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Lebanon Country Report

By

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Table of contents

Executive Summary.....	1
1. Context and Introduction.....	2
2. General objectives and governance.....	3
3. Legislation and Funding.....	8
4. Institutions, civil society actors and infrastructure.....	12
4.1 Stakeholder analysis matrix of the cultural sector.....	16
4.2 SWOT analysis of the cultural sector.....	17
5. Education and training.....	17
6. Non-professional practices and general audience.....	18
7. Conclusions and recommendations	19
8. Annexes.....	21



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Executive Summary

In 1943, Lebanon became officially The Lebanese Republic, assembling within its land different religions. Lebanon established a unique political system, "Confessionalism", which is a power-sharing mechanism based on religious communities. The co-existence of these religious communities has granted the country a freedom that is not shared by most of the other Arab countries.

Even though Lebanon gained its independence in 1943, it was not until 1993 that the Ministry of Culture was finally established. The aim behind the creation of this ministry was to set up an institution that would be the only reference for sponsorship and support of the Lebanese cultural life, in terms of knowledge, research and creativity.

There are no unified general objectives, principles or strategies that govern the Lebanese cultural scene. In European countries, cultural institutions work within the framework of the government's strategies, whereas in Lebanon, culturally, the government is almost non-existent. Each cultural institution enjoys free and independent internal governance. Individuals running these institutions have the absolute power over the objectives, principles and strategies of the institutions, which give room to creativity and freedom of maneuver.

However, with the difficult political situation in the region, the financial support for arts and culture is becoming more and more difficult, however it does not prevent the cultural scene from remaining lively and versatile.

The Lebanese cultural scene depends mostly on independent individuals/institutions/associations, which show great artistic, intellectual and/or entrepreneurship potentials. It is far from relying on anything but on human capacities and the possibilities they can bring. The majority of the institutions are non-profit associations, which allows them to get funds from foreign funding bodies (as most of these bodies require that the applicant be a non-profit association). Most of the funding for the Lebanese arts and culture domain are foreign and European ones.

There is a real expansion on the cultural level. The artistic scene is constantly moving, young and creative artists are emerging, the design and creative field have never been so vivid, theatre plays, musical creations, festivals, photo and painting exhibitions, crafts, dance... The city is always on the move and the Lebanese creators are present all over the world with their productions and initiatives. The main problem remains the same for almost all the cultural associations: securing money/funds for the running costs.

The cultural scene is very lively, but mostly in Beirut; however the potential to strengthen and improve the professional environment through the involvement of both the public and the private sectors, inside and outside the capital, is real. The involvement of the Ministry of Culture, which should provide the strategic



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framework within which cultural operators can perform, would be a positive development.

1 Context and introduction

Throughout the centuries, Lebanon, which gained its independence in 1943, was part of numerous successive empires: Egyptian, Persian, Assyrian, Hellenistic, Roman, Armenian, Eastern Roman/Byzantine, Arab (Umayyad, Abbasid, and Fatimid), Mamluk, Crusader's state, the Ottoman Empire and finally the French mandate. A number of Lebanon's most prestigious historical and cultural remains testify the passage of these civilizations.

In 1943, Lebanon became officially The Lebanese Republic, assembling within its 10,452 km² of land different religions: Christians, Druzes and Muslims. It established a unique political system, "Confessionalism", which is a power-sharing mechanism based on religious communities. Even though the existence of these religious communities has been the cause of major political problems in the country, it has also granted the country a freedom that is not shared by most of the other Arab countries.

Economically, Lebanon relies on a very active private sector and a large banking sector. It has a competitive free market and a strong commercial tradition. The Lebanese economy is service-oriented. There are no doubts that the country benefits also from its large diaspora. It is said that there are 3 times more Lebanese outside the country than inside...

Unfortunately, the country is constantly prone to national, regional and international political and economic difficulties which makes it very fragile and unstable.

Situated in Western Asia, Lebanon is bordered by Syria to the north and east and Palestine to the South.

Even though Lebanon gained its independence in 1943, it was not until 1993 that the Ministry of Culture was finally established. 50 years during which a lot happened in Lebanon on all levels; political, religious, social, economic, educational and cultural, without forgetting a civil war of 15 years. All through these 50 years, and in the absence of the Ministry of Culture, the public sector played a major a role in creating opportunities/activities/situations for Lebanese intellectuals and artists to create and generate products (books, paintings, theatre plays, films, etc...) that provided Lebanon a regional and international reputation of being a free country, allowing for the freedom of expression and creativity. So the public sector was present but in a different configuration: during that time, a number of ministries were involved in the cultural sector like the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Information and others...

It is important to mention that during the civil war and with the political, religious and economic crisis that faced the country, the public sector encountered a lot of problems and challenges which resulted in a diminution of support given to culture. To compensate for this loss, a new and informal system was born where



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the Lebanese civil societies, associations, individuals and communities stepped out and militated to keep the cultural scene alive despite everything.

So what is the situation of the cultural scene in Lebanon? What we can definitely say is that Lebanon is still considered to be one of the most active countries on the cultural and artistic scene of the region, even with the development of the cultural scene of the Gulf. The Gulf countries might have the financial means to bring in the best of the international cultural scene but it is still not considered to be a platform for creativity and artistic invention like Lebanon. What makes Lebanon such a special case within the Arab Region? To whom should we give the credit and how do we explain this phenomenon given the complexity of the context?

