

# Arts and culture in Lebanon

*Overview of the cultural landscape  
from the thawra to February 2022*

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**ROBERT A. MATTA**  
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# Who are we ?

The promotion of culture is the purpose of Agenda Culturel, its *raison d'être* and its mission.

For 27 years, our magazine, both in its paper version (before 2019) and online [[www.agendaculturel.com](http://www.agendaculturel.com)], has been working to promote Lebanon's cultural events to as many people as possible, and in so doing, encourages the development of cultural, artistic, and tourist life in the country.

Agenda Culturel is the only specialized publication that highlights cultural activities in Lebanon, and the first of its kind in the Arab world. It is now available in English, with the Mym Agenda [[www.mymagenda.com](http://www.mymagenda.com)]. This new website covers cultural news in Lebanon and all countries of the Middle East.

Agenda Culturel also features the BAM [[www.bamleb.com](http://www.bamleb.com)], our tourist guide to Lebanon, tinged with the pigments of our cultural expertise.

Finally, our company organizes conferences, events, weekends, and cultural trips, in Lebanon and elsewhere.

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# Intention note

Convinced of the absolute necessity of maintaining a plural and dynamic cultural and artistic offer, Agenda Culturel, as well as the different actors composing and making the Lebanese cultural life, cultivate the wish to see the artistic production perpetuate and flourish.

Despite the current national conjuncture, and precisely in the hope of a better future for the country and its artistic and cultural life, the following study stands as a field investigation of the cultural sector as it prevails in Lebanon today. The interviews conducted with more than forty people in the different disciplines of the cultural sector aim at better understanding the needs of the actors within the sector. The study constitutes a valuable working tool for whoever wishes to invest in the maintenance and development of an artistic and cultural life that meets the needs of artists and the public alike.

In order to uphold a sector undergoing the acute Lebanese crisis, create a community of actors, maintain creation, foster an expertise of the subject, and ensure cultural diversity, the stakes are numerous, and it is therefore imperative to record and define a global vision of the sector. For the instigation of a sustainable identity for the country, for the education of the youngest, for the maintenance of an innovative and liberating discourse, and because it represents at the same time a source of catharsis, hope and inclusion, culture must continue to occupy a place of prominence among the essential considerations for the prosperity of the country and the well-being of its inhabitants.

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# General Panorama

This first part aims to define which authorities are in charge of culture in Lebanon, and to report on the state of their work. Starting with a historical context that seems to suggest a favourable position toward a free and plural artistic creation, it will then explain the current economic, health and political situation of Lebanon, in order to contextualise the study in the current state of the country.

It will then be a question of listing the great cultural institutions of the country, starting with the state authority: the Ministry of Culture. To this end, its commitments and provisions in favour of culture will be detailed. Later, the role of the mu-

nicipalities in the cultural democratisation of the country will be addressed. The study will next question the content of the arts training put in place by educational structures, both at the secondary and higher-education levels. Following this, the major local, regional and international associations involved in supporting culture in Lebanon will be enumerated.

This study of the global panorama of the main cultural actors in the country will thus allow to understand in what framework arts and culture evolve in Lebanon, in order to better understand the stakes of the cultural sub-sectors.

## Heritage and cultural diversity

Rich with an undeniably multicultural history, Lebanon has been shaped around a diversity of faiths, communities and influences that have nourished the country and its inhabitants with an intellectual and artistic openness. Widely trilingual, the country of the cedar attracts regional and Western actors alike, and has asserted itself, during its existence, as a Mecca of culture and art in the Middle East. Its artistic production is eclectic, liberating, and renowned throughout the world.

## Economic and political situation of the country

While the *thawra* (revolution) of October 2019 held out hope for a movement to breathe new life into Lebanese politics, the crises that followed hindered this idea of revival. With the collapse of the banking system, the people saw their savings blocked by the banks. While, originally, the dollar was equivalent to 1500 Lebanese pounds, and the two currencies circulated concurrently in the country, the inability of the financial system to function has led to the establishment of a black market in which the dollar and the Lebanese pound are exchanged at daily varying rates, depending on the turmoil. At the same time, the market prices are continuously adapting to the ever-increasing devaluation of the Lebanese pound, reducing the purchasing power of the Lebanese population a little more with every day that passes.

The health crisis has added to the difficulty of the population's living conditions, in that it has been accompanied by a total closure of the country for many months. The restrictions that followed the different periods of lockdown strongly affected the economy, and in particular, the sec-

tors of catering, festivities, entertainment, culture, etc.

The double explosion of August 4th in the port of Beirut devastated the city, and especially the neighbourhoods of Gemmayze and Mar Mikhael, which were the focus of much of the capital's festive, artistic and cultural activity. The tragedy, both human and material, was accompanied by the resignation of the government which, already weakened by a virulent challenge to its capacities, was unable to find a successor for thirteen months. The bankruptcy of the state only aggravated the situation, especially when looking at the energy (electricity and gasoline).

Thus, the uncertainty inherent in this period of crises has strongly affected the cultural sector over the past three years.

## Governance

The Lebanese Ministry of Culture was created in 1993 and was coupled with the Ministry of Higher Education until 2000. In 2020, its annual budget was \$33 million, or 0.24% of the state budget, which is one of the lowest ministerial portfolios; for comparison, France currently allocates 2.56% of its annual budget to culture. The cultural budget for 2022 is estimated at 0.045% of the state budget, or \$2 million, but as the official rate is still fixed at \$1 for 1500 pounds, this represents about \$150,000 on the black market, which currently fixes the dollar at 20,000 Lebanese pounds.

Today, the office is divided into two directorates:

- The Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA), responsible for traditional classed buildings, archaeological excavations and cultural properties.
- The Directorate of Culture, which deals with the different artistic and cultural sectors, as well as cultural industries.



Three public bodies are attached to the Ministry:

- The General Council of Museums, which is an independent national commission created in 2018. Currently, the general president, selected by competition, is Anne-Marie Afeiche. Its members are appointed by the Council of Ministers.
- The National Conservatory of Music, created in 1920 and currently managed by Walid Moussallem. It also has two orchestras, the Philharmonic and the Oriental orchestras, and fifteen branches throughout the country. Thanks to its teaching, the Conservatory has the exclusive right to grant a doctorate in music. It is also a national centre for music archives and research.
- The National Library, headed by Hassan Acra, is a national public institution whose mission revolves around the preservation of Lebanon's written archives.

The general management of these three entities is subject to the confessionalism in force at the state level: the director of the Conservatory must be Greek-Orthodox and the director of the Library must be Maronite. Only the director of the General Council of Museums does not depend on this criterion, because the body was very recently created. In order to ensure a certain balance of confessions in the positions of general directors of the state, he must, however, be Christian. Since 2018, and although they were appointed by the Council of Ministers, the lack of signature by the President of the Republic of their respective decrees, has prevented the directors of these three bodies from receiving their salaries.

## Cultural politics

Today, there is no real state strategy in place to support culture in Lebanon. Despite the Ministry's attempts to commission studies to make the cultural sector economically profitable and a tool for economic development, none of the recommenda-

tions produced by Strategy& or raised during the CÈDRE Conference (Conférence Économique pour le Développement par les Réformes et avec les Entreprises) in 2018 have been taken into account. After the explosion of August 4th, 2020, the Ministry had very little involvement in the reconstruction process, which included many cultural organizations, cultural industries and artists. For example, while the General Directorate of Antiquities estimated that 600 heritage buildings were destroyed by the double explosion, the Ministry of Culture has not undertaken any fundraising, apart from granting restoration permits and freezing real estate transactions in the affected areas.

Thus, whatever artistic sector they evolve in, artists do not benefit from any status vis-à-vis the State. They are "normal" workers, and their art is not protected because the government sees culture as any other consumer product, and cultural companies are subjected to the same rules as any commercial company. If there are subdivisions according to the sectors of culture (literature, cinema, etc.), the lack of qualification of the employees of these offices, as well as their ignorance of the subject, does not allow to set up a real differentiated strategy according to the needs of the sectors they oversee. There is no active cultural policy: artists and cultural industries work in a regulatory framework that does not encourage creation, does not benefit from any fiscal incentive or any form of protectionism, and suffers from censorship and administrative red tape. Thus, Article 25 of the VAT law, set at a rate of 11% for companies and self-employed workers, does not exempt the actors of the cultural sector. In addition to this tax, cultural industries owe the state a tax on their profits, a tax on salaries and wages, a tax on non-resident taxpayers (for individuals or legal entities without a professional establishment in Lebanon), and fees due to the Mutual Fund of Professional Artists' Unions.



## Decentralisation

The 1977 Municipalities Act (and in particular Acts 47, 49 and 50) empowers municipalities to allocate budgets to support cultural activities within their boundaries. They can make spaces available for cultural purposes of public utility or introduce tax exemptions for cultural entities. These laws require municipalities to promote cultural production by providing the necessary logistics to produce cultural work and making it available to the public. Law 37 states that municipalities are responsible for enriching their communities with cultural activities and providing resources for potential cultural initiatives.

Yet, these prerogatives are generally not promoted. In 2019, the municipality of Tripoli only granted 1% of its total annual budget to cultural industries, or less than 10 cents per resident. That same year, the city of Jezzine allocated 42% of its total budget to culture, with a strong investment in tourism. With \$14.4 per resident per year for culture, Jezzine seems to be a special case in terms of resource allocation for culture in Lebanon. In contrast, the municipalities of Zahle, Aley or Zouk Michael allocate between \$2 and \$4.6 per resident per year to culture, and these are the cities that allocate the highest budget to the sector. However, this low involvement of municipalities in the promotion of cultural initiatives in their districts considered in light of the very weak state involvement in supporting the development of municipalities. In fact, the taxes collected by the state on behalf of the cities are barely paid, contrary to what the legislation provides. For example, the municipality of Jezzine reported its situation: only 12% of the budget that should have been granted to the city was handed over by the state in 2019. Given the crises that have succeeded one another since the last digital data, the resources and means available to culture have become even more scarce.

