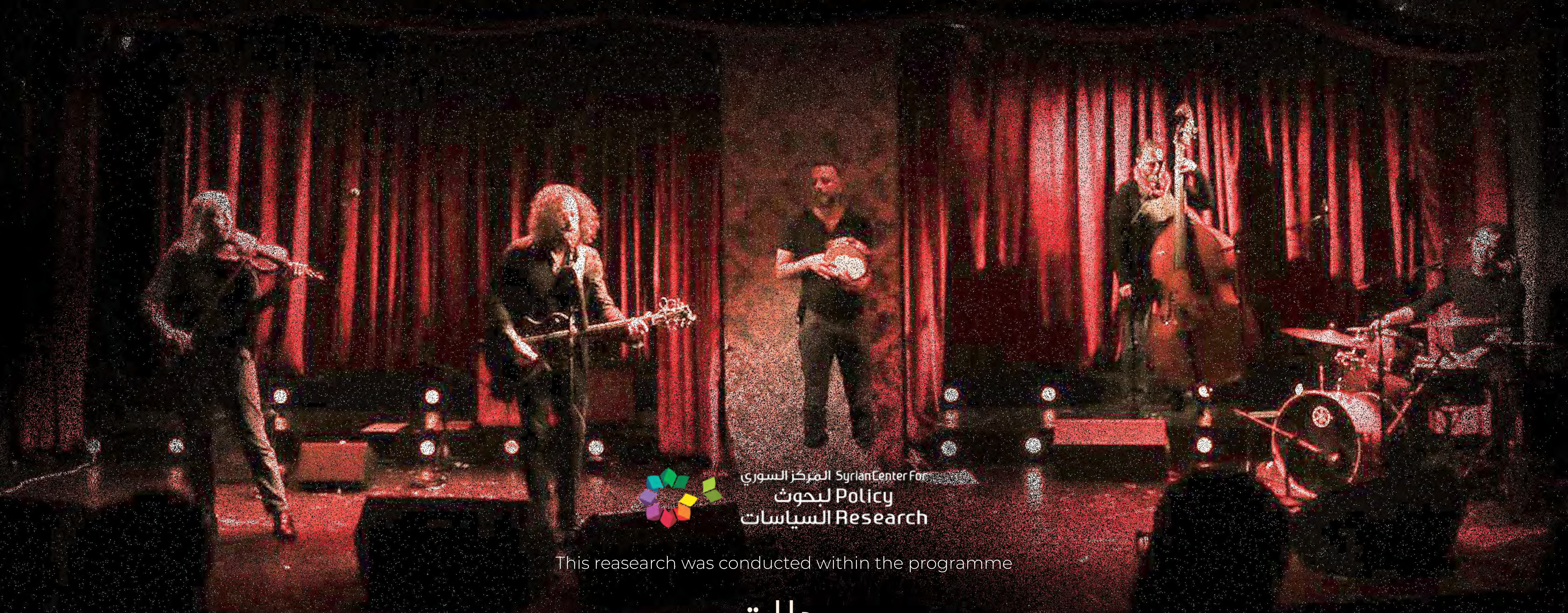


ON PROTECTING IMAGINATION & CREATION

Needs Assessment for the Performing Arts Sector
in Lebanon in Light of Accumulated Crises



اتجاهات
Independent Culture
Ettijahat



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Policy
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This research was conducted within the programme

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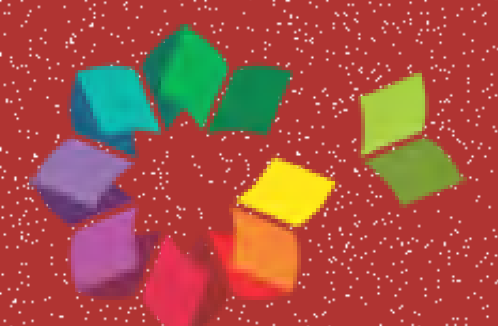
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Designed by:

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The outcomes and suggestions in this research do not represent Ettijahat - Independent Culture.

● ● TABLE OF CONTENT

4	Introduction	43	Technical work in the Performing Arts Sector	
5	Methodology	45	Technician Availability and Capabilities	
9	Characteristics of the Research Sample	45	The Refugee Crisis and Technical Work	
17	Performing Arts Sector in Lebanon	46	Technicians' Working Conditions	57 Conclusions
18	· Political and Social Context	48	Availability of Work Opportunities	61 Future Choices to Develop and Sustain Performing Arts in Lebanon
20	· Artistic Production	48	Wage Levels	63 Short Term
20	· Quantity and Quality of Artistic Production before Fall 2019	49	Work Hours and Sustainability	64 Mid Term
23	· Quantity and Quality of Artistic Production after Fall 2019	50	Protection, Insurance, and Social Security	68 Arabic Language References
24	· Sector Governance and Cultural Policy	50	Equipment and Installations	68 English Language References
27	· Agents	51	Relationship with the rest of the Artistic Team	69 Appendix I: Research Ethics
30	Institutional Administrative Capabilities	53	Qualification and Training (or Self-Training)	71 Appendix II: Legislation Relating to Performing and Musical Arts
37	Tangible Capabilities (Infrastructure and Equipment)	53	Skills of Performing Arts Technicians in Need of Development	73 Appendix III: Tax Laws
37	· Human Capacity			74 Appendix IV: Labour Laws
38	· Funding			
40	· Relationship with the Audience			