Today, in 2014, the Ministry of Culture is celebrating its 21st anniversary. What did it accomplish all through these years? What are its strengths and its weaknesses? What are its future plans? If we were to evaluate its role within the Lebanese cultural scene, what would it be? Which role did it play according to the Lebanese cultural institutions? And what is expected from it?

But then again, why should we answer all these questions related to the Ministry of Culture and to the public sector involved in arts and culture when it is well known that the Ministry doesn't have a major role on the Lebanese cultural scene?

If we wish to have a clear understanding of the Lebanese cultural scene, we should start by talking about the main players which are the independent/private cultural associations/individuals that have and are still taking the lead...

2 General objectives and governance

General objectives

There are no unified general objectives, principles or strategies that govern the Lebanese cultural scene. In European countries, cultural institutions work within the framework of the government's strategies, whereas in Lebanon, and as explained below, culturally, the government is almost non-existent. Each cultural institution enjoys a free and independent internal governance. Individuals running these institutions have the absolute power over the objectives, principles and strategies of the institutions, which gives room to creativity and freedom of maneuver.

Government presence in the Lebanese cultural scene is felt at the level of taxes and censorship, which have no relation whatsoever with the Ministry of Culture. The taxes that the government imposes on the cultural domain are the remit of the Ministry of Finance; censorship falls under the jurisdiction of the General Security; it concerns mostly theatre and movie productions.

Governance

The following is a small anecdote about the Ministry of culture. Many cultural managers, artists, institutions would have similar stories to tell that would only



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consolidate the fact that the active Lebanese cultural players have forgotten about the public sector and are expecting almost nothing from the Ministry of Culture.

ducer of a theatre play that was staged this year, I was invited, along with the director of the play, to meet with the General Director at the Ministry of Culture. The responsible of the theatre department at the ministry had recommended the play as the official Lebanese entry in a theatre festival that was to take place in Algeria, and by official request from the Algerian government. The offices of the ministry occupy a number of floors in a building in a central area of Beirut. Apart from the outside signage and the Lebanese flag, nothing would differentiate this building from any other. At the entrance of the building, there were posters of events (festivals, theatre plays, concerts, etc...) that had long since passed. Inside, there were a few paintings by Lebanese artists which are part of a big collection owned by the Ministry (within its regulations, the Ministry has a budget dedicated to the purchase of Lebanese paintings). Going through the floors, almost all the offices were empty, except for the one where we were heading: it was the General Director's office. He welcomed us and invited us into a big office, where we could hear classical music in the background. The GD presented himself as belonging formerly to the educational sector.

Getting back to the purpose of the meeting, the GD who "didn't get the chance to see the play but trusts completely the opinion of his colleague" wanted to know if we were interested in representing Lebanon in Algeria during its annual theatre festival. He continued saying that "the festival would take charge of the expenses for airline tickets, accommodation and the per diem of the crew, along with all the technical requirements of the play (scenography and lighting)". He added "As you should know, the ministry has a very limited budget but we are however willing to back you up with a small financial support". Two weeks later, he told me that the festival couldn't cover the airline tickets and that there was no way that the Ministry could do it and that we would have to forget about going to Algeria.

But what is the role of the Lebanese Ministry of Culture?

According to Act No. 215 of 04/02/1993, as amended by Act No. 247 of 7/8/2000 to Article 11, the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education became "The Ministry of Culture".

The aim behind the creation of the Ministry of Culture was to set up an institution that would be the only reference for sponsorship and support of the Lebanese cultural life, in terms of knowledge, research and creativity. It thus brought together the various services involved in cultural affairs, previously scattered and uncoordinated among several public institutions. However, the State was then unable to develop a harmonious cultural policy.

In brief, the Ministry of Culture is divided into two major components:

I- General Directorate of Culture

1. Administrative Department
2. Cultural Affairs Department
3. National Book Department



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4. Cinema, theatre and exhibitions Department

II- General Directorate of Antiquity

1. Historical Monuments Department
2. Archeological Excavation Department
3. Museums Department

The Ministry has also under its supervision three organisms that have their own administration:

1. The Lebanese National Commission for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO)
2. The National Music Conservatory
3. The International Centre for Human Sciences

In the framework of this profile, we will concentrate on the General Directorate of Culture, and analyse its objectives and tasks.

The General Directorate of Culture has two main missions:

- To reinforce and stimulate the cultural movement, through encouraging creative young talents and supporting associations and cultural institutions in the field of thoughts, literature and arts in all its forms. Its main objective is to facilitate the access of the citizen to cultural production, to channel and benefit from the existing creative potential and to increase work opportunities.
- To develop and manage the National Library, to create public libraries, manage them and disseminate them all over the country to safeguard the national memory and to familiarise the citizen to its patrimony and culture.

The Ministry also aims at promoting the scientific, archeological, intellectual and artistic universal patrimony of Lebanon by its citizens.

Policy of supporting the cultural sectors

Since its establishment, the Ministry of Culture has decided to devote part of its annual budget to support cultural activities. In 2001, the Department was able to incorporate into its budget a budget line specifically dedicated to the support of Lebanese cinema. Thus, the Department's budget now includes five budget items devoted to supporting creativity and cultural development, distributed as follows:

1. **Books.** It aims at:
 - Developing the taste of the citizen to read
 - Encourage the original production of work and its publication in Lebanon
 - Reinforce the publishing industry in Lebanon
 - Help the publishing houses in difficulty

For the purchase of books, the ministry adopted the following measures:

- To buy books targeting a wide audience and channeling them to departmental libraries



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- To give priority to Lebanese authors and publishers
 - To acquire beautiful books as gifts to visitors to Lebanon
 - To pay attention to renowned publishing houses who suffered from economic difficulties and support them by buying their publications, provided that the publishing house in question presents an Action Plan to improve its financial situation.
2. **Visual Arts.** The policy of the Ministry in supporting this field is implemented mainly through the purchase of paintings and sculptures created by Lebanese artists. It is based on the following criteria:
- To dedicate the largest share of the amount allocated to this sector to the acquisition of varied works of talented artists to complete the collection of the Department of Visual Arts
 - To encourage beginners and promising artists by purchasing one of their works, or two at most
 - To increase the collection of the Department through the acquisition of a minimum of one sculpture per year
 - To refrain from buying a work of the same artist on two consecutive years.