Although there is no official census of cultural activities and institutions throughout the country, the inventory made by Agenda Culturel suggests that half of the country's cultural spaces are located in Beirut. Thus, the obvious lack of adequate infrastructure seems to be a major factor against a greater consumption of art and culture outside of the capital.

However, and if Beirut has long been the heart of creation and dissemination of art and culture in Lebanon, the inhabitants of the regions seem to show a growing interest in the sector, and cities are witnessing the increasing emergence of artistic and cultural initiatives. In this regard, the city of Tripoli has been named cultural capital of the Arab world for 2024. Unfortunately, access remains limited due to the lack of an active state policy and a massive exodus to the capital and, more recently, to other countries, resulting in an inexorable brain drain.

## Education

### Arts practice in schools

In high school, art was identified as an essential element of the educational process by the 1997 education reform plan. However, the statistics released each year by the Center for Education Research and Development (CERD) show a lack of involvement on the part of schools in terms of teaching art. This data reveals significant disparities, depending on the governorate, in the practices of recruiting art teachers. While the number of art teachers across the country is estimated at 5,250 (which would be equivalent to at least two teachers per school), some schools have no art teachers, others have only one, others dedicate entire afternoons to art practice, while some do not offer art classes but suggest that students join art clubs, as a means of entertainment after

school. It is worth noting that only visual arts (estimated at around 3800 teachers) and music (around 900 teachers) are official subjects in the Lebanese educational program, while drama, which is often offered (around 550 teachers), is considered an optional artistic activity. Moreover, it would appear that teachers are randomly allocated to schools according to a method of assignment that prioritizes the living conditions and accommodation of teachers rather than the needs of the schools themselves.

The handling of arts practice is quite different in private and public schools: statistics show that there are twice as many music teachers, three times as many drama teachers, and just under twice as many art teachers in private schools than in public schools. Private schools appear to offer a higher quality of art classes, which can probably be explained by the freedom of decision that private schools enjoy, their greater financial capacity, their ability to amend their curricula more easily in accordance with new official prerogatives, and their greater ease in employing contract workers. In addition, some public schools, which do not have art teachers, devote time to art courses under names not recognized by the official curriculum, by teachers who are not officially certified to teach this discipline. A similar situation appears in private schools, where compulsory art instruction is ignored, and only optional art classes are offered. The health crisis and the accompanying distance learning has also led to a delay in the school curriculum, relegating the practice of arts in schools to the background. As well, even since the resumption of activities, school outings to the theatre or museums have mostly been cancelled, notably because of the cost of transportation. As a result, students are only marginally aware of arts and culture at school.

## Higher education

There are several universities in Lebanon offering training in arts:

- Antonine University in Baabda has a Faculty of Music and Musicology.
- Our Lady of Louaize University in Zouk Mosbeh has a department of Arts and Music, as well as a department of Audio-visual and Theatre.
- The American University of Beirut has a Faculty of Arts and a film club.
- The American University of Science and Technology has an arts department.
- The Arab University of Beirut offers training in Audio-visual and Theatre.
- The Haigazian University offers courses in music.
- The Holy Spirit University in Kaslik has programs in photography, painting and iconography, a theatre department and a music department.
- The Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts (part of the University of Balamand) has Schools of Visual Arts, Decorative Arts and Cinema and Audio-visual production, as well as a film club.
- The Lebanese American University offers training in Fine Arts and Performing Arts at its Beirut campus, as well as training in Audio-visual and Theatre at its Byblos campus.
- The Lebanese University has a Faculty of Pedagogy that provides courses in music and art education, and issues teaching diplomas for both specializations. It also has a Faculty of Fine Arts and Architecture, which trains teachers.
- Saint-Joseph University offers three drama courses and also has its own theatre, the Beryte Theatre, where students can perform, and a master's and doctoral program in art criticism and curatorial studies.

If there are few candidates for these higher education programs, this has always been the case, as art remains a vocation that is often denigrated and unrecognized by the Lebanese society. However, it seems that the crises have not affected

the willingness of aspiring artists to pursue their studies; the number of students registered remains the same as before 2018. This situation can be explained by a need, more than ever, to express one's ideas and feelings through the professional practice of an artistic discipline, and the almost vital desire to occupy a satisfying profession for those who are already suffering from a difficult daily situation. In addition, the quality of the teaching provided by professionals in the sector is noteworthy, in that it ensures that students receive excellent training and a network for the future. However, the strong devaluation of teachers' salaries has led many of them to leave their jobs or even the country (for example, 40% of visual arts teachers have left their positions at the Lebanese University). In order to ensure that students receive their diplomas, universities have had to quickly recruit or ask existing teachers to teach additional courses. Holding courses is also complicated by the costs related to gasoline and electricity: the lessons are therefore held in a hybrid way, both face-to-face and remote, to counter the obstacle of transportation on the one hand, and the absence of internet on the other.

## Associations and patronage

Faced with the inability of the state to protect and support artistic creation, many NGOs and international institutions support the cultural sector in Lebanon. Among them:

- Al Mawred al Thaqafy is a regional non-governmental organization founded in 2004 which aims to support artists from the Arab world. It promotes exchanges between artists in the region and offers grants, scholarships and training. Since the beginning of the crisis, the association has created support cells and a financial fund to help artists.
- AFAC (Arab Fund for Art and Culture)

is an independent foundation created in 2007 which targets independent artists in the Arab world and supports them with grants.

- The Friedrich Naumann Foundation, which funds many artistic and cultural projects in Lebanon (studies, festivals, etc.).
- Robert A. Matta Foundation and Saadallah & Loubna Khalil Foundation are patrons who support arts and culture in Lebanon.

## International aid

Diplomatic cultural bodies are working hard to promote a prolific artistic and cultural scene in Lebanon. These include:

- UNESCO, which works to promote culture in Lebanon as a tool for social cohesion. After the double explosion in the port of Beirut on August 4th, 2020, UNESCO launched the Li Beirut initiative to support the rehabilitation of heritage buildings, museums and galleries in the capital, and to support Beirut's creative economy. This initiative has also organized Terdad, a major cultural event in July 2021.
- The European Union, through its Delegation, supports many artistic and cultural projects in Lebanon.
- The Institut français, which has nine branches throughout the country, is not only a frequent partner of artistic and cultural initiatives undertaken, but also actively participates in the Lebanese cultural life (residencies, events, festivals, etc.). The French Institute has launched the Nafas residency program to allow 100 Lebanese artists to pursue their creative activities by developing cultural exchanges with France.
- The British Council has launched the Catapult initiative, supported by the Art and Culture Department, which aims to bring out talents by offering them to collaborate with various organisms in the following fields: dance and performing arts, music, games and visual arts.

- The Goethe Institute is the cultural centre of Germany. In addition to promoting the German language and teaching courses, the Institute organizes and supports cultural events with the aim of promoting intercultural exchange.

- The Istituto Italiano di Cultura is the Cultural Office of the Italian Embassy and supports the circulation of ideas and arts through the creation and promotion of cultural events in Lebanon.

## Emergence of new cultural space

Lebanon has many cultural centres on its territory, including those of diplomatic institutions. However, many restaurants or festive venues diversify their activities by regularly offering live concerts or temporary exhibitions (for example, Haven for Artists or Onomatopoeia in Beirut). Spaces with numerous activities are multiplying, while awareness of art and the protection of creative minds seems to be growing. While, internationally, the concept of the third place is already relatively developed and appears to be asserting itself as a new way of consuming culture, Lebanon is also increasingly turning to this type of space as a reaction to the inability of the State to provide or promote cultural venues.

## Conclusion

Although the economic returns of the Lebanese cultural sector are difficult to measure, as there is no body capable of aggregating and analysing them, the latest figures estimate that the cultural industries recorded an annual income of \$894 million in 2019. Thus, if we add the untraceable part of the income generated by these industries to this initial figure (which represents about twice as much), we can estimate that they have a market value of about \$2 billion, or 5% of GDP.

Data on creative jobs and occupations are still very incomplete, as there is no national survey of the labour force and its distribution in the workforce by the state or an accredited body. However, the Central Administration of Statistics published a study in 2018 reporting that there are 13,000 people in artistic occupations, or 0.8% of the labour force. Another survey, carried out by the World Bank, estimates this figure at 75,000 people, or 4.5% of the working population. The Institute of Finance considers that 100,000 people work in creative sectors, in the strict sense of the term. If skilled workers and craftsmen are added to this figure, the “potentially creative” population then amounts to 360,000 people, or 20% of the active population.

Thus, and if the sector remains ostensibly alive, a source of important economic returns but also essential to the continuity of a national identity and an international influence, the absence of a vision or a will in favour of a global cultural policy led by the Ministry of Culture, and the total dependence of the sector on private or associative initiatives, which precedes the artists and the companies, remain the most preoccupying problems in Lebanon today.

# Sectoral Review

The following reports add to the transversal vision explored earlier by proposing a complementary analysis, by sector, of the realities and challenges of culture and its various domains, which are:

- music
- performing arts
- visual arts
- cinema
- literature
- heritage

We shall thus detail their:

- conditions of creation and production
- conditions of programming and diffusion
- audiences
- economic models

Such a classification will allow us to look at the specificities of these sectors, and will thus provide an opportunity to determine the global issues as well as the specific problems of these sectors.

This diagnosis is based on:

- a collection of data and statistics from multiple and comparative analyses
- consultation with some forty major players in the various sectors.

Here, emphasis has been placed on the variety of interlocutors contacted: the following study is therefore a summary of the words of artists, associations, producers and other professionals of the promotion and distribution of culture in Lebanon. The aim of this research is to draw the most objective and realistic conclusions possible. The obvious impossibility of interviewing the entire artistic and cultural scene implies a necessary non-exhaustiveness of the following analyses. On the other hand, these reports must be considered as guidelines for further research for anyone who wishes to see culture flourish in Lebanon.



