

cultural relations PLATFORM

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EU INTERVENTION IN LEBANON IN THE ARTS AND CULTURE SECTORS



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AUTHORS' NOTICE ON THE IMPACT OF THE SITUATION IN GAZA ON THE REPORT'S FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As part of this assignment, we held discussions with actors from the arts and culture sectors in Lebanon with the aim of formulating recommendations on an eventual European cultural policy in the country. Nevertheless:

- **The risk of genocide**¹ in Gaza where Israel continues to target civilians (as of 10 November over 11,078 people have been killed, two-thirds of them reportedly children and women according to UNRWA)² and bans the provision of drinking water, medicine and fuel, has exacerbated feelings of anger and injustice among Lebanese photographers, artistic directors, artists, musicians, singers, illustrators, filmmakers, designers, stylists, curators and programmers, whether based in Lebanon or in Western countries, who have expressed outrage at the violence inflicted on Gazans since October 7th,
- **The unconditional support from the European Commission and some European governments for Israel**, despite the new European measures taken to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza, has left a feeling amongst Lebanese actors in the arts and culture sectors that the defense of democratic and human values championed by the European Union in its policy has double standards and does not apply to them.

On October 13th, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen went to Tel Aviv and declared following a meeting with Benjamin Netanyahu that Israel has the “right” even the “duty to defend its population”. On October 9th, the Commissioner in charge of European Neighborhood Policy, Oliver Varhelyi, announced that the European Executive would review its development aid for the Palestinians, explaining that “all payments are Immediately suspended”. These declarations have weakened the voice of the European Union at a time when it had the opportunity to be an important and fair actor.

- **The punitive measures** taken against artists, photographers, and writers from the Arab world, has exacerbated these feelings.
In the Lebanese magazine *L'orient Le Jour*, an article entitled “When showing support for Palestine means putting yourself in danger”³ describe how the creative and

¹ United Nations: UN experts call on international community to prevent genocide against the Palestinian people 16 November 2023: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/11/gaza-un-experts-call-international-community-prevent-genocide-against>

² As of 1 November 2023, more than 3,500 children were killed according to Committee on the Rights of the Child

³ Gilles Khoury *Quand afficher son soutien à la Palestine signifie se mettre en danger*, OLJ, Beirut, 10 Novembre 2023
<https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1356729/quand-afficher-son-soutien-a-la-palestine-signifie-se-mettre-en-danger.html>

cultural industries have been undergoing a seismic shift, with actions with seemingly racist overtones being taken against personalities displaying their support for the Palestinian cause: two paintings by the artist Ayman Baalbaki were withdrawn from the catalog of Christie's biannual sale of Middle Eastern art organized on November 9th in London; the Palestinian writer, Adania Shibli, was deprived of the LitProm literary prize she was supposed to receive at the Frankfurt International Book Fair for her novel *A Minor Detail*; and two professional photographers in Lebanon says they no longer receive work from Western agencies because they voiced their support for Palestine on social networks, with numerous other examples confirming this sense of injustice.

Therefore, the recommendations in this report cannot have the expected impact without an explanation from the European Commission towards who feel betrayed.

Even if the structures and actors of culture and art were not insensitive to European funds, "this need would never be to the detriment of their pride" and to what they consider to be "a Western contempt towards their societies." This is essential to consider when currently working in the region, since for these artists, what is happening in Gaza is most definitely not a human crisis but rather a humanitarian crisis. There is a serious risk of compromising the accumulation of efforts that have been focused on this region for decades.

On a technical level, several scheduled interviews were postponed following a reluctance amongst actors to be interviewed and a general feeling of exasperation. We are working to schedule new meetings.



INTRODUCTION

Lebanon's economic, social and security situation has rapidly deteriorated since the October 2019 protests calling for an overhaul of the prevailing economic and political system. The 2019 uprising was the result of a policy pursued since the end of the civil war by successive Lebanese post-war governments, which has consisted of a sectarian distribution of power and wealth, increasing dependence on foreign aid while deliberately constraining productive sectors.

To tackle this situation, sectarian leaders opted for a dual method consisting of immobilism towards dealing with the economic crisis and, at the same time, oppressing the uprising. The COVID-19 pandemic was beneficial for the regime as it helped deter people from protesting while further isolating them. On August 4, 2020, the Beirut blast which devastated the capital marked the decisive point in confirming the regime's failure to protect Lebanese society. More than that, it forced people to choose between resignation or searching for a better, safer place to live. This allowed leaders to regain their power using fear of war, fueling sectarian conflicts, and establishing themselves as saviors working outside the framework of state institutions. This crisis continues to this day, threatening the entirety of Lebanese society who are being faced with a "triple crisis" wherein a broad segment of the Lebanese and non-Lebanese population has fallen below the poverty line⁴.

According to the World Bank Lebanon Economic Monitor (LEM)⁵ released in June 2021, the country's economic and financial crisis is likely to rank among the three most severe crises globally since the mid-nineteenth century: "In the face of colossal challenges, continuous, policy inaction and the absence of a fully functioning executive authority threaten already dire socio-economic conditions and a fragile social peace with no clear turning point in the horizon". The sharp deterioration in basic services would have long-term implications: mass migration, loss of learning opportunities/brain drain, poor health outcomes, etc. As a result, Lebanon is being faced with a dangerous depletion of resources, including human capital, with highly skilled labor increasingly likely to take up potential opportunities abroad, constituting a permanent social and economic loss for the country. This permanent damage to human capital would likely be highly irreparable.

⁴ UNICEF: *Synthesis of the crisis' impact on Lebanon*

⁵ World Bank Groupe. *Lebanon Economic Monitor*. Spring 2021.

<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/394741622469174252/pdf/Lebanon-Economic-Monitor-Lebanon-Sinking-to-the-Top-3.pdf>

The arts and culture sectors, like all sectors in Lebanon, were strongly impacted. In a study published in 2020 by the Basil Fuleihan Financial Institute⁶, “the CCI sector growth was in line with the general trend of the Lebanese economy, marking a turnover peak in 2017, with a slight increase of 1.4% compared to 2016, comparable to the GDP growth rate. In 2018 and 2019, the sectors are in recession and suffers an aggravated activity slowdown, with negative growth rates of -2.5% in 2018 and -7.9% in 2019”.

However, these sectors were sources of income before 2019. According to the study published in 2020⁷, the Lebanese Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) hold the greatest growth potential compared to other countries in the Middle East [World Bank, 2018] and were a major determinant of wealth creation in Lebanon between 2004 and 2015, contributing to 4.75% of the country’s GDP in 2015, or 2.3 billion USD according to the “Creative Economy Report 2010” published by UNESCO/UNDP [2010]. In a 2010 ranking of countries according to the ratio of the creative industries’ contribution to wealth creation, Lebanon ranked first in the Middle East and North Africa region, ahead of countries such as Jordan, Syria and the United Arab Emirates [UNESCO/UNDP, 2010]. Until 2015—the last year for which international comparisons are possible—Lebanon still ranked ahead of countries such as Egypt and Canada, among others, in terms of the CCIs contribution to GDP. This sector entered a period of stagnation followed by a recession in 2018, with zero growth rates until 2018 and negative growth rates from 2019 onwards.

In terms of job opportunities, the Central Administration of Statistics⁸ reported in 2018 that 13,000 individuals worked in the artistic professions, accounting for 0.8% of the active population, while a survey conducted by the World Bank suggests that this figure could actually be closer to 75,000 people, constituting 4.5% of the active population.

Although these figures should be taken with caution, as some reports include sub-sectors such as jewelry and textiles in the ICC, the table below (Figure 1) displays the evolution of the contribution of certain CCI sectors to the economy (in USD).

⁶ Basil Fuleihan Financial Institute. *The Contribution of Cultural and Creative Industries to the Lebanese Economy. Cultural statistics at the service of economic development*. Beirut, October 2020: <http://www.institutdesfinances.gov.lb/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/ICC-report-sept21-fr.pdf>

⁷ Basil Fuleihan Financial Institute. *The Contribution of Cultural and Creative Industries to the Lebanese Economy. Cultural statistics at the service of economic development*. Beirut, October 2020: <http://www.institutdesfinances.gov.lb/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/ICC-report-sept21-fr.pdf>

⁸ Arts and culture in Lebanon February 2022 *Overview of the cultural landscape from the thawra to February 2022*. Beirut 2022. <https://panarab.s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/30b7c1f58ecd3e17>

Evolution of the contribution of CCI to the economy (in USD) according to classification adopted by the study between 2016 and 2019				
Classification of CCI	2016	2017	2018	2019
Performing arts and festivals (excluding music)	92,835,167	114,514,367	99,330,352	86,144,627
Visual arts	36,396,776	38,165,192	38,019,488	31,400,757
Cinema	87,000,295	93,086,065	89,171,695	78,810,150
Publishing: books and press	494,256,050	476,757,914	417,898,006	353,028,202

Figure 1 Evolution of the contribution of certain CCI sectors to the economy (in USD) between 2016 and 2019 according to the classification adopted by the study

However, despite the multi-dimensional crisis, it is noteworthy to observe that the arts and cultural sectors in Lebanon, encompassing various artistic domains such as music, visual arts, cinema, and theater, continues to demonstrate resilience and determination rather than succumbing to the challenges. This is achieved by adapting its working methods to new circumstances, launching new initiatives and collectives that foster collaboration and experimentation, decentralizing the art scene, and promoting cultural activities beyond Beirut. This decentralization benefits artists from various sectors in cities such as Tripoli, Sidon, Tyre, Zahle, among others. Not only does it provide opportunities and exposure for artists, but it also nurtures a more inclusive and diverse artistic landscape throughout the country. Additionally, the mobilization of the Lebanese Diaspora continues to play an important role in supporting the arts and culture sectors.

In this report, through a quantitative study and in-depth research, we seek to examine the current situation of the arts and culture sectors in Lebanon, and their challenges and needs.

METHODOLOGY

Assignment objectives

Based on qualitative research, analysis, and discussions with various stakeholders in Beirut and major Lebanese cities, the objective of this assignment is to comprehend the characteristics and behaviors of the arts and culture sectors in Lebanon from 2019 to the present day. The primary aim is to create a comprehensive mapping of the artistic and cultural scene, thereby enabling a better understanding of the overall situation, including both challenges and opportunities stemming from before and after the 2019 uprising of 2019 that was followed by the financial and economic crisis.

By identifying the sectors' needs and providing recommendations, this assignment aims to assist the EU Delegation in Lebanon in mobilizing the necessary resources and developing an intervention strategy to support these sectors, which are currently experiencing a severe economic and financial crisis.

Specifically, the assignment entails:

- Mapping different institutions: their nature, sector of intervention, location, establishment, human resources, economic capacities, and challenges,
- Identifying potential organizations/structures that could benefit from EU support,
- Formulate recommendations for the development of an EU artistic and cultural strategy in Lebanon.

Sectoral perimeters

For the purpose of the assessment, we have chosen to exclude certain cultural and creative sectors despite their significance. These sectors include architecture, video games, tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and design. Our rationale for this exclusion is as follows:

- Architecture and tangible/intangible cultural heritage: The study of these sectors necessitates a distinct approach involving the Ministry of Culture and UNESCO, as they hold responsibility for their management. Numerous studies have already been dedicated to these sectors in Lebanon, primarily focusing on their preservation. A recent example pertains to the request to include the Rachid Karami International Fair, designed by Oscar Niemeyer, on the UNESCO World Heritage List,
- Video games: The video game industry is relatively new in Lebanon, and conducting research on this sector requires an inventory to define its creators, users, and financing mechanisms,
- Design sectors: This sector necessitates a greater allocation of human resources and time for in-depth study.

Temporal perimeters

Considering the significant radical, economic, demographic, and social changes that Lebanon has undergone since 2020, it is relevant to establish 2019 as the pivotal year demarcating two distinct situations: the periods before and following the economic recession in the country. Therefore, the analysis primarily concentrates on studying the artistic and cultural sectors from 2019 to the present day.

Methodology

The figure below depicts the three phases carried out by the consultants, with the exception of the organization of a consultation meeting, planned for the third phase and which was canceled.

3 PHASES

PHASE 1: Inception phase

- ❖ Kick-off meeting to gather information, validate the methodology, specify the timetable for deliverables, and ensure a mutual understanding of the study's objectives
- ❖ Defining selection criteria
- ❖ Desk review

PHASE 2: Data collection and analysis

- ❖ Mapping on Excel sheet format: name, date of creation, sector of intervention, human resources, etc.
- ❖ Development of interview guidelines
- ❖ Semi-structured interviews
- ❖ Focus groups meetings
- ❖ Data analysis
- ❖ Presentation of preliminary results on PowerPoint

PHASE 3: Synthesis and recommendations

- ❖ Data analysis
- ❖ Additional interviews with artistic, cultural initiatives and organisations
- ❖ Final report: general overview of the situation, findings, recommendations
- ❖ Organisation of the consultation meeting

This report corresponds to the third phase of the assessment, in which the following sections are presented:

- An overview of the laws governing the arts and culture sectors and their evolution,
- The various main international and regional actors involved in the cultural sector in Lebanon and the main programs and projects,
- An analysis of the collected data, which forms the basis for the recommendations suggested in this report to propose new scenarios that are both targeted and sustainable.

THE ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL SECTOR IN LEBANON: OVERVIEW

A. LEGAL FRAMEWORKS REGULATING THE CULTURAL SECTOR IN LEBANON

“Until 1993, the concept of culture was not included in the designation — nor in the structure — of state ministries; the Ministry of National Education was the one to deal with fine arts as part of its tasks.” In 1993, the first Ministry of Culture was established in Lebanon pursuant to Law No. 215 dated 2/4/1993 which established the “Ministry of Culture and Higher Education” and replaced the Ministry of National Education and Fine Arts with the “Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports”. Until 2000, the concept of culture had been linked to the educational sector in general; however, in that year, Law No. 247 dated 7/8/2000 regarding the merger, abolition and establishment of ministries was promulgated and the “Ministry of Culture” became an independent, specialized ministry with distinct goals, objectives, structure, bodies and budget. In 2008, Law No. 35 related to the “Organization of the Ministry of Culture” was promulgated.⁹

Below are is a time line of the laws and organizations regulating the arts and culture sectors in Lebanon

- 1993** Establishment of the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education
- 2000** The Ministry of Culture became an independent specialized ministry, with distinct goals, objectives, structure, bodies and budget
- 2008** Promulgation of Law No. 35/2008 related to the “Organization of the Ministry of Culture,” which resulted in:
 - The organizational structure of the Ministry of Culture became the only governing entity for the Ministry’s bodies, thereafter unifying all legislation into one law to “ensure clarity, logical sequence and fluidity in terms of the form and guarantees a minimum level of consistency and integration among its clauses and provisions.”
 - Establishment of two funds in the Ministry: 1) The Fund to Support Cultural Activities and Industries that fall under the competence of the Directorate General

⁹ Nayla Geagea, in study *Insights into Cultural Policies in Lebanon*, Culture Resource (Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafy) with the Orient-Institut Studies 6. Beirut, February 2021

of Cultural Affairs, and 2) the Fund for Antiquities and Heritage and Historical Buildings.