Around 1610 art pieces constitute the collection of the Ministry of Culture, which was built up from the fifties. As a result of the war, a number of these pieces suffered from moisture and dust. Between 1997 and 1998, a first inspection and restoration operation took place.

3. **Performing Arts.**

The support goes to:

1. Active and permanent theatre spaces.
2. Theatre groups performing in Lebanon.
3. Participation of theatre groups in international festivals
4. Children's theatre.
5. Dance.
6. Participation of young people in subsidised activities.

4. **Cinema.**

1. Each year the Ministry of Culture subsidises *10 film productions at most*:
 - Feature films of professional filmmakers
 - A first film by a young director
 - Short films (fiction)
 - Documentaries
2. The director or producer must submit to the Ministry of Culture the screenplay for which they hold the intellectual property rights allowing its production
3. Directors cannot be supported by the Ministry of Culture over two consecutive years for the same project or a new project.
4. If any director or producer did not get a grant, he may ask for support for the same project for 3 consecutive years.
5. The beneficiary must sign a contract committing to:



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- Return the sum obtained from the Ministry for non-implementation of the project within a maximum period of 18 months from the date of receipt of the amount, whatever the reason.
- Mention the support of the Ministry at the beginning and/or end of the film, in a form approved beforehand by the Ministry of Culture.
- Provide the Ministry of Culture a full copy of the film with all rights except for commercial rights.
- Organise a Premiere Projection at the UNESCO Palace or another cultural centre.

6. The Ministry of Culture also supports film festivals participating in the costs of the organisation, after having studied the program and its estimated budget, taking into account other sources of support that the festival has obtained.

5. **Associations.**

No information has been given on this point.

For each of these areas, there is an advisory committee comprising members of the Ministry and other experts. Members of the committee cannot benefit from the support of the Ministry. Each committee reviews the file submitted to the Ministry based on the principles and criteria applied to each sector. Subsequently, the committee presents the proposals to the Minister for a final decision after consulting with the General Director of Culture.

On the other hand, the beneficiaries commit themselves to follow the general and specific conditions set by the Ministry.

What did the Lebanese Ministry of Culture achieve in 2014?

According to the General Director of the Ministry of Culture, the annual budget of the Ministry is lower than 1% of the national yearly budget which makes it extremely difficult for the Ministry to implement its policies by supporting the different Lebanese artistic and cultural domains. Most of the Ministry's budget goes to its employees and to maintenance agreements.

There are no records available for the public about the activities of the Ministry of Culture that took place over this year, which makes it difficult to assess the current situation.

What is the future strategy/plan of the Ministry of Culture?

The Ministerial Council has finally approved the restructuring of the Ministry of Culture, a project that-is in progress since a long time. According to the General Director, the main problem of the Ministry lies in the fact that there is no organigramme and no job description for each position; that there are very few competent employees; and that some work should be done on increasing the number of the employees as well as working on their qualifications and competencies. Following the difficult financial situation of the country, it will not be possible to increase the number of employees for the time being, but the objective is to work on resource management with the present staff to increase



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the Ministry efficiency. It seemed like a huge challenge for him but no serious development within the Ministry could be implemented without this first major step.

3 Legislation and funding

Legislation

Very little is being done on the legislative level in relation to culture in Lebanon. According to the General Director of the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry is not involved at all in reviewing or improving the Lebanese legislation in regards to arts and culture, and apparently does not see the need to do so.

Even at the legislation level, it seems that only the private sector is taking initiatives. However, these initiatives are mostly a reaction by the private sector to try and solve imminent problems like the prohibition of a movie or a play.

Three important initiatives were led in the past ten years by the private sector.

The first one is a book published by Al Mawred Al Thaqafy presenting an overview of the policies and cultural practices of eight Arab countries, including Lebanon, with an introductory chapter by the editor of the book, Hanna Hajj Ali. In the chapter dedicated to Lebanon, a section about laws and regulations can be found with the following information:

- Regulatory Act of the Ministry of Culture, 2008

This law specifies in details the role of the Ministry, its objectives and its internal structure.

- Regulatory Act in relation to artistic professions, 2008

This law regulates the artistic professions and occupations, determines the definitions of these professions while clarifying the terms of membership to the trade unions. It also determines the provisions of non-Lebanese artists and conditions of their stay and the establishment of trade unions and mutual fund and affiliation's conditions.

- Laws related to Public institutions under the guardianship of the Ministry of Culture

This book can be found online in Arabic on

<http://mawred.org/publications/culture-policy-publications>.