# Music

In order to better understand the Lebanese music scene, it is crucial to distinguish between several types of musical productions. The following section will address classical music, carried by the philharmonic and oriental orchestras of the National Orchestra, as well as contemporary music, which includes different styles of music, such as rock, jazz, pop, electronic music, among others. The subsequent study intentionally omits Lebanese star singer, because their success implies a turnover and an export capacity that cannot be compared to the reality of the country's artists.

## Conditions of creation and production

### Classical music

Generally, the practice of classical music in Lebanon is unfortunately not encouraged, and the profession remains poorly paid and looked down on. Nevertheless, classical music receives important support from foreign diplomatic instances, which has enabled it to maintain a certain level of activity despite the crises. Nowadays, the departure of many foreign classical musicians, coupled with the inability of Lebanese musicians to attend training courses abroad, is a major concern that has resulted in a significant decline in the standards of classical music.

The Lebanese Higher Conservatory of Music, chaired by Walid Moussalem, features a philharmonic orchestra and an oriental orchestra. Whereas the philharmonic orchestra used to consist a third of foreigners, the sharp devaluation of the Lebanese pound and the consequent drastic decrease in salaries has led them to give up their jobs. This has severely hampered the orchestra, which saw a significant loss of musicians and the removal of some of their seats. Therefore, the number of concerts held has decreased, especially since the remaining musicians are now unable to travel to the Conservatory every day due to the price of gasoline. As a result, the Philharmonic's 2020/2021 season witnessed only four concerts, down from 35. All of the Oriental Orchestra's concerts have been cancelled. The Conservatory also offers a free music program open to students from the age of seven.

The curriculum is divided into two departments: Western and Arabic. In addition to the practice of an instrument, students are expected to study theoretical subjects (musical training, harmony, fugue, counterpoint, history of music, etc.) and to participate in a choir and instrumental ensembles. The Conservatory awards diplomas at the baccalaureate, bachelor, and master levels. Prior to the onset of the crises, the school gathered between 5500 and 6000 students in all branches. Since 2019, the project of a headquarters for the Lebanese Higher Conservatory of Music in Dbayeh has been initiated. Financed by the Chinese government at a cost of \$62 million, the project involves the construction of two buildings that will house a concert hall of 1200 seats for both orchestras, as well as eight floors dedicated to the management of the Conservatory and academic teaching, allowing teachers to award degrees in performance, composition, and music theory. This building is projected to be ready in October 2023.

## Contemporary music

The academic offer remains rather limited as far as contemporary music is concerned. Although many musicians are self-taught, some have been educated by independent teachers or schools. Thus, only USEK has its own School of Music, while Antonine University offers a degree in music and musicology.

Over the last few years, many artists in the music sector have been forced to emigrate in order to maintain their activity. From abroad, many of them continue to work with regards to Lebanon; their activities often revolve around a collaboration between Lebanese diaspora artists, hoping to rebuild an artistic scene in Lebanon (for example, Zeid Hamdan from France, who works with Lebanese artists to organize events jointly, or Anthony Semaan, former owner of the Beirut Jam Sessions platform who now organises bookings in London). However, the export of Lebanese music production is complicated by the handling of intellectual property in relation to an artistic work, its enforcement being an important issue in Lebanon and the Middle East. The concept is not well known by artists and seldom enforced. This situation poses a problem abroad because Europe and North America are very vigilant about these issues. Although a delegation of SACEM (Société des Auteurs, Compositeurs et Editeurs de Musique), which remains the only legitimate society to collect copyright on the territory, already exists in Lebanon, its scope of action remains very limited. Thus, piracy is quite frequent and Lebanese artists, aware of the situation, focus on holding live concerts to curtail the deficit induced by the lack of income from their musical releases. Consequently, they only promote their products (CDs, singles, etc.) very scarcely and make up for the shortfall by hoping for the highest fees.

Anghami is a Lebanese streaming platform established in 2011 by Elie Habib and Eddy Maroun. Pioneering the notion of a legal music service in the Middle East, the platform now counts 78 million users. Anghami operates on 29 wireless networks in the MENA region, and offers daily, weekly, or monthly subscriptions. Faced with the financial crisis in Lebanon, the company, whose co-founder still own 32%, has chosen to restrict its offices in Beirut to marketing and content creation, while the technology hub was relocated to Dubai in 2021. On February 3rd, 2022, Anghami has become the first tech company in the Arab world to be listed on the New York Stock Exchange.

Artists who have stayed in the country are suffering from a difficult and unfavourable environment. On the one hand, the double explosion of the port of August 4th, 2020, as well as the financial crisis, has led to the closure of many recording studios; the estimated number of studios still in operation is roughly ten. Before 2018, recording studios charged artists between \$45 and \$70 per hour for recording; nowadays, it is not feasible to determine a set price. In order to create a song, a singer has several options:

- They can find someone to record their lyrics on a royalty-free instrumental found on the internet, at a cost of around 300,000 Lebanese pounds.
- They can work with a music producer, who will compose a melody over which the artist will insert their lyrics. A Lebanese producer charges between \$300 and \$400 for a song.
- They can choose to surround themselves with a team, usually consisting of a producer, a composer, a sound engineer, a mixing engineer, and a mastering engineer, and record their songs in a studio. This option costs about \$5,000, depending on the recording time and the volume of production desired.

On the other hand, labels, such as Rupture or Thawra Records, are still actively supporting Lebanese artists. They are responsible of helping an artist carry out their project, secure funding, manage their image, and distribute their music. Unfortunately, very few artists are signed with a label in Lebanon. For example, out of 40 hip-hop artists, only one is under some form of management, by a foreign label. Artists who are not under a label are faced with two choices: decide to self-produce independently, or find a distributor who, for a 30% fee on the earnings generated by the artist, will take care of the marketing and the distribution on streaming platforms. Despite this, broadcasting on streaming platforms (Anghami, Spotify, Deezer, etc.) is only marginally remunerative: artists are only paid \$0.03 per stream (i.e., per play).

## Programming and broadcasting conditions

### Classical music

While the only existing concert halls for orchestras are in the Casino du Liban, the Palais des Congrès and the Palais de l'UNESCO, the predominance of churches and university auditoriums as venues for classical music recitals reflects the lack of available sites where orchestras can perform. In addition, the global health crisis has severely affected the music industry by making it impossible to hold concerts and tours, which are the essence of music. While the sector has found a way to compensate for these constraints through digital means, such as YouTube or live videos posted on social media, this solution remains precarious and cannot fully satisfy the public.

### Contemporary music

Artists need to find their own equipment, their audience, and “sell” themselves on social networks. Censorship is also an obstacle for Lebanese musicians and singers: the country has repeatedly experienced the cancellation of concerts at the request of ecclesiastical authorities or for political reasons; for example, the group Mashrou' Leila was forbidden to perform at the international Byblos International Festival in 2019.

As for contemporary music festivals, there are only two in Lebanon: Irtijal and Beirut & Beyond. Given the scarcity of these initiatives, Irtijal and Beirut & Beyond are now advocates of a diverse and high-quality musical creation. While they were originally intended to showcase music that could be described as experimental, this “niche” approach can no longer be considered, and the curators are now committed to offering their stage to all, in order to best support the Lebanese musical production. Moreover, Irtijal has lately established itself as an NGO, through a support of the production of artists on stage and workshops held with UNESCO to help musicians financially. The festival now acts as a supportive body for the music industry in Lebanon.

Regarding electronic music, the destruction of Beirut's iconic clubs in the wake of the double explosion of August 4th, 2020, left a gap in the market that has allowed for roving collectives to emerge. This has led to a revival of the house and techno scenes, which have found an innovative momentum. Similarly, local DJs are now in greater demand, due to the constraints of hiring foreign artists.



## Audiences

### Classical music

Since the end of the lockdowns in June 2021, the demand for concerts and musical events has soared. The audience seems to be eager to attend, especially since a significant effort is made to ensure free or very low prices for a population whose purchasing power has been considerably shaken. This situation, which led to an ever-increasing monetary precariousness for artists, allows them to ensure the continuity of their activities.

It should further be mentioned that despite the restrictions related to the pandemic and the major financial crisis that affected the country, the Baalbeck Festival was able to continue its efforts to promote the Lebanese music scene by producing two major events: Sound of Resilience, organized online in 2020, which gathered 12 million spectators, and Shine on Lebanon, featuring ten artists performing in the Bekaa's little-known Roman temples in 2021.

### Contemporary music

Overall, the offer is essentially concentrated in Beirut, and this is particularly for the house and techno scenes. Only a few events are held by electronic music collectives in other parts of the country during the summer, often around large seaside resorts. However, many young Lebanese have left the country, drastically reducing the number of attendees. There is thus a clear increase in club attendance during the periods corresponding to the vacations of the diaspora (summer and Christmas), while it is more difficult to attract a large audience during the year. As far as concerts are concerned, the audience seems to be eager despite an obvious loss; events usually gather between 200 and 500 people each night.

## Economic models

### Classical music

Classical music festivals and concerts in Lebanon (Beirut Chants, the Bustan Festival and other private initiatives) have always relied on patronage for their funding. As of 2018, they have managed, despite the cessation of subsidies by banks, to find some financial stability by collaborating with foreigners. They benefit from partnerships, grants from international festivals and from the generosity of the diaspora. For some, this important support allows them to ensure that the events are free of charge, and therefore attract a large audience.

### Contemporary music

In Lebanon, most music professionals are forced to find other sources of income (often teaching or performing at parties, weddings, etc.) in order to meet their needs. Independent musicians have difficulty financing their productions, especially since music recording is greatly complicated by the financial state of the country, as the purchase of equipment can only be done in dollars.

As for clubs, the ever-increasing impact of the crisis makes it difficult to set prices that suit both clients and artists. More than 75% of the costs involved in organising an event in a nightclub have to be paid in dollars, while the sales of tickets and drinks is made in Lebanese pounds. Thus, the profits do not allow the promoters to compensate themselves, as they are constantly reinvested toward hosting future events.

