From the Arab Revolutions to Covid 19
A Chronology of the Arab Independent Art Scene

Fatin Farhat and Marwa Helmy

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Introduction

The past ten years that elapsed from the rise of the Arab revolution until the Covid 19 crisis have presented many challenges to the Arab region, ranging from political to health, economic, and social challenges, and have given rise to new cultural and artistic practices, the migration and immigration of artists from the region, the emergence of new funding trends, and formation of associations, the growing influence of social media and digital platforms, rethinking the relationship between the cultural sector and the new political regimes, as well as the rise of new cultural hegemonies in some regions of the Arab region.

This paper investigates practices that emerged during and after the rise of the Arab revolutions and the Covid 19 pandemic (2011- present) while highlighting aspects of the cultural sector's status in the Arab region before the uprisings. The paper focuses on what is commonly known as the levant and North Africa Arab states (MENA region). It will not directly address the status of the independent Arab art sector in the Gulf states.

Considering the vastness of the Arab region, its subregional characteristics, and country-based differences, the paper will consider the common denominators and synergies between the different countries' cultural sector(s). It will map out the complexities of referring to the "cultural sector" in the Arab region as one homogeneous entity. More specifically, the paper will offer an overview of the status of freedom of expression in the region and address art for social change, including the empowerment of communities, youth, women, and other marginalized groups through the arts. At the institutional level, the paper will look at the governance of the independent cultural sector, artist rights, and fair payments, showcasing funding mechanisms and the economic impact of the sector. The paper will demonstrate regional collaborations and dialogue models and look into the future role of digitization and hybrid creations in the region. Finally, the report will conclude with a future outlook on the independent art scene in the Arab region.

Context

Post the 2011 wave of Arab revolutions, the Arab region underwent significant economic, social, and political transformations. On the one hand, the Arab revolutions carried the hope that it would be possible to create pluralistic and inclusive political and cultural systems in the region. They thus motivated society(s) to reorganize within classical civil society and beyond. Optimism and hope prevailed among Arab artists and organizations as well as their communities, resulting in a flourishing of creative initiatives, particularly among youth, and resulted in initiatives that reclaimed public spaces and the emergence of a new dynamic in drafting participatory and more dynamic cultural policies and several legislative reforms. In the period following the Arab spring, a broad segment of artistic and cultural activities in the Arab region focused on producing tangible social change. There are abundant indicators that these interventions rose and contributed to developing citizenship and communities while raising awareness and debate about critical societal issues, albeit in limited circles. The most significant changes are witnessed at the levels of creative places and public spaces, new governance modalities, advocacy, alternative learning discourse, community development, and outreach and social engagement. These changes seem to have grown during the first wave and not necessarily the second wave of the Arab revolutions.

The turn of events and the disappointment that prevailed in the few years post the Arab revolutions have impacted the dynamic of the independent art scene, particularly in the subsequent acute deterioration of personal liberties and access to public spaces. The optimism halted as new Islamist extremist movements, and authoritarian powers started forming in the region. The material cultural heritage of the region become under threat as a result of the armed conflicts of the last recent years. The cultural infrastructure (human and material) was negatively affected, as many cultural spaces were destroyed in many Arab countries, and hundreds of artists and cultural operators, as well as several cultural organizations and platforms, have been dispersed outside the Arab region (Syria, Yemen, and Libya). As sectarianism and fundamentalism have emerged as powerful forces within the conflict, the well-being and safety of different minority groups and independent artists in the region were jeopardized.

The Arab revolutions led to political, economic, and legislative changes toward a positive direction that seeks pluralism and the fight against corruption in Jordan, and Morocco, to name a few. It is important to note that several countries in the region remained distant from the political change but were indirectly affected. Lebanon continues to suffer from internal political problems and a deteriorating economic situation that led to a popular movement at the end of 2019. The status of Lebanon became more complicated after Beirut port's explosion in August 2020. Palestine continues to suffer from Israeli occupation and internal division, while the plurality and democracy of the political system in Tunisia is now challenged since Qais Bis Saed took office. The Arab Gulf states witnessed a significant cultural boom due to direct state support and intervention. On a larger scale, the whole region continues to suffer from rigid governmental policies, increased surveillance and censorship, and complex governmental laws that complicate work processes and often disregard art and culture's role in sustainable development. Such policies translate to threats to freedom of expression within rigid state structures and minimized access to mobility between countries in the region.

The outburst of the Covid 19 crisis has deeply affected all areas of life, including the arts and culture sector, thus exposing its fragility. As a result of closures and shutdowns in the region and funders' new focus on Covid 19, many cultural organizations have suffered in terms of the ability to serve their communities, maintain sustainability, and adjust to new modes of functioning (virtual convening and lack of mobility). Most cultural managers and practitioners were forced to work from home, creating a new challenge to connectivity and internet access. The pandemic resulted in many psychological and financial consequences for artists, managers, and practitioners in the sector that rely on unstable sources of income or employment opportunities; consequently, many workers in the field have experienced exhaustion and burnout.

The arts and culture sector has suffered further from limited and diminishing funding resources necessary for independent organizations to maintain sustainability and development. On the institutional level, cultural organizations are not only struggling to extend their regional networks but also to survive, as existing local institutional frameworks and capacities and resources are still insufficient to support the cultural sector, and public support for culture remains minimal. International funding for the arts and culture sector is constantly shrinking, and most of the financing that serves the sector is now geared towards using art as an empowerment tool for refugees, women, youth, and other under-represented groups on a short-term project basis.

The role of local governments in cultural development is underdeveloped and needs more exploration, although there are some positive examples in Jordan, Palestine, and Tunisia. Meanwhile, public national and regional cultural policies – critical for strengthening the cultural sector and building its links with development – remain either incomplete, absent, or irrelevant. There is a lack of public support on the levels of policy, implementation, infrastructure, artists' social protection and funding for the development of art education in most of the targeted countries, increased by social perceptions that do not value art education. Not enough literature and research exist in all cultural sectors. In higher education, the overall approach to art education is frequently disparity with contemporary practices and remains traditional, with lines drawn between different artistic disciplines.

Most funding for the region's arts and culture comes from foreign foundations and governments with developmental and social justice mandates. Although local support for arts and culture is increasing in the Arab region, foreign foundations and organizations still provide the most financial support for arts and culture organizations and initiatives. Government funding is negligible or highly politicized, individual support and private philanthropy are still not mature and significant (with a few exceptions, as in Palestine), and corporate social responsibility funding tends to gear towards entertainment and festivals often respond to the public priorities. The lack of a well-developed and diverse funding ecology in the Arab region dramatically limits the diversity of practices, independence, and sustainability of cultural work. [1]

On a more general note, there is no doubt that the **social** conditions have been greatly affected in light of the political, security, and economic conditions: a decrease in employment and education opportunities, an increase in the percentage of poverty, and the numbers of refugees, especially in countries still suffering from conflict. The region also suffers from acute environmental challenges caused by the destruction of natural resources such as oil wells, dams, and forests and the shortage of drinking water. Yemen is an example of disease outbreaks caused by pollution and military conflict. In general, there is a significant lack of awareness of environmental issues in the region.

An independent Art Sector(s)?