The second initiative is a collective work on the situation of censorship in Lebanon entitled "Acts of Censorship, Legally". The authors of this book view their work as a move to reconsider the laws of censorship in Lebanon. This initiative was supported by the main Lebanese cultural institutions : Beirut DC, Ashkal Alwan, Metropolis, Beirut Art Centre, Né à Beyrouth, Assabil, Shams, Umam, Zico House and two German institutions: Goethe Institute and the Heinrich Boll Foundation – Middle East Office. This work was done in response to a number of consecutive cases of censorship on Lebanese cultural products by the General Security. When asked about the censorship system in Lebanon, the general director of the Ministry of Culture states "that this is the job of the General Security and not ours. In fact, we can't offer support to any cultural initiative if it doesn't have the approval of the



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General Security. As an example, to be able to support a theatre play, the director/producer should have in premier lieu the approval of the General Security on the text of the play”.

To quote from the book *The Work of Censorship, Legally*, a joint research by Nizar Saghieh, Nayla Geagea and Rana Saghieh: “Several difficulties were faced in documenting censorship cases. Concerning prior censorship of films and theatre plays, decisions by General Security are only made public when covered by the media, usually to protest against a particular case of censorship. Therefore, documentation relied primarily on the cooperation of artists and individuals who have had their work censored. Moreover, General Security’s decision-making process is partially influenced by the opinions of hard-to-access religious institutions and political groups”. The study demonstrates that the various institutions that implement censorship are not independent and lack the necessary qualifications and experience to do their work”. Also, according to the same study, “Public discourse on censorship remains limited, as evidenced by the complete absence of any judicial review of censorship decisions as well as a considerable lack in legal information on the topic”.

The third and quite interesting work that has been done lately was managed by the Beirut Theatre. The Beirut Theatre is one of the oldest theatres in town and has welcomed all through the years the best of national, regional and international artists. It is considered by the Lebanese cultural scene as a national heritage. Few years ago, the theatre shut its doors as the owners of the building decided to demolish in order to make way for a new one. This is where a number of artists stood up and decided to reverse this decision. A movement with the slogan “Give back the Theatre to Beirut” was born and grew up to become an association to fight for the preservation of the theatre. It resorted to legal measures and the case was given to a lawyer, but without success. In the end, one of the ministers, embarrassed by the big campaign and under pressure from the local Media, was able to declare the theatre as a National Heritage Cultural Space, putting an immediate stop to the demolition of the theatre. However, this case is still pending as the owners of the building have taken the case to court and pressed charges against the Ministry of Culture.

Funding

With the difficult political situation in the region, the financial support for arts and culture is becoming more and more difficult. However, this does not prevent the Lebanese cultural scene to remain lively and versatile.

In Lebanon, the arts institutions rely very much on foreign funding and mostly on European ones. Even though European budgets have diminished, they are still the most important source of funds.

Here are the main sources of funding for arts and culture in Lebanon:

International funding: maybe the best example of an international funding agency is the Ford Foundation that has supported for many years a number of Lebanese cultural associations like Shams (Performing Arts), Beirut DC (Cinema) and Ashkal



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Alwan (Visual Arts). Most of the funds were allocated for long periods, three to five years. Some of the grants are over, some others are finishing. The associations that were granted the funds from the Ford Foundation are now looking for new ways of insuring their survival but it is quite difficult as they were used to a secure annual budget that doesn't exist anymore.

European Union funding: there is a variety of European funds. It is becoming more and more current to work in partnership with European cultural and educational institutions. In other words, to be able to get the European fund, the funder is requiring the applicant to have at least one European partner, therefore the collaboration between non-European and European institutions is growing. These types of funding fall mainly within the exchange policy of some universities and cultural institutions. Needless to say, the European Union allocates some funds through their local representative office with a small yearly grant for culture and through bigger grants for targeted and specific fields of interest. The interest varies according to the current priorities of the European Union, which are not necessarily consistent with those of local institutions/projects, and which makes it difficult for them.

European cultural centres funding: these are available through the existing centres like the French Institute, Goethe Institute, The British Council and many others. With the economic crisis that the world is facing, the budgets of these centres are constantly shrinking. Political interests of foreign countries in Lebanon play a major role in the allocated budget. Therefore, it is obvious that France has a major interest in Lebanon and is still the main player in the cultural field.

Public funding: public funding has been for years almost non-existent. The Ministry of Culture's financial support is so minimal that cultural institutions/associations forget that it represents a funding option. However, lately the Municipality of Beirut began to play a significant role on the cultural scene. The Municipality is now supporting a number of cultural events and activities and is more and more implicated in the cultural scene. It has made a big progress also in partnering with foreign municipalities and in getting grants to support national initiatives. The involvement of the municipality is particularly important in Beirut but is not exclusive to it. In the regions, municipalities are realising the importance of cultural activities for their tourism economy and there is a real boom of festivals supported or initiated by the municipalities. For example, the municipality of Jounieh (in the north of the country) has put in place a yearly summer festival with a musical national, regional and international programme. Along with this programme, the municipality gives a huge space for the locals to sell their products and open late to attract the festival audience. Municipalities have realised that these festivals are touristic and economic and give a push for the regional growth. However, these initiatives depend on the interest of the mayor and his beliefs so the investment in culture is very unequal depending on each region.



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The Ministry of Tourism plays an important role in supporting the major international festivals that are organised every summer all over the country. The Ministry does allocate yearly a considerable amount of money for the most renowned festivals, like the Baalbek International Festival, Beiteddine International Festival and others. These festivals programme international stars and their tickets are quite expensive and thus are mainly reserved to the middle and upper classes. It is important to mention at this stage that a number of these festivals are managed by the wives of the political leaders of the country.