INTRODUCTION

This research has been conducted as part of the Maharat programme, a platform created to develop the skills of performing arts practitioners and focuses primarily on developing the experience of young technical practitioners, facilitating the growth of a new generation of technicians in the performing art field. The programme includes training components, digital resources, and specialized support opportunities in the fields of lighting and sound techniques in performing arts, as well as Stage Management and Theatre Production. The program was launched by Ettijahat - Independent Culture, in partnership with Drosos Foundation, and the research was conducted in collaboration with the Syrian Center for Policy Studies. **The research aims to complete an initial assessment of the challenges of the performing arts sector during the political, social, economic and health crises that the region in general, and Lebanon in particular, are going through.** It focuses on assessing the capabilities of the technicians working in the sector and ascertaining their main characteristics in terms of theoretical and practical capabilities, in order to consider the types of wide-reaching and comprehensive responses that can support this sector and improve the job opportunities it can provide.

This comes in addition to designing the training components within the Maharat programme to make them dynamic and in line with closing existing theoretical and practical gaps.

Within this context, **the research identifies the governance structure of the performing arts sector, the effectiveness of cultural policy, and the roles of its practitioners. It also looks at the availability of needed infrastructure, equipment, funding and human capital.** It evaluates the sector's capabilities in order to determine how to benefit more effectively from available resources, and the level of commitment to inclusion and participation in the sector's work mechanisms, as well as the fairness of distribution of its resources and budgets, the official and unofficial policies that regulate its work, the role of the general legislative and legal environment, the political situation, the current conditions of radical change, the community culture, the economic situation, and the role of foreign agents in supporting or hindering the sector's capabilities.

The research proposes multi-sector solutions to the challenges associated with working in performing arts in Lebanon, contributes to putting forth scenarios that could impact the decision-making process at a sectorial level, and provides a systematic approach to support a participatory mechanism for making decisions and supporting them, including the possibility of making links between the performing arts sector and the for-profit and private sectors and increasing the chances of benefiting from such connections.

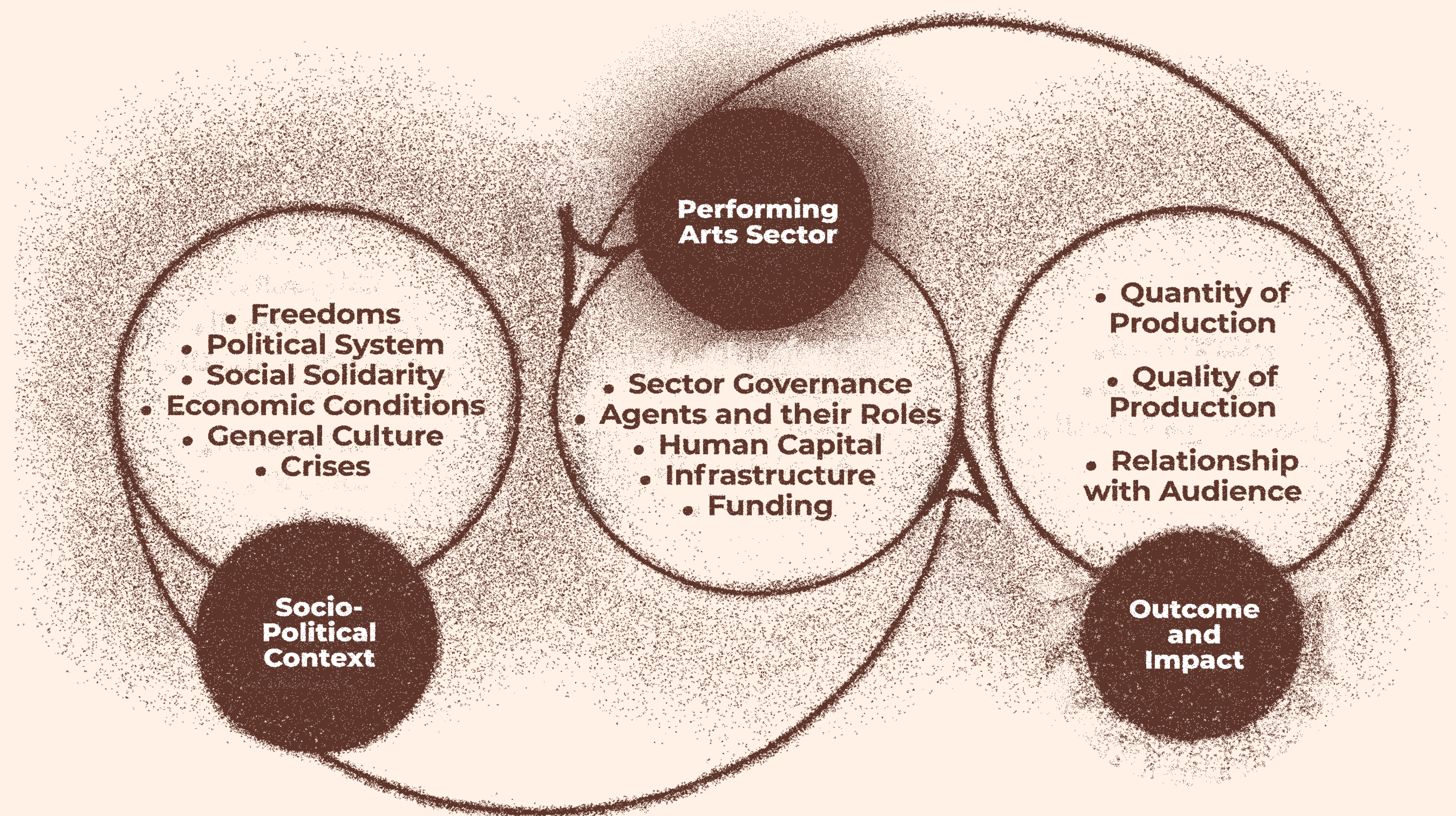
The research focuses on studying the case of technicians from the perspective of the organizations working in the performing arts sector, as well as the perspective of the technicians themselves, whether they are currently active, or have the potential to be active; and comparing them with the industry standards of technician capacity, in addition to knowing what possible options they have to overcome challenges and create new spaces for professional work.