"In the history of art and culture in Yemen, many changes and interruptions have occurred due to multiple conflicts and wars. As for the latest statistics on cultural work, in Yemen, before 2014, about 102 civil institutions and associations received funding from the Heritage Support Fund. After 2015, this support was cut off, and the associations closed, leaving about 15 institutions in Aden, and there are no accurate numbers for cultural organizations in Sanaa to date."
Rafiq Al-Akouri - Yemen[2]

The term independent art sector is probably the most used and recently debated among artists, practitioners, and professionals in the Arab region. To define the 'independent' field of art, it is essential to recognize that there is no **one art world** on the one hand and, on the other, to contest

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[1] Kokache, Moukhtar, CKU report
[2] "Action for Hope العمل للأمل." *Action for Hope العمل للأمل*, www.facebook.com/act4hope.

the possibility of art and artists being independent. That is, of course, true in infinite forms at the micro level, but one can also see this in a more general way at the macro level.[3] In the region, independent art is generally used to describe art produced by independent artists from mainstream commercial markets and by independent art organizations not affiliated with state institutions.

Despite governmental control, hegemony, and the centralization of Arab cultural policy (s), in the Arab region, it seems that independent art has existed for decades before the use of the label of "independence ."Interviews conducted in the context of this paper show that the terminology was slowly introduced in the first decade of this century, mainly by independent theater groups in Egypt such as Al Warsha, several music bands, and by foreign cultural centers (i.e., The British Council, Institut Français, and Goethe Institute).[4] The terminology was further enforced with the establishment of regional cultural organizations such as Cultural Resource[5] (Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafy) in 2003 as a regional, non-profit organization that sought to support artistic creativity in the Arab region and encourage cultural exchange within the region and beyond. In doing so, Al Mawred acted as an interlocutor between artists and foreign funding, allowing artists to produce and showcase their work independently from state-supported institutions in their countries and without the pressure of foreign funders. The term was further reinforced by the establishment of the Arab Fund for Art and Culture (AFAC)[6], which was established in 2007 to support individual artists, writers, researchers, intellectuals, and organizations from the Arab region working in the arts and culture. Whereas Al Mawred, from its inception, depended financially on the support of international funding agencies, AFAC was conceived to propose a different modality of funding: the reliance on Arab philanthropy to offer new modalities of local financial sustainability and independence. However, this proved unsuccessful, and soon, AFAC also diversified its funding from international donors.

In the past few years, a new debate emerged in the Arab region between civil society organizations on funding in relation to neoliberalism and political independence. Being on the frontline of the discussion of issues such as liberty, colonialism, etc., the cultural sector was soon invited into the debate; the definition of independence was contested. Can Arab artists and organizations be truly independent if the funding that supports their work comes from outside the region? Can interlocutors such as Al Mawred and AFAC plan and strategize independently? How does foreign funding affect the priorities of the cultural sector as a whole? These are a few of the questions that are presently under debate. Until now, the discussion is very much limited to the direct recipients of funds (the organizations that act as interlocutors between funders and communities).

The non-governmental cultural sector plays an essential and active role in the cultural scene in the region despite the many challenges it faces. The non-governmental creation creates a balance in the form of the artistic product away from the formal production models. It also allows a margin of freedom of expression and deals more with society and its currents. Civil society organizations

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[3] Independents. (n.d.). Retrieved October 16, 2022, from The Independent Project website: http://www.theindependentproject.it/independents-map/

[4] Interview with Marina Barham, Al Hara Theatre Palestine

[5] www.mawred.org

[6] "AFAC." *Www.arabculturefund.org*, www.arabculturefund.org

are suffering from many legal and administrative restrictions in many Arab countries, where the state imposes control over these institutions to varying degrees. On the other hand, this sector is considered the leading cultural actor in countries such as Lebanon and Palestine. This is largely attributed to a strong tradition of the strength of the civil society and the relative weakness of governmental performance.

Some independent organizations played an important role, after the Arab revolutions, in countries suffering from strenuous political conditions and the weakness of cultural life, such as "Ariete" in Libya, Sudan Film Factory in Sudan, "La Maison des Cinéastes" in Mauritania, as well as the "Ettijahat for Independent Culture," in Syria.

Between 2011 to 2014, this sector played an important role in changing the cultural and artistic scene and influencing countries' cultural policies and practices. This role began to diminish due to the growing restrictions on foreign funding and freedom of expression. Between 2014 to 2017, many medium and small non-governmental cultural institutions closed their doors. This closure has affected the cultural scene greatly, as many festivals, cultural events stopped, and consequently, the audience for culture and arts diminished, as the context post-revolutionary totally changed.

Freedom of Expression: Governmental, Society and Self-censorship

"The lack of political and security stability in northern Syria leaves cultural actors exposed to risks beyond their ability to deal with."[7]
Randa Hammou - Syria

"Artists and those working in the cultural field in Yemen face many challenges, including persecution and difficulty obtaining work permits and licenses, religious extremism, neglect of the state, lack of freedom of expression, lack of support, the requirement to submit works that comply with the agendas and visions of political parties and others."[8]
Firyal Majdi- Yemen

"Sometimes governments do not suppress us with direct measures, but rather use the mobilization of public opinion against us, through religious extremism and socially employing it to become the moral ruler."
Noun Kashkoush - Sudan[9]

In recent years, Arab artists, collectives, and organizations have faced a threefold obstacle that has hindered their free expression and creation: governmental structured actions and measures, social norms and traditions, and inflicted self-censorship.

Over the last ten years, the status of freedom of expression changed significantly in the Arab region. In the years that followed the Arab revolutions and the limited reclaim of public spaces

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[7] "Action for Hope العمل للأمل." *Action for Hope العمل للأمل*, www.facebook.com/act4hope.
[8] "Action for Hope العمل للأمل." *Action for Hope العمل للأمل*, www.facebook.com/act4hope.
[9] "Action for Hope العمل للأمل." *Action for Hope العمل للأمل*, www.facebook.com/act4hope.

and the hope for change, artists, organizations, and communities felt empowered to speak up. This status has changed recently to diminished access to public spaces, freedom of expression, and creation.

Post the Arab revolutions, there have been positive developments in the Arab constitutions and laws since 2014 in favor of freedom of expression and artistic creativity. In Tunisia, Article 42 of the Tunisian constitution, approved in 2014, states that "the right to culture is guaranteed, freedom of creativity is guaranteed, and the state encourages cultural creativity." Likewise, the state abolished censorship of theatrical works, which was previously imposed. In Egypt, the current constitution adopted in 2014 has included, for the first time, Article 67 on freedom of creativity.[10] It forbids the imprisonment of creators for publishing their works. Consequently, the article annulled all contradictory articles and legislations previously issued.

Freedom of expression remains strictly controlled as governments introduced other legislations criminalizing free speech, including internet and digital surveillance equipment. Human rights defenders faced criminal prosecutions, imprisonment, administrative restrictions, threats, and intimidation. Civil society organizations saw their activity criminalized, and measures that hindered their daily work, including registration, permits, and money transfer, only escalated. Security forces across the region used unlawful force to crush peaceful protests. Authorities across the region continued to arrest, detain and prosecute individuals solely for their peaceful expression of their criticism of the authorities, including their response to the pandemic. This sadly can be seen across all Arab countries under study.[11]

The diminishing space of freedom of expression has impacted artists, cultural practitioners, and cultural organizations. In recent years, governments have threatened and detained artists in many Arab countries including Palestine, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Yemen. On the 22nd of August 2022, Palestinian poet Ashraf Faddyad was finally released after spending nine years in Saudi prisons (800 lashes) under the accusation of immoral speech. LGBTQ artists' communities have also been exposed by governments in Egypt, Lebanon, and Palestine (Mashrou Laila). Security forces in several Arab countries have also been imposing burdensome restrictions on what kind of art is appropriate to local communities. In addition, artists and art organizations were targeted by their communities for the same reasons. A parade that celebrates theatre was raided by unknown youth in Ramallah on the 8th of July, 2022, with the claim that the puppets represent the homosexuality flags, many cases of artists' precautions were reported in Egypt as well. During the last decade, Egypt witnessed several rulings against artists and researchers. In 2013, the writer "Karam Saber" was sentenced to five years for allegations of contempt of religion in his collection of stories entitled "Where is God?" A two-year prison sentence was issued against the writer Ahmed Naji for violating public morals in his novel "The Use of Life." In 2016, a ruling was issued to imprison the Egyptian journalist Islam Beheiry for five years, later reduced to a year, on charges of contempt of religion, in his program "With Islam," in which he attacked Islamic heritage. In Egypt, the Authority for the Censorship of Works of Art is a censorship body affiliated with the ministry of culture and established under law No. 430 of 1955. As such, artists practice self-censorship in fear for their lives and the safety of their families and close circles.