Small Arab grants: there is a number of small grants available to Arab artists/institutions/associations and which include Lebanon. Depending on the policy of each of the granting bodies, these grants can be for theatre and cinema production, for book publishing, for musical creations and other type of artistic activities. We can list AFAC (The Arab Funds for Arts and Culture), YATF (Young Arab Theatre Fund), AL MAWRED AL THAQAFY and others... These funds have been of great help to the Lebanese cultural scene even if they come as small grants.

Private funding: the private funding in Lebanon relies very much on personal acquaintances and social status. Most of the funding for arts and culture comes from the banking sector. Banks are playing a major role in sponsoring events in Lebanon, however they mainly support events that can bring them good visibility and have no interest whatsoever in the quality of the work. There is no transparency whatsoever in the way these banks sponsor activities and they do not have clear strategy that can guide cultural operators. You can find that both parties are mostly discontent: the banks complain about receiving a huge number of applications that they are not interested in, while the cultural operators grumble about never being able to secure sponsorship from a bank sponsor for any of their events.

Philanthropic funding: lately, we have seen some institutions succeeding in getting money from wealthy people. Upon closer look at this somehow new phenomenon, we also found out that this is usually done through acquaintances and social status. In other words, those who are able to get the money out of the rich Lebanese businessmen, are those who know them, which makes it quite difficult for the others to get to them.

New ways of funding: the crowd funding system is potentially a new mean to fund artistic and cultural activities. It is still a bit premature to say whether it could work in Lebanon, but what we can definitely state is that the cultural operators are exploring this new opportunity. Some attempts have already been made but we don't have clear feedback on the issue.

Some institutions are also adopting the system of fundraising event which is becoming quite common these days such as an auction event or event just a party to collect funds for the institutions. It is obvious that there is a continuous



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search by cultural operators for new and inventive ways to fund their activities and somehow they are being able to do it despite all the economic problems of the country. Almost all those who have been asked about the financial situation of culture in Lebanon the reply was that they were not getting enough funds to realise their work. There is a general dissatisfaction about the state of affairs but everybody seems to adapt.

4 Institutions and civil society actors and infrastructures

Institutions and civil society actors

If you look at any study made about the main players of the Lebanese economy, you will find that these are from the private sector. The private sector is any company that is owned by citizens and not by the government. In the cultural domain, the majority of the institutions are non-profit since this status allow them to get funds from foreign funding bodies (as most of these funding bodies require that the applicant is a non-profit association). The cultural scene is no exception; it is also based on independent individuals/institutions/associations, with great artistic, intellectual and/or entrepreneurship potentials. The Lebanese cultural scene is far from relying on anything but on human capacities and the possibilities it can bring.

Looking back to the years, and looking back at the cultural scene in particular, we could say that there are now what we can call the "Oldies" and another group that we can call the "New comers". The oldies are the cultural institutions/associations/individuals that came up in the 1990s, such as Zico House, Ashkal Alwan, Beirut DC, SHAMS, Khayal and others. At the time, Lebanon was just rising up from 15 years of civil war and a number of young arts lovers created a cultural mood that attracted foreigners from all over the world and gave back Lebanon a place on the international artistic scene. Ashkal Alwan was into visual arts and made public installations in public spaces. Beirut DC's main mission was to support the Arab Cinema. Zico House was concentrating on cultural development through civic and social associations. SHAMS was more involved in Performing Arts. Khayal was a puppet company for children. All the above mentioned institutions are still active today despite all the financial, administrative and institutional challenges that they have faced all through the years.

Along with these main institutions emerged also a number of festivals. In the performing arts' field, AYLOUL festival opened up the doors to a new wave of Lebanese artists that are now recognised internationally. AYLOUL was not only about showcasing Lebanese arts to the local audience; it was also about inviting curators to select and programme Lebanese arts in their own countries. AYLOUL revealed that the Lebanese audience, although small at the time, was ready and eager to open up to avant-gardist programmes and to regional and international arts scenes. AYLOUL doesn't exist anymore but it definitely opened up the door to many future achievements.



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Cinema festivals were also founded at the time like "Cinema Days of Beirut" which was created and organised by Beirut DC, the "Beirut International Film Festival" created and organised by Colette Naufal and "...Né à Beyrouth". What is worth mentioning at this stage is that each of these festivals was specialised in a domain ("Cinema Days of Beirut" in Arabic cinema, "Beirut International Film Festival" in the best of international cinema and "...Né à Beyrouth" in Lebanese cinema) and that somehow each managed to work without stepping out on the other festivals... This phenomenon also applied to the other disciplines. It was as if there was an exclusivity agreement between the players that no one dared to question. All three cinema festivals still exist and are now considered to be at the core of the domain in Lebanon.

For the theatre, the 90s also witnessed a very active movement due to the strength of the artistic directors of the theatres. Beirut had two main independent theatres: Al Madina Theatre and Beirut Theatre. Both were very active and programmed the best of the national and the regional theatrical productions. Al Madina Theatre is still active whereas the Beirut Theatre, closed in 1998, re-opened twice under two different managements. As you will read below, the Beirut Theatre is today in danger of destruction and a major campaign by local arts operators to is still ongoing to save the space. Today the city counts two independent theatres: Al Madina Theatre and Babel Theatre. They are both constantly struggling to keep up with their overheads and it looks like they might close because of the lack of funding. But somehow, they manage and until today they are both working. The city has also a number of theatres that belong to universities like Monot Theatre, which is a very active theatre and is mostly considered to be francophone, and Gulbenkian theatre which belongs to the Lebanese American University. This year, Joe Kodeih, a theatre director and actor has opened a new theatre and has until now programmed mainly Lebanese productions. There are a number of other theatres here and there but the above mentioned are the most renowned in the city. Outside the capital, the big other cities usually have at least one theatre, privately owned, like in Tyr and in Tripoli. As for villages, there is a growth in opening multidisciplinary centres that can host cultural events like small plays, movie screening, concerts, exhibitions, workshops, etc...