From a broader point of view, the reliance on private funding, representing a remedy to the incapacity of the state, can lead to abuses. On one hand, the commercial aspect sometimes supersedes the

artistic aspect, which then considerably affects the quality of the musical production. On the other hand, the scarcity of benefactors leads to an exacerbated and harmful rivalry that does not contribute the sector.

## Sectoral conclusion

Having examined the different stages of musical creation, production, and distribution, it is possible to identify the following challenges:

- The lack of professional training among Lebanese schools and universities, added to the inability of musicians to finance studies abroad and the departure of many classical musicians from outside Lebanon, has led to a drastic decline in the standard of orchestras in Lebanon.

- The notions of copyright and respect for intellectual property are not sufficiently adhered to in Lebanon and constitute a real issue for artists, both in terms of fair remuneration for their work and of exporting their art.

- The lack of sufficiently adapted infrastructures (concert halls, recording studios, etc.) complicates the work of Lebanese singers and musicians, and contributes to the disregard of their professions.

- A decentralization of the offer is to be considered, in favour of a greater diversification of the audience.

- Today, artists and promoters of musical events are now managing to maintain a certain level of activity through private funding or a principle of self-sufficiency of their companies. However, these economic models have their limits: on one hand, they create a climate of competition that can be detrimental to artistic development, and on the other, they only seldom allow them to be compensated.

# Per for ming Arts

According to the UNESCO classification, the Performing Arts refers to theatres, festivals, and performances. The following thus is an analysis of the state of theatre, dance, and circus in Lebanon from the beginning of the health, economic and political crises until the end of 2021.

## Conditions of creation and production

At the beginning of the 2000s, contemporary dance was almost non-existent in the Lebanese stage production: dancers were not professionally trained, there were no studios or active troupes, and no possibility of external funding. Today, thanks to the creation of the Maqamat association in 2002 and its BIPOD festival two years later, this form of art has strongly developed. Dance schools have been created (although there is still no university training in dance), international organizations have taken an interest in the artistic initiatives that were emerging, and bodies for support and cooperation between artists have come together. However, the successive crises of the past few years have

significantly shaken the dance community. Many dancers have moved abroad, especially the new generation.

Although theatre has been well established in the Lebanese scene for decades, the production of plays is nowadays hampered by the very high costs of renting theatre halls and transporting actors, to which must be added the costs related to staging and costumes, as well as the costs related to the exploitation of a work. These costs can no longer be covered by the directors, who are faced with three choices in order to continue their activities:

- Turn to an economy of scenery and staging, a reduced team and produce a minimalist and potentially easily transportable play (in traditional theatres, outdoors, in rental spaces, etc.).
- Become attached to a structure (such as Zoukak, Hammana Artist House, Tyro, etc.) that allows them to perform in a previously constructed set (a hall, equipment, etc.) and benefits from partnerships already contracted with associations and international bodies.
- Undertake a cooperation with a body (an NGO, a university, etc.) wishing to set up a theatrical project as part of its activities.

However, not all these configurations can be economically profitable; the funding that is allocated only covers the costs associated with the creation.

Also, many actors have been forced to leave the country due to the financial crisis, which raises real questions about the renewal and modernization of the theatrical offer in Lebanon. In addition, the lack of professional training for technicians (sound engineer, lighting engineer, stage manager, costume designer, etc.) in Lebanon has led to a scarcity of people certified in these professions, thus affecting the quality of the final production.

Zoukak, founded in 2017, focuses on providing artists with spaces to create and disseminate their work. Zoukak is also a theatre company that produces its own plays, offers psychological interventions around the practice of drama to marginalized populations, organizes a festival, workshops and conferences (Zoukak Sidewalks) and publishes studies. Supported by the Institut français, Zoukak launched the Focus Liban initiative, allowing artists residing in Lebanon to benefit from grants to present their work to international curators and festival directors, as well as the Lebanese public.

## Conditions of programming and broadcasting

Repeated periods of lockdown and health restrictions have undermined a sector that was built around its relationship with the public. Despite the recent resumption of activities, few performances take place in Lebanon, mainly because of the financial difficulties mentioned above.

The few plays that do manage to be produced are only performed for a short time and do not attract enough attention to draw big crowds. Conversely, the diffusion of shows on the Internet has increased significantly since 2020 and represents a solution for theatre companies in regard to renting a hall the duration of the play. It is also the opportunity for a greater visibility, rid of geographical limits.

While Lebanon used to host many plays produced abroad, the expenses related to the arrival of a foreign troupe are now too high to have a show performed, with actors needing travel and accommodation, and a staging that needs to be hosted at a venue. All these costs, requested in dollars, can no longer be internalized by any Lebanese authority.

## Audiences

There are 18 theatres in Lebanon. While most of them are located in the different neighbourhoods of Beirut and its suburbs, there is also one in Jounieh (Théâtre Athénée), one in Hammana (Hammana Artist House), one in Saida (Ishbilia), and one in Tyre (Lebanese National Theatre). However, the performing arts are often considered as an art “reserved for the elites”, as it is expensive, sometimes arcane, and few troupes export their productions outside the large Beirut theatres. An important work of democratization must therefore be undertaken, in favour of the regions and their populations. To this end, Kassem Istambouli has, for example, rehabilitated a cinema in Tyre into a theatre accessible to all, where, thanks to the help of UNESCO and international bodies, performances and workshops are offered free of charge. Similarly, Seanna Kaleesa’s Urban Circus International initiative aims to popularize circus arts throughout the country.

The COVID restrictions closed theatres for almost two years, and even after they reopened, there was still a lack of interest from audiences, frightened by the global health crisis, especially among those over forty, the demographic that usually attend plays. The economic crisis has also made it impossible to hold school trips to the theatre, while the younger generation can no longer afford to buy tickets.

## Economic models

While the sector was essentially based on ticket sales during performances (for example, BIPOD, by the company Maqamat, was financed up to 35% by the box office), the economic crisis has reversed this pattern: it is completely unfeasible to offer shows for a fee, as the public is not able to pay. However, as far as artistic pro-

duction is concerned, the fact that events are completely free of charge can also represent an obstacle to the promotion of culture, as the amount and quality of the work carried out, which legitimately deserves to be paid for, becomes invisible. It is therefore necessary to envisage fees that would make it possible to suit both the low purchasing power of the public and the value of the actors' work.

To be able to support themselves, actors of the sector organize workshops or teach their discipline, which allows them to ensure a fixed remuneration (although subject to the fluctuations of the currency). To finance their projects, companies turn to international aid, including AFAC, Al Mawred el Thaqafi, and diplomatic institutions. The precariousness of the sector leads troupes and directors to apply for a call for projects before their creation. They are then subject to specific conditions, policies and criteria that may hinder their wishes. This support, as important as it is, responds to the associative logic of social and societal support, and to the "political" agendas of the patrons, to the point of sometimes forgetting the creative value as such. As well, this system does not allow the actors of the sector to perpetuate their activities: at the beginning of each project, they have to audition and present their work to new committees, which are the only ones able to determine their admissibility. Today, there is no body in charge of mediation between funding agencies and artists.

## Sectoral conclusion

As a result of this analysis, the following issues are identified:

- In addition to theatre education, there is no university training in dance or circus arts in Lebanon. There is also no training for technicians.
- The departure of many actors, dancers and technicians is currently an obstacle to the sustainability of the sector.
- The creation of a show requires funds in dollars (for the rental of a hall, the creation of sets, etc.) that are difficult to acquire for Lebanese companies. The companies that continue to operate do so without profit.
- The work of democratization and decentralization of the theatrical offer remains to be done. However, these objectives must be in line with the context of total gratuity, in view of the economic situation of the target populations.
- The COVID crisis led to the closure of theatres for two years, and even after reopening, the public remains reluctant.
- The quasi free of charge, although necessary, and the strong dependence on NGOs and other donors do not allow actors of the sector to perpetuate their activities, and also devaluates the artistic and professional value of those concerned.
- Nowadays, it is unthinkable to finance the arrival of foreign productions in Lebanese cinemas, because of the high costs.



# Visual Arts

## Conditions of creation and production

In Lebanon, working conditions remain a major concern for all visual artists today. They are confronted with excessive costs and work restrictions due to the lack of electricity (and therefore of light). The only solution these artists have is to reinvent themselves, each according to their means, in their practices and their creations.

Still considered a “niche” sector, visual arts education has few students, but this number has not decreased in recent years. On the contrary, the devaluation of the Lebanese pound has led to a significant drop in tuition fees, and the number of students in the visual arts field seems to have increased this past year. However, the schools do yet not possess equipped workshops which would enable their students to have self-service facilities. They are thus constrained to purchasing their tools and materials themselves. For example, professors at the Lebanese University organized a fundraising to help their students get supplies.

## Conditions of Programming and Broadcasting

There are 56 galleries in Lebanon, mainly in Beirut and its suburbs. Some gallerists have managed to maintain an important level of activity so far, even though the number of exhibitions held in Lebanon has decreased significantly in recent years: 139 in 2021 compared to 450 in 2016. Daily, gallery owners are bound to work reduced schedules, as they are subject to electricity restrictions, and still need to ensure adequate light and temperature for the artworks. Nevertheless, there has been an upswing in the quantity of auctions, many of which are held online (notably to counteract sanitary restrictions as well as electricity costs). The devaluation of prices has strongly affected art, and this situation has created a craze on the part of buyers, who see the purchase of a work as an investment opportunity, and to get liquidity out of the banks, which they no longer have confidence in. However, this situation brings up a certain dichotomy: given the rise of the prices of the equipment and the costs of creation, the prices of the works are inevitably lowered to meet the demand.

Once they graduate, young artists are expected to contact art galleries, participate in competitions and events in hopes of being spotted. While many galleries were focusing their collections on the work of the new generation prior to 2019, the economic crisis has made this a risk they would rather not take. Yet, the collapse of a part of the sector due to the economic crisis, as well as the August 4th, 2020, explosion, has allowed younger artists to enjoy a creative and innovative momentum without necessarily requiring the endorsement of a gallery. The *thawra* has also revealed many new talents, and some initiatives are being undertaken, sometimes in unconventional venues, to al-

low young people to exhibit their art.