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10 مؤسسة حرية الفكر والتعبير. "تجريم الخيال..كيف ينظر البرلمان إلى حرية الإبداع؟" 5 أبريل 2020.
afteegypt.org/freedom_creativity/2020/04/05/18568-afteegypt.html
[11] Amnesty International report, 2021

Stand by the Arts is a project that Al Mawred Al Thaqafi conceived in the year 2016 after conducting a study of the risks facing artists and cultural actors in this region and the types of support available to them locally and internationally. *Stand for Art* supports artists and cultural actors in the Arab region who are at risk. At risk means that they are threatened and in physical danger because of their artistic output or cultural activities or that they are in grave peril due to conditions in their environment (such as war or civil strife). In response, action by local, regional, and international cultural organizations was placed to create protection programs for artists under threat.[12] Additionally, the program targets artists or cultural actors who cannot sustain their artistic and cultural activities due to precarious economic circumstances, psychological, legal, or health conditions, or an environmental disaster, by granting them exceptional, nonrecurrent support specially designed in response to such cases or changes. Up until now, the program has supported tens of artists across the Arab region.

Art for Social Change

"Art is simply for people. At the beginning of my work, a taxi driver asked me about my work. He mistook the word theatre for a slaughterhouse (مسلخ،مسرح)! Like any student who graduated from the Institute of Arts, I had the passion and drove to work in theater, and I came out and was shocked by the reality."[13]
Qassem Istanbouli – Lebanon

"Through my work with marginalized groups in villages and suburbs of cities, the biggest challenge was the people's impression and interaction with us. But during the work, we felt the people's need, as the audience was thirsty and a future for shows, so that in some villages they would give us feasts when we came."[14]
Mukhles Bouchard - Morocco

"Our question and work centers around making art a tool in confronting the tool of war, and how we turn it into a building and aid tool for man in return for the war that drains him."[15]
Reem Al-Khatib - Syria

Over the past twenty-five years, in line with global movements, the Arab region has seen the emergence of cultural initiatives and artistic productions aimed at altering social realities.

Building on the early experiments and infrastructure that emerged in the 1990s and as a direct impact of the Arab revolutions, the last decade has seen an upsurge of creative activity and expression in the region. "Aesthetic trends and themes have merged from the experiences and realities of different countries, cities, and communities. Whereas cultural infrastructure formerly belonged almost exclusively to the state, artists and social activists founded new independent spaces, collectives, platforms, and initiatives. Community-based spaces and interventions grew

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[12] www.mawred.org
[13] "Action for Hope العمل للأمل." *Action for Hope* العمل للأمل, www.facebook.com/act4hope.
[14] "Action for Hope العمل للأمل." *Action for Hope* العمل للأمل, www.facebook.com/act4hope.
[15] "Action for Hope العمل للأمل." *Action for Hope* العمل للأمل, www.facebook.com/act4hope.

while cultural advocacy and artistic outreach experiments began to take shape. This development is largely owed to the region's relatively new service infrastructure of organizations that provide financial, capacity, training, and circulation support, which began to democratize access to resources and create opportunities for convening and exchange provided by organizations such as the Young Arab Theatre Fund, Culture Resource/Al-Mawred Al Thaqafy and the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC)".[16]

Elsewhere in the Arab region, arts and culture production has been shaped in response to intense socio-political conditions. Visual artists, theatre directors, writers, filmmakers, musicians, choreographers, and photographers have produced compelling works dealing with war, trauma, violence, occupation, colonial heritage, poverty, sexuality and desire, women's social status, sexual minorities, marginalization, emigration, the plight of refugees, informal settlements, slums, authority, patriarchy and failed governance".[17] There are different modalities of addressing social values: direct and indirect. For example, instead of speaking about women's rights, positive and robust female models are presented in artistic works that also entertain people by sending a positive, settled message. The same applies to other targeted groups.

There has also been a lot of criticism of this approach of focusing on social agendas. Whereas some artists have chosen this path, others feel pressured and instrumentalized. These artists also voice concerns about the instrumentalization of the communities they work with and engagement on a short-term basis, often due to funding limitations. Long-term involvement with local communities, building trust, and creating partnerships are tools for making an impact, and such conditions are rarely available. Some projects are designed without proper consultations with local communities to test their actual needs.

Despite the incredible artistic production (most of which was nurtured by local and regional NGOs) and their creation of extermination spaces, these projects did not significantly contribute to popular public dialogue as they remain contained in specific sectors of society and main dwellings. In Tunisia, for example, up until 2011, artists working in the cultural sector had little access to their local communities. In this context, La Rue stands out as an excellent example: artists working with local communities in Madina. These interventions give voice to the community. The scale of this work might be small, but it's nonetheless significant as a way to raise the community's voice.

Internal and external evaluation processes indicate that the projects have generally impacted their direct beneficiaries but rarely have contributed to changing or shaping public opinion or led to substantial policy change. This is partly due to the limited resources and the fact that only when experienced by many people can socially-engaged art activate the discourse that helps shape values and inspires action. Funders also impose a challenge as they tend to support local large-scale projects that allow for visibility in the short term. Funders are not necessarily very patient with seeing an impact, and quality and aesthetics are often overlooked in such projects. In recent years,

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[16] Kocache, Moukhtar. "Creation Out of Crisis (English Version)." *Creation Out of Crisis (English Version) by Centre for Culture and Development (CKU) - Issuu*, issuu.com/cku-centerforkulturogudvikling/docs/creation_out_of_crisis_by_moukhtar_.

[17] Husseiney, Bassma. "حال الفنون." *Jadaliyya - جدلية*, www.jadaliyya.com/Details/35206.

most cultural NGOs have established outreach departments that plan community participation projects in different rural settings.

