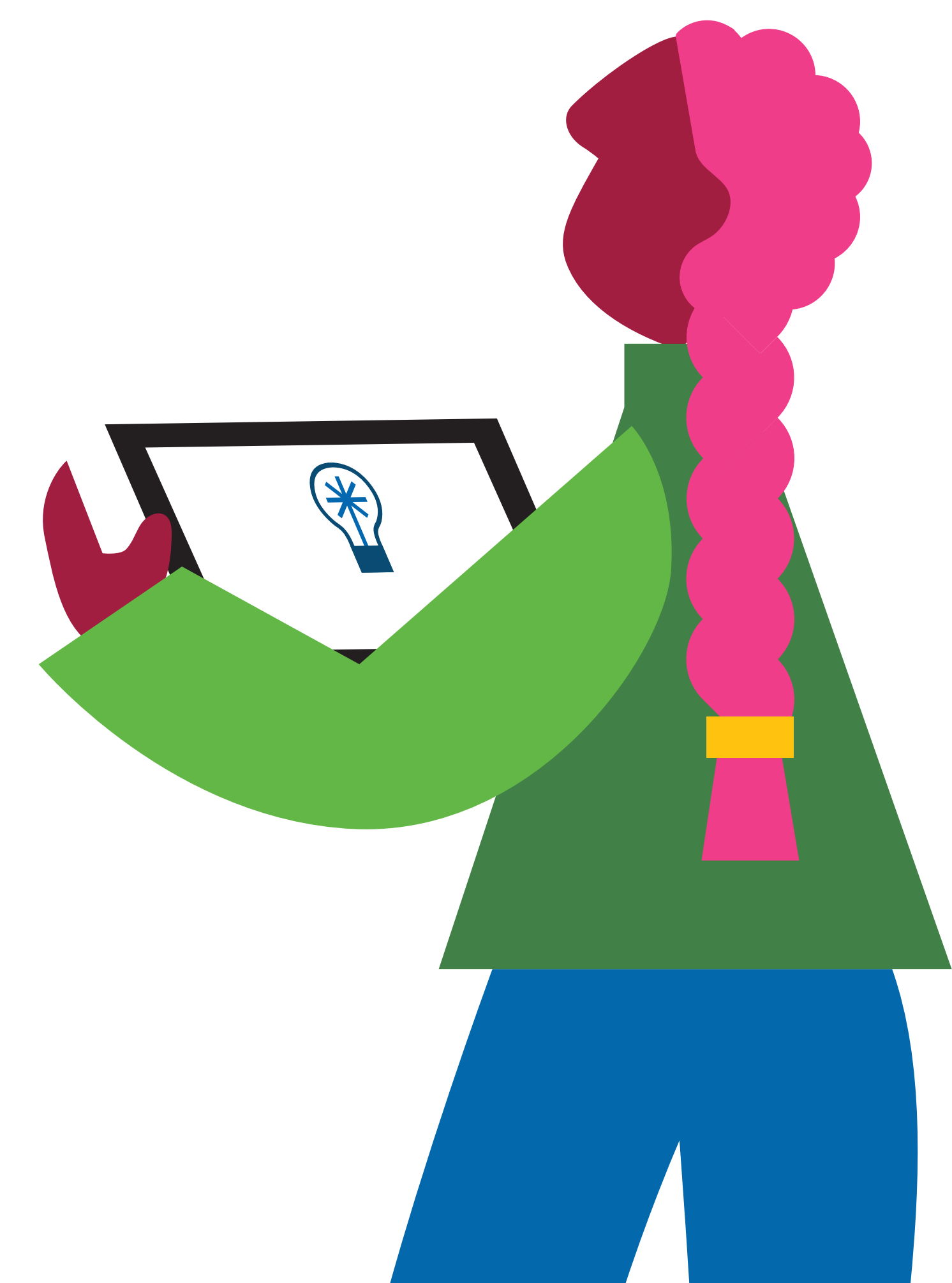
gallery or exhibition of photos, videos, and voice recordings telling the story of Madaba

an enhanced Madaba open-air exhibition

Escape the Room

# REFLECTIONS ON WORKING WITH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ON COLLECTIVE RESEARCH

- **Take advantage of an opportunity and act on it immediately!** The idea started when we saw an article on GJU's LinkedIn page about a class doing field visits and interviews in Madaba as part of their coursework. We immediately contacted the professor and pitched our idea. **Within three months, we pitched the idea to GJU, conducted a training session for students, interviewed 96 people, and completed the data analysis.**
- **Conducting work within an existing university course is a win-win opportunity for students and the organization or research team.** The organization or research teams gain the support of creative and skilled students to carry out the work, and the students gain practical experience, which could contribute to their learning and professional journeys. Students expressed that it was a great learning experience, as shared in this [video](#).
- **Working with students means you can quickly launch a team of researchers to achieve faster results and more content (written and visual).** Students took great photos, which provided content for the Lab to use in future material. Working with students also means that the organization or research team needs to do some work to clean up the data, as students are beginners and, therefore, will produce results of a different standard than a consultant, company, or organization.
- **Collaboration with universities can open up other opportunities.** The collaboration was well received by GJU, and we met professors and departments interested in partnering with UNDP and the Accelerator Lab on various topics. Such interest could lead to further discussions and, potentially, strategic partnerships.



## CONCLUSION

In addition to getting a closer look at Madaba's tourism potential, developing ideas for tourism experiments inspired by the data, and running an exercise that proved valuable and enjoyable for both the Accelerator Lab and the GJU, **we hope that this mapping can serve as a reference for anyone looking to contribute to the development of the tourism sector and industry in Madaba and Jordan.**



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

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Thank you to the German Jordanian University for their collaboration in this effort.

A special thanks to Raghad Alhadidi, Dean's Assistant for Industrial Links and lecturer at the School of Applied Humanities and Languages (SAHL), and students of the Contrastive Cultural Studies Course. The data analysis and results shared in this knowledge product would not have been possible without the students' fieldwork and the support of Raghad Alhadidi.

Furthermore, most of the photos in this publication were taken by the students.

**If you are intrigued to dig deeper into the data, learn more, and discuss ideas, don't hesitate to contact the UNDP Jordan Accelerator Lab at [ayah.younis@undp.org](mailto:ayah.younis@undp.org) and [mohammad.abumughli@undp.org](mailto:mohammad.abumughli@undp.org).**