- The right of artists and art workers to establish professional syndicates specialized in the fields provided for in this law was enshrined; however, it maintained the system of authorization in force, in accordance with the Labour Law and the Trade Union Organization Law (i.e. since the 1950s); thus the power to grant authorizations was transferred from the Ministry of Labour to the Ministry of Culture. This law ultimately restricted the right to join professional artistic syndicates, subject to the prior approval of the Ministry of Culture.

2008 Regulation of Artistic Professions: Law No.56 of 27/12/2008

2012 Law No.7535 was passed to establish a Mutual Aid Fund, leveraging a 2% tax on the box office income of all artistic and cultural activities.

2014 Decree No.622/2014 was promulgated, and reorganized the structure and duties of the Directorate General of Cultural Affairs through the creation of four sub-sections and departments, as presented in the figure below.

Directorate General of Cultural Affairs



Figure 2 Detailed structure of the Directorate General of Cultural Affairs in accordance with Decree No. 622/2014

2016 Established by Law No. 35/2008, the Fund for Supporting Cultural Activities and Industries became operational, aiming to support programs and activities in the Directorate General of Cultural Affairs' fields of interest, and contributing to the funding of the productions and activities of the cultural industries and knowledge economy, particularly through the support and marketing of film production, documents and audio-visual publications. However, the impact of these funds remains unclear, since the amount allocated to this fund is quite limited with the majority of it devoted to payroll. For example, the estimated expenditure of the Ministry of Culture in 2008 was approximately 19 billion Lebanese pounds (i.e. 2 million US dollars) the budget of the Baalbek Festival amounts to 2 million US dollars, and the Beiteddine Festival ranges from 1.5 to 2.5 million US dollars. The Ministry of Culture, like other Ministries in Lebanon, relies on international and private funding.

Activity	% of net profit rate
Theatre, film and TV directors	40%
Composers and artists (singers)	40%
Actors	40%
Sculptors and painters	25%
Engraving and calligraphy artists	25%
Authors	25%
Organization of concerts and festivals	20%
Artistic activities	25%

Figure 3 Current fiscal tax policy pursued by the Lebanese Government on cultural sector workers ¹⁰

2023 According to a study conducted in 2023 by the Basil Fuleihan Institute in partnership with UNICEF¹¹, the measures proposed in the 2024 budget proposal formulated by the government will impact the arts and culture sectors by:

- Taxing individuals or entities that organize artistic or musical entertainment, or similar types of events prior to any revenue generation;
- Increasing the fees for the Patent Law, the Literary and Artistic property law, as well as for the commercial and industrial trademarks (some of them multiplied by 40 times their initial amount);

¹⁰ According to Decision No. 283/1, of 7 March 2008, issued by the Ministry of Finance, determining the applicable rates on total revenues to calculate the net profit. In *AN INITIATIVE OF THE WORKING GROUP ON CULTURAL POLICIES IN LEBANON*

¹¹ *A SUMMARY OF THE BUDGET PROPOSAL AS SENT BY THE GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON TO PARLIAMENT FOR REVIEW, DISCUSSION AND APPROVAL*. Institut des Finances Basil Fuleihan in partnership with UNICEF. Beirut 2023

- Imposing a new fee for obtaining a license to invest in a touristic establishment, receiving a confirmation certificate for the continuity of the investment, or acquiring a tourist guide card

However, it remains to be seen to what extent the stakeholders in the arts and culture sectors comply with these taxes, especially since until 2017 the Lebanese government had not passed a general budget since 2005, and since 2019, the administrations have been totally paralyzed.

Gaps that have not been addressed by the legislation

- Neglecting the problem of the tax burden endured by workers in this field (see Figure 2)
- The omission of any distinction between non-profit cultural works and activities and those that are purely commercial and for-profit
- Powers exercised by the security services and that diminish the authority of the Ministry of Culture and the financial and censorship powers that are still enshrined in Lebanese law, thus limiting artists' activity.
- On the professional artistic syndicates: the Lebanese government's ratification of Convention No. 87/1948 allows for the establishment of trade unions without any authorization, similarly to associations which only require a notice of recognition, contrary to what was enshrined in the new legislation.
- The legislation regulating theatres and cinemas has not been modified since the 1950s: the tax burdens still imposed on theatres and cinemas, and the law has subjected their investment to the same conditions imposed on nightclubs and hotels.

Censorship powers over artistic content

The laws that govern the arts and culture sectors are as follows:

- The law issued on 27/11/1947: Subjecting all films to the censorship of the General Directorate of General Security.
- Legislative Decree No. 2, of 1/1/1977: Subjecting plays to the prior censorship of the General Directorate of General Security.
- 27 Legislative Decree No. 55, of 5/8/1967: Banning the printing, publication and distribution of publications before obtaining a prior permit from the General Directorate of General Security.

Despite their inadequacy, these laws nevertheless exist, making it important to emphasize:

- The increasingly strong religious interference in the arts and culture sectors, leading to the imposition of conservative positions based on broad religious, sectarian,



political and ethical considerations. This restricts the freedom of creativity in this field and constitutes direct discrimination against workers in the sectors.

- The dominance of the clergy, whether Christian or Muslim, in the decisions of the General Directorate of General Security to censor artistic and cultural events. For example, in 2019, a concert by Mashrou'Leila, a Lebanese rock group, was banned under pressure from Christian clerics, accused of blasphemy after a photomontage published by the group's singer on his Facebook page (subsequently removed) where the face of the Virgin Mary has been replaced by that of the sultry singer Madonna.
- Stand-up comedians are now subject to more frequent interrogations than was the case prior to 2019 and are now governed, like other artists and all citizens, by criminal law, which prohibits any attack on the “authority of the state, its prestige, or its civil, military, financial, or economic institutions”¹².
- Since the 2019 protests, the General Security has paid more attention to censoring works that contain insults, which was not the case before 2019 when the censorship service merely indicated the presence of insults in an artistic work without banning them, according to an anonymous source from General Security.

¹² Lebanese penal code: https://www.stl-tsl.org/sites/default/files/documents/legal-documents/relevant-lebanese-law/CHA_09_0048_1July2010_FR.pdf

B. MAIN FUNDING RESOURCES

Involvement of official authorities in the artistic and cultural scene in Lebanon

The Lebanese state's involvement is often driven by certain political powers and various sectarian groups; as a result, major festivals held in the country have sectarian implications. These renowned summer festivals receive the majority of public and private funding devoted to the performing arts. According to a study conducted in 2017, the Ministry of Tourism has a yearly envelope of 2.6 million dollars (2.4 million €) with which to fund such festivals, the three main festivals receiving the largest share of this budget, up to 500,000 € (460,000 €) for the Baalbek Festival.¹³

- The Beiteddine Festival is sponsored by Nora Junblat, wife of leader of the Socialist Progressive Party Walid Junblat. Société Générale Bank, the Mediterranean Bank and Medgulf Insurance Company are the major partners.
- The Tyre Festivals sponsored by Randa Berri, wife of Nabih Berri, the Speaker of the Parliament and leader of the Amal Movement
- A number of cultural activities in Tripoli and north Lebanon are conducted in cooperation with a foreign foundation sponsored by the MP and Minister Mohammed Al-Safadi who created the cultural centre Safadi in Tripoli in 2007,
- Former Minister Leila Solh Hamadeh and vice-president of the Alwaleed Bin Talal Foundation inaugurated the cultural movement located in the city of Bint Jbeil which was launched with the support of the Alwaleed Bin Talal Humanitarian Foundation,
- Najib Mikati, Prime minister and businessman, founded the cultural centre called Azm, Beit el Fann (Maison de l'art/Art House).

Cultural policy within the private (commercial) sector, before 2019

The private sector funds culture in two ways: 1) through fiat money in exchange for financial profits. We will only focus on the second one: 2) via sponsorship by companies, banks, large clubs, and rich individuals

- Byblos Bank sponsors, among other cultural events, the Byblos International Festivals and allocates some of its halls to organize a number of art galleries and support a number of plays.
- The FFA private bank organized art exhibitions in support of artists twice a year.

¹³ CONTEMPORARY PERFORMING ARTS IN LEBANON: AN OVERVIEW. IETM Mapping. Emmanuel Haddad. Beirut, March 2017

- Audi Bank sponsored the Lebanese film festival.
- Société Générale Bank, the Mediterranean Bank, Medgulf Insurance Co. are major partners of Bait Adden Festival.
- CMA CGM Co., Al-Waleed bin Talal Foundation and the Arab Company for Insurance are major financiers of the Baalbek Festival.

This situation has changed since 2019 due to the weakening banking system and the conflictual relationship that has been established between the Lebanese and the banks.

Cultural exchanges with Lebanon through international cultural centers and institutions While the list below is not exhaustive, it represents the foreign cultural centers and representations in Lebanon along with their main activities;

- **French Institute**

The French Institute has the mission of strengthening and promoting cultural exchanges between France and Lebanon. It is a multidisciplinary cultural hub, serving as a French language teaching center, a venue for cultural dissemination, and a platform for artistic exchanges. The Institute has nine branches: Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon, Deir Al Qamar, Zahle, four sub centers: Nabatieh, Tyre, Jounieh and Baalbek (for their activities see the table below).

- **American Cultural Center**

Opened in 2004, this center's programs are now part of the National Public Library in Baaqline in the Shouf District, the Public Library in Zahle Municipality, the Municipal Building in Rashaya (Beqaa) and the Kamel Yusef Cultural Center in Nabatieh (southern Lebanon), in cooperation with the Information and Cultural Affairs Section at the U.S Embassy in Beirut.

The Public Diplomacy Section (PDS) at the U.S. Embassy in Beirut has its Public Diplomacy Grants Program for arts and cultural programming. In 2023, the Program offered awards ranging from \$5,000 to \$25,000, with proposals needing include in their project "an American cultural element or a connection with American expert(s), organization(s), or institution(s)." ¹⁴

- **Russian Cultural Center**

This center in Beirut seeks to deliver Russian language education and promote cultural relations between Russia and Lebanon. To this end Russian-Lebanese cultural centers have been opened in Tripoli, Batroun, Baalbek, Beit Mery, Baakleen, Nabatieh and Rashaya.

¹⁴ Grant Opportunities: PDS Annual Program Statement, U.S Embassy in Lebanon: <https://lb.usembassy.gov/pds-annual-program-statement-2023/>

In 2010 the center opened the Shouf cultural center branch, which works towards familiarizing the local community with Russian culture and includes a ballet dance school that has become renowned in the Shouf area.

Russian Film Festival in Lebanon: this festival is held with the support of the Russian Foreign Ministry and under the patronage of the Lebanese Ministries of Culture and Tourism, and with the support of the Lebanese embassy in Russia.

- [Embassy of Japan in Lebanon](#)

The Embassy of Japan organizes various cultural events to strengthen exchange and mutual understanding between Japan and Lebanon: In 2018, there was joint concert between the Lebanese National Higher Conservatory of Music and Japanese Taiko Drumming performers in Beirut, as well as the Japanese Photo Exhibition titled “Tohoku through the Eyes of Japanese Photographers” at the University of Balamand and the Lebanese University in cooperation with the Japan Foundation.

In 2008, the Japanese Academic Center was opened at Saint Joseph University, as the university had begun offering Japanese language courses since 2005. The center organizes various cultural activities. In 2017, the government of Japan funded a capacity-building project that aims to strengthen humanitarian and institutional infrastructure for the safeguarding of Lebanese living heritage. The project was implemented by the UNESCO Regional Office in Beirut.

- [Confucius Institute](#)

This first Confucius Institute in the Middle East was established in October 2006 through an agreement with Saint Joseph University. It is the official Chinese language center in the country. The center includes language classes and cultural activities, opening the door to cultural exchange in numerous fields such as calligraphy, papercutting, and singing, along with lectures on Chinese medicine, politics, and economics. The institute has launched competitions in the Chinese language along with the Chinese Embassy in Beirut, such as the Speech Competition and Singing Competition.

- [Goethe-Institute](#)

The Goethe-Institut in Lebanon organizes and supports a broad spectrum of cultural events that present German culture and promote international cultural exchange. The language department focuses on training workshops and seminars for teachers of German. The Media Lounge of the Institut offers up-to-date information on culture, politics and society in Germany. Events are regularly organized in cooperation with Lebanese partners (for project(s) see the table below).



- [House of Arts and Culture, the Lebanese-Omani Centre](#)

Funded by the Sultanate of Oman in 2009 in Beirut, the house for art and culture is under construction. The House will be home to facilities for a multitude of forms of artistic expression: Theatre, Dance, Graphic, Cinematic, and Environmental Arts.

- [Instituto Cervantes](#)

The Cervantes Institutes in Beirut, Kaslik and Tripoli aim to promote the Spanish language and culture in Lebanon. The Institute has a program of cultural activities that includes conferences, film screenings, book presentations, exhibitions, and dance and theatrical performances, with a special emphasis – in Lebanon – on musical concerts and performing arts. In 2014 the Centre cooperated with Dar al-Mussawir (Photographer's House), Metropolis Cinema, and Reading Days Festival. "Cervantes'" most important contribution is carried out through the Beirut International Platform for Dance.

- [British Council](#)

The BC focuses on English Language Learning Centers, education through joint work programs at the school and university level, community development in regard to social development, and different art forms through seeking the development of young talents in the field of cultural policies. Various programs to support cultural policies have been specified within the agenda of the British Council. The Council organizes an annual program for young cultural leaders worldwide in order to support them in developing their skills and expertise and being the best directed they can be for the success of their cultural projects (for project(s) see the table below).