Other examples of art social intervention projects are the South Med CV (regional), CASE (Palestine), and the Temporary Art Platform (Lebanon). SouthMed CV is a project that was initiated by Interarts Foundation for International Cultural Cooperation (Spain) and implemented by a consortium of European and South Med-based cultural organizations, namely: BAC Art Center, Tunisia; Gudrun for Art and Development, Egypt; Khayal Arts & Education, Lebanon; the National Center for Culture and the Arts/King Hussein Foundation, Jordan; and the German Commission for UNESCO. The consortium format offered a very unique and innovative model of sub-granting that affirmed North/South cooperation within the project's scope region and beyond. At its inception, the project was to cover 36 months (the 1st of April, 2015 to the 31st of March, 2018). The project delivered 38 grants to projects in seven Southern Mediterranean countries (Algeria, Tunisia, Jordan, Morocco, Lebanon, Palestine, and Egypt) throughout its implementation through two open calls. It organized regional capacity-building and networking activities, a final publication, and two major conferences.[18]

The "Culture, Art and Social Engagement" (CASE) project was started in 2016 by the A. M. Al Qattan Foundation (Palestine) and co-funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Its goal is to highlight the role of arts and culture as an effective tool for promoting social engagement, strengthening social cohesion, and cultural identity, thus promoting freedom of expression and societal engagement. The project fosters community engagement with local concerns and enhances community conversation. Communities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are involved in the development of projects through a participatory method, which involves communities in disadvantaged regions. To raise awareness and find appropriate solutions, local community needs and priorities are identified and communicated through art projects to officials and decision-makers, including local government units. Project outputs take various art forms, including visual art exhibitions, artworks in the public space, film screenings, plays, and publications. These are an outcome of a community-based research process and workshops with students, mothers, artists, teachers, and community activists.[19]

The Temporary Art Platform (Lebanon) bridges art and possibility by stirring the potential of collaboration. This guiding method allowed TAP to undertake bold programming in the most unexpected places and sites, reaching out to marginalized communities in Lebanon and addressing pressing social issues. The places they have intervened in include, for example, a contested public shore, a sterile medical center, a young native forest, disengaged daily newspapers, a forgotten National Museum, and a secluded village, to name a few. More specifically, TAP's recent interdisciplinary program, *Art, Ecology, and the Commons*, having taken place last August 2021, emerged out of theoretical and sociological interest in community-building in times of crisis. Lebanon exists at the center of a far greater unrelenting storm of tribulations: an unresolved waste management crisis, a sharp 90% ongoing depreciation of the local currency, a complex political deadlock, and a plummeting economy exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, which was all met with the devastating Beirut Port explosion. By bringing artistic and ecological practices together to build a community on a 2,000-square-meter forest site along the Beirut River, in the suburbs of

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[18] South Med CV evaluation report

[19] http://qattanfoundation.org/en/cap/projects/culture-art-and-social-engagement-case

Beirut, the project harnessed this young forest's interdependence and resilience to foster self-organization and recovery for a local community in agony. For ten days, citizens and artists gathered for walks, talks, films, meals, planting, and care.[20]

Institutional Development: Governance, Fair Payment and Development Opportunities

"Sometimes governments do not suppress us with direct measures, but rather use the mobilization of public opinion against us, through religious extremism and socially employing it to become the moral ruler."
Noun Kashkoush - Sudan

Good governance of Arab cultural and artistic NGOs is also often challenged. Arab cultural NGOs recognize the need for internal sound governance and are expected to run the organizations with good governance also by the donor community. However, the reality is much more challenging. Most of the NGOs existing today came as initiatives of individuals who remain at the head of their institutions today (mainly due to the limited market in the field). Most of the board and general assembly members consist of friends and supporters, their membership in the institutions is often prolonged for years, so the work is hardly challenged. The administration of Arab culture and art NGOs is not fully democratized. However, in recent years, the awareness for better governance has been rising, motivated by the organizations and their constituencies' demands. Young artists and practitioners opt for down-up modalities in the form of unregistered organizations and collectives. It is important to note that many new organizations register as non-profit companies rather than NGOs. This option also comes with complications that have to do with registration and often the lack of transparency, as the governance system is based on the executive leadership only.

Interviews conducted in this paper indicate that artists' working and living conditions remain below acceptable standards, with some artists reporting incomes below the national minimum wage. Improvement of living and working conditions — and, in particular, ensuring the fair and equitable remuneration and contracting of artists —is not yet a critical strategic objective for the sector. If artists are not appropriately remunerated for their work, a career within the arts is not viable. The distinct nature of individual art forms and their associated sectoral or industry practices means significant variations in how to pay, and contractual issues manifest themselves across different art forms and arts sectors. Even the most progressive organizations such as A.M. Al Qattan Foundation and Al Mawred, still don't have basic income policies and rates for the artists and practitioners they work with. Due to limited funding, artists are often compensated below their needs and expectations. Women artists, managers, and practitioners suffer the most as they balance their roles as mothers and caretakers and their work responsibilities. Sexual harassment in the field has also been highly exposed in the last few years, motivating several cultural organizations to draft and approve new relevant policies in their bylaws.

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[20] Nomination statement by Fatin Farhat to the Vera List Center for Art and Polices Award NYC (material collected from TAP's website)

Artistic syndicates in most Arab countries are unorganized entities and do not play the required role for which they were established, protecting the artists' social and professional rights. However, these entities work to a great extent to achieve the interests of the state more than the artists. In Egypt, for example, syndicates remained part of the ministry's organogram until 2011. On the other hand, some artistic syndicates play the role of "guardian of morals and social traditions".

Independent artists are exposed to various challenges. In addition to the security and social conditions, the conflict between their roles as artists and cultural managers is also challenging. Artists are obliged to play dual roles due to the scarcity of specialization and lack of skills. However, the concept of an "agent" is slowly rising, and many Arab artists are now collaborating with agents outside the Arab region.

The past years have witnessed the forced migration of hundreds of artists and cultural and creative workers from the Arab region. These artists faced threats related to their work environments and safety. Artists, writers, cultural practitioners, and managers moving from Syria, Yemen, and Libya are among the most vulnerable groups, confronted with various types and levels of risk in the Arab region and Europe, complicating their attempts to pursue their careers as artists. In addition, many artists face physical and emotional threats as they adapt to new artistic practices, work conditions, and unfamiliar social circles while learning a new language. Many, in fact end up deserting their creative careers altogether.

The Sanad initiative, created and carried out by Ettijahat for Independent Culture, aims to oppose all types of oppression that artists may experience, from exploitation and ignorance to intimidation and marginalization. It also supports freedom of speech and solidarity. Sanad focuses on upcoming artists and others involved in the arts and culture. Sanad strives to increase artists' awareness of their legal rights wherever they were forced to relocate by offering legal and informational services to artists and cultural actors in many creative sectors who have been compelled to leave their countries of origin and move to new work environments.[21]

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[21] https://www.ettijahat.org/

Facebook post by Anna Akash:
"Planting avocado at home is a successful way of shifting careers for the unemployed in the independent art sector, listed on denylists, and forgotten in this resilient land despite their academic qualifications, knowledge, and expertise."
#Plant_avocados-eat-bread

Cultural Policy

Cultural policy is not set in a vacuum or void. It depends on prevalent social attitudes, political and geopolitical contexts, ideological and theological frameworks, and economic conditions. After all, the concept of a national culture was not necessarily evident in the Arab world before the creation of nation-states through Western colonial rule and decolonization. For most Arab countries, particularly those under the solid colonial control, the idea of a national identity began to spread in the late 19th century.