During the 2000s, the cultural scene saw the emergence of new associations, like Zoukak, which is a theatre company and a cultural association, and Collectif Kahraba. The similarities between the two associations is the teaming up of persons coming from different artistic backgrounds. Within the same association, you can find for example a photographer, a graphic designer, a dancer and a playwright. These individuals work on their own and in group and were capable of fostering a major place in the Lebanese cultural scene. However, even though the "Oldies" were also created as associations, they were managed by one person and looked more like an individual initiative.

A lot is being done also by individuals. Very few of these persons have majored in cultural management, since this field is not yet available in the local universities.



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The available majors are mainly cinema and theatre and there is very little on the management of these activities. Those who studied Cultural Management are mainly those who lived abroad and came back home. It is a common practice to find a theatre director wearing many hats, that of producer, sound and light designer, scenographer and even graphic designer for the same play. This is mainly due to the lack of financial support but we can notice that some changes are occurring and that the demand for professional specialisation is increasing.

Looking at the way these institutions are governed, we notice that most of them follow the same system. In the 90s, most of the cultural institutions started as an individual initiative. Zico House was initiated by Zico, Ashkal Alwan was initiated by Christine Tohme, etc. Soon most of these individuals decided to turn their initiatives into associations for two reasons: to have a legal status vis-à-vis the government and to be able to apply and get funds. Even though most of the "Oldies" were turned into associations, they are still until today managed and run by the same person who initiated them and they look more like an individual initiative. The association is just a judiciary cover.

Today, things have changed a bit; the institutions are turning more into collectives even though they are still legally registering as associations. The decisions are taken collectively. This is happening mostly within theatre companies like Zoukak and Collectif Kahraba. Very few of these associations are being able to get a proper administrative team due to financial problems. Among the success stories in terms of management, the Beirut Art Centre is one of the few organisations which was able since its creation to maintain its administrative team with its different components. One of the main problems of the cultural institutions in Lebanon is indeed to find funds for operational expenditures.

Infrastructures

Lebanon counts a number of small museums. The main one, the National Museum, is located in Beirut and is a public institution. The others are privately owned: Ameen Rihani Museum, Archaeological Museum of the American University of Beirut, Bsous Silk Museum, Byblos Fossil Museum, Byblos Wax Museum, Gibran Museum, Lebanese Heritage Museum, Museum of Lebanese Prehistory, Robert Mouawad Private Museum, Sidon Soap Museum, Sursock Museum (a modern and contemporary art museum in Beirut) and the Tourist Landmark of the Resistance.

In 2008, a project was initiated following a cooperation agreement between the City of Beirut and the City of Paris: a war-damaged building threatened with demolition at the end of the 1990s, "The Yellow House" was finally saved thanks to the efforts of civil society and the commitment of the City of Beirut. The Yellow House will be restored to accommodate:

- a museum,
- a cultural and artistic meeting place,
- a facility for archiving research and studies on the city of Beirut throughout history,



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- an urban planning office for the City of Beirut,
- an underground car-park.

This project is now under construction. It has been entitled "Beit Beirut" which means the house of Beirut.

In terms of libraries, public libraries can be found in most of the cities and major regions of the country. There are overall 7 municipal libraries, 15 ministry libraries, around 40 other libraries that are open to the great public and 25 private specialised libraries, like The Oriental Library, Orthodox Studies Centre Library and Engineering and Architects Order Library. There are also the universities' libraries.

ASSABIL, a non-governmental association founded in 1997 to establish and promote public libraries in Lebanon that are free and open to all, is operating the city's public libraries. ASSABIL has been commissioned by the Municipality of Beirut to manage and operate the municipal public libraries in the neighbourhoods of Bachoura (since 2000), Geitawi (since 2004) and Monnot (since 2008). In the coming years, ASSABIL and the Municipality of Beirut are planning to add to this existing network an additional 9 libraries throughout the city.

While it is uncommon for an NGO to be operating a city's public libraries, Assabil's arrangement fits within Beirut's trend towards private management and financing of public works. "The concept of public right is very poor in Beirut. The dominant culture or thinking is private, not public." said Boulad, the head of Assabil. Although the municipality provides Assabil with spaces for libraries and partial funding, it doesn't interfere in the NGO's management. Assabil also relies on corporations, corporate foundations, and foreign countries and foundations to help cover its costs. Since 2007, and upon the Minister of Culture's recommendation, the Lebanese Government has taken on the responsibility for financing the Revival Project of the Lebanese National Library, in continuation of the Rehabilitation Project funded by the European Union in 2003-2006.

Lately, the Lebanese cultural scene is witnessing a boom in the opening of cultural spaces with the opening of of AltCity, of Dawawine, of Metro Al Madina, of Beirut Art Centre and many other spaces that hold different activities all year long, ranging from movies screenings, talks, performances, concerts, installations, etc... The new trend is to have everything within one space: the screening space, the reading space, a cafeteria, a working space, etc... These are meant to be multifunctional spaces, capable of accommodating different kind of activities. These are again privately owned spaces. Each of these spaces has its audience and are therefore quite active.