- [Italian Cultural Center](#)

The Italian Cultural Institute and the Embassy of Italy promote and disseminate Italian language and culture through the promotion of inter-university cooperation and the organization of courses and language events, aiming to encourage the circulation of ideas, arts, sciences, and cultural activities between Italy and Lebanon. A bilateral cultural, scientific, and technological collaboration agreement was signed with the Lebanese state in 2000. It introduced the teaching of Italian as a second foreign language in several Lebanese secondary schools, at the Lebanese University, at the Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik, and at Haigazian University. In addition to Beirut, the Italian Cultural Institute has a branch in Tyre and organizes activities in Dbayeh, Jounieh, Nabatieh, Sarba, Sidon, Zahle, thanks to specific agreements concluded with local public and private institutions. The Committee of the Dante Alighieri Society is active in Tripoli. Furthermore, four Italian archaeological missions are operational in Lebanon, operating in the north, Chouf, and Tyre regions, respectively (with two of these missions operating in the latter). Cultural promotion takes place through the organization of and participation in events, including artistic and photographic exhibitions, opera, chamber, jazz, and popular music concerts, conferences, theatrical performances, and poetry recitals. Among the partnerships in cultural events, there are collaborations with the Beirut Art Film Festival (BAFF), Beirut International Platform of Dance (BIPOD), Liban Jazz, the MACAM Museums (Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art), Sursok Museum, and Beit Beirut.



- [Cultural Council of Iran](#)

The center carries out activities such as intellectual and cultural seminars and conferences related to general religious and cultural matters, periodic cultural publications, and artistic festivals, especially at the cinematic level. On the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Cultural Commission of the Islamic Republic of Iran organized, in cooperation with the Beirut International Center for Production and Al-Manar TV, the 2nd Iranian Cinema Festival in Beirut.

- [Embassy of Switzerland to Lebanon and Syria](#)

The Swiss Cooperation Program for the Middle East 2019-2024 is the Swiss response for Lebanon based on the Regional Cooperation Program Middle East 2019-2024 that also guides the country's responses in Iraq, Jordan, Syria and Turkey.

- [Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon](#)

The Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon was established in 1979 as the Delegation of the European Commission. The EU Delegation deal with political and economic issues, trade, and cooperation in a wide array of fields.

Through its engagement with political actors, civil society, the private sector, academics, the media and citizens, the EU Delegation raises awareness of EU issues and concerns among the Lebanese authorities and the broader Lebanese public.

The EU Delegation's main tasks include:

- Representing EU interests in coordination with the EU Member States in Lebanon.
- Cooperating with Lebanese partners in areas of mutual interest.
- Ensuring that the EU cooperation benefits those most in need.

The Association Agreement signed in 2002 and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) Action Plan constitute the main framework of current relations between the EU and Lebanon.

- [European Union National Institutes for Culture- EUNIC](#)

The European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) is the European network of organizations engaging in cultural relations from all EU member states and associate countries. It was created in 2006 by six EU cultural institutes: The Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the British Council, the Danish Cultural Institute, the Goethe-Institut, the Institut français and SICCA, the predecessor of the Dutch Cultural Agency (for projects see table below). EUNIC is a partner of the EU in defining and implementing EU cultural policy.



EUNIC members are joined together in 139 clusters in 107 countries worldwide; clusters are the network's branches, established where at least three EUNIC members are represented to engage in cultural relations, co-creating activities with partner organizations. In Lebanon, the full members of the Cluster are the Danish Cultural Institute, Goethe-Institut, Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Institut français, Romanian Cultural Institute, Instituto Cervantes. The associate member at the global level is the British Council.

However, it is challenging to identify projects led by EUNIC itself rather than by its members. In project communication, the focus is often on individual members or clusters.

- [Lebanese branch for the network of national European institutes](#)

The institute was established in 2011 in order to encourage partnerships between European cultural centers and stimulate cultural pluralism. This network includes: the Institut français, Goethe Institute, British Council, Cervantes Institute, Italian Cultural Center and the Romanian Cultural Institute.

Regional Funds

The three principal regional funds that support cultural production are:

- Culture Resource (Al Mawred al Thaqafy)¹⁵: A regional, non-profit organization founded in 2003 that seeks to support artistic creativity in the Arab region and to encourage cultural exchange within the region and beyond. The work of Culture Resource is based on an appreciation of the value of the diverse cultural heritage within the Arab region, and a belief in the critical role of culture in the development of civil society, the importance of access to culture for all, and the rights of artists to freedom of expression.
- The Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC)¹⁶: Founded in 2007 through the initiative of Arab cultural activists as an independent foundation to support individual artists, writers, researchers, intellectuals, as well as organizations from the Arab region working in the field of arts and culture. Since its launch, AFAC's programs have steadily expanded to cover cinema, photography, visual and performing arts, creative and critical writings, music, and documentary films, in addition to funding research, training programs and cultural events. Based in Beirut, AFAC works with artists and organizations all over the Arab region and the rest of the world.

¹⁵ <https://mawred.org/?lang=en>

¹⁶ <https://www.arabculturefund.org/>



- Mophradat¹⁷: Young Arab Theatre Fund, founded in 2004, Mophradat creates opportunities for artists from the Arab world through an inventive approach to funding, commissioning, collaborating, and gathering. The name Mophradat is an (eccentric) transliteration of the Arabic word meaning vocabulary. Their name speaks to the uniqueness of individual elements in a collective, but also to the way in which, brought together, they generate shared meanings and understandings.

The diaspora's role in supporting the arts and culture sectors

Historically, the diaspora plays a significant role in stabilizing the financial situation of families in Lebanon, given the large number of Lebanese individuals worldwide.

The diaspora has seen its role increase during the crises experienced by Lebanon, especially following the August 4th explosion. For example, several initiatives were launched on personal and institutional levels. Exhibitions of Lebanese artists based in Paris were held in that city and in Lisbon, while others like MUSICA SAWA ("Music Together") were launched to "highlight the seriousness of the situation in Lebanon and assist Lebanese NGOs." For one month, artists provided a virtual performance each day, allowing audiences to make donations. As well, there has been mobilization with international organizations to ensure artistic residencies, especially in France. As well, there is participation in operational funding for certain organizations, etc.

Table of international funds or different donors

The table below presents a non-exhaustive list of sources of international funding in the arts and culture sectors in Lebanon. It is worth noting that it is difficult to find information related to international funding in these sectors because 1) they are sometimes presented in projects related to civil society, actions for democracy, actions to prevent immigration, etc., and 2) they are sometimes a component of a larger program. The aim of this section is to provide an overview of the sectors financed by different donors, in order to avoid redundancies in actions and ensure complementarity within the different programs.

¹⁷ <https://mophradat.org/en/who-we-are/>

International Cooperation In the Arts and Culture Sectors In Lebanon Since 2018

Project Title	Funders	Budget	Local Partners	Duration	Description
Music schools for Refugees	British Council, Cultural Protection Fund	£488,160	Action for Hope	2020-2021	The project's aim is to preserve and promote traditional Syrian music and musical instrument making among refugee communities in two musical schools in Lebanon and Jordan
Preserving the living memory of the pastoral routes and heritage of the Bedouin	British Council, Cultural Protection Fund	£396,621	American University of Beirut	2020-2021	The project aims to collect, archive and share the traditional skills and living memory of the Bedouins of Bekaa in Lebanon
Masarat Grants program: We Must Clown Program. Program Ethno for folk, world and traditional music. The 'Story of Nujoud' Program for refugees and displaced people.	British Council	Grants ranging from 4000 to 10,000 GBP		2021	The program seeks to respond to the needs of artists and cultural practitioners in Iraq, Jordan Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Yemen through the provision financial support 21 projects have received grants to implement their projects by October 2021.
Cinematheque Beirut	Norwegian development aid	NOK 1.1 million	Metropolis Cinema	2020 - 2021	This project aims at expanding the current capacities of the Beirut Cinematheque in research, cataloguing, and raising awareness on the importance of preserving Lebanese film heritage.
Support to Maqamat Programs	Norwegian development aid	NOK 1.8 million	Maqamat Theatre Dance	2018 - 2019	The project provides Maqamat with support to run their programs.

MARSAH by WARCHE 13	Norwegian development aid		Warche 13	2022 - 2023	The project aims at strengthening and sustaining the independent cultural and artistic sphere in Tripoli, in the lead up to it serving as the Arab Capital for Culture in 2024.
Arab Image Foundation	Norwegian development aid	1.7 million NOK	AIF - Arab Image Foundation	2016 - 2017	The project will enable the AIF to ensure a better preservation of its collections, through physical archiving and digitization.
Reviving Beirut's Culture in the frame of the Li Beirut ¹⁸	Lebanon Financing Facility LFF, multi-donor trust fund	\$2.2 million	Administered by the World Bank	Launched in September 2020	Call for proposals to develop cultural productions in areas affected by the explosion at the city's port on Aug. 4 2020. The initiative aims to revitalize cultural life in the Lebanese capital artists and institutions weakened by the Aug. 4, 2020 port blast.
Construction of the National High Institute for Music "Conservatory" in Dbayeh	Chinese government under the Belt and Road Initiative	\$ 60 million	Lebanese National Higher Conservatory of Music	Started in 2020	To improve music and art education in Lebanon but also to provide new opportunities for cultural exchanges.
Strings of Hope - Chamber Music Mentoring Program 2023	The Goethe-Institute Lebanon		Musicales de Baabdash, the Lebanese National Higher Conservatory of Music	2023	A mentoring program designed for Lebanese advanced students, and young musicians in the field of classical music, to enhance the skills of young Lebanese students/musicians, working towards a joint chamber music concert with the German musicians.

¹⁸ Li Beirut: An international initiative launched by UNESCO, in the aftermath of the Beirut explosions, to support the rehabilitation of schools, historic heritage buildings, museums, galleries and the creative industry. With the support from the German Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Talents Beirut/9 th Edition	Goethe-Institute		Metropolis Association	2023	The project aims to support film talents from the Arab World,
FANTASMEEM in the frame of the project Cultural and Creative Industries	Goethe-Institute				The program is part of an initiative of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Collaboration and Development to support the creative economy in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Senegal, Kenya and SouthAfrica,
Rehabilitation of the National Library at Sanaye Beirut	Qatar				
Art & Territoire	The Cooperation and Cultural Action Service of the French Embassy		In collaboration with local structures and municipalities	2021-2022	The program aims to support artistic projects dedicated to the promotion of Lebanese heritage, it emphasizes contemporary creation and the importance of its anchoring in the heart of the territories.
NAFAS	Co-financed by the French the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture.		The Association of Cultural Meeting Centers and the French Institute of Lebanon	2020-2022	Emergency program for artistic residencies in France for 100 Lebanese artists, hard hit in the exercise of their profession.
Lawha	ERC: European Research Council	€ 1,498,813.00	Hosted by the Orient-Institute Beirut (OIB) of the Max Weber Foundation	2020 - 2025	This research and database project aims to investigate the trajectories of artists and their works in and from Lebanon since its independence in 1943.
Rehabilitation and valorization of the Qadisha Valley	Italian cooperation Agency	€ 500.000	UNESCO	2023	The initiative aims to rehabilitate and valorize the Qadisha Valley, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1998.

Solidarity Fund for Artistic and Cultural Structures	Drosos Foundation		Arab Fund for Arts and Culture & Culture Resource (Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafy)	Ongoing	To navigate the current crisis in the country and to develop a new framework for the future of the arts and culture sectors.
					This project aims to develop the life skills of young people and to professionalise artists through the establishment of the first performance-training programme for engaged street art in Lebanon.
An Independent Dance Space	Drosos Foundation		Studio 8	Ongoing	To provide Studio 8 with comprehensive support for creating an independent dance space and platform.

Other sources of cultural funding:

- Abu Dhabi Film Festival, SANAD Fund

SANAD is the Development and Post-Production Fund of the Abu Dhabi Film Festival (ADFF). SANAD provides talented filmmakers from the Arab world with meaningful support from within the region towards the development or completion of their narrative and documentary feature-length films.

- Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC)

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture focuses on the physical, social, cultural and economic revitalisation of communities in the Muslim world. It includes: the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme, and the Aga Khan Historic Music initiative.

- Arts Collaboratory (Project Fund for Visual Arts and Social Innovation)

This project fund finances artistic projects that focus on research about societal issues, facilitating relationships and the development of new perspectives on social, economic and/or climate issues.

- Bidayyat for Audiovisual Arts

Bidayyat also supports the production of short documentary and experimental films; throughout the year Bidayyat launches one to two annual calls for proposals for long documentary film projects (duration from 24 to 90 min).

- Doha Film Institute

Development, production and post-production funding is available for first- and second-time directors from the MENA region for feature length projects. Short films are eligible.

- Fondation Marc de Montalembert

The Marc de Montalembert grants provide support to projects related to Mediterranean cultures or to artistic crafts and trades. Such projects help young people from the Mediterranean region.



DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

It is challenging to separate the political crisis from the financial and economic crisis and the 2019 uprising, as there is a causal link between these three events. This interdependence is noticeable in the responses of institutions and artists.

Nevertheless, information collected in our survey reveals that the impacts and responses provided by the arts and culture sectors differ according to the 2019 uprising, the financial and economic crisis, the COVID pandemic, and the August 4th blast.

In her study, Maissa Abou Rahal observes this evolution of impacts and responses in the performing arts sector, an analysis that can be applied to all sectors: “The events of October 2019 have had a considerable effect on the performing arts community, whether in the dynamics of the social scene, the sense of civic responsibility, and the representation of different activist groups. Following that uprising in activism, the pandemic came in halting the rhythm and imposing a time of reflection, discussion, and observation of the ‘creative machine’ ... Some performances took place virtually, other artists and professionals retrieved in a state of reflection, until life and movement started emerging again, under an ever-so-strong economic crisis, meager activities tried to kick in to yet again the knockout of mass destruction with the August 4th 2020 catastrophe. Humans injured, studios and theaters destroyed, investments obliterated, and a state of urgency, cooperation and solidarity for survival took over... private organizations took the lead to organize support initiatives and collaborations. Coming back from that state of destruction, survival, shock, was challenging, yet, also a form of survival and perseverance”.





Figure 4 August 4th Beirut Explosion Direct Disaster Impact

Thus, in this section we try to study the current situation of the arts and culture sectors in Lebanon, where we can observe the devastating effects of these different crises along with the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we also witness the emergence of various performing arts, increased public engagement, outreach, and creativity, all with a strong sense of perseverance.

A. INSTITUTIONAL DATA

General observation

A 13-question survey were distributed to a group of 45 key participants (artists and institutions) to collect comprehensive data and perspectives. 25 institutions and 9 cultural practitioners responded to the questionnaires. The main reasons for the unwillingness of others to fill out the questionnaires ranged from practical reasons, such as being on vacation during this time, since institutions were often on vacation or busy organizing their return after vacation. Therefore, answering the questionnaires was not a priority. For others, there was frustration and weariness in answering and "once again" filling out such documents to explain their situation.