The reality of cultural policies in the Arab world (which differs from country to country following the nature of the ruling regime) swings between two extremes: the totalitarian (and prevailing) mode, in which the state monopolizes all "cultural action" from design and finance to execution, and the democratic (and waning) mode in which freedom is the basis of expression and the prerequisite for artistic and cultural innovation. Cultural policies in the Arab world feature the following general traits: they tend to remain theories that do not translate into practical integrated plans; they remain confined to the authorized or guided path or the official documents and are not translated into a set of formally adopted rules, laws, and procedures for the realization of long-term change and development; they put culture at the service of politics (giving rise to such terms as Arab national culture, national identity culture, Islamic identity culture, resistance culture, the

ruling party culture, and centralized official culture) rather than putting politics at the service of culture. Most Arab cultural policies also favor the Arab culture at the expense of ethnic and religious minorities in the region. Seen in this light, cultural policies in Arab countries vary from being non-existent to aiming to tame, or simply being inadequate.[22]

It is worth mentioning that in recent years, the UNESCO Convention 2005 on the diversity of cultural expressions has encouraged some Arab states to opt for opening up dialogue on cultural policy in several Arab countries. One objective of the treaty is to reaffirm the sovereign rights of states to maintain, adopt and implement policies and measures that they deem appropriate for the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions on their territory; in the broad participation of civil society organizations.[23] In Morocco, Tunisia, and Palestine, the UNESCO 2005 expert facility (with four Arab members) has allowed all stakeholders to open dialogue on cultural policy issues. Still, more work must be invested to make the Convention a fundamental tool for change.

Culture Resource launched the Cultural Policy program in 2009 to develop a cultural environment that boosts freedom of expression and creativity and stimulates the cultural sector's role in social and political change in the Arab region. Towards these ends, the program aimed to contribute to developing the cultural ecosystem in both the governmental and independent cultural sectors so that they can play a more effective and dynamic role in society. It also aimed to survey and monitor the development of cultural policies in Arab countries to generate a knowledge base that supports cultural planning and cooperation in the region, build the capacities of cultural actors and researchers involved in cultural policies, and propose mechanisms that will serve to develop the overall cultural ecosystem in Arab countries. As a first step toward developing cultural policies in the Arab region, the Cultural Policy program fostered the creation of 12 local working groups dedicated to developing cultural policies in their own countries with support from Culture Resource. These National Cultural Policy Groups (NCPGs) were operating in the following countries: Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Mauritania, Egypt, Sudan, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.

In addition to the NCPGs, the Cultural Policy program sponsored exploratory surveys and specialized studies in various branches of the field of cultural policies, such as national laws and legislations about culture and the arts, as a preliminary step toward building an Arab regional cultural policy knowledge base. The research was carried out by specialized scholars and organizations concerned with this field. The first surveys on policies, legislation, and practices affecting cultural work in the region were conducted in eight countries: Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. These were published under the title, "An Introduction to Cultural Policies in the Arab World," in the framework of the First Conference on Cultural Policies in the Arab Region organized by Culture Resource in Beirut on 7-8 June 2010. The program also partnered with Ettijahat- Independent Culture, which, with support from Culture Resource, became responsible for administering the Cultural Policy in the Arab Region website,

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[22] Haj Ali, Hanane. Hamersveld, Ineke van. *Cultural Policies in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia: An Introduction*. Brussels: Culture Resource, 2010.
[23]https://en.unesco.org/creativity/convention#:~:text=The%202005%20Convention%20aims%20to,syste ms%20of%20governance%20for%20culture.

updating the exploratory surveys, and preparing regular annual reports on developments in cultural policy in the Arab region.

In addition, the Cultural Policy program promoted networking and the exchange of expertise between cultural actors in the region by convening annual meetings under the heading "The Arab Cultural Policies Group." Starting from 2015, the program started to adopt new work mechanisms as the context changed and required new tools. As the state of mobilization that followed the revolutions is no more the same, as well as the dynamics of the relationship between civil society and governments.

Another successful model of engaging civil society with governmental agencies in policy post the Arab spring is Med Culture. Med Culture is a 5-year (2014-2018) regional program funded by the European Union to accompany partner countries in the south of the Mediterranean in developing and improving cultural policies and practices related to the culture sector. The approach adopted in the project depended on consultation/participation and attempted to build partnerships with civil society actors, ministries, and private and public institutions involved in culture as well as other cross-cutting sectors such as labor, economy, women, and youth, and social welfare to illustrate the transversal value of culture.

While failing to motivate the Ministry of Culture in Lebanon to initiate a cultural policy process, Med Culture succeeded wildly in Jordan. A draft of a cultural strategy was developed with the active participation of the Jordanian Ministry of Culture and the broad involvement of Jordanian cultural operators of the independent sector, which received the ministry's approval in September 2016. About 80 Jordanian cultural operators, representatives of line ministries, and representatives of local authorities are expected to participate in the workshops that led to the formation of the strategy.[24]

At the regional level, the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), since its creation, has drafted and endorsed only three different Arab Culture Strategies, the last of which was endorsed in December 2021.[25] ALECSAO is a Tunis-based specialized institution working under the umbrella of the League of Arab States. It is essentially concerned with developing and coordinating activities related to education, culture, and sciences in the Arab World. It was established under Article 3 of the Arab Cultural Unity Charter and was officially announced in Cairo on the 25th of July, 1970. As stated in Article One of its Constitution, ALECSO was established to promote Arab intellectual unity through education, culture, and sciences and enhance the educational, cultural, and scientific level in the Arab World so that it can positively contribute to a universal civilization.[26] Unfortunately, the first two strategies were not supported by proper annual plans, needed budgets, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. We are yet to see the future of the current strategy, which is the most updated and relevant to the present context in the MENA region.

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[24] https://south.euneighbours.eu/news/jordan-marks-start-new-chapter-cultural-policy-making-med-culture-present/
[25] Fatin Farhat contributed to the strategies section on governance.
[26] ALECSO website

Networking and Collaborations

Networking and collaborations within the independent Arab art sector can be initiated locally by local organizations but are encouraged mainly by funders and international partners, negatively impacting their long-term sustainability and ownership by local parterres. Reasons that hinder the formal networks in the Arab region are often attributed to competition of the limited financial sources, the busy agendas of local partners, and the lack of human capacities to run such projects. There are examples of operating networks initiated by SIDA (PANN – Palestine Network of Performing Arts, Tamasi (regional network for performing arts), and Nass (informal cinema organizations), among others. Different projects encourage informal networks, such as Culture All Around, major festivals, the Abbara project, and the ACE projects. Beirut DC is presently launching a project that brings together leading local and regional institutions supporting Arab independent cinema - and documentary, in particular - and some of their international supporters and partners to discuss, organize, and collaborate for a stronger Arab Narrative Shift Ecosystem.

Still, creating more spaces that belief in sharing is necessary. For example, Lebanon's design sector was rapidly growing, and little knowledge was shared among peers. Thus the Create Space Beirut was launched, becoming of the "common good," sharing knowledge, not about personal gain. The idea was to build a community that cares about all its members and where all successes can be celebrated.

The case of Palestine is unique as when funding became scarce, local organizations felt obliged to work together to survive. It became clear that one is dependent on the survival of the other. New partnerships emerged and continued to thrive as a result. Unfortunately, the exact opposite happened in Lebanon post the August 2020 explosion: a proliferation of NGOs. A missed opportunity to consolidate the work on the NGOs that have been working for the sector. The competition grows when the number of

It is important to note that the mobility of artists and artistic productions is also more challenged now than ever. Arab artists find difficulties in obtaining the proper permits necessary to enter and showcase their work in neighboring Arab countries. Palestinian Gaza artists, as well as Syrian artists, suffer the most. This challenge is particularly true when a regional event is organized. Only a few cities in the Arab region can now host a group of Arab artists in one event without difficulty, consequently challenging the concept of Arab networking and knowledge exchange. Often the assistance of a third (foreign party) is solicited to allow for obtaining the needed permits. Whereas the Convention 2005 on the diversity of cultural expression has a particular clause that obliges countries to facilitate visa and travel permits, governments have paid little attention to its activation, and civil society organizations have done little work to lobby for its enforcement.