At the international level, the economic and political crises in Lebanon have prompted foreign actors to mobilise in favour of Lebanese artistic creation. After the double explosion, many international entities have offered support cells for Lebanese artists. Several residencies were set up, allowing them to travel for some time, and keep producing while meeting and networking with other professionals. Many exhibitions were also organised to promote artists, and financial aid was awarded. As well, Lebanese galleries are joining international fairs and promoting their artists to institutions or museums. The visibility given to some creators has been quite beneficial to them, especially as some were little known in the international scene. In this respect, the importance of social networks has also changed the way galleries and artists communicate, as they now use global platforms to broadcast their art. However, the enthusiasm on the international art market remains limited. Lebanese artists are mainly appealing to the Lebanese diaspora, which is keen to support artistic creation in Lebanon. Few foreign collectors invest in Lebanese art, and the market remains largely national, especially when it comes to emerging artists.

The digital platform Correspondances, supported by the French Ministry of Culture, in partnership with the Institut français and part of the UNESCO's "Li Beirut" initiative, was launched after the double explosion of the port of August 4th, 2020. This project was created out of the will of the actors of the Lebanese artistic and cultural scene to establish a community of contributing artists in order to promote a prolific and qualitative production in Lebanon. Considering the incapacity of the State, the answer today seems to lie in the cooperation between artists, curators, and other professionals of the sector, which Correspondances aims to connect.

## Audiences

The Lebanese public continues to show a significant interest in visiting galleries. However, these are constrained by the cost of gasoline and the COVID crisis that continues to plague.

As far as buyers are concerned, most Lebanese art collectors are oriented towards classical and traditional works. Thus, painting and sculpture remain the easiest art forms to sell, while some artists making more experimental art, such as installation or video, are struggling to find buyers. However, the NFT wave is also sweeping the art market, with many Lebanese artists trying to break into the crypto trend.

## Economic models

Nowadays, a visual artist can hardly earn a living by selling their art in Lebanon. Although the sale of artworks remains the main source of revenue, these artists also need to ensure another source of income since the price of primary materials, electricity, as well as potential craftsmen and assistants to hire is to be paid in dollars. This represents considerable costs compared to the current purchasing power of the Lebanese population. The question of remuneration has always been an important concern for artists, and many have turned to teaching, but the drastic decrease of salaries given by universities is no longer allowing them to meet their needs. To compensate for this lack of funding, artists try to obtain loans, grants or support mostly from large institutional collectors or from galleries themselves, which sometimes provide advances on production to ensure the continuation of their artists' work. As for art galleries, and because they are considered commercial companies, they cannot claim any financial aid from donors or international institutions. Given the current situation of the country, they can only hope to sell enough to cover their costs. While sales in Lebanon used to be conducted in "lollars", i.e., at the rate of \$1 for 8,000 Lebanese pounds until the end of 2021, galleries now only accept payments in "fresh" dollars. Selling their works abroad, especially in international shows, allows artists to ensure a flow of income.

## Sectoral conclusion

Thus, and after examining the state of visual arts in Lebanon, the following challenges are identified:

- The acquisition of materials and the costs related to electricity are too important to be assumed by a large majority of artists, who see their creative possibilities reduced.
- The devaluation of prices and payment by cheque has led to an increase in demand on the art market between 2019 and the end of 2021, but artworks are now being sold in dollars again.
- On the international art market, demand for Lebanese art remains essentially Lebanese, i.e., it is only of interest to the diaspora.
- Lebanese collectors remain cautious and traditional with regards to their acquisitions, and the more experimental art finds few buyers in Lebanon.
- The precarious economic situation of the country has pushed artists to seek grants or opportunities abroad. Many Lebanese visual artists are leaving the country.
- Universities who offer visual art studies do not have adequate facilities and materials to help their students to create.
- Many young artists are entering the art market, but they are struggling to enter the networks of galleries and meet their audience.



# Cine ma

With an international reputation forged in recent years, thanks to the quality of the work of its professionals, Lebanon enjoys a virtuous momentum towards its film production. However, the country's financial, political and health crises are putting a strain on an industry which, although talented, requires considerable funding, a certain expertise and constant promotional support.

## Conditions of creation and production

From a general point of view, film production has decreased: there were about 30 films produced per year; today there are between 10 and 15. Also, the types of audio-visual production have changed: directors are turning to the production of series, which are easier to finance (digital platforms are more interested in series, as they represent sustainable and profitable content) and appeal to a very large audience, or to short films, which require less funding. Documentaries also represent an important part of film production, and often benefit from international, and particularly European, funding. As far as feature films are concerned, productions are either oriented towards commercial films, which already have an audience, can be made on reduced budgets and benefit from regional aid, or towards films d'auteur, which benefit from easy financing by European public institutions and can

easily be purchased by platforms. However, quality films with large budgets are in danger in Lebanon because they usually rely on private funding, which is no longer available.

Regarding training, while many aspired to make films without any real professional training, the new generation of directors and technicians has a large majority of specialized bachelor's or master's degrees (delivered by the IESAV of Saint Joseph University, the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts, the University of Notre-Dame de Louaize, and others). If the departure of some professors, due to the financial situation, challenges the maintenance of quality training for audio-visual students, the real issue for today's young graduates remains visibility and networking: some manage to produce their short films, but many scripts remain unproduced for years.

The Liban Cinéma Foundation, chaired by Maya de Freige, is a private association that supports the development of the Lebanese film industry. The Foundation's mission is to support the younger generation by helping them with the financing, promotion, distribution and dissemination of their works, by approaching experts adapted to their needs. The initiative focuses on building a national internal ecosystem that will strengthen Lebanese cinema. The Foundation insists on structuring the sector, especially through the establishment of co-production agreements with foreign countries, including France, Belgium and Argentina. These are however delayed by the Lebanese government.

## Conditions of programming and broadcasting

Today, there are seven cinemas in Beirut, one in Saida (Ishbilia, which showcases contemporary Lebanese and Arab independent cinema) and one in Zahle (Stargate). These cinemas are struggling to finance themselves: despite an increase in prices, ticket sales are not enough to cover their costs. To reduce these, theatres do not buy the films they show and do not invest in promotion around the films, they are only a platform hosting and offering productions to the public. That leaves the salaries, electricity, fuel and the equipment to be paid. The multiplexes therefore choose to orient their programming around American blockbusters, which cost very little and will appeal the largest possible audience. The rest of the offer is of little interest to exhibitors because the interested public cannot cover the costs of running the theatres. This leads to a situation in which most Lebanese productions, and especially independent films d'auteur, never see the light of day in their country of origin.

It should also be noted that censorship remains a major problem for Lebanese directors who are subject to the approval of the General Security for the broadcasting of their production. These authorizations are issued by officials in charge of national security who unfortunately do not necessarily have any training or education in cinema. The sector is therefore not independent of the state and its policies.

Metropolis Cinema is an association created in 2006. While the Metropolis theatre was the only one to offer a program of films d'auteur and independent movies, the closure of the theatre in January 2020 has made a whole range of production invisible, despite the audience always being present. Metropolis is now focusing its activities on holding temporary events. Thanks to its partnerships with international festivals, European diplomatic bodies and non-governmental organizations, the association now organizes numerous festivals that embrace all types of audio-visual production (documentaries, short films, feature films, European cinema, Lebanese cinema, young audiences, animations, etc.) and aim to promote Lebanese audio-visual production, as well as the diversification of film distribution throughout the country.

The lack of diversity in the permanent theatres has led to the creation of numerous film festivals in the capital and throughout the country. These festivals, although forced to stop during the lockdowns, were able to resume their activities fairly quickly despite the crises, thanks to the ease with which their infrastructures could be set up, allowing them to be hosted by theatres or concert halls, or even to take place outdoors. Access to international festivals remains the most important opportunity for visibility for film productions. They also represent funding opportunities for future projects. In recent years, Lebanese cinema has enjoyed considerable success in major international events (Venice, Berlin, Cannes, etc.), allowing filmmakers to see their productions screened in cinemas abroad.

Finally, the emergence of streaming platforms has considerably transformed the sector. While giants such as Netflix focus on providing content that is regionally relevant to their users (e.g., Netflix

MENA is constantly being updated with productions by directors from the region), other platforms have been created by Middle Eastern actors. For example, the Lebanese platform Aflamuna (created by Beirut DC) and the Middle Eastern platform Shasha Movies have a limited but frequently updated catalogue, and thus intend to promote the region's cinematographic creation. As for the regional platforms Shahid or OSN Movies, they aim to be direct competitors of Netflix, in that they offer very extensive catalogues that bring together both films and series produced locally, but also international productions. However, the weight of the Lebanese cinema on these streaming giants remains lower, both because of a low rate of Lebanese subscribers, but also due of a considerable offer in which the Lebanese production is lost. Today, we notice a transformation of the Middle Eastern market in terms of audio-visuals: whereas Lebanon and Egypt were the leaders in the cinema sector, the Gulf countries are increasingly imposing themselves on streaming platforms, especially thanks to the range of series they offer.

## Audiences

In Beirut, where most of the demand is concentrated, the multiplicity of festivals, estimated at around twenty in 2021, has brought together a wide range of audiences around very diverse offerings. A strong interest for the seventh art is apparent among the Lebanese public, especially among the younger generations. This is due to the proliferation of video-on-demand platforms, which have allowed a larger number of people to have access to, and therefore be interested in, cinema (although this access is conditioned by a powerful internet speed, which remains impossible in the remote and impoverished regions of Lebanon). Thus, thanks to the wealth of their catalogues, streaming platforms have allowed a wider

audience to watch more films and enjoy diverse productions. In Lebanon, as on a global level, the consumption of cinema has therefore been modified in favour of the small screen, in a world constrained by the health restrictions brought about by the COVID crisis. The holding of free and open-air events remains the most efficient way to gather an audience in demand of big screen viewing. Moreover, the diversity of their offers, compared to multiplexes (which only screen big productions that attract a family audience), remains the only possibility for Lebanese spectators to enjoy independent and auteur productions.