However, combined with our qualitative data, as well as extensive secondary research, we Managed to obtain efficient information. The analysis of the findings contained in this section will be compared to those from another unpublished study conducted in 2020-2021 by

Maissa Abou Rahal with the financial support of AFAC, where she assessed the impact of the triple crisis on the performing arts, visual arts, and art practitioners in Lebanon.

At the institutional level, participants in the survey were categorized into four main groups within the arts and culture sectors, each with subcategories:

- Performing arts category, currently defined in three main subcategories:
- Visual arts category, also referred to as the art scene, with five sub-categories:
- Cinema category
- Music category

Figure 5 depicts the number of participants per category at the institutional level. To this list, we will add the work of Ghada Ghanem, a singing professor at the National Conservatory who has launched various initiatives in the arts and culture sectors, outside the capital.

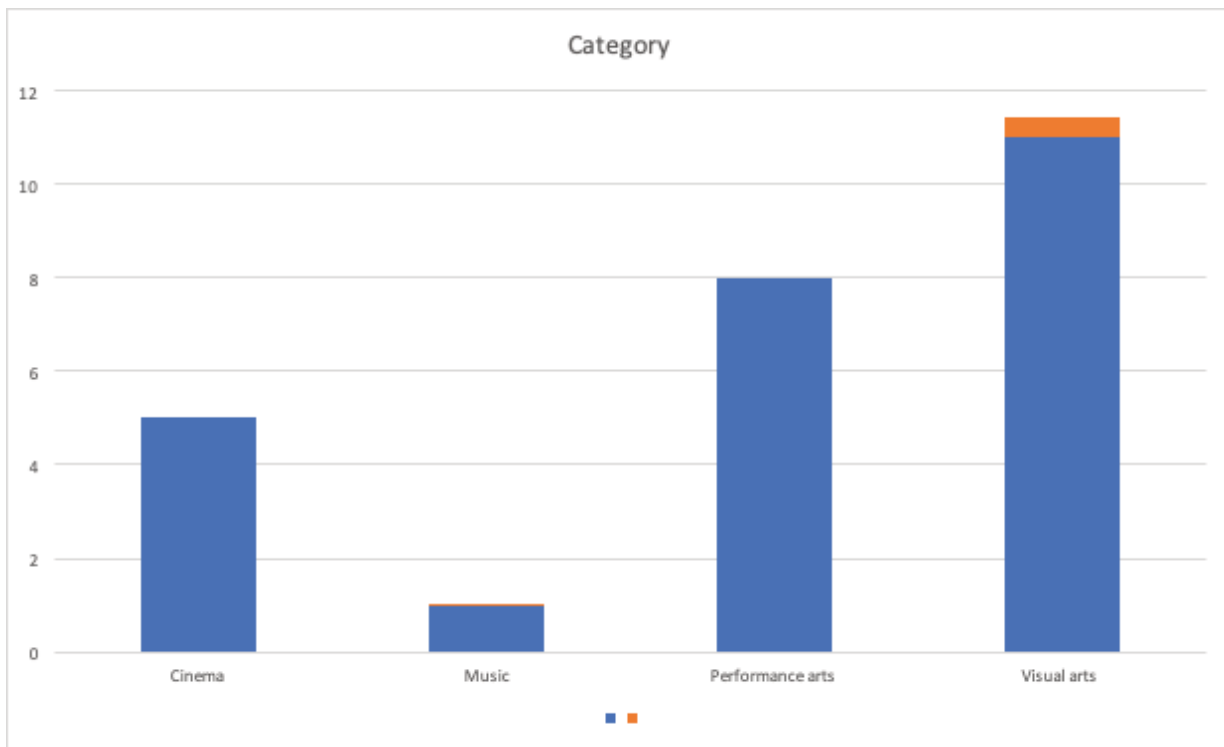


Figure 5 Participants by sectors of activity

In order to have a representative overview of the culture and art scene in Lebanon, we made sure to have diversity in terms of: work sector, geographic location, institutional size, legal status, and experience.

Figure 6 on the next page presents information on the key participants in terms of: geographical location, date of establishment, number of permanent employees, and their legal status.

One can observe the relatively small number of employees in this sector. This could be linked to the fact that the functioning of cultural organizations also depends on the work of numerous people with uncertain statuses, such as interns, freelancers, and consultants.

The founding dates of the institutions reveal that, despite the crisis, 20% of the key participants' institutions only embarked on their work following 2019, with one in 2019. Among the institutions founded from 2019 onwards, three are located outside of Beirut: Al Qalamoun in North Lebanon, Batloun in Mount Lebanon, and Shebaa in southern Lebanon. In addition to these, we can include the initiative of Ghada Ghanem (see details below) in Saghbine in the Bekaa West.

As explained by the institutions, this is a **deliberate effort to decentralize art and culture to other cities and regions**, making them accessible to local communities far from Beirut. This is because Beirut, where most activities are concentrated, has become accessibly challenging due to the economic and financial crisis. This trend was further exacerbated by the 2019 uprising, where major cities like Saida and Tripoli actively participated in the protests. In fact, this trend had already begun long before 2019, with institutions established in Saida and Tripoli.

The second noteworthy point is that these new institutions cover all arts and culture sectors, in addition to a cinema cooperative whose creation was a response to the various crises affecting the sectors.



Location		
Beirrut	15	60%
Tripoli	4	16%
North	2	8%
Bekaa, Zahle	1	4%
South Lebanon	2	8%
Mount Lebanon	1	4%
Founded since		
Before 2019	19	78%
In 2019	1	4%
After 2019	5	20%
Legal status		
Registered	19	79%
Registration in progress	4	17%
Not registered	1	4%
Team		
NA/ volunteers	3	12%
Less than 5	6	24%
Between 5 and 9	9	36%
Between 10 and 20	3	12%
More than 20	4	16%

Figure 6 geographical location, date of establishment, number of permanent employees, and their legal status

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Performing arts category

In this section, we will try to highlight the transformations taking place in the performing arts category following the 2019 Uprising, the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns, and the Beirut blast.

The performing arts category is currently defined in three main subcategories:

1. Theater, which includes theatrical companies, theatrical groups, stages and spaces, and individual theatrical practitioners, including producers, actors, theater teachers, and technical specialists.
2. Dance, which includes dance schools and institutions, dance theaters, dance companies, and individual dance professionals, including choreographers, dancers, dance teachers, and technical specialists.
3. Stand-up comedy, which includes comedians, producers, commercial and non-commercial host organizations.

In this category of eight institutional respondents, two subcategories are presented as follows: six in theatre and three in dance (the fact there is a total of nine stems from the fact that one institution has a sectoral intervention in both theatre and dance). Even though there has been an increasing momentum of stand-up comedy shows since 2019, this subcategory, unfortunately, did not participate in the survey.

At the geographical level, the distribution of key participants is as follows: five in Beirut, one in Tripoli, one in the Shouf (Batloun), and one in the Bekaa (Zahle).

Brief overview

According to a recent observatory study published in February 2022 by L'Agenda Culturel¹⁹ “performing arts are often considered as an art ‘reserved for the elites’, because they are expensive and sometimes abstruse, and few troupes export their productions outside the large Beirut theaters. An important work of de-democratization must therefore be undertaken, in favor of the regions and their populations”.

This observation raises the question of whether non-academic theater is considered in the creative and cultural industries in Lebanon. It also highlights **the lack of recent studies examining popular performances in villages and secondary cities**, despite their significance to

¹⁹ Agenda Culturel, Emma Moschkowitz. *Les Arts et La Culture au Liban, Radiographie de la situation Culturelle au Liban de la thawra a fevrier 2022*. Beirut. 2022. <https://panarab.s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/2533af537142661f>

local communities. Furthermore, as pointed out by M. Abou Rahal, older generations of artists/ audiences testify that performing arts, along with music, have been the sole form of artistic production to broaden in scope and reach a wider, more popular audience. Examples include The Theatre de Dix Heures (1962 to 1978 and 1986 to 2018), which presented comedic theater shows to diverse audiences. A contemporary example is Zoukak, which first encountered professional success by performing in rural municipal public spaces since 2005.

Therefore, the recent history of theater in Lebanon is not exhaustive. Yet, what emerges at the surface is primarily the archived and recounted list of performances in the main theatrical spaces of Beirut. **We believe that it would be illuminating to conduct a study on these art forms, to explore their origins, development, and impact on local communities.**

Impact of the triple crisis

The 2019 uprising: Believing that theatre must stand alongside the community, where its value is more apparent in the street, almost all institution members were mobilized in the street. Some of them, like Sada, opened their studio space for community members “to express their feelings and dissatisfaction with the deterioration of economic conditions.” Thus, for some institutions, the decrease in income-generating activities was compensated by increased visibility in their community, and as a result they gained a larger audience.

The economic and financial crisis has significantly affected the performing arts sector, leading to daily challenges: The loss of purchasing power among the population has shifted priorities, making it challenging for people to attend cultural events and support artistic initiatives as they did before. This shift has resulted in fewer commissions and, consequently, reduced income for artists. “Basic living needs have become luxuries for many, and it becomes difficult for artists to find jobs in the cultural sector and to sustain themselves through their artistic work, this has prompted some artists, including the country's top talents, to seek second professions or emigrate in search of more stable work and living conditions”. According to Metro, approx. 60% of the artistic and cultural workers in Lebanon have left the country.

Additionally, there has been a decrease in funding, particularly following the Beirut blast, as international support prioritized urgent humanitarian aid. Several important donors who were previously interested in supporting artists and artistic works have withdrawn their support. The banking crisis has further complicated matters, creating difficulties in receiving funding from foreign donors, and when possible being confronted by high transaction costs.

As well, international funders have imposed more complex conditions before granting funds to local entities, particularly newly established ones. “The theatre of Babylon closed. The Beirut Theatre closed. There is no funding while they need strong funding. They helped a lot as well. The Tournesol Theatre helped many young people perform and practice there”²⁰.

²⁰ M. Abou Rahal. Op. Cite



For institutions outside Beirut, ensuring continuous activity has been challenging. For example, in the Bekaa, the arts and culture sectors have been affected since the ISIS attacks in Eرسال, with the few decentralized cultural events originally led by NGOs in the region becoming rare.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted numerous institutions, with theaters being forced to close, and scheduled activities being canceled. Even after reopening, people have remained afraid to go into enclosed spaces. The economic crisis, coupled with the lack of compensation, has posed significant challenges for institutions.

However, the pandemic has also prompted some institutions to move their activities online by organizing free online events. This shift has enabled them to create a network of support locally and internationally, connecting with a vast network of artists. It has further allowed institutions to establish a support network, leverage various tools in their toolbox, concentrate on their work, and enhance their visibility, especially through digital means.

The Beirut blast, while not directly influencing all institutions, has left an indelible mark on those in its vicinity. Artists who lived in or around the blast area were faced with disruptions and psychological impacts, which, in some cases, affected their ability to create. For example, several members of Laban's team were physically injured, and their studio was damaged.

“While Beirut used to be a cultural hub attracting artists from all over the region and internationally, we are experiencing that after the collapse the city’s once vibrant arts and cultural scene has become increasingly exhausted, stressed and deserted”.

Following the Beirut Port explosion and the ongoing political and financial crisis, the arts and culture sectors has been left impaired. This situation has impacted young artists, many of whom can no longer afford to attend universities or receive private tutoring to further develop and hone their artistic talents.

Even in those regions geographically distant from Beirut, the explosion has nevertheless hindered the ability of those there to work, leading them to lose the desire to work and question why they are “destined to struggle and be resilient throughout their lives”.

In her study conducted in 2020-2021 M. Abou Rahal highlight the damage caused to two main theatrical spaces – the Theatre Gemmayze, a 126-year-old theater in the heart of the city with damages amounting to 60.000 USD, and the Zoukak theater which was relatively newly refurbished, and has acted as a hosting space for various projects and young professionals’ initiatives. Zoukak, through their relationship with international funding institutions as well as their managed finances, succeeded in reconstructing their space and



also offering post-disaster funding support to professional individuals who were heavily impacted by the blast.

However, despite the challenges and anger, many institutions have decided to continue their activities as an act of resistance. Some have even shifted their focus to meet the emerging needs of their communities.

Cooperation between institutions: Interviews highlighted **community-driven initiatives and collaborations.**

The economic and financial crisis has led institutions to change their modes of operation by adopting or encouraging a greater focus on cooperation, for some at least. This is evident in initiatives such as the sharing of materials, offering venues at affordable prices, or opening their doors to experiences involving young artists in order to enhance their artistic skills. The latter may be attributed to the departure of a significant number of artists from Lebanon and the desire to engage with emerging talents.

Since the 2019 protests, followed by the blast, and in the absence of governmental support, some institutions have been involved in solidarity campaigns.

Moreover, there has been an observed trend of **intersectoral collaboration** in the work of certain institutions. Artists and institutions are involving local communities and integrating cultural activities into their social fabric. This includes activities such as producing and preserving organic fruits and vegetables, which serve as tickets to events and activities. This allows them to generate more funds, especially with the decline in funding that has shifted towards increased humanitarian assistance.

Government support:

All the institutions state that they have not yet received any assistance from the government. This is even worse for those institutions located in secondary cities, where some institutions rely on the support of philanthropists, often politicians. Since 2019, these philanthropists have drastically reduced or eliminated their support for culture, as their attention has shifted more towards humanitarian assistance.

According to M. Abou Rahal, post-disaster assistance and support to performing arts professionals was received from the main funding and supporting organizations in Lebanon and the region, AFAC and Mophradad, and the financial assistance through the syndicate of actors in Lebanon distributing support funds from Japanese donors, the Lebanese army, and some private donors to registered professional performers in the syndicate.

International post disaster assistance

As illustrated in Figure 7 below, five out of eight institutions have received international support. The three others are either young institutions or located in secondary cities (Bekaa



and Shouf). These numbers, while being merely indicative, are still significant concerning international support outside Beirut and for young institutions.