The Funding of the Independent Art Scene

"How can we, as cultural actors, protect the cultural project from the agendas and ideas of funders? We have come to a place where we are all aware of the fragility, limitations, and weaknesses of the structures in which we live".[27]
Helena Nassif - Lebanon

Funding the Arab creative sector (organizations and individual artists) remains the main challenge for its development. Arab cultural NGOs active in the arts and culture sector depend almost entirely on foreign support, which impacts their independence in planning their projects. In addition, as a result of the lack of financial resources, non-governmental organizations compete for those resources, and the provision of administrative expenses for managing artistic and cultural centers remains the first concern of their supervisors.

Public and other expenditure on artistic and cultural programs and productions in the Arab world is not transparent due to the lack of necessary data. However, general data indicate that the share of cultural affairs in the annual budgets of the majority of Arab countries is low.

The various sources of funding for cultural organizations in the Arab region come from international organizations, local and international public bodies, local governments, local institutions, and the private sector. Revenues from income-generating projects in the cultural and artistic field are still minimal and not very reliable as a permanent source of financial stability for organizations and initiatives.

The research clearly shows that the financial resources available and available to support artistic productions, in particular, are minimal and meager at the expense of creative, artistic and cultural programs and activities, which primarily aim to use the arts as a means of expression, empowerment and capacity building, or as a means to provide psychological support to specific groups in society. Many private cultural and artistic projects are funded through tracks and grants that are not necessarily dedicated to the culture and arts sector. The research shows that the vast majority of funding for this sector comes through funding projects dedicated to the development of human rights, children's rights, women, unemployment, empowerment, and other topics, which affect the dynamics of the sector's growth in general. For example, SIDA does not explicitly target culture. In the past few years, the Drosos Foundation has played a pivotal role in supporting art projects for children in each Palestine. The Drosos Foundation's support is vital because it also contributes to providing the current expenses of local institutions, which puts institutions in a state of reassurance on the one hand, and enables them to of building continuity programs. However, this is changing in its new strategy. The Droros Foundation will no longer focus on creativity.

Private sector institutions sometimes refrain from disclosing their funds to the cultural sector. Companies and banks stand out in supporting some art projects for children and festivals that have a large audience such as festivals. Philanthropy in the Arab region is still immature. In Egypt, the Series Foundation and in Palestine, A.M Al Qattan Foundation are two positive examples where philanthropy comes to the service of the sector. When AFAC was established, the main was to

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[27] "Action for Hope العمل للأمل." *Action for Hope العمل للأمل*, www.facebook.com/act4hope.

mobilize Arab private capital to benefit the sector. This has not succeeded, and now AFAC exists mainly thanks to international funding agencies.

At the regional level, Arab artists and institutions benefit from some of the support and funding mechanisms available by service organizations that provide financial support, capacity, training, and deliberation and have begun to democratize access to resources, thus creating opportunities for meeting and exchange. Examples of these institutions are the Cultural Resource Foundation, AFAC, and Ettijahat for Independent culture. These grants are distinguished by their independence by focusing on the artistic quality of their recipients.

It is important to note that international funding for arts also shifts according to the changing political situation. While international attention was previously focused on supporting civil society and artistic initiatives in Palestine, the deteriorating political situation in the post-Arab Spring era and in the countries that are going through democratic change has altered the regional and international interest in Palestine. In the first few years following the revolutions, funding was geared towards Tunisia and Syrians and now this is shifting more towards Lebanon and Yemen. Internationally, the situation in the Arab region affected the world, as the number of refugees increased, especially in Europe, which increased the economic burdens on these countries despite grants and aid.

International organizations direct part of their budgets to support the region's arts and culture sector based on their priorities, objectives, and vision of their role. They may be direct financial funds to support artistic and cultural production or opportunities for training and mobility within or outside the Arab region. The European Union, the US, and European private organizations (Open Society Foundations, Ford Foundation, Stichting Doen), the European Cultural Foundation, and Anna Lindh Foundation are the most important examples of influence, clarity of strategy, and the size of funding. Consulates and foreign cultural organizations also play an essential role in supporting the sector, primarily through networking and collaborations projects (French Cultural Center, The British Council, and the Goethe-Institut are among the most prominent). The European Union National Institutes for Culture[28], founded in 2006, is a network of European national institutes of culture and national bodies engaged in cultural and related activities beyond their national borders. EUNIC is currently active in several countries, Tunisia and Egypt in particular, as it supports crucial programs related to creative industries and capacity building of cultural institutions and operators.

For many years and in the aftermath of the revolutions in 2011, foreign funding agencies and cultural entities played an essential role in supporting non-governmental cultural activities. From 2014 onward, periodic reviews of the plans of these institutions take place due to changing priorities and the new restrictive laws on direct funding to institutions and individuals. Some of these entities worked more with the government, represented by the Ministry of Culture (Goethe Institute). Some institutions have scaled back their activities in Egypt, especially the artistic production grants. In other countries, the situation is more accessible and open, as the security and legal restrictions are less: Tunisia and Lebanon are examples of this.

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[28] www.eunicglobal.eu

In the framework of EU-Arab World cultural relations and specifically in terms of knowledge of, access to, and procedures of funding, Arab (or southern) potentials partners are faced with many barriers that implicitly hinder access to funds and create an imbalance in the ecosystem of cultural practices on the local and regional (southern) levels. While developed to achieve efficient and transparent communication, EU commission applications (and accompanying guidelines and annexes) present a challenge. Application forms are not only too detailed and repetitive, one may add. Their inherent composition, language, connected references, and subtexts make them unattainable and incomprehensible to a large subset of organizations in need and of eligibility for such funds. In relevance to regional projects or multi-country ones that are administrated by offices in EU countries, in addition to the above knowledge of mechanisms and formats, southern large-scale or medium-scale organizations are rarely found to be leading coalitions or multi-country projects. Building on the above, regional and medium-sized organizations do not think they have the chance to win a grant or tender if they are the lead.[29]

It is important to note that they are new challenges arising in foreign funding for culture in the region. Most foreign organizations now demand that local and regional cultural independent organizations sign anti-terrorism annexes and appendices that incriminate local political parties (SIDA, EU in Palestine, USAID), a matter widely refused by the sector.

Reaction to Covid-19

Cultural practitioners across the Arab region were already operating in fragile contexts when Covid 19 erupted. The COVID-19 crisis has simply magnified long-standing vulnerabilities for cultural actors in the area. While the current turmoil motivated immediate reaction to relief the cultural sector in many countries around the world, the majority of Arab governments of the Arab region did not respond quickly or allocate the needed financial resources to cope with the impact of Covid 19. Civil society actors in the Arab region responded faster despite the limited resources. It could be argued that civil society has been for decades before operating until turbulent times was, in particular, why many were able to yet another crisis pretty quickly, that is to say. Operators and artists in the region are accustomed to last-minute changes in events due to political turbulences. In the second year of the pandemic, initiatives grew from Algeria to Jordan, which, although modest, reflecting some attention on the part of state actors. Tunisia stood out in terms of comprehensiveness and sophistication. It has deployed a relief and recovery fund to support artists and cultural practitioners engaged in every cultural sector and industry (Fonds Reliance Culture). Lebanon did not seem to have prepared any particular emergency or recovery measures for the cultural sector and so did Jordan (with the exception of the quick response on the audiovisual sector from the Royal Film Commission), the Egyptian government supported the recovery of the audio-visual sector, one of the most important in the region. It encouraged the digitization of the activities of the Ministry of Culture (UNESCO, 2020l) and the cultural offer as part of a campaign for social distancing titled "stay at home, culture is in your hands" (Daily News, 2020). The government firmly controls the cultural sector in Algeria, supporting most initiatives. The only partially independent sector, publishing, has been hit particularly hard. In general, the Algerian government has not designed any support measures other than a limited economic support program for cultural freelancers who have been deprived of financial income due to the pandemic provided

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[29] Interview with Fida Touma

by the Algerian National Office of Copyright and Related Rights. At the same time, in Palestine, the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) decided to support the Ministry of Culture by helping artists so that they can also access the grant programs made available by the Al-Qattan Foundation. In Libya, although there is no ministry of culture, the Libyan General Authority for culture has tried to assist Libyan artists by facilitating their digital productions.

