

Local



KUWAIT: The first Hearth Summit in the Middle East kicked off on Thursday at the American University of Kuwait (AUK), bringing together participants for a three-day event focused on connection, community, and the exploration of place and memory. The summit, organized by Kuwait-based social development organization en.v in collaboration with the global Wellbeing Project, aims to promote individual, collective and ecological well-being.
— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait hosts first Hearth Summit in the Middle East

Summit aims to broaden public understanding of well-being beyond individual wellness

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Hearth Summit, first of its kind in the region, kicked off on Thursday at AUK, bringing participants together for a three-day event centered on connection, community, and a shared exploration of place and memory. The summit was organized by en.v in collaboration with the Wellbeing Project, a global network dedicated to advancing individual, collective and ecological wellbeing. Speaking to Kuwait Times, Elisa Franceschinis, Managing Director of en.v, announced that the organization is partnering with the international Wellbeing Project to host the first Heart Summit in the Middle East.

The global network focuses on advancing awareness around personal, collective and environmental well-being. She explained that en.v, a Kuwait-based social development organization active since 2008, identified a need for initiatives that cultivate a more united, compassionate and resilient society. This alignment led to their collaboration with the Wellbeing Project, whose Hearth Summit has previously taken place across Latin America, Europe, Africa and Asia. Youth were chosen as a primary audience due to their openness to change, optimism and eagerness to engage.

Franceschinis noted that many young people who joined en.v's programs over the past 15 years have since become collabo-



somatic practices such as yoga, breathwork, and meditation.

Organizers aim to offer participants opportunities to reflect, process emotions, and reconnect with themselves during a period marked by regional grief and collective trauma. For her part, Raquel Vicedo, Regional Summits Director at 'The Wellbeing Project', highlighted the rapid global expansion of the Hearth Summit Movement, a concept that supports local and regional teams in creating transformative well-being-focused events. The movement gained momentum after the first global summit held

speakers, artists, and experiences that cater to varied learning styles. Vicedo said she expects the summit's influence to ripple through the region, as has been the case elsewhere, noting that the organizer of an upcoming summit in Rabat, Morocco attended the Kuwait event for inspiration after being moved by a previous summit in Senegal.

Regarding outcomes, Vicedo emphasized that the summit aims not for fixed or measurable objectives but for personal transformation. She hopes each attendee leaves with at least one insight or practice



also acknowledging cultural differences in how these issues are approached around the world.

As one of the speakers, the professor will present on intercultural communication, describing culture as an invisible architecture that shapes how people think, perceive and interact. His talk will focus on how cultural norms such as personal space, nonverbal cues, values, and worldviews can lead to misunderstandings when people from different backgrounds interact. He explained "If we don't take the time to look inward at our own cultural values and perceptions,

development, offering viewers a reflective journey across different eras. To produce the film, Dashti used her iPhone, skillfully blending a variety of documentary footage and audio elements to support and enrich the narrative. On Thursday evening, attendees gathered in their designated Family Circles small, intimate groups created to anchor participants throughout the summit. These circles offered a welcoming space for introductions, early conversations, and the trust-building essential for deeper reflection in the days ahead.

The first plenary session blended film, storytelling, music, and spoken reflection, beginning with Kuwait Through Time, a short film by Zainab Dashti, followed by opening remarks from Zouh Al Mahdi. In addition, Dr. Maha Bali spoke about cultivating safe and inclusive communal spaces, and Mishari Al Najjar shared a touching narrative on intergenerational healing through embroidery. The evening closed with a musical performance by Yousif Yaseen with Ahmed Alshnanawani, creating a reflective atmosphere that set the tone for the summit.

The following day, themed "Remembering," opened with simultaneous sessions inviting attendees to move, create and reflect. Participants chose between a grounding movement practice with Zeena Ismail, a poetry gathering on the terrace hosted by ARTSCENE, or a clay workshop led by Nudge Club focused on crafting worry stones. A collective Qi-Gong session with H Khalaf. The second session featured a musical performance by Kadisa, a reflection on the healing resonance of Maqam by Professor Nidaa Abou Mrad, and a panel on collective wounds and intergenerational healing.

Poet Areej Saleh shared spoken word pieces, while writer Mai Al-Nakib discussed the ties between memory, storytelling and connection. The plenary session concluded with an interdisciplinary conversation on Kuwait's maritime heritage and its layers of cultural memory. As workshops allowed participants to follow their own creative paths, ranging from drawing and poetry to drama, music, journaling and environmental storytelling, the day eased into another Family Circle gathering and a curated short-film screening with AFAC.



rators, speakers, and facilitators, forming a growing community committed to social development. She emphasized that the summit aims to broaden public understanding of well-being beyond individual wellness. The initiative encourages participants to consider care at three levels — self, community, and environment — highlighting how these levels are interconnected and essential for sustainable development.

Franceschinis added that the concept aligns naturally with Kuwaiti culture, which has historically been rooted in mutual support and community bonds. She said the summit seeks to revive these traditions by creating spaces that rebuild connections across Kuwait's increasingly diverse population. The three-day event blends lectures with artistic and interactive elements, including poetry, comedy, clay workshops, art therapy, mapping exercises, as well as

in June 2022 in Bilbao, Spain, which brought together nearly 1,000 participants from different countries.

Vicedo stated that the success of the Bilbao summit inspired attendees to replicate the experience in their own countries and languages, explaining "What began organically has grown into a widespread international initiative. Nearly three years later, 24 summits have taken place across the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Europe, with at least 25 more planned for the next 18 months." She noted that Kuwait is hosting the first summit of its kind in the Middle East, expressing satisfaction with the strong local response.

Vicedo said "More than 200 people registered despite the season's crowded event calendar," praising the Kuwaiti team for its year-and-a-half of preparation and for designing a diverse program featuring



— whether adopting healthier habits, taking moments of daily reflection, or simply integrating small, meaningful actions into their lives. Fahad Al-Sumait, Associate Professor of Communication and Media at AUK, said that the university was excited to host an event focused on bringing people together, noting that the summit aligns closely with AUK's ethos of embracing wellness, diversity and the value of community.

He noted that AUK has previously hosted wellness-related events, but this is the first summit of its kind at the university, bringing together representatives from various global institutions as well as other academic and cultural organizations. Compared to previous AUK wellness events, Al-Sumait added "They wanted a blend of the international with the local," explaining that the summit addresses universal concerns while

then we won't easily work with people from different backgrounds".

In her turn, Jana Alnaqeeb, Public Relations and CSR Manager for Kuwait Times, the event's media sponsor, said "We take pride in being an active part of the community. Our mission is to highlight the key issues that impact people's lives in Kuwait and to help bridge the gap between Kuwaitis and expatriates." She explained that their coverage aims to highlight both environmental and emotional challenges while fostering deeper understanding and connection among everyone who calls Kuwait home.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Times Content Creator Zainab Dashti took part in the Heart Summit with her short film "Kuwait Through Time," a creative project that explores the country's history through the perspective of a time-traveling narrator. The film highlights key moments in Kuwait's cultural and social