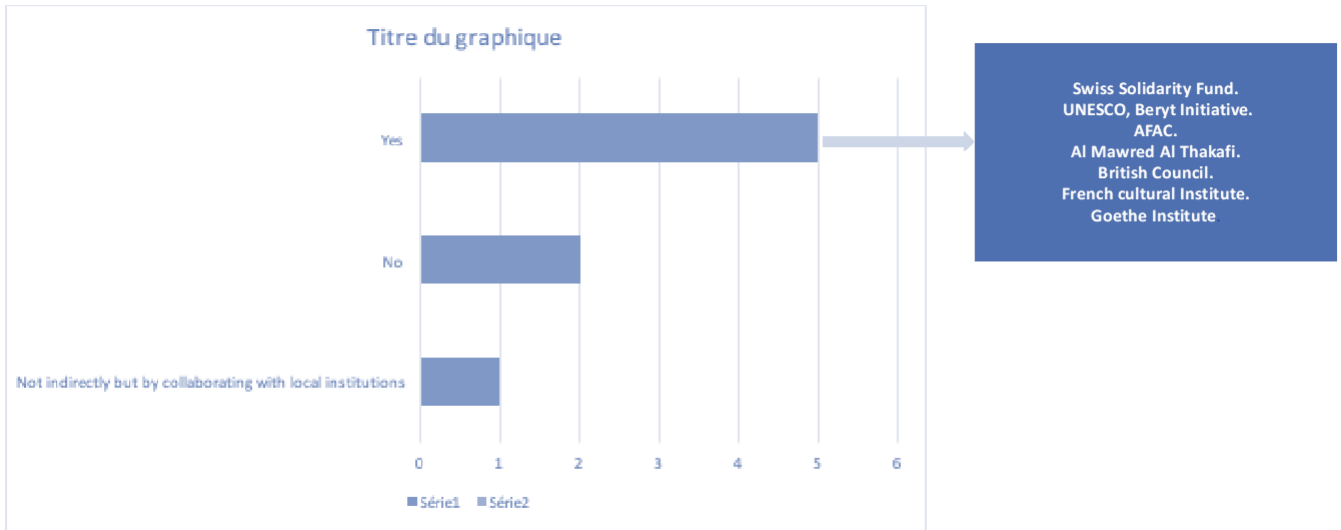


Figure 7 International and Regional Funding in Response to Crises

- **The use of technology:**

All institutions rely on social media to promote their work and enhance their visibility, expand their audience, and reach broader segments of the local and international communities. The COVID-19 pandemic made them realize the importance of communicating their work online. Thus, three out of the eight institutions are beginning to develop a communications strategy, establish an online database to foster connections, and launch online experiences that appeal to audiences unable to attend performances on-site.

With inflation, the use of internet tools, particularly for meetings, has enabled them to reduce costs, such as travel expenses.

- **And ARTS Go On**

Despite the crises and the post-explosion shock, the answers have demonstrated resilience and adaptability. They have found innovative solutions, sought alternative funding sources, and adapted to changing circumstances. This has included creating spaces for artists, activists, and emerging talents, thereby contributing to cultural growth, and focusing on better development that is more technical and creative.

This commitment to continue stems from a belief that arts and culture “are not luxury but a need and right for all, and the community’s mental and psychological well-being is as important as biological and physiological well-being”²¹

For example, the Beirut Contemporary Ballet produced a dance film in response to the blast. FADA was launched in March 2022 to preserve and conserve documents associated with the Lebanese theatrical heritage. Metro decided to relocate to a new and larger venue, increasing its audience capacity, as well as implementing flexible pricing accessible to most people and launching a performing arts school, Metro *Al Mehaniya*, to support the younger generation of artists, providing them with education and opportunities to grow their practices. **Community Involvement was crucial to supporting these initiatives.** In the case of Metro, which sold micro shares to finance their move, this development was made possible primarily through the support of the surrounding community. As for Fada, they had the support of the theatre community, which donated books and materials.

Additionally, the answers from the institutions highlight three main changes:

- The decentralization of the art and culture scene in Lebanon from Beirut to secondary cities, where we are witnessing a rapid rise of small organizations in different regions trying to address the lack of decentralization and meet the needs of their communities.
- The close connection between arts and culture, on one hand, and social-political change on the other, is becoming more evident.
- A growing desire for togetherness.

²¹ Answer from Sarmada



The Visual Arts Category

The visual arts category, also referred to as the artistic scene, has five sub-categories:

1. Individual visual arts practitioners, including artists and curators (we chose to combine this section with artistic practitioners since we do not have a representative sample from artists and curators).
2. For-profit and commercial entities including galleries, auction houses, dealers, and art fairs.
3. Private/public not-for-profit organizations including museums and institutions.
4. Cultural initiatives/temporary platforms/cooperatives/exhibition centers/festivals.
5. Educational platforms and institutions.

In this category, among the eleven institutional respondents, six subcategories have been discerned, as illustrated in the Figure 8 below. We can observe great diversity in:

- Sector of activity, as displayed in the graph below,
- Workplace location: Three out of four organizations were founded between 2018 and 2020. Interviews and answers reveal that there is a willingness among people from secondary cities to found organizations that would be close to their community.
- The founding date of the institutions ranges from 1934 to 2021, with two of them having been founded following the 2019 uprising, in 2020 and 2021, respectively. This demonstrates their willingness to continue working despite challenges.



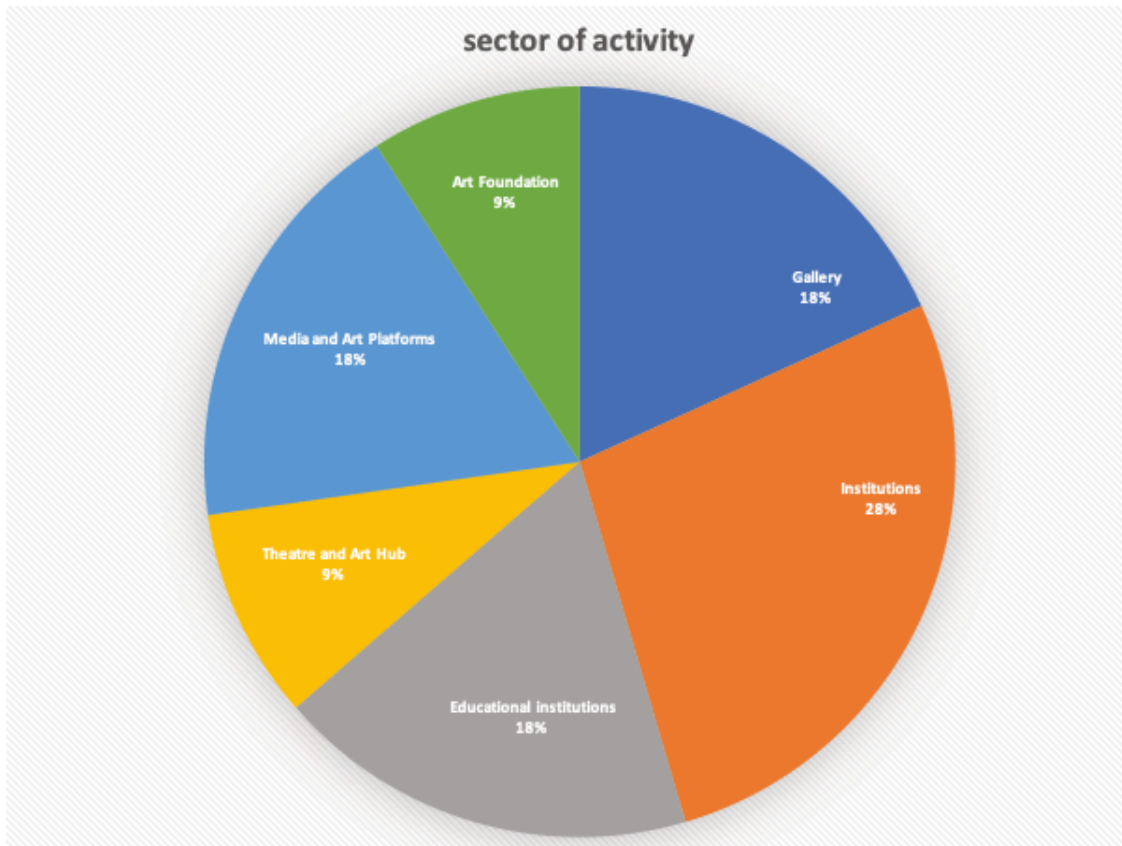


Figure 8 Distribution of Survey Participants by Sectors of Activity

Brief overview

In this study, we are not seeking to trace the ancient history of contemporary art in Lebanon, despite its significance. However, it seems important to present the evolution of the contemporary art scene from the 1990s (in the aftermath of the civil) war to the present day by briefly citing certain initiatives to understand the organic nature of Lebanon's cultural ecosystem and the evolution of the art scene as we know it. "One cannot but underline **the richness of the Lebanese artistic scene based on private initiatives that mainly rely on private funds.** This creates a structurally fragile situation, especially noting the lack of governmental initiatives, public museums, and active art centers, despite the existence of opulent art collections"²².

The information in this section is based on the study conducted by M. Abou Rahal.

²² M. Abou Rahal. Op. Cite

From 1990 to 2000

In 1990, Lebanon witnessed an emergence of new galleries, such as the Agial Gallery in 1990 and Janine Rubeiz Gallery in 1992. In 1993, Solidere launched the photographic collection program, while in 1994, Agenda Culturel printed a magazine for the promotion of cultural events in Lebanon, emphasizing the importance of cultural events and arts in the country.

The end of the civil war allowed for the return of artists who had moved to Europe during the conflict, as well as for the birth of new artists, performers, and filmmakers. This new artistic movement inspired the establishment of independent initiatives by individuals. For example, in the early 90s, Ashkal Alwan was founded and Zico House, a family villa transformed into an art exhibition and spaces for artistic residencies, opened its doors.

From 1994 to 2000, the Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts started as an exhibition space, and in 2002 was transformed to become a platform for multidisciplinary practices called Home Works. In 1997, the Arab Image Foundation became a home to a unique collection of photographic archives, that has aimed to accumulate, maintain, and research photography from the Middle East, North Africa and the Arab Diaspora.

Artistic and cultural events also abounded, such as *Le Mois de la Photographie* in 1998. Between 1997 and 2001 there were performances by local and international artists as well as artistic events in various spaces across Beirut.

From 2000 to 2007

In 2000, Espace SD was launched, serving as a multidisciplinary alternative space for artists' projects, hosting regular exhibitions. In 2002, the space was expanded to include designers, and host numerous events such as cine-club, concerts, talks etc. In 2005, Sfeir Semler Gallery was established, and in 2009, the Beirut Art Center was created.

From 2007 to 2012

A boom in the Lebanese art scene arose after 2007 resulting from the development of projects in the Gulf, and the popularity of Lebanese artists in auctions, biennials, and art fairs on the international scene.

2007 witnessed the first Lebanese pavilion at the Venice Biennale and the founding of the *Galerie Tanit*. In 2010, the *Beirut Exhibition Center* and the *Beirut Art Fair* were launched. In 2011, the *Art Factum* gallery was established, and in 2012, both the *Artlab Gallery* and *Art on 56th* were launched.

From 2012 to 2019

In 2012, *Saradar Group* organized a committee of varied international experts such as curators, historians and critics, to collect modern and contemporary pieces of Lebanese art. The aim was to make this collection accessible to the public and exhibit it in a private space.



In 2015, the *Sursock Museum* and the *Salon d'Automne* were relaunched. Additionally, numerous private collectors decided to exhibit their collections to the public and an increasing number of spaces for art exhibitions and events were established. Also in 2015, the *Marfa gallery* was opened, along with the *Beirut Art Residency* dedicated to supporting the production and dissemination of contemporary art.

From 2014 to 2017, the French festival *Photomed* took place in Lebanon, and the *Albedo Creative Platform* was established. The renovated yellow house called “Beit Beirut” was inaugurated in 2017. Although initially intended to become a museum and cultural center for the city, it currently only hosts events and temporary exhibitions from time to time, with no proper programming. 2017 also saw the opening of the *Mina Image Center* and the contemporary art *Letitia Gallery*.

Other public space exhibitions took place across Lebanon before the country’s financial collapse, such as the contemporary art exhibition at the *Rachid Karami International Fair* of Tripoli and the painting exhibition at the *Grand Sofar Hotel*.

Impact of the triple crisis

The surveys and responses to the questionnaires reveal that the crises have had a significant impact on the gallery sector, which, before 2019, was characterized by a certain degree of stability and active engagement. People had the capacity to explore various investment opportunities, while collectors and sponsors played a central role in supporting artists and cultural institutions. After 2019, political and socio-economic crises significantly affected the sector, leading to a reduction in cultural activities and limited access to resources. Many collectors, previously ardent supporters of the arts, began to withdraw their investments and support.

There was a notable decrease in public participation in cultural activities, as people were compelled to focus more on satisfying their basic survival needs. This shift in priorities cast a shadow on the vitality of the sector, where many artists and galleries struggled to maintain their work.

This change also forced artistic and cultural institutions to be heavily dependent on aid to ensure their viability. This created **inequality between those who received funding and those struggling to obtain it**, compelling them to seek out alternatives. For example, to remain active, the Zico House began partnering with other artistic and cultural structures across Lebanon, creating a model of mutual support.



Emigration further impacted libraries, especially outside Beirut, leading to a new challenge to keep them operational. This, along with the lack of sufficient budgets and the loss of support from the Ministry of Culture (already insufficient), has posed new challenges.

The 2019 uprising

As in the performing arts sector, almost all institutional members were involved in the 2019. Places like Ishbilia in Saida became a gathering space for protesters, activists, and young people from various backgrounds. It also increased the visibility of the space among the residents, making them aware of the services it offers and contributing to the development of their current community.

This is also the case of Zico House in Beirut, which was initially a space for artistic and cultural encounters, later transformed into a hub for meetings, exchanges, and activism. However, the period following the uprising left a general sense of despair, and feelings of resignation developed, leading people to feel less committed to others, especially towards cultural events that advocate for social change.

The economic and financial crisis

The ongoing economic crisis, coupled with political instability, has had widespread repercussions on the visual arts sector, affecting the sustainability of organizations, whether well-established and supported by bankers, or older ones benefiting from the trust and support of sponsors, or even those with a cooperation agreement that includes financial contributions from municipalities. Economic slowdown, local currency devaluation, hyperinflation, rising operating costs, and savings accounts being blocked by banks have all led to difficulties in planning and executing activities.

Furthermore, the severe electricity shortages and significant increases in fuel and gas prices have hindered people's mobility, both for the public and artists alike (especially those not residing in the same city where they work). This has resulted in a decrease in the number of events and visits, impacting artistic programming. Additionally, a large societal segment has shifted priorities, either being compelled to take on multiple jobs or work longer hours, leaving little time for leisure activities, while some have left the country in search of better opportunities.