METHODOLOGY

The research uses a mix of two conceptual frameworks: On the one hand there is the cultural political economy framework (Jessop, 2004) which analyses the performing arts sector in a political, social and economic context and identifies its actors and their roles. On the other hand, there is the capability approach (Sen, 1999) which focuses on freedom as a value and a tool to empower individuals, and enable them to practice their capabilities and skills in the fields of their choosing. The conceptual framework helps to analyse the performing arts sector from a governance infrastructure standpoint, as well as the roles of main players and the human and material elements. The framework identifies the role of the factors affecting the general context, such as the effect of the political system's nature, and that of social relationships and economic conditions on the performance of the cultural sector. The framework clarifies the outputs of the performing arts sector, whether from tangible or intangible production, quantity and quality, and its interaction with the community.

FIGURE 1: Analytical framework of the performing arts sector and its technicians



Source: Needs Assessment of Performing Arts Sector in Lebanon 2020, Ettijahat.

The research uses the qualitative method of analysis through semi-structured interviews with a large number of key informants, including technicians and representatives of organizations working in the sector, in addition to a desk review of the literature and previous studies about the sector and its technicians. The research is participatory at its various stages through the discussion of the methodology and the primary results, and the organic contribution of the field researchers in completing the research, in addition to the discussion of the final results and their publication with those interested.

The research also focuses on studying the impact of the crises that Lebanon is passing through on the governance and performance of the performing arts sector and the performance of the organizations working in it, assessing the technical human capital in the sectors when it comes to its theoretical and practical capabilities, and the level of exploitation, or waste, of available capacities. The research takes an in-depth look into identifying the main causes of the flaws and gaps such as: academic training and practical experience, available demand, and work culture. The outcomes of interviews with the individuals and organizations were assessed by identifying the main themes that the participants brought up, the level of agreement or disagreement over them and the frequency of repetition of themes among the participants. The research also presents

quotes from the contributions of the research participants, shown between quotation marks.

THE RESEARCH INCLUDES:

- **Art collectives working in the performing arts field in Lebanon's main cities.**
- **The cultural spaces designed for and hosting performing arts shows and activities.**
- **Institutions supporting cultural work: local, regional, and international.**
- **Individual experts from different performing arts fields, including academics, technicians, actors, dancers, directors, writers, and light, sound, and set designers.**
- **Workers in the for-profit artistic entertainment sector.**

The research adheres to research ethics (Appendix I) that include not causing any harm to the participants or researchers, and the commitment to professionalism, objectivity, and the privacy of participants, respect for and understanding of the social and cultural environment, making the outcomes available to everyone for the benefit of the public, ensuring equality between women and men, taking vulnerable groups into consideration, and including all segments and groups within the scope of the research from all different political backgrounds, nationalities and socio-economic classes.

FIELD RESEARCH

(WORK TEAM AND SAMPLE):

A coordination team (six participants) was formed to work on the literature review, designing the methodology and tools, selecting field researchers and practitioners, training, supervising the field research, analysing the data and contributing to the final report. This is alongside the field research team (six researchers) who conducted the interviews, completed data entry, and contributed to outcome discussions. The initial