Two kinds of regional dynamics are worth noticing: the rapid response of non-governmental regional funding schemes and the increasing regional intergovernmental cooperation on culture in response to the pandemic. As to the former, four examples stand out, the updated "Stand for art" program of Culture Resource and the "Artist support grant" of the Arab Fund for the Arts and Culture (AFAC), Art Lives and the special Netflix/AFAC grant for filmmakers. Al Mawred and AFAC also continued to support the Lebanon Solidarity Fund, while A.M Al Qattan Foundation and Al Mawred launched the Takatuf emergency grant to support Palestinian cultural NGOs in Palestine and Lebanon.

Creative Industries

"The opportunity before us is the merge between creativity, economy, and technology. The closure of the public sphere and the state's monopoly on art has become a classic and old scenario."[30]
Salman Al Turki – Iraq

The term "cultural industries" is still highly debatable in our Arab region. It is commonly used to refer to heritage and handicraft industries. In contrast, the overall concept of creative industries, which includes at least 13 industries such as filmmaking, music, performing arts, publishing, design, video games, etc., is not fully and well incorporated.

Therefore, in most Arab countries, cultural industries are not considered an integrated sector, in fact each industry is looked at separately, and the overall strategy that considers integration and coordination is absent. Hence, in a broader sense, creative industries continue to suffer from various problems and constraints, most importantly: absence of supportive policies and laws, lack of information and statistics on both industries and their economic impact, intellectual property laws, absence of the necessary administrative structures to organize and manage the sector and the conflicts between its roles and the unavailability of coordination among them.

The revenues of the cultural and creative industries are estimated at 2.250 billion dollars annually worldwide, which represents 3% of the world's gross domestic product (GDP).[31] It also provides 29.5 million job opportunities worldwide. Many jobs are in the visual arts, music, and publishing sectors. The most important characteristic of this sector is that it is a young sector. In Europe, the

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[30] "Action for Hope العمل للأمل." *Action for Hope العمل للأمل*, www.facebook.com/act4hope

[31] https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/global_report_fact_sheet_en.pdf

most significant proportion of people working in the cultural industries sector is between the ages of 19 and 25, most of them are working in start-ups and freelancers.[32]

At the international level, several institutions are concerned with protecting and supporting creative industries and promoting their social and economic value through various programs; UNESCO is at the helm of these institutions. According to UNESCO, "CCIs" are among the fastest-growing industries in the world. They have proven to be a sustainable development option based on a unique and renewed resource, human creativity." The potential of these industries was positioned at the core of UNESCO's 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions[33]. This legally binding international treaty aims to enable cultural artists, professionals, practitioners, and other citizens to create, produce, disseminate and enjoy a wide range of cultural goods, services, and activities, especially regarding their artistic expressions. This Convention supports mechanisms that promote innovation and strengthen the emergence of active CCI for inclusive economic and social development, including tools to boost domestic production, develop local markets, and facilitate platforms for distribution and exchange worldwide.

International organizations, especially European cultural institutions operating in the Arab region, play an important role in supporting cultural industries through direct support programs for artists, research or training programs, and artistic and cultural events. The most prominent of these institutions are the British Council, the German Goethe Institute, the French Institute, and the Swiss Arts Council, as well as the programs of the European Union and the European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC). Some of these institutions also deal with the broader organizational perspective of cultural industries in a wider sense by pushing for the formulation of supportive policies, organizing the sector administrative structures, capacity building, encouraging networking and coordination among the several existing ministries, bodies, and institutions, the British Council Creative Economy program is am example.[34]

The British Council has launched in Egypt several programs on the creative economy for more than ten years, working with policymakers, institutions, and creators. In 2018 and 2019, a project funded by the European Union on behalf of the European Union's National Institutes of Culture (EUNIC) was launched to raise awareness of the importance of the creative economy in creating job opportunities and to encourage cooperation among local actors in the creative economy sector. The Council is also implementing the Programe for the Development of Inclusive and Creative Economies to support and develop creative and social institutions in partnership with the United Kingdom and five major emerging economies worldwide, including Egypt. Partnerships take place – at the policy, institutional and individual levels.

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[32] "Cultural Times. The First Global Map of Cultural and Creative Industries | Diversity of Cultural Expressions." *Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, en.unesco.org/creativity/files/culturaltimesthefirstglobalmapofculturalandcreativeindustriespdf..

[33] "The Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions | Diversity of Cultural Expressions." *Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, 15 Feb. 2018, en.unesco.org/creativity/convention.

[34] "Creative Economy | British Council." *Creative Economy | British Council*, www.britishcouncil.org.eg/en/programmes/arts/creative-economy.

Most foreign cultural institutions have direct support programs for creators in different artistic fields (film production, theater, music, and literature). They play an important role, given the lack of funding sources for independent art in the Arab region.

Creative Industries in the time of Arab spring

The situation of cultural industries in the region is generally fragile for the reasons mentioned before. Cultural and artistic demonstrations were an essential partner in the political waves of 2011. The Arab Spring, which affected many countries in the region, was accompanied by artistic and cultural voices that expressed the aspirations of the Arab streets. Cultural and artistic performances flourished in the squares of the Arab revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Sudan, and Yemen. Many cultural initiatives have been formed that aim to develop alternatives for setting cultural policies in the country, and to improve the conditions of artists and cultural actors, as happened in Egypt, where the Independent Culture Coalition was formed of more than one hundred and twenty institutions, cultural and artistic initiatives and hundreds of artists.

This period also witnessed a great boom for the independent creative sector in countries undergoing political change. Musical, theatrical and art exhibitions of a political nature were largely prevalent at that time. Many new musical and theatrical troupes were formed that performed in the squares, streets, and independent theaters. There was also a significant expansion in the usage of public spaces to provide free performances and festivals for the revolutionaries. "El Fann Midan" (Art is a Square) was a festival that took place in the squares of the Egyptian governorates through the efforts of volunteers and personal donations. Over more than three years, it presented hundreds of artistic performances to thousands of audiences. The creative scene in Tunisia was very active as well. The civil society drafted a new cultural policy in cooperation with the culture ministry. The security situation in Syria, Libya and Yemen, however, did not prevent the activity of artistic and cultural groups, albeit on a smaller scale.

On the commercial level, this period witnessed a significant decline in cinema, musical and theatrical productions, and the publishing sector was significantly affected. This was normally due to the political tensions, the security situation, the rapid changes in the administrative structures of the cultural institutions, the administrative and financial mess in all state institutions, whether governmental or private, and the public's preoccupation with other political priorities. Drama production also has declined, and production companies stopped their activities, waiting for the political and security conditions to stabilize.