Regarding galleries, after the illegal control of capital by banks, many Lebanese have found ways to withdraw their money by purchasing real estate or, for many, buying works of art and paying with "Lollars" checks. Consequently, the art market has exploded with new galleries emerging, creating intense and not always fair competition. Some galleries that chose to stay out of this market and not accept these "Lollars" checks, and whose clients mostly left the country, have witnessed a decrease in sales (with one gallery operating at only 25% of its pre-2019 crisis levels).

However, some organizations have found alternatives, such as adopting a temporarily circular economic system for self-sustainability. Others have provided electricity and



internet in their spaces, attracting freelancers, designers, and students, creating a community that engages with cultural and artistic programs. Some have reimagined their exhibitions and public programming by focusing on partnerships and longer exhibitions. Public libraries, in particular, have experienced a qualitative and quantitative increase in clients, especially a new audience that could no longer buy books. There has also been a growing need for free public services, including book borrowing, internet access, photography, etc.

The Beirut blast

Some institutions were severely affected physically, such as Dar El Nimer, which suffered damage. Gallery Art was completely destroyed in the explosion, and it took eight months of extensive renovations to rebuild it. As well, innumerable valuable artworks in their collection were also damaged or destroyed in the blast, representing a substantial loss for the institution. Additionally, the owner of the institution and her assistant were injured. All of this, without any assistance or support from institutions or NGOs, has exacerbated the difficulty of the recovery process.

Mission Art Gallery, situated within a 1 km radius from the explosion, was entirely destroyed. At the time they were host to an exhibition for an Egyptian artist for which they were fully compensated for the loss of her artwork thanks to the insurance company. However, the walls, windows, doors, etc., were not covered by insurance. As well, three libraries managed by Sabil were also physically impacted. Thus, the immediate focus shifted towards providing humanitarian aid and support to those affected by the disaster.

In addition to the physical impact, the Beirut blast had a profound emotional toll on the people, instilling feelings “of desperation and fear that prompted reflection on the purpose of their work.” For some institutions, “the trauma and grief experienced by the community members and staff have affected their ability to engage in creative pursuits and organizational activities during that period.”

Furthermore, the blast strained Lebanon's already fragile economy and resulted in a redirection of resources towards emergency response and reconstruction efforts. This has affected institutions' financial stability and access to funding, hindering their ability to carry out projects and support local artists and creators.

Nevertheless, the August 4th blast highlighted the importance of secondary cities. Following the blast, well-established local and international cultural organizations in Beirut recognized the need to establish new networks, partnerships, and collaborations. For example, Ishbilia's network expanded, attracting a diverse audience and enhancing their cultural activities.

The COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many spaces to close for several months, leading to the cancellation or postponement of numerous events. Consequently, this halt in income



generation made it impossible to cover running costs, employee salaries, or upcoming programs during that period.

On a psychological level, the pandemic had a profound impact on artists and creators in Lebanon, affecting their ability to access physical spaces, materials, and resources. For some institutions, in-person events shifted to online platforms, and workshops and gatherings were either canceled or hosted virtually.

The pandemic had a devastating effect on galleries' existence, as they had to halt their exhibitions and temporarily close. Even after reopening, they have continued to be affected since many people have remained hesitant to attend in-person events, including exhibitions, due to health concerns and restrictions.

For others, like Beit Atfal El Smoud, it was a deliberate period of regression that they embraced as a motivating force to move forward with even greater momentum. This was their way of compensating for the experiences, information, and knowledge that the beneficiary groups were deprived of during the Corona crisis and the economic crisis aftermath. As for Zico, this period prompted them to prioritize the Zico House's archive, which earned them a grant in 2021 from AFAC and Cultural Resource.

Government support

Except for Sabil, which manages public libraries on behalf of the Ministry, all the institutions interviewed stated that they have never received any support from the government. According to one interviewee, the annual contributions by the Ministry of Culture to some associations were insufficient, with a complete absence of cultural policy from the state which primarily focused on "improvisation" at best. The lack of effective cultural policies from the Ministries of Culture and Tourism, which have failed to provide adequate support to local institutions, has forced these institutions to seek funding from international sources. According to another interviewee, the arts and culture sectors in Lebanon have been able to thrive thanks to the support of non-governmental funding.

International collaborations or support

In this category, only two institutions did not receive any funding or support. The first is an institution that carries out activities in Palestinian camps in Lebanon, while the second refused aid from an NGO since the funding came with conditions attached. Other institutions have succeeded in diversifying sources of support by mobilizing a large network of donors, while the Lebanese army has provided assistance to one gallery severely affected by the explosion.

Below, a non-exhaustive list of donors mentioned by institutions.

- AFAC, Mophradat,
- French Embassy, French Institute,



- Goethe-Institute, German Society for International Cooperation,
- British Council,
- King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Henrich Boell Lebanon,
- GTI, a Japanese company
- Marsa Foundation

Cooperation between institutions

On this point, various institutions have emphasized the importance of collaboration. In the responses, one can read: “The global situation has led to a reduction in global funding opportunities as well. Consequently, **partnerships have become more crucial than ever before**. Sharing programming, splitting costs, and increasing visibility have become essential strategies for survival”; “2019 crisis, made cultural organizations in Lebanon more willing to meet and get to know each other to create new modes of opportunity and **collaboration which benefit both organizations and communities and help to expand both organizations’ audiences**”; “In today’s landscape, partnerships have become increasingly vital. Collaborating on **programming, sharing costs, and enhancing visibility have become essential strategies**”.

Thus, we witness collaborations at multiple levels: intersectoral, interorganizational, and inter-geographical:

- Ishbilia has fostered new collaborations and partnerships with different Lebanese organizations, including Metropolis Cinema and the NAAS NETWORK.
- Shadda is part of the Independent Cultural Alliance, a coalition formed to support events and activities related to Tripoli being named the Arab Capital of Culture 2024.
- Zico has been collaborating with other associations and providing spaces in Zico House for hubs, including food and agricultural NGOs such as Food Heritage. They have developed their outreach program with other NGOs and universities like AUB, as well as with associations in other regions of Lebanon outside of Beirut.
- The House of Culture and Arts collaborates with Beirut DC, and with Caritas on Programs for students since the house is open to Lebanese citizens and residents alike (for example, Syrians and Palestinians).
- Al-Sabil’s work contributed to collecting the necessary donations at record speed following the port explosion, not only for rehabilitation, but also for developing libraries, providing them with modern equipment, and compensating for the lost books.

And ARTS go On

The 2019 crisis compelled those in the visual arts sector to conceive of new means of sustainability that do not rely on funding alone, but rather on constant tools of income generation. Several adaptive initiatives have been adopted by institutions, such as:



- Barzakh created a spirit of a collaboratively run institution, trying to avoid bureaucratic structures with malleable and fluid job descriptions and loose hierarchy. They made an effort to curate events and activities that are meaningful to a range of people and create an atmosphere that welcomes both the very young and very old alike, as well as people from disadvantaged communities or with disabilities. In this regard they curated and organized events with their entire team's involvement in each step of the process, emphasizing knowledge and skill sharing, as well as financial sustainability and independence that does not depend on donor money.
- Shadda is seeking varied funding sources, including partnerships with businesses and international organizations. The institution is also engaged in policy dialogues and campaigns for supportive cultural policies.
- Art on 56th Gallery's "commitment to supporting artists from all backgrounds and nurturing Lebanon's arts and culture sectors remains resolute". They believe in the transformative role of art in the society. The Gallery committed its own resources to rebuild the space, organizing the "Comeback" exhibition. This exhibition served as a reminder of art's power "to uplift spirits during challenging times, it served as a beacon of hope, reconnecting them with their audience and symbolizing recovery".
- Mission Art, due to the crises in Lebanon, had to seek partners abroad. Some partnerships were created with other galleries in the Gulf region.
- The House of Culture and Arts is a group of artists working as one team who believe "in work, cooperation and participation". They contribute their time and expertise, and they also share the financial burden of transportation, housing, and other expenses.
- Beit atfal el Smoud relied mostly on voluntary work and the capabilities of young people who had experience in both ongoing and permanent, as well as the capabilities of the staff in the institution. This helped maintain a spirit of continuity, but there was a need for competent individuals in order to provide the best possible support.

The use of technology

All of the institutions use social media platforms to increase their visibility. However, some institutions have deepened the use of technological tools for engaging in international partnerships and online events.

The most advanced in this regard is Shadda, which has developed online platforms and virtual exhibitions for broader access. This institution has observed a growing resilience within the artistic community as artists adapt to new circumstances and embrace digital platforms for events, virtual exhibitions, and virtual collaborations. This has enabled them to engage in intercultural exchanges and expand the reach of their initiatives. Furthermore, digital tools have provided valuable data and information on audience preferences and engagement. This approach has helped them refine their strategies and tailor their content to better resonate with their community.



For other institutions, there have been varied approaches:

- Barzakh is developing a publication to be distributed electronically and in print.
- Zico House has created a website that compiles archives, making them accessible to all, which allowed the institution to continue to operate during the COVID-19 crisis by sharing portions of their archives.
- The Art on 56th Gallery acknowledges the central role of technology and digital platforms in promoting the arts and culture sectors in recent years. Through their website and social media platforms, they have effectively showcased their artists' work to a global audience. This not only expanded their reach but also made art more accessible to a broader audience, transcending geographical boundaries.
- The Gibran Khalil Committee launched a project to sell virtual paintings as reproductions, however implementing this was not easily accomplished.

For the House of Culture and Arts, technology has contributed to a more rapid, wider dissemination, increasing the possibility for the identification of and communication with institutions or individuals sharing similar orientations.

CINEMA CATEGORY

Although this category only had a small number of respondents (five institutions), their diversity in terms of age, geographical distribution, and sector of intervention remains highly interesting. Thus, we can see institutions founded between 1999 and 2020. Three are in Beirut and two in Tripoli. Additionally, Ishbilia cinema in Saida was also included in the Visual Arts section.

Here we present each of these institutions, thereby allowing for a broader understanding of the current situation of the sectors in the face of the various crises in Lebanon.

Brief overview

While it is not the purpose of this section to trace the history of Lebanese cinema, it seems important to highlight certain milestones in the production of cinema in Lebanon and the initiatives that were put in place following the end of the civil war, marking a new chapter in the history of Lebanese cinema.

If the 1960s were marked by films from the Rahbani brothers that were highly appreciated by the general public due to their language, themes, and subjects being close to their daily lives or at least what they aspired to, the 1970s saw the development of a cinema that questioned the fragmentation of the country as it sank into a civil war. Filmmakers like



Maroun Bagdadi, Borhane Alaouié, and Jocelyne Saab produced works despite the lack of resources. However, this cinema did not reach the wider public and remained within elite circles.

With the war, many filmmakers were forced to leave the country, working intermittently—for the most part—from abroad. With the “return of peace” through an agreement between warlords resulting in a radical shift from a state of war to a desire to live together, many films revisited the memory of the civil war. These films were marked by an approach aiming to counter the “amnesia of war, whether implemented or not by the Lebanese state.”²³ To mention just a few productions: “Seule avec la guerre” by Danielle Arbid in 2001, “West Beyrouth” by Ziad Doueiri in 1998, “Beyrouth Fantôme” by Ghassan Salhabin 1998, and “Al Bayt al Zaher” (Around the Pink House) by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige in 1999. However, despite being selected by numerous festivals in France and worldwide, these films received limited reception in Lebanon. According to field surveys conducted in 2010, 2014, and 2018, they are primarily known by the Lebanese intellectual elite, without penetrating further into the public consciousness²⁴.

Below is a non-exhaustive list of initiatives in Lebanese cinema that emerged at the end of the civil war.

1997: The oldest Lebanese festival, the Beirut International Film Festival, was launched. The festival hosted the Cannes Palme d’Or winner and famous Iranian Director Abbas Kiarostami in 2000.

1998: Nadi Lekol EL Nass (Club for All) was launched in Beirut with the aim of presenting a collection of cinematic works blending culture and politics to stimulate culture, facilitate debate among different segments of the public, and highlight a range of works.

1999: Creation of Beirut DC, now Aflamuna, which offers assistance and support to independent Arab filmmakers needed to overcome difficulties and constraints to promote the Arab film industry. In the same year, the Beirut International Documentary Festival, DOCUDAY, was launched to raise public awareness of the non-fictional film genre as an entertainment and informational tool.

2001: BDC first organized the Ayam Beirut Al Cinema'iya.

2006: The Metropolis Cinema was created, offering a program of auteur and independent films.

²³ Thomas Richard. *La guerre civile Libanaise au cinéma et Les circulations transculturelles*. DOSSIER THÉMATIQUE: Formes narratives et co-production dans les cinémas des pays arabes. 2020

²⁴ Idem

2009: Creation of the Cabriolet Film Festival by the Laboratoire d'Art, the first outdoor festival in Lebanon. This year also witnessed the realization of Shankaboot, the first interactive web series in the Arab world. The series was produced in the Lebanese dialect and addresses taboo social issues in the Arab world, fostering exchanges of opinion among young internet users in the region.

PRESENTATION OF THE INSTITUTIONS PARTICIPATING IN THE SURVEY

Beirut

Cooperative des Métiers du Cinéma – 2020: Seven individuals from the film sector (filmmakers, a scriptwriter, post-production supervisor, producer, production designer, director, editor, and director of photography), united and started working on a cooperative for the different cinematic fields. Keenly aware that film production in Lebanon does not align with the actual resources available in the country, they sought an alternative means of producing films, from scriptwriting to distribution, putting in place an alternative approach and vision which takes into consideration the circumstances and economic situation Lebanon is facing. This cooperative is comprised of several collectives, one for each film making sector. Active since 2020, this cooperative aims to foster an environment and create a structure for common action based on participatory, equality, inclusive and non-sectarian values.

Fondation Liban Cinema – 2003: FLC was born in 2003 through a group of film industry professionals with a strong desire to support Lebanese cinema but also to raise its profile internationally. FLC plays a powerful and effective role in the Lebanese audio-visual industry aiming to develop a competitive Lebanese film industry by professionalizing and structuring the sector. Official cooperation links FLC to the public sector, giving it the mandate to negotiate coproduction agreements, attract investments in the media field, and help the film industry grow and compete.

Aflamuna – 1999: Founded in 1999 as Beirut DC, Aflamuna is a non-profit organization striving to empower filmmakers and audiences from every corner of the Arab world. This organization believes in the power of film as a driver of change, access to independent cinema being a right for all communities across class and cultural divides, and advocates for the rights of Arab artists to select their own narratives. They offer resources, host events,



and create virtual and physical spaces that bring filmmakers, communities, and civil society closer, paving the way for radical and transformative collaboration.