In terms of theatre venues, the government owns one theatre which is the UNESCO Palace but the rest of the existing theatres (around 4) are privately owned. These theatres program Lebanese, Arab and international performances. Almost all the theatres are suffering from financial problems but were somehow able to survive despite of everything.



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4.1 Stakeholder analysis matrix of the cultural sector

Stakeholder and basics characteristics	Interests and how affected by the problems	Capacity and motivation to bring about change	Possible actions to address stakeholder interests
<p><i>Stakeholders from the private sector:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cultural Associations - Cultural Operators - Artists <p><i>Basic characteristics:</i> Independence</p>	<p><i>Interests:</i> Finding permanent financial support. Discovering and presenting the best artistic work to the audience.</p> <p>Affected mainly by financial problems.</p>	<p><i>Capacity:</i> Strong</p> <p><i>Motivation:</i> Average</p>	Create new funding possibilities.
<p><i>Stakeholders from the public sector:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Ministry of Culture <p><i>Basic characteristics:</i> Alienated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Municipalities <p><i>Basic characteristics:</i> Supportive</p>	<p><i>Interests:</i> For the ministry, to restructure their internal organisation and to fulfill their duties.</p> <p>Affected mainly by financial problems.</p>	<p><i>Capacity:</i> Weak</p> <p><i>Motivation:</i> Weak</p>	Offer consultancy and capacity-building trainings.
<p><i>Stakeholders:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Funding bodies - Sponsors <p><i>Basic characteristics:</i> Project-oriented</p>	<p><i>Interests:</i> To serve their missions through supporting arts and culture.</p> <p>Affected by the continuous political situation of the region</p>	<p><i>Capacity:</i> Strong</p> <p><i>Motivation:</i> Average</p>	Build a structured virtual platform where the funder/sponsor can know about the future plans/projects of each of the institutions in advance.
<p><i>Stakeholders:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Audience - Media <p><i>Basic characteristics:</i> Interested and available</p>	<p><i>Interests:</i> To see the best of Lebanese, Arab and international arts and culture.</p>	<p><i>Capacity:</i> Strong</p> <p><i>Motivation:</i> Average</p>	



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4.2 SWOT analysis of the cultural sector

	Helpful To achieve the objective	Harmful To achieve the objective
Internal to the organisation	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Freedom in the choice of the projects/events - Independence - Diversity in the arts fields - Openness to international artistic scene 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of specialised persons - Lack of continuity/sustainability in the projects - Deficiency in national strategy/policy - Nonexistence of the public sector
External to the organisation	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the interest of foreign cultural institutions in the Lebanese creativity - availability of exchange and collaboration programs - accessibility of foreign funds 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the unstable political situation - the unstable economic situation - the unstable regional situation

5 Education and Training

The main universities in Lebanon are the American University of Beirut (AUB), the Lebanese American University (LAU), the Lebanese University and the St Joseph University (USJ). There is a number of smaller ones like the Beirut Arab University, the Balamand University, the Notre-Dame University (NDU), Hagazian, etc... As can be understood from the name of each university, the curriculum is either in Arabic, French or English.

The main universities mentioned above offer programs related to arts and culture. However, the available programs are basic programs (like BA in History of Arts, BA in Communication Arts) but very few specialised programs exist. ALBA (Académie libanaise des Beaux-Arts) part of the Balamand University has some masters programs like Masters in Visual Arts, Masters in Design, Masters in Movie Production and Masters in Special effects.

15 years ago, new universities were accredited like AUST, Al Kafaat University, AUL, and others. These universities offer programs in TV, graphic and interior designs but no theatre or visual arts programs.

There are very few trainings available and these are implemented mainly either by universities or cultural associations. These are more like workshops considered as part of the university curriculum. Some universities invite foreign professional to give a workshop/training in a specific subject and when these are open to the public, there is a lot of interest.



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In 2011, Ashkal Alwan launched an interdisciplinary non-accredited arts study program entitled The HWP. The program admits artists and other cultural practitioners who wish to develop their formal, historical, and critical skills in a discursive setting, and provides enrolled fellows with feedback and resources to facilitate and support their practice. The program is also accessible to non-enrolled participants through various lectures and other activities that are open to the general public.

6 Non-professional practices and general audience

For a certain period of time, the audience or the wider public boycotted the theatre. Plays were becoming too experimental and the wider public didn't enjoy watching a one hour play without a word uttered or without understanding the meaning of it. Frustrated by the situation, artists complained of the general lack of interest in their art. However, this state of affairs has changed and currently audiences are eager to watch interesting plays and are becoming more demanding of quality. This is quite promising for the future of the theatre.

There is a huge interest by the Lebanese audience in paintings, designs of all sorts, installations, sculptures, etc... The visual arts spaces like the Beirut Art Centre for example bring to Lebanon the best of regional and international work and audiences rush to see it.

The movie sector has always had a preferential treatment amongst the Lebanese audience. American movies dominate the screens and are always ranking at the top of the Lebanese box-office. There are however a few initiatives like Metropolis that allows for a different kind of cinema to be seen. Even if the audience is smaller, these initiatives meet some success. A lot of special weeks are being programmed like the ARTE week or the Iranian Cinema weeks and these are awaited by a large number of people. There is a number of new cinema initiatives also taking place like the Cabriolet Film Festival which is the first outdoors film festival of its kind in Lebanon. The festival has since become an annual event and takes place over the course of three consecutive nights on Gemmayzeh Stairs in the heart of Beirut City.

As for music and concerts, the audience is there and awaiting international, Arab and Lebanese concerts.