During this period, all sources of income for the Arab Spring countries declined, and the economy was severely affected. The cultural and creative industries were one of those sectors that were most affected. There are no accurate estimates of the size of the financial losses during that period. Still, the cinema, drama, and music sectors took some years to recover until the Covid crisis hit by the end of 2019.

Creative Industries in post-Covid period

The Covid-19 pandemic crisis has been a real test for the world's cultural and creative industries regarding the sector's strength, organization, and resilience to the significant decline caused by the

pandemic. The sector has been affected by the crisis that has touched all of the world's economic sectors. According to the World Bank, most of the world's countries have faced recessions in 2020. The current health crisis could cost more than $1 trillion in 2020, and the International Labor Organization (ILO) has projected the loss of between 5 and 25 million jobs.

The cultural and creative industries sector has been affected in various parts of the world. UNESCO has declared that "we are facing a cultural emergency." Still, the extent of damage has varied from region to region and from State to another in terms of the sector's strength in having protection tools for its institutions and actors: creators, artists, and administrators. These tools are mainly the sector's regulatory policy, strategy, and administrative, financial, and social insurance systems. The COVID-19 crisis has affected the core activities of many of the world's cultural organizations, owing to the widespread cancellation of scheduled events, due to the partial or complete suspension of activities, the temporary or permanent reductions in the number of workers, as well as the cancellation of international and local trips. Consequently, the world's cultural institutions have been financially disadvantaged, owing to a significant decline in income and reduced access to necessary funding.

In our Arab region, the creative industry sector has been significantly affected. The crisis has demonstrated the urgent need to create mechanisms to assess the economic value of cultural industries and the value of their contribution to the national economy, in addition to the need to review governance systems in cultural institutions, especially in civil society organizations, which have been most affected by the lack of funding and the absence of financial sustainability mechanisms. The crisis has also demonstrated the need to review the critical insurance system to protect the sector's actors, such as creators, artists, and administrators.

How has the world dealt with the crisis to address the social and economic impacts of the pandemic and provide relief and recovery for creative and cultural sectors? What has been the quality of policy, decisions, and emergency responses? At the level of the government sector and non-governmental organizations?

In the Arab countries, European cultural institutions continued their artist support programs. Eunic's Creative Industries Support Program continued through the German Goethe Institute. The Swiss Arts Council also continued the Egyptian artists' artistic residency program in many artistic fields in Switzerland. The British Council has launched a program to support artistic projects in various artistic fields.

Regionally, the crisis appears to have prompted Arab countries to strengthen regional cooperation in the cultural sphere. In May 2020, the Arab Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) organized an extraordinary virtual meeting of Arab states' ministers of culture to showcase and discuss efforts to combat the virus. The organization has launched a series of initiatives favoring the cultural sector, including a new digital platform. To support the sector's crisis, digitization of production, cultural distribution, and intellectual property protection were identified as priorities. This meeting was followed in mid-June by an extraordinary virtual conference of Ministers of Culture of the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), which took action to protect the cultural sector and stressed the importance of the digitization process. Overall, State and non-State actors have placed great

importance on digital tools as a critical part of relief and recovery measures in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

The epidemic crisis has undoubtedly raised awareness of creative industries' economic and social importance internationally, regionally, and locally. It has contributed to concerted efforts to develop emergency and future plans to support and protect this vital sector from and maximize its utilization after the crisis by all possible mechanisms.

Future Outlook

It can be said that the past ten years, including political, security, economic, social, and health changes, have redrawn the cultural landscape in the region significantly, whether at the level of the official or unofficial scene. The various challenges demonstrated the importance of culture as an essential element for political and social change and for achieving sustainable development. There was also a need for regional cultural policies that take into account emerging cultural markets, such as the Gulf countries, for example, and support cultural rights, freedom of creativity and the free movement of artists and cultural and creative products. The current period is witnessing a great openness to the cultural and artistic fields in the Arab Gulf countries, which are working to open large markets for cultural and creative products through many cultural events, festivals, and art exhibitions. This change in the Gulf's attitudes towards culture and the arts has provided new opportunities for many Arab artists in various fields such as cinema, music, theater, and visual arts, due to the presence of large financial capabilities that help in the production and mobility.

In Saudi Arabia, for example, the Riyadh Season, an international entertainment festival held in the city of Riyadh, the capital of the Kingdom, has become one of the most important regional cultural events that attract a large number of artists from the region. The festival aims to transform the city of Riyadh into a global tourist entertainment destination, in accordance with the objectives of the Quality of Life Program, one of the programs of the Saudi Vision 2030. The Riyadh season began for the first time in 2019 and attracted more than 10 million visitors, and its second season began on the 20th of October, 2021 after stopping in 2020 due to Corona virus pandemic. This is in addition to many other events that take place throughout the year in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Bahrain. In the last years, Abu Dhabi made huge investments in the creative and cultural industries, ranging from the establishment of world-class cultural institutions and infrastructure (such as the Louvre Abu Dhabi, New York University Abu Dhabi, the Creative District - Yas, House of Oud, House of Artisans, Abu Dhabi Children's Library) to programs and initiatives which have reached international levels (such as Abu Dhabi Culture Summit, Abu Dhabi Art, Abu Dhabi Classical Music Season, Abu Dhabi Talent Development Program), and stimulated the growth of companies, employees and practitioners in the creative and cultural field in the Emirate and abroad.

It may be important for Gulf countries to pay attention to the situation of artists and cultural institutions in countries that suffer from security and political instability, such as Yemen, Libya and Iraq. It is important that the agendas of these festivals include programs to support the culture sector in these major events, whether through direct support programs or through support for the

movement of artists and performances. Despite the importance of interaction and cooperation with these cultural events, However, care must be taken that the great polarization of artists towards the Gulf countries, due to the quality of the economic situation, does not affect the state of art markets in countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria. Therefore, these countries must also find the necessary incentives to ensure that artists do not migrate to the Gulf countries and that the cultural and artistic scene in the rest of the Arab countries becomes empty. The previous ear also showed the urgent need to pay attention to the digital dimension in artistic and cultural production. In pandemic times, digital platforms have been the most consumed alternative to live cultural events. Therefore, investing in digitization and technology related to culture is necessary now and in the future. Also, the cultural and creative industries sector must be dealt with as an integrated sector, whether setting policies, managing it, or promoting it and measuring its economic impact.

The next stage should witness a review of the objectives of regional and global partnerships, especially with the European Union and its various countries, so that the new partnerships guarantee the sector's needs and priorities in the region and are based on equality and equal opportunities. At the local level, policies must be pushed to ensure cultural rights, decentralize cultural services, and support freedom of artistic creation, civil society participation, and the independent cultural sector.

There is a need for the independent art sector to create a new form of cultural solidarity in the Arab region and the world. A region where authoritarian autocracies have failed to convey essential welfare services to their people, focusing exclusively on security and its industry and benefiting corruptibly from laying ground to infrastructure for the global economy and its corporate investments. Among many other failures, Arab governments couldn't be further from alleviating poverty, eradicating inequality, diminishing illiteracy, reducing unemployment, eliminating gender discrimination, empowering freedom of speech, and nurturing democratic political life. There is a role for artists, practitioners, and managers to change the existing dependencies on authoritarian autocracies and the international political scene, aspiring to influence a more just, equal, and peaceful order, especially in the region. The proposal call-on transnational solidarity ties and networks between the region and the global south and sets forth principles and examples that might become tomorrow's everyday cultural practices.[35]

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[35] Interview with Yazid Anani

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