Tripoli

Tripoli Film Festival – 2013: Is a cinematic event conceived in 2013 to ameliorate the image of the city with three main objectives 1) Enriching the local cultural environment in Tripoli, 2) Promoting the rich cultural heritage of Tripoli and its local artists, and 3) Branding and Marketing Tripoli and its region as a highly promising tourist destination.

Oobconcept – 2014: OOBconcept is a production house founded by filmmaker Ahmad Naboulsi in North Lebanon in 2014 with the aim of providing film creation services from development to post-production. Its specificity lies in providing these services in-house, significantly reducing the costs and stress associated with hiring multiple companies while simplifying the process.

Saida

Ishbilia – 2018: Reopened in 2018, Ishbilia has a longer history in Lebanon, having first been established in 1980 as a hub of resistance through art. However, Ishbilia was forced to close its doors in 2007 for financial and social reasons. Since 2018, Ishbilia has reopened as a dynamic hub for culture and knowledge, particularly focusing on arts and culture programs. Ishbilia is a cinema, theater, co-working and cultural space, targeting young curators, artists, intellectuals, and students. It aims to foster this environment by providing tools for creative expression, innovation, and diverse artistic practices for youth in South Lebanon. Their primary beneficiaries are local and international artists, community activists, cultural practitioners, supporters and lovers of theater and cinema, as well as students.

This presentation highlights three points:

- The desire of the Lebanese youth working in the arts and culture sectors to launch initiatives primarily targeting the local community, thereby allowing them access to culture and art that were previously concentrated in the capital. This is the case with Ishbilia, the Tripoli Film Festival, and the Oobconcept in Tripoli. It is also true for Swan Dance in Zahle (see the performing arts sector) and Terroirs de Saghbine in West Bekaa (presented in the music sector), as well as other organizations in places like Shebaa, etc.
- The second point is the inclusion of heritage in the cinema sector to valorize it and move it beyond the limited circle of experts; in other words, to further democratize it.
- The third point is that the severe crises in Lebanon have not only hindered the evolution of the sector, as evidenced by the ongoing work of Aflamuna and the Fondation Liban Cinema, but they have also motivated the creation of new initiatives



outside the current system with no government support to prepare youth for careers in cinema, as is the case with the Cooperative des Métiers du Cinéma.

Impact of the triple crisis

Even though the entire sector has slowed down due to the ramifications of the crisis, the political conditions since 2019 and the Beirut explosion prompted the members of the Cooperative des Métiers du Cinéma to come together and launch their initiative. As for Aflamuna, the political environment in Lebanon since 1999 has been one of the reasons the organization was born, as independent Arab cinema, including Lebanese cinema, emerged from political upheavals and resistance. Keeping it alive and ensuring it reaches its audience is the Aflamuna's main goal.

For Oobconcept, despite the enormous challenges they face (including the loss of some data from their projects as their editing room was located near the port of Beirut), what happened has pushed them to explore more opportunities in the non-commercial domain.

“The past couple of years were marked by the successive closure of independent cultural spaces, a sharp decline in international funding, and the disappearance of what little local funding previously existed. Nonetheless, this year seems to mark a return of new initiatives and the return of many festivals and established actors. There are encouraging innovations in the cultural sector, with more social based practices and rural actors”²⁵.

The 2019 uprising

Like other sectors, the cinema sector was involved in the 2019 uprising.

The economic and financial crisis

The level of impact from the economic and financial crisis varies among organizations.

The Foundation Liban Cinema, which used to receive small grants from the public sector, has seen these funds nearly dry up since 2018, along with support from sponsors. FLC, tasked with negotiating co-production agreements with the Ministries of Education and Culture, has faced challenges as these ministries have overlooked the importance of such agreements, hindering progress. Additionally, their savings have been blocked by banks or suffered losses due to the depreciation of the local currency. As a result, they have reduced their team and, consequently, their productivity, thereby making them increasingly vulnerable.

For Aflamuna, they had to utilize the money stuck in the bank wisely, refusing to exploit the crisis for their benefit. The organization initially absorbed the impact of inflation and adjusted its employees' salaries to prevent the loss of their income's value. Since then, they

²⁵ Aflamuna

have had to navigate the challenges associated with Lebanese banks concerning local and international payments. For example, they temporarily started making many of their payments within the country in cash, which is unfavorable for donors and any audit or accounting system. Also, the rise in emigration has made it difficult to recruit team members and led their turnover to be higher than it used to be (although still manageable). Organizing a screening or event is slowly becoming easier, however for a while it was (and still is) incomparable to the pre-2019 situation. Simple things, such as the provision of electricity and transportation, have become incredibly more challenging.

For the Tripoli Film Festival, the crisis has had a financial impact due to the lack of budgets from the private sector (sponsors). To address this, they have appointed a grant officer tasked with securing funding, particularly from organizations, embassies, as well as the diaspora.

The Beirut Blast

The Beirut blast has profoundly impacted the sector due to the mass exodus, disenchantment, and depression experienced by certain artists. It has led to the collapse of the ecosystem, threatening the transmission of know-how, necessitating the need for reinvention, resulting in a significant reduction in production, and creating a dependency on external support.

Aflamuna reacted quickly after the blast by pausing running programs and establishing the Beirut Filmmakers and Film-workers Relief Fund. They also coordinated relief efforts with other arts institutions, giving Lebanese grantees and collaborators the flexibility and time they needed. However, they had to resume their regional work without too much delay.

Oobconcept lost reputation after the blast when they lost a portion of the data for a project they were working on for Saudi Arabia, because their editing suite was located next to the port.

The COVID-19 pandemic

For Aflamuna, COVID-19 fundamentally changed the nature of sharing a film with an audience. The virtual transition might have already been ongoing, and there might be a slow return to “normality” occurring, however but there is a pre- and post-COVID era for the independent film sector worldwide—a change they are still trying to comprehend and adapt to. Practically, during the pandemic, they had to move all their events online, as well as their workflow, thereby creating an environment conducive for remote work. In doing so they experimented with new virtual formats such as open access streaming and online labs, some of which will even continue for the foreseeable future. Finally, the cessation of events meant they were able to focus more on research and production resources.



The global health crisis, as well as the precautions taken through the suspension of festivals and travel, led certain institutions such as Foundation Liban Cinema to temporarily shift support for artists towards health aid actions.

Government support

No institution mentioned the government providing support following the port explosion and amid the crises. Even though Foundation Liban Cinema has previously benefited significantly from government support in the past, such as an annual envelope of financial subsidies allocated by the Ministry of Culture to film production (cancelled since 2018); the financial support from IDAL, the Investment Promotion Authority of Lebanon, which allowed FLC to organize professional meetings attracting investors and producers to the country; and the BDL's financial support to host the Lebanon Factory in Lebanon in 2017.

International collaborations or support

Even though international funding has declined for several years, Fondation Liban Cinema can mobilize a wide array of international and regional support: from the EU Delegation, Centre National du Cinéma – France, Centre du Cinéma de Wallonie-Bruxelles, French Institute, AFAC IMA, UNESCO, etc. Additionally, by granting dual nationality to films that benefit from the advantages offered by both countries party to the agreement, FLC negotiated a co-production agreement that has been formalized with France. Another agreement negotiated with Belgium is awaiting signature by the Minister of Culture.

Among the other sources of international support for other institutions, some have been mentioned such as: British Council, EU-funded All-Around Culture program, UNESCO Beryt Fund. Others, like the Tripoli Film Festival, relied on financial support from NGOs, embassies, and the diaspora.

Cooperation between institutions

The main collaborations mentioned by participants are:

Aflamuna: After the Beirut blast, they launched two rounds of relief funding for filmmakers and film-workers. They have been involved in collaborations to defend artists at risk, including the translation of PEN America's guide and their own guide for filmmakers, which will soon be published. They have piloted and will soon launch a program to support the creation and empowerment of community cinemas across the region. They are also developing theoretical frameworks such as the "Living in Dignity Fund", which is a form of basic income for filmmakers to ensure their livelihood and expand the diversity of voices behind the camera. Furthermore, they are soon launching an initiative to support local film organizations, helping them to prevent closure and become more efficient players in the ecosystem.

Oobconcept, supports and collaborates with larger organizations in the cinema industry like Metropolis and Heinrich Boll by providing logistical support for organizing film festivals in

North Lebanon. They are working towards creating a sort of community-based effort, particularly focused on the independent cultural organizations in Tripoli.

The Tripoli Film Festival collaborates with other local and regional institutions, one example being their Forum Tripoli Film Industry days.

And ARTS Go On

The 2019 uprising, the economic and financial crisis which revealed the system's inherent flaws, coupled with the tragedy of the August 4th port explosion, influenced many filmmakers. Several documentaries were resultantly made about the 2019 uprising, focusing on several key themes: corruption, the end of a system, and impunity, culminating in the explosion on August 4th.

Additionally, there have been initiatives that have taken place, such as the network of Lebanese professionals in Lebanon and the diaspora, to create partnerships and internalize foreign production and post-production services in Lebanon. The mobilization by FLC of a network with international partners to set up a solidarity and emergency fund to support film production has taken place. This led to the creation of the Lebanese Film Fund, a support fund financed by the EU which has provided direct financial assistance to nine film projects.

Paradoxically, for Aflamuna, this has been one of the institution's most fruitful periods, as they have expanded their budget, team, and programs, and played a more significant regional role in the field, successfully introducing innovative practices on a large scale. This is thanks to their sufficient agility to survive and navigate the local and international crises that have been ongoing since 2019. They have been keenly aware of the need for solidarity during this time and resultantly have been **proactive in collaborating with other institutions and establishing regional and international networks.**

On a practical level, Aflamuna opened a bank account abroad through which to receive grants, doubled their fundraising efforts, and launched an initiative that advocates for a simple yet powerful **switch from project funding to artist funding.** Another initiative focuses on **preserving the local independent institutions** that have become the main resources for the regional film sector by funding them and accompanying them through a **capacity-building process** to equip them for both current and future challenges. Aflamuna has also taken steps to address safety concerns, as they have started researching and working with security experts to not only offer a guide for the safety and security of film workers in the region, but also to **ensure the safety of all participants in their events.**

“What changed is our understanding of our impact and making sure that we stay agile in our programs to reach filmmakers and an audience that is now burdened with many life-threatening issues that we need to consider. We had to revisit all our programs to make sure



that everyone involved understands the role of culture in general and storytelling in particular in illustrating crises and challenging normative and reactionary”²⁶.

The use of technology

Recent technological developments have encouraged some institutions, such as FLC, to reorient their efforts towards developing series delivered over streaming services in response to such platforms’ content needs.

Others have witnessed their increasing reliance on and professionalization of digital technologies growing in recent years. Aflamuna, for instance, has created a virtual working environment through digital platforms, which has proven essential for them to work efficiently. Moreover, one of their flagship projects is a free online streaming platform, and another program they offer is a digital platform that provides open resources for film workers in the Arab region.

The lack of services, particularly outside of Beirut, has proven challenging. For example, while Tripoli Film Festival launched its online edition in 2020 due to the COVID pandemic, their use of technology nevertheless remains highly limited due to a lack of internet access.

²⁶ Aflamuna



MUSIC CATEGORY

This category can be divided into four sub-sector categories:

1. Classical scene
2. Alternative scene
3. Commercial scene
4. Independent scene

In terms of quantitative data, this sector has received less participatory responses to our survey in comparison to the other three sectors, as only one institution has answered. *Rumman*, launched in 2021 from the Qalamoun in Tripoli.

To this list, we will add a project, although not directly related to music. Specifically, it is the initiative of Ghada Ghanem, a soprano, Lebanese opera singer and professor of singing at the National Conservatory. She tirelessly works to implement initiatives to alleviate the weight of the crises in Lebanon and to reinvent models of social support through art. Her latest initiative was the launch of a women's choir in 2023, to which she continues to give singing lessons in a friendly format while remaining professional. The last concert of the Choir took place in December at the Ahla Fawda Festival at the Eco Hub in Hamra.

Thus, this category will present the two projects taking place outside of Beirut, along with their main achievements and challenges.

Rumman shed light on the development of Tripoli and how cultural and artistic initiatives are flourishing, believing in the decentralization of arts and culture to expand their reach beyond the confines of Beirut. As explained by Ramman, Tripoli's historical and economic importance has been overshadowed by a culmination of challenges that has led to urban poverty and negative perceptions about the city (post-war neglect, the spillover effects of the Syrian conflict, limited investments, etc.). However, the October 2019 uprising marked a transformative moment, triggering grassroots initiatives aimed at redefining Tripoli's identity and highlighting its creative potential. These initiatives sought to challenge stigmas and showcase Tripoli's progressive and artistic side.

Terroirs de Saghbine, launched by Ghada Ghanem in 2021, is an artistic residency in West Beqaa, hosted in her inherited 150-year-old family home. The objective of this project is to introduce culture into underserved villages and connect it to agronomy. By hosting artists who participate in various workshops on Mouneh preparation and perform for the local community during their stay, the initiative aims to support both artists and the rural community. So far, TDS has hosted poet Talal Haidar, painter Greta Naufal, ceramist Samar Mogharbel, painter Rose Hussein, and musicians Olga & Sergei Bolun. The initiative addresses the lack of cultural centers or artists' residencies in rural areas. According to

Ghada who believes that art and culture should be accessible to all citizens, "people are convinced that culture, art, and music performances have become a financial burden for citizens outside Beirut (due to expensive transportation and ticket fees)." The economic crisis in 2019 "let all feel that the city is no longer offering what it used to offer. We had to turn to other possibilities, think out of the box, and take our art to different levels to remote".

Impact of the triple crisis

The economic crisis has driven many artists, musicians, and technical professionals to seek better opportunities abroad, resulting in a noticeable talent drain from the local arts scene. Additionally, organizing events in Tripoli has become more expensive both for event organizers and attendees due to inflation and rising costs of services, including artists' fees (in just one year the average cost of organizing a live music event in Tripoli has doubled).

It is also worth mentioning that since the blast occurred, other cities — including Tripoli — have emerged as a destination for artists from Beirut, creating opportunities for engagement and appreciation, thereby underscoring the significance of independent cultural spaces like Rumman.

Government support

The ineffective national cultural policy proved costly during the pandemic and in the aftermath of the port blast, leaving independent artists and professionals without social security, healthcare coverage, or pension funds. Rumman's experience demonstrates that a greater focus on municipal level engagement has proven crucial for activity implementation and impact assessment. Collaborating with municipalities for permits, services and fostering a supportive environment showcases their potential to economically benefit from arts and culture.