If Beirut used to hold a very important place in the diffusion of Lebanese cinema, in that it gathered the majority of the supply and demand, the impact of the crises on the capital has given more visibility to other regions. Today, the actors of the sector are busy organizing events outside Beirut, often outdoors (to counter the sanitary restrictions) and free of charge, in order to reach the broadest audience possible. A wider democratization of the seventh art remains a major concern, and the work needs to be done from a young age. In addition, recent festivals in the regions, especially in the Bekaa, Akkar and the Chouf, have shown their citizens are enthusiastic about the offer.

## Economic models

In recent years, as public funds having always been almost non-existent, Lebanese film production has essentially relied on three means of financing: foreign funds, private funds, and the necessary diversification of directors' activities. Following the successive crises in the country, the economic model has been strongly shaken.

First, while a lot of private money had been invested in Lebanese cinema, given its international success, these funds have

inexorably dried up. This financial support has indeed been severely affected by the economic crisis. On the one hand, some private donors have seen their money blocked in banks and the value of their assets greatly reduced by the devaluation of the Lebanese pound. On the other hand, many investors have left the country. Lastly, among those who manage to continue their patronage, many are those who now turn to support charitable associations or initiatives that help endangered, marginalized and impoverished populations.

From this observation, the cinematographic production has massively turned towards the international market, especially since the opening towards the foreign market has allowed Lebanese cinema to enjoy even more visibility (which is a significant advantage for the production companies that are paid, thanks to the distribution of the films they produce rather than to their production itself). Generally, foreign financing is essential for film production in Lebanon. Many directors propose their script to European producers; most of the work is then done from Europe and only the shooting takes place in Lebanon. The European public authorities are also very important in the financing of Lebanese films; the French National Cinema Center (CNC) for Film and Moving Images, for example, frequently allocates budgets to directors and producers, but their advances are conditioned by script obligations (51% of the dialogues must be in French), which sometimes affect the artistic creation. Similarly, some funding from foreign diplomatic institutions requires the scripts to have a cultural link to the funding body, to the detriment of a certain creative desire. Moreover, European authorities sometimes tend to prefer scenarios that exploit a certain sensationalism implied by the crises and conflicts that Lebanon is experiencing, to the point of rejecting projects that are not related to them.

Recently, this dependence on the in-

ternational market has been complicated by the health and economic crises: the freezing of capital and the banking restrictions are complicating exchanges with foreign countries, as Lebanese producers are forced to elaborate financial arrangements regarding the rates charged, currencies, etc., in order to hopefully obtain support from abroad. It is then necessary to propose differentiated budgets according to the authorities to which they are addressed: at the official rate for taxation, in euros for European institutions, in dollars for international organizations. These schemes are even more complex when it comes to co-productions, as they involve specific amounts being spent in specific countries (for example, filming is done in Lebanon, post-production in Sweden, editing in the Netherlands, etc.).

Finally, film creation has always been poorly remunerated for Lebanese directors, and they have to, in tandem with their projects, either turn to teaching or to creating commercial productions (advertising and television) with large companies, often from the Gulf, interested in the quality of the equipment, the professionalism and the absence of censorship in Lebanon (compared to the policies in place in these countries). Similarly, production companies (of which there are about ten in Lebanon) used to finance commercial productions in order to be able to afford not to make a profit on films d'auteur. However, this solution is no longer viable: with the explosion destroying many studios and a lot of equipment, the health crisis making it impossible to travel, and the economic crisis, commercial production houses have relocated to Dubai, Amman or Saudi Arabia. Today, Lebanese filmmakers are struggling to find contracts with foreign clients, which could allow them to meet their needs and finance their own productions.

## Sectoral conclusion

Following the analysis of the sector, it is possible to identify the following problems:

- Young filmmakers are struggling to create a professional network and to gain visibility on the film scene, the establishment of cooperation entities between them remains to be done.

- With the inability of private patrons to continue their support of cinema, films with a substantial budget cannot be produced in Lebanon. Many scripts remain unproduced.

- The health crisis has accelerated the transformation of the audio-visual sector, in favour of streaming platforms. If the demand for theatrical screenings has decreased, the demand for the type of production has also changed: VOD-platform users seem to have a growing interest in series. However, while these platforms have enabled filmmakers to increase their visibility, and the public to continue to have access to cinema despite the pandemic, they present a real accessibility problem, particularly for populations that have little or no access to the Internet or cannot afford a subscription.

- Censorship remains a real problem in Lebanon, preventing Lebanese filmmakers from broadcasting some of their films in the country.

- The considerable costs related to the maintenance of a movie theatre reduces its capacity to screen a variety of films, resulting in a very large audience (American and big budget) which is only slightly representative of the regional and world cinema offer.

- The democratization and decentralization of the cinematographic offer to all kinds of audiences and in all regions of Lebanon is very recent and is still a major challenge: it is a matter of informing and educating a new but demanding audience, as well as supporting and promoting the hosting of cultural events outside Beirut.

- The lack of private funds has led to

an intensification of co-production with foreign countries, but the freezing of capital and banking restrictions make international financing more difficult. Also, international aid represents, to a certain extent, a hindrance to complete freedom of script creation.

- The destruction of a lot of material and locations after the double explosion has strongly shaken film production, which has become less attractive for foreigners.

While many Lebanese films have been released in theatres and festivals in 2020 and 2021, it should be noted that this involves projects started in 2017/2018, before the crises began. The current situation being drastically different, the observation of the impact of the economic and sanitary crises on the cinema sector will only be noticed by 2023/2024.



# Li tera ture

## Conditions of programming and broadcasting

The economic and health crises, as well as the double explosion of August 4th, 2020, have considerably reduced the number of literary events organized in Lebanon. Thus, while 327 conferences/book signings were organized in 2016, a particularly successful year, there were only 41 in 2021.

## Conditions of creation and production

While most writers continue to create, the conditions for publishing and disseminating their works have been altered by both local and international movements that have transformed the literary sector.

There are about fifty publishing houses operating in Lebanon, among them are Dar el Machred, Hachette Antoine, and Dar el Jadid. The financial crisis has caused them to restrict the number of publications they produce. This situation inevitably affects newcomers to the market who try to publish their first book: their success is not assured, and few publishers will take this risk. In addition, problems of piracy and censorship are still frequent in the country. On the one hand, intellectual property is hardly respected and supported, and piracy, especially on the Internet, is common. On the other hand, a publishing house could be unable to publish a book that it had selected because of a censorship decision by the General Security.

The National Library, founded in 1941, was closed for 42 years until its reopening in 2018. Today, it is managed by Hassan Acra and provides access to all the Lebanese archives (books, brochures, etc.). Although it has previously signed agreements with several international institutions, including the National Library of France and libraries in Jordan, the lack of laws and decrees affecting it has limited its opportunities. The damage to the building following the double explosion, as well as the drastic reduction of the allocated budget (\$15,000 per year compared to \$500,000 before the crises), add to the difficulty of the library's operation.

There are a total of 120 libraries in Lebanon: 40 CLACs, 3 libraries managed by Assabil and 77 municipal libraries.

In 2001, in collaboration with the International Organization of the Francophonie, the Ministry of Culture inaugurated a network of 14 public libraries managed by municipalities, called Centres de Lecture et d'Animation Culturelle (CLAC), aiming to offer books to the surrounding populations. Although there are now forty of them, these cultural spaces have unfortunately lost much of their influence in recent years, and now receive very few visitors. The Ministry has not maintained the vitality of these libraries, and the mu-

municipalities have very few resources to allocate to them. In addition, schools and young people are not encouraged to visit these libraries: schools do not organize outings anymore, mainly due to lack of resources, and fewer and fewer books are assigned to be read by the school system. In conjunction to the state action, the Assabil association has set up three public libraries in Beirut (in Bachoura, Geitawi and Monot).

Assabil was founded in 1997 out of the desire to create public reading spaces in Lebanon. Today, Assabil manages a network of three public libraries in Beirut which are dedicated to lending books free of charge, providing free access to the Internet and organizing cultural activities (a reading club in Arabic, English and French, a film club, meetings, etc). The association also has a mobile library called Kotobus, which travels to public schools and refugee camps, and plans to make trips to six villages without libraries starting in February 2022. With the decrease in the purchasing power of the Lebanese people, Assabil has witnessed a significant number of visitors (2,500 visitors in November 2021) and is lending an average of 3,000 books per month.

As far as festivals are concerned, the Salon du Livre francophone, organized by the Institut français of Beirut, was the third most important francophone literature fair in the world, after those of Paris and Montreal, and was accompanied by numerous cultural events and activities for schoolchildren. It has unfortunately ceased to take place in 2019, when the thawra began.

This year, to compensate for this absence, the Institut français has suggested a series of writing residencies to Lebanese writers and artists, providing them with an important breath of fresh air in favour of maintaining their creative possibilities. About a hundred Lebanese artists and

writers were able to benefit from this program. In this regard, the Institut français is currently preparing a new version of its Salon, based on an innovative design.

The Arab Salon continues to be held every year, where religious literature holds an important place.

## Audiences

In recent years, French literary production has seen a decrease not only in its supply, but also in its demand. If the importance of the French-speaking world in Lebanon tends to decrease, this low interest in French literature also affects publishing houses, which find it increasingly difficult to export their productions throughout the Middle East. Although there is interest among European readers, who discover, in Lebanese literature, a reality that is very different to their own (the war and its stigma being a favourite subject for Lebanese authors), the cost of exporting to European countries is still too high for a publishing house to bear, in view of the risks it represents. Thus, many French-speaking publishing houses have been forced to stop their activities (Tamyras, Noir, Blanc etc., les Editions de la Revue Phénicienne, etc.) and only a few continue to exist (such as l'Orient des Livres or even Oser dire, publishing poetry). Authors who write in French are therefore turning to French publishing houses to ensure a certain visibility or take advantage of co-publishing agreements between a Lebanese house and a foreign distributor, in order to be able to export. However, this leads to a situation in which Lebanese authors write about subjects relating to the Lebanese reality, and that are meant to affect the Lebanese public in a certain way, who does not have access to these texts. Thus, if it is current authors, children of the civil war, who fill the gaps in the national history through their works, their absence from the Lebanese literary landscape makes it impossible to carry out the work of memory that these authors

are trying to pursue.

The use of English and Arabic in literary production is now predominant in Lebanon. Publishers of books in Arabic are trying to export their products throughout the Middle East but are faced with censorship in some countries, and a particular demand: the Gulf countries have shown a strong interest in practical fields, such as cooking, astrology or religion, to the detriment of fiction. In addition, there is the problem of language: the writing used by some authors, which is close to oral and sometimes even dialectal, constitutes a barrier to the export of these books. Indeed, in order to be sold in Arab countries, a book must be written in the most classical Arabic language, which is often far from the realities of its use. This is also true for children's literature.

Within the country, purchases seem to be conditioned by the price of books: readers seem to gravitate toward paperbacks or "discounted" books. In the same way, and even if the proportion of French readers is decreasing, they are also those who often have the greatest purchasing power, and therefore those who can most easily buy books, which allows French literature to survive, to a certain extent.

Generally speaking, people over thirty represent much of the novel readership. Also, the sales of children's literature have increased a lot in the last few years, but this craze is observed worldwide. Young people between the ages of 15 and 20 are largely absent from bookstore statistics. Readers of French-language books are generally older than readers of English-language books.

## Economic models

There are now just over a hundred bookstores across Lebanon, but the sharp rise in the price of books is undermining their business model. Compared to France, where the health restrictions linked to the COVID crisis did not affect book purchases by the French population, Lebanon has seen its number of readers drop considerably since 2020, due to the significant decrease in the purchasing power of the Lebanese people, turning books into luxury items. The decrease in numbers of purchases in bookstores can be estimated at 60% since the beginning of the crises. Nevertheless, the periods of lockdown have pushed booksellers to sell books online, allowing them to maintain some business.

Publishers are struggling to cover the costs of printing their publications, which are charged in dollars (it costs about \$2,300 to print a book today). Thus, among the printing houses present in Lebanon, forty have closed within a six-month span in 2020. The import of books is also to be paid in dollars, while sales are made in Lebanese pounds. Sold at black market rates, the cost of a book has increased by about 200%. The supply of books in bookstores has therefore necessarily decreased, especially with regard to imported production.



## Sectoral conclusion

After this analysis of the literary sector in Lebanon, it is possible to identify the following issues:

- The financial difficulties faced by publishing houses affect the possibilities for new writers to see their works get published.

- Intellectual property is little respected in Lebanon, and authors regularly see their works pirated. Censorship is also applied to literary production, hindering writers' freedom of expression.

- The collapse of the state has led to a deterioration of public libraries (CLAC) and their operations. Students are not encouraged to visit them.

- The health restrictions linked to the COVID crisis, to which must be added a drop in interest on the part of the Lebanese public, has led to a considerable decrease in the number of literary events organized throughout the country.

- The literary production in French is dwindling, as Arabic and English books are becoming increasingly important.

- The drastic devaluation of the Lebanese pound has led to a considerable rise in the price of books, forcing bookstores to reduce their supply and preventing a significant portion of the Lebanese population from purchasing books.

# Heritage

Tangible heritage, as defined in Lebanon, includes public buildings, archaeological and historical monuments, and museums.

## Archaeological and museum heritage

The Direction Générale des Antiquités, a sub-directorate of the Ministry of Culture, is divided into three departments: one for furniture and archaeological fieldwork, one for the historical heritage and one for museums. These three sections are in charge of the restoration, conservation, rehabilitation and development of Lebanon's historical sites and monuments. All civil servants working in these sections must undergo a competitive examination at the Civil Service Council and stand before a jury of university doctors. The civil servants who ensure the technical part in the field must be archeologist, architect and/or doctoral student.

The DGA cooperates with UNESCO and ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property) as well as with ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites).

The impact of the pandemic on the sector was very significant, and led to long months of closure of museums and archaeological sites, along with the shutdown of professionals in the field. Du-

ring the repeated lockdowns, the state museums closed their doors. Among the private museums, university museums (of the American University of Beirut, St. Joseph's University and Balamand) followed the government's regulations on higher education institutions. Outside the capital, some museums remained open, but the policy for the reopening of the country's various institutions has placed museum institutions in last priority (in phase 4, i.e., March 2021).

While 90% of the world's museums have closed their doors because of the pandemic, Lebanese museums have also been negatively impacted by the internal crises in the country since the country since 2019. Several private museums are still closed to the public, such as the Lebanese Prehistory Museum, the Mouawad Museum, the Sursock Museum, Wonders of the Sea, etc. Electricity shortages have also hindered the collections' conservation. At the National Museum, for instance, the drastic changes in temperature and humidity, caused by the successive start-up and shutdown of the air conditioning systems and conservation tools, weaken the collections.

There are five national museums in Lebanon. The National Museum in Beirut, which was rehabilitated in 1999 and then in 2016, is now the subject of an annex project, initiated and funded by the National Heritage Foundation, intended to host temporary exhibitions, educational workshops, conferences, and a cafeteria. The other four are site museums that form an integral part of the country's archaeological sites. They are located in Byblos (financially supported by the government of Quebec), in Baalbeck (supported by the German government), in Beiteddine (closed for several years, the exhibits were removed in order to protect them from deterioration of the building) and in Tripoli (in the citadel, the creation of which was supported by the Agence Française du Développement). Further national museums

are underway, notably in Tyre (funded by Italy), Saida (the archaeological site has been excavated since 1998 by the British Museum team, thanks to Kuwaiti funding, but was recently interrupted) and Beirut (also supported by a Kuwaiti fund and also interrupted). All these archaeological sites are under control and surveillance of the Lebanese State, and their protection is the duty of the Ministry of Culture. Archaeological excavations continue in Lebanon, financed by foreign teams, academic or institutional (in Byblos for example, the Louvre Museum has granted funds), but they are now slowed down or suspended.

### Protection and conservation of museum and archaeological heritage

To ensure the protection of the heritage, it is necessary to identify, inventory, classify and monitor it. This task is the prerogative of the State.

The law 166 LR from 1933 determines as antiquity “all products of human activity (...) prior to the year 1700”. Moreover, a 2008 law deals with the management and protection of the material heritage, which is the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture and gives the same Ministry the right to appropriate the properties concerned and to take any material, legal or judicial measure to preserve them. However, the application of these laws is slowed down by the lack of good management and restricted teams, as well as a low budget to effectively cover the costs of restoration and conservation. Nowadays, the scarce projects are undertaken with the help of occasional donations from organizations, sponsors or patrons.

In addition, there is a need to establish common standards for all museums in Lebanon. It is necessary to verify that these institutions meet the requirements and conditions as established by the International Committee of Museums, until national legislations can be applied. A greater

coordination of the initiatives of the museums, whether public or private, also lies ahead.

A 1970 UNESCO convention against illicit trafficking was ratified by Lebanon in 1992. However, these laws are more or less respected in the country. They need to be further enforced and updated as there are still grey areas that allow for deviance. The country also needs to legislate ethical issues and, if necessary, to organize itself around a committee capable of managing these considerations.

### Audiences

The attendance of Lebanese museums by the general public has always been minimal, the main visitors being school groups, tourists, or academics. However, temporary events, such as La Nuit des Musées, regularly show that the Lebanese public is ready to meet any invitation to discover its heritage: more than 10,000 people participated in the last edition of this event.

Due to the health and financial crises, these audiences have become even smaller: there is less tourism in the country, and the prices of transportation (school buses, cabs, gasoline) have become too high to be supported by educational institutions. The restrictions linked to the health crisis in confined places (such as Beiteddine) have also put off visitors who, faced with the distancing measures, the gauges, and the restricted schedules, no longer travel. For instance, there is now an average of fifty visitors per day at the National Museum, although it has a capacity of more than 300 people per day.

## Architectural heritage

As far as built heritage is concerned, there is a dichotomy between what is officially protected (i.e., structures built before 1700, according to Law 166 LR of November 1933) and what the public considers to be part of the Lebanese heritage (which would then include Lebanese houses with three arches and red tiles, buildings from the 1930s/1940s with three or four floors arranged around a central space, and modern, post-1930s to 1970s architecture). A bill to set the framework for recent heritage protection was presented to parliament in 2017 but has yet to be passed.

Now few historic buildings are owned by the state; almost all of these buildings are privately owned. In recent years, the Lebanese society has become more aware of the value of the built heritage that more and more people consider as a double investment, both real estate and heritage. However, the preservation of Lebanese real estate heritage remains an important consideration as many real estate developers intend to acquire buildings to reclaim the land and build modern buildings on it (for example, the building law in Beirut allows for buildings up to fifteen floors high or more in the historical center, so it is more profitable for owners to destroy a traditional house to build a tower). If a legal framework is in existence and stipulates that “no one should destroy or modify any building in the devastated areas of Beirut without the approval of the General Directorate of Antiquities”, these laws remain momentary and periodic (today, they are only effective for two years). For instance, a draft law initiated in 2000 concerning the protection of Beirut’s real estate heritage is still under revision and discussion in the parliament. Thus, the current legislative framework does not effectively protect historic buildings and the General Directorate of Antiquities is sometimes forced to circumvent the law

to enforce its decisions. To this end, the DGA has pursued a very conservative policy since 1996 to prevent the destruction of historic buildings as much as possible. However, the authority now counts only three architects and a topographer (the only engineer having resigned) for the heritage section to manage the entire Lebanese territory. About twenty more architects are needed to cope with the abundance of building sites, but the salaries offered by the Ministry today are too low to interest architects who prefer to go into private practice.

### Protection and conservation of built heritage

Six hundred and forty buildings belonging to the Lebanese cultural heritage were damaged by the double explosion of August 4th, 2020, according to the DGA’s first estimate. Following this tragedy, Law 194 of October 2020 froze real estate transactions for a period of two years, pending the implementation of a reconstruction and protection plan for historic buildings and districts by the Ministry of Culture. The General Directorate of Antiquities, due to a lack of funds, did not have the means to start major restoration projects after the August 4th tragedy. If some aids from international organizations were granted, allowing to rebuild or consolidate some buildings in danger, the lack of confidence of the governments towards the Lebanese State has strongly minimized the donations (especially because they were subject to conditions that the Lebanese government refused). International guidelines promote aid to private organizations, this situation compelled the State to cooperate with these initiatives, among which Aliph (International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas) or Beirut Built Heritage Rescue architects, in order to establish a list of priority projects in the conservation of degraded heritage. Alongside the state action, UNESCO launched on August 27th, 2020, Li Beirut, an initiative for an

urban recovery for Beirut. Joined by AUB researchers, UNESCO is working to identify and map cultural heritage in the areas damaged by the blast. Moreover, on behalf of the General Directorate of Antiquities, a plan for the protection of the built heritage in the destroyed neighborhoods is being elaborated. Other NGOs have largely undertaken the reconstruction of the destroyed areas of Beirut:

- Aliph has allocated \$5 million for the renovation of private buildings on behalf of the National Museum (thus the General Directorate of Antiquities), the Sursok Museum and for some NGOs.

- Offre Joie has restored entire streets in the districts of Mar Mikhael and Karantina.

- Beit el Baraka worked on the restoration around the Jesuit Garden in Geitawi.

- Beirut Heritage Initiative prioritised about 20 inhabited heritage buildings by protecting them from rain and ensuring their maintenance, with assistance from Aliph. Then, BHI launched partial reconstruction and total restoration operations in Rmeil, Medawar and Ashrafieh in the framework of cluster rehabilitation.

- Nussaned and Live Love Beirut worked on specific buildings and are now focusing their reconstruction on clusters in Mar Mikhaël.

- The associations House of Christmas, Baytna Baytak, and Mada are also involved in the post-explosion reconstruction of the port.

Thus, a recent inventory shows that 958 heritage buildings remain in the perimeter of East Beirut (between Charles Helou Avenue, Bechara el Khoury Avenue, and Independence Avenue) from the 1860/1945 period, 53% of which have been restored since the double explosion of the port on August 4, either by their owners or by NGOs, i.e. 511 buildings. 15% are under renovation, which means that 32% are not yet renovated or abandoned.

Broadly speaking, the failure of the state has led to a situation in which the

government cannot afford to implement its policy. The building laws and operating coefficients currently in force touch on political levers that no director at state level dares to raise.

Thus, given the meager budget allocated to the Ministry of Culture, it has become impossible for the General Directorate of Antiquities to enforce the law according to which it is allowed to appropriate building owners in exchange for monetary compensation, in order to preserve certain monuments or historical sites. For instance, the city of Tripoli, which is home to many jewels of the Lebanese built heritage, suffers from a notable lack of interest from the accredited authorities: although many reports have been undertaken, they have not resulted in any action. A few private donors have helped with the restoration of mosques and hammams, but it seems that these supports are made for electoral or personal purposes. In addition, many houses are collapsing without anyone being concerned; on the contrary, this situation is sometimes seen by the owners as an opportunity to replace these buildings with taller ones. However, it should be noted that at the national level, the pressure is somewhat reduced outside the capital because the construction coefficient is lower: there are fewer opportunities for economic returns on real estate construction in the regions. Therefore, the heritage subsists more outside Beirut. It is worth noting that thanks to the “Cultural Heritage and Urban Development” plan launched in 2004 by the Lebanese government, through the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) and with the support of the World Bank, the French Development Agency and the Italian Cooperation, the archaeological sites of Byblos, Baalbeck and Tyre as well as some elements of the historic urban centers of Saida and Tripoli have been protected, rehabilitated, and revitalized.

To counteract the lack of state action, militant associations are lobbying to save



places in critical conditions, as well as associations working on the census, legislation and sometimes suing owners who try to damage heritage buildings. UNESCO is also more aware of the protection of heritage since the double explosion of the port on August 4, 2020. For example, the American University of Beirut is currently working on a project, mandated by UNESCO, to set up classification criteria based on the new notion of “historical landscapes”. However, while these initiatives can raise issues and transmit them to international bodies or the media, they are unable to replace the state and the role it is supposed to play in protecting heritage.

### Training of the workforce

To effectively protect heritage, it is necessary to ensure the availability of trained staff and workers who respect the original materials and construction techniques as well as the international charters for the conservation and preservation of ancient sites and buildings. To this end, the restoration of heritage buildings requires a permit from the General Directorate of Antiquities. Obtaining these permits was made easier after the explosion, in order to speed up the work. Although control has become less obvious, the DGA remains intransigent on the facades and structures, although less so on the interiors, unless the building is classified as historic.

While a training center exists for architects to learn restoration and conservation techniques for classified monuments and sites at the Lebanese University, there have been non-specialized associations in Lebanon undertaking repairs and causing significant damage. Some building owners have also used unqualified workers to maintain their houses in order to limit their costs. To remedy this situation, the General Directorate of Antiquities of the Ministry of Culture has launched training sessions for these associations. Furthermore, an initiative of the European

Institute for Cooperation and Development, supported by France and Germany, training courses, mainly in Beirut and sometimes in Tripoli, have been set up since 2021 to train plasterers, masons, carpenters, etc. Finally, many contractors, who initially managed modern buildings, have been trained to manage restoration sites since the tragedy of August 4, 2020, because the impact of the explosion has created a windfall of work in the field. Thus, the August 4 tragedy, while causing reconstruction disasters in the immediate aftermath of the blast, has pushed companies to comply with specifications and hence to train their workers. This has resulted in an increase in the skill level of the workforce.

Nowadays, it is therefore a question of training qualified personnel, while waiting for the arrival of potential funds. In the current context of the country, only foreign funds are involved, because local funds are dried up and public bodies only finance public spaces. For instance, the World Bank is currently preparing a tender for about thirty buildings in Beirut, but this tender, scheduled for the beginning of 2022, remains both minimal and uncertain (the deadline has not yet been met, and the list of buildings chosen has still not been made official). Also, the “Reform, Recovery & Reconstruction Framework” plan launched in December 2020 by the European Union, the World Bank, and the United Nations, planned to grant, as part of its cultural component, \$8 million to UN Habitat to spend on the reconstruction of Beirut (out of a total of \$13 million for the rehabilitation of housing and support for the cultural industries in Beirut); this project was finally launched in early 2022.

## Sectoral conclusion

Thus, the archaeological and architectural heritages are today facing the following problems

- The double explosion in the port of Beirut on August 4th, 2020, devastated many elements of the built heritage of the Lebanese capital. It also damaged some of the capital's museums.

- Archaeological excavations and museum creation projects are mostly interrupted due to lack of management and budget.

- The laws concerning the protection and conservation of the museum heritage and archaeological sites are insufficiently respected due to inadequate financial and human means.

- The maintenance of common standards (requirements, conditions) for all museums in Lebanon remains to be legislated.

- The number of visitors of museums and archaeological sites has always been very low in Lebanon. This situation has worsened recently due to the difficulty for the public to move around, due to the increase in transport prices, and due to a generalized fear linked to the health crisis of COVID, as well as a generalized disinterest.

- The laws of 1933 and 2008, concerning heritage, have not been updated, and there is today a dissonance between what the Lebanese legislation protects, and what it would be justified to consider as part of the national heritage.

- The decisions regarding the protection of the built heritage in Lebanon are only momentary and are hardly respected. The owners of protected buildings can easily bypass them and push for the destruction of their heritage, in order to build a higher building that would give them more income.

- The low budget granted by the Ministry of Culture leads to a lack of specialized employees and a small margin of flexibility for the General Directorate of Antiquities, thus hindering its ability to

act. This reality was even more problematic after the explosion of the port of Beirut.

- 32% of the heritage buildings damaged by the double explosion of the port on August 4th, 2020, remain unrenovated to this day.

- There is a lack of skilled labor, and the existing one is expensive. We are witnessing the restoration of heritage by unlicensed workers, which undermines the integrity of these buildings and can potentially damage the integrity of Lebanon's architectural heritage. However, and following the high demand for restoration that resulted from the double explosion in the port of Beirut on August 4th, 2020, the training given to workers has increased significantly and the requirements have been, for the most part, met.

# Editorial note

Although it is self-evident that each sector of culture must be considered individually, and that the challenges faced by each are specific, it is nevertheless possible to identify some general trends.

Firstly, the practically non-existent active cultural policy of the State has created a state of affairs in which no vision or strategy can be followed. Furthermore, artists and cultural actors do not receive any support or assistance for their activities.

Whilst the sector relies on the private sector, the financial crisis that plagued the country has prevented patrons, banks and sponsors from continuing to provide financial support for artistic and cultural initiatives. The double explosion in the port of Beirut on August 4, 2020, has severely impacted the cultural life of the capital, destroying many venues (galleries, performance halls, workshops, etc.). This situation has prompted the exodus of a large number of artists, in all fields of culture.

In spite of this, some decided to stay in Lebanon and continue to create, to organize, to make the country alive. A certain resumption of artistic and cultural activities could be observed recently. This has been made possible, first and foremost, thanks to the will and dynamism of some cultural stakeholders who, with the help of their teams, have decided to keep going and not giving up. They were supported by several embassies and by the mobilization of international organizations. Moreover, many programs and artists' residencies abroad have been initiated for Lebanese artists, as well as financial support for them, and many events have been held. It is to be noted that since March 2022, and counting on the vitality, the dynamism and the entrepreneurial spirit of the Lebanese, the cultural projects are jostling again and the organizations whether they are art galleries, cultural centers, producers of live art etc. can contemplate more serenely a long-term programming.