On another note, the media is very supportive of the cultural scene in Lebanon. It follows all the events/activities/festivals/initiatives that take place in Beirut and outside of it. During the summer, the media is mostly dedicated to the international festivals that take place as mentioned above outside Beirut.

They also support the cultural scene by offering free advertisements on Radios, TVs, newspapers, magazines and online media websites. They are willing to partner with cultural institutions in return of some visibility that they can gain – that is if these institutions/festivals are independent. In Lebanon, almost each political party has



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its own TV, radio and newspaper. As long as cultural events have no political connotation, all the media are most of the time willing to cover them. When on the contrary the event does have a political connotation, then the organisers usually turn to the media (radio/TV/film) that have the same affiliations.

7 Conclusions and recommendations

Trying to identify the main problems of the Lebanese cultural scene, one comes up with different answers: financial issues, lack of coordination between the different cultural operators, absence of strategic infrastructures, inefficiency of the public sector, the quality of the productions and the type of audiences (the intellectual versus the big public, the urban versus the rural).

In the end, considering the serious instability of the Lebanese environment, the cultural scene may be considered as very lively. It seems that the Lebanese people, with all their complexity, have a keen knack for survival and that every time the country is facing difficulties, citizens gain in force and in creativity!

For the time being, there is a real expansion on the cultural level. The artistic scene is constantly moving, young and creative artists are emerging, the design and creative field have never been so vivid, theatre plays, musical creations, festivals, photo and painting exhibitions, crafts, dance... The city is always on the move and the Lebanese creators are present all over the world with their productions and initiatives. No one is expecting any support from the government or the country, and everyone is doing as he/she sees fit.

The problem remains the same for almost all the cultural associations: securing money/funds for the running costs. The question is: where do we go from here? What about next year? Where and how do we secure the funding? Most of the associations have to work on projects to secure money. Most of the times, the project is able to cover the salaries, the office expenses and of course the project itself. Therefore, the institution gets employees for this project on a temporary basis: it teaches them how to work according to institution standards but as soon as the project is over, the institution is no longer capable of paying its employees and has to let them go until it secures funding for another project. It is a vicious circle in which many institutions find themselves caught up, and it puts into question the sustainability of the institution. And yet when you look back you find that most of the institutions are still there and are still working as hard as the first day...

The other major issue has to do with coordination and transparency between the different theatres. The idea of publishing a common agenda, an idea by Zico House, for all the theatres came up as an answer to this issue. A common monthly agenda was prepared and distributed at the entrance of all theatres, in which one could find all the events programmed in all the theatres. It soon became clear that some events were taking place at the same time, which was a problem for the theatres, and the dates were coordinated accordingly. It went very well for a



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certain period of time, but as soon as Zico House stopped working on this, the theatres stopped this coordination and all the efforts that were put in place went to naught.

Another issue has to do with the duplication of the work: since the end of the civil war, we have witnessed duplication in the work done for the development of arts & culture. In the absence of real dissemination and serious record-keeping, every initiative is considered a new effort. In order to find out about theatrical or musical events or how many plays were staged in 2013, who staged them, in which theatre, how many people attended, requires tremendous personal effort. The same work is being done over and over again, year after year, without building up and progressing on any level...

In Lebanon, family is considered to be a very strong component of the society, and yet, upon closer look, the citizen has in fact a very individualistic approach, especially when it comes to business and work. Each cultural operator/institution is fighting to develop its work unilaterally with little concern for improving the national situation. If and when, he/she works on a specific national cultural issue, it turns out that this is because his/her work will benefit from this work.

Although the cultural scene is very lively mostly in Beirut, many things can be done to strengthen and improve the professional environment by both the public and the private sectors, inside and outside the capital. Together with the Ministry of Culture, a lot can and should be done but there is there is a long way to go.

Here are some outstanding points that need to be addressed:

- Work on archiving/recording what is happening culturally and artistically in Lebanon.
- Create a platform to gather all information related to the Lebanese cultural scene.
- Find ways to strengthen institutions through funding their operational expenditures and not only their projects.
- On the legislative level, find ways of securing more money to the cultural scene through the deduction of yearly percentages from taxes or income.
- Motivate the sponsors to clarify their cultural strategies.
- Encourage the cultural operators to allocate some of their time regularly to come up with solutions/ideas to improve the current situation, in coordination with other institutions
- Encourage the government to provide real financial support to cultural spaces.

During my meeting with the General Director of the Ministry of Culture, I was curious to know if the Ministry, at the time of its creation, looked into international



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examples to put its objectives. It turned out that the Ministry based all its structure on the French system.

I was very surprised to hear about this and asked again: "but in what way do we resemble the French system?" The cultural scene in France relies entirely on the Ministry whereas in Lebanon it is completely the opposite. I mentioned that our system looked more like the American system where most of the work is done through the institutions and communities.

Maybe what needs to be done at this stage is to re-look on the foundations of the cultural scene in Lebanon and start up all over again, after a deep research on international examples and come up with a new particular system that can suit a country like Lebanon. But then again, even if we don't, arts and culture will always be there and will always be as vivid as it has been and as it is today.

8 Annexes

- The site of the Ministry of Culture: <http://culture.gov.lb/>
- The site of the Mawred Al Thaqafy: <http://mawred.org/publications/culture-policy-publications>.
- « The Work of Censorship, Legally », a joint research by Nizar Saghieh, Nayla Geagea and Rana Saghieh.
- Interview with the General Director of the Ministry of Culture.
- Meeting with Paul Mattar, director of the Monot Theatre.
- Meeting with Hanane Hajj Ali, actress/researcher/teacher.