For TDS, culture and art do not seem to be a priority for the state or any governmental institutions—artists are left to fend for themselves and find alternative solutions to live in a dignified manner.

International collaborations or support

Rumman has been involved in a myriad of collaborations, such as with the French Institute in Tripoli, Ville de Belfort, Stichting DOEN (Netherlands), Delia Art Foundation, etc.

Cooperation between institutions

In the case of TDS, it is important to highlight the significant support they have received from artists, friends, and the local community (for example, children painted old stairs and old walls in the village). Additionally, they embarked on a collaboration in 2021 with Masrah al Madina in Hamra, where they brought Mouneh makers from TDS to exhibit their products



before and after the concert of Ghada Ghanem. This event was sponsored by the AUB Neighborhood Initiative, with all the funds from the concert going to support Terroirs de Saghbine.

And ARTS Go On

Rumman secured a five-year lease to the city's largest indoor music and cultural venue, providing artists, audiences, and the community with a versatile platform for performances, rehearsals, and residency programs. In September 2022, in collaboration with local and international partners, Rumman successfully launched the pilot edition of the Maarad Music Festival, an independent music festival showcasing local and international talents at the Rachid Karami International Fair. Choosing the UNESCO-listed Rachid Karami International Fair highlights the Rumman's commitment to heritage preservation. As well, Rumman achieved a significant milestone by supporting and organizing the travel of eight musicians from Tripoli and North Lebanon for performances abroad.

As well, as mentioned earlier, Ghada Ghanem's latest initiative was the 2023 launch of a women's choir, with the choir's most recent concert taking place in December 2023.

The use of technology

Technology and digital platforms have become integral to Rumman's approach in promoting the arts and culture sectors. This has enabled them to overcome challenges, broaden their impact, and establish a dynamic and engaging presence within the broader cultural landscape.



ARTISTS

Speaking about the arts and culture sectors, the impact they have suffered from the three crises remains abstract until we have testimonies from the people working in these sectors. This section allows us to observe the changes that have occurred in the lives of these actors on all levels: personally, professionally, in terms of their health, and economically speaking.

In this section, we received eight responses to our survey from artistic professionals or artists, covering different Lebanese regions: six from Beirut, one from Keserwan, and one from Becharreh, as well as different fields of cultural and artistic activities:

- A filmmaker
- Film editor and videographer
- Director, Editor, Dancer, and Dance teacher
- Theatre performant
- Documentary artist and painter
- Artist
- Interior designer
- Design and Audiovisual artist

The economic and financial crisis, the Beirut Blast & the COVID-19 pandemic

Even if some have found jobs that secure them income in foreign currency, the crisis remains tough. As said by one artist: “The economic and political situation has led them to witness a country collapsing, prompting them to rethink their relationship to the country and the story they want to tell in their work—a narrative of a collapsing country, which was not that present before”. After the blast he decided to start working in film again, and when he finished writing, he realized he had to throw out everything and start writing a new film instead: “What I have written before didn’t make sense anymore”. During the unrest and for two years after, he was mostly engaged in protests in the streets, or organizing political groups: “I felt the need to be physically, emotionally, and intellectually participating in this action of change. I was not able to think about art or produce artistic work. It took me until March 22nd to be able to engage in artistic activities again.”

For the artist, it was difficult to escape the emotional toll it took on her. The uncertainty, demotivation, and anxiety that engulfed the country made it challenging for her to find the inspiration to create. The ongoing crisis in Lebanon has significantly impacted her career choices, with a notable decrease in demand for her services and potential job opportunities offering limited budgets or remuneration: “I try to lower my expectations when it comes to projects”. As a result, she finds herself mainly working on NGO’s films and success stories, feeling like she has been neglecting the other creative projects and documentary opportunities that she used to pursue. Also, her house was in the area surrounding the blast that was most affected and which saw the most devastation. This meant that she was not able to reside at her home for some time, had to reestablish herself, and took some time to

get back on track workwise. During the pandemic, she was amid editing the documentary titled "The Blue Inmates." However, the project was put on hold for a considerable period, and when she finally resumed, she had to adapt to the new safety protocols, which added a great deal of stress to the process.

For the dancer, the dance field has suffered greatly. The decline in the Lebanese currency's value led to an enormous decrease in the number of students registered in dance schools. Consequently, dance teachers who continue to operate are being paid three times less than what they used to prior to 2019. In the photography field, the same situation occurred: the number of clients decreased, and they had to lower prices due to the economic situation of their clients. These sectors were both affected by the blast, as the Lebanese people were traumatized, with a great number leaving the country; consequently, there were fewer clients. During COVID-19, everything was closed, and even when work returned, people no longer opted to resume their lessons. It was only by 2022 that some of the interviewees had more classes, albeit with very low salaries.

For the director of an artistic space, she was significantly affected by the crisis since the country's middle class, who used to purchase art, were strangled by the banks' seizure of their money. Consequently, there were fewer sales and less revenue. The port explosion further paralyzed the middle class for several years, along with emotional dysfunction. So far, COVID was not a problem compared to the explosion, as she moved her blown-up atelier to the building where she lives.

For the documentary artist and painter, the blast has a direct connection. He was holding an art exhibition titled "And Then Stillness" during that period in a gallery in Gemmayzeh (Rmeil 329 Gallery), and some of his works were damaged. Additionally, the explosion had a significant psychological impact on him artistically. He needed time to regenerate and recover psychologically to paint again. Strangely enough, despite his tendency to document (and sometimes predict) events, he completely externalized the phenomenon of the explosion and has never painted or interpreted it. It was too dramatic and macabre to be a subject of art in his personal approach. Therefore, he chose to explore different themes. As for the COVID period, it created feelings of introversion, isolation, solitude, and equality within him. These themes were very inspiring for him to interpret in his artworks.

For the interior designer, the political conditions in Lebanon, the socio-economic crisis of 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the blast of August 4th had both direct and indirect impacts on her. Psychologically, she found herself grappling with a noticeable decline in her wellspring of inspiration that had highly fueled her artistic expression and innovation. The prevailing circumstances seemed to cast a shadow on her creative drive, inhibiting the emergence of novel concepts and artistic endeavors. Her perseverance through such difficult circumstances demonstrates her resilience and commitment to her craft. The main obstacle is that the majority do not see art as a necessity, and as such it is still considered secondary.



For the designer and audiovisual artist who participated in the protests and believed that people can make a difference, however, the disappointment that followed the revolution's failure had a huge impact on her political beliefs, leaving her with resentment and bitterness. Since then, she has adopted a more pragmatic view, having begun to consider creating a business that can generate passive income instead of creating art. Her actual work is highly technical and banal: "I felt I had much more potential, but I agreed to do the job only because it paid me in Dollars. Eventually, this job took most of my time, which made me miserable until I decided to quit." The blast had a significantly conflictual influence on her work. On one hand, the anger and despair that followed the traumatic experience gave her the inspiration to create. On the other hand, the survivor's guilt made her hate herself for creating anything related to the blast: "It made me question the function and use of art".

For the Director, the political and economic conditions influenced the production design of her work. Since 2019, she has had to reconsider and reconceive of her creational process: the rehearsals, the research, and the implementation of the theatrical piece. What could be covered by ticket sales has to be funded directly by whatever funds she has on hand already. For her next piece, she has relocated all her rehearsals to a public theater in France (which is the main co-producer) because it was cheaper to rehearse abroad than in Beirut. The real problem she and her peers are facing is the amount of money needed to rent a rehearsal space, as the space must cover its energy costs, which can sometimes exceed the fee she earns as an artist. The Beirut blast had a significant impact on her emotional and psychological health, but it did not directly impact her work or physical health. However, the COVID-19 pandemic had a deleterious impact on her economic stability, as her livelihood is based on touring. But, in a way, it gave her the space and time to reconsider her work, reshape it, and experiment with new mediums and formats such as audio pieces. She has tackled these challenges with one of the practical solutions being to work in collaboration with structures abroad, these collaborations being the result of years of touring and creating connections; her true concern today is for young artists and fresh theater graduates.

Government support

All survey participants stated they have not received any assistance from the government.

International collaborations or support

Only three out of the eight participants received support from international or regional organizations: international funding from Switzerland and the USA, a residency in the framework of NAFAS (French Institute), and the Solidarity Fund from AFAC following the Beirut blast.



What changed after 2019

Before 2019, the arts and culture scene in Lebanon was more vibrant, with numerous cultural events, exhibitions, and festivals taking place regularly, showcasing the diversity and creativity of Lebanese artists. Since 2019, the situation changed significantly—the political and economic crises, along with the impact of the Beirut blast and the subsequent COVID-19 pandemic, have had a profound effect on the arts and culture sectors. As a result, many cultural venues closed or faced financial struggles, leading to a decrease in cultural activities.

Additionally, the demotivating atmosphere and uncertainty in the country affected artists' motivation and ability to produce new works. Many artists faced financial challenges and had to find alternative sources of income, which impacted their artistic pursuits.

Some artists still need time to fully grasp the scale of the changes they have endured, as they are still in the middle of the crisis, with everyone still busy struggling to survive. The need for change in arts and culture requires distance, observation, and reflection. This is especially crucial now when people are either suffering or healing. Additionally, during such times, the system becomes weak, which may result in further repression (as is currently occurring). However, it also gives rise to undefined spaces of creation that exist outside of the system. These are spaces that artists and intellectuals can redefine.

Before 2019, artists at all levels were able to exhibit and sell their works of art. After the crisis, wealthy people rapidly invested in well-established and expensive assets to stabilize the situation and regain momentum.

For the professional dancer, she tried to remain positive and keep her expenses in check, only buying vital necessities: "I don't know if we could say it is an achievement, but the fact that I was able to stay in Lebanon and continue my work regarding this poor situation should count for something." However, competing in America's Got Talent in 2022 with Mayyas and winning, since they trained in very difficult and poor situations in Lebanon (no electricity, no gas for the cars, etc.), is their biggest achievement.

The documentary artist and painter, in the last exhibition he held in Beirut (2020) titled "And Then Stillness," presented a personal chronicle of Beirut's recent political and social state. For him, "the artworks document paralyzed fundamental educational, cultural, financial, public, and social institutions. From movement to stillness, the work depicts the transition from noise to silence, social congregation to isolation, and intensity to lightness". His personal approach in the artistic field is to document phenomena on canvas. He had even approached the banking collapse in several of his works. For him, the post-2019 period witnessed a proliferation of artists, galleries, and works of art: "New names emerged. New topics. New techniques, etc... Unstable and uncomprehensive market. I haven't overcome them yet. I'm still sticking to my approach".



For the interior designer, after 2019, all the new works of art they created started embodying more negatively harsh topics, and that is what changed in their field after 2019.

The Director aims to write about her observations in the theater scene specifically. She has noticed the following changes: 1) A comeback of the commercial comedy theater in venues that used to host more experimental and independent projects; 2) A recurrent theme where the artists become witnesses to what is occurring around them, with the theatrical pieces evolving to deal with personal and intimate questions more greatly. In her opinion, this is a direct result of the works implemented by NGOs that use theater as a therapeutic tool for marginalized communities; 3) The lack of press critiques and space/time for exchanges about works and pieces; 4) The formation of new groups, theater companies and cooperatives that are still insisting on working in alternative production modes.

As part of her research cycle dealing with the economic speculation and its impact on theatrical narratives, she created the interactive installation *Who Killed Youssef Beidas?* That opened in June 2022 in Beirut. She stated: "being able to continue my work in these times with the team I collaborate with is for me the biggest achievement".

The use of technology

Most of the interviewees use technology for basic visibility on social networks. However, for one artist, Roy Dib, technology allowed him to bypass censorship. He was able to show his censored film, "The Beach House," on Vimeo in Lebanon.



CONCLUSION

As illustrated in the report, despite the multi-dimensional nature of the crisis, the arts and culture sectors in Lebanon, encompassing various artistic domains such as music, visual arts, cinema, and theater, continues to demonstrate resilience and determination. Rather than succumbing to the challenges, the sectors display the following:

- Artists, musicians, painters, filmmakers, and theatrical practitioners persevere, adapting to the circumstances and contributing to the artistic landscape of Lebanon. They continue to create, perform, exhibit, and engage audiences, showcasing their talent and dedication.
- In response to the crisis, numerous artistic initiatives and collectives have emerged, providing vital support, resources, and platforms for artists across different sectors. These initiatives foster collaboration, experimentation, and the showcasing of artistic works. They include music collectives, art galleries, independent cinema screenings, and theatrical groups, all contributing to the diverse artistic fabric of Lebanon.
- The promotion of cultural activities beyond Beirut has led to the decentralization of the arts scene, benefiting artists from various sectors. Music festivals, art exhibitions, film screenings, and theater performances are increasingly being held in cities such as Tripoli, Sidon, Tyre, Zahle and others. This decentralization not only provides opportunities and exposure for artists, but also nurtures a more inclusive and diverse artistic landscape throughout the country.
- The Lebanese diaspora continues to play an important role in supporting the arts and culture sectors. Musicians, visual artists, filmmakers, and theatrical practitioners living abroad contribute their expertise, financial support, and

networking opportunities. Their involvement strengthens the resilience of the sectors and fosters connections between the local and global artistic communities.

To ensure the maintenance of these achievements, support actions are needed, as mentioned in the recommendations section. However, for these actions to have an impact, short and medium-term measures are required, such as:

- Guidelines allowing continuity and connecting projects on a sectoral, geographical, and generational level. This strategy should pool resources and ensure a primary objective: supporting all components of the arts and culture sectors in Lebanon.
- Rebuilding trust among art and culture stakeholders in Lebanon, which has been impacted by the European Commission's stance on the war on Gaza, is crucial for ongoing partnership development.
- In the long term, easing project requirements, encouraging more institutions and artists to respond to project calls.
- Involving local individuals in the launch of project calls who are familiar with the Lebanese situation and can advise on structuring targeted and sustainable project calls.



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cultural relations PLATFORM

The Cultural Relations Platform is project funded by the Partnership Instrument (Service for Foreign Policy Instruments, European Commission) launched in April 2020 to support the European Union to engage in international cultural relations within the framework of the EU strategy for international cultural relations.

The CRP follows up on the previous Cultural Diplomacy Platform, CDP (2016-2020). It provides a renewed approach based on a set of shared principles and new activities, aiming to promote and facilitate sustainable cultural exchanges, people-to-people activities, and co-creation processes between Europeans and citizens from countries all over the world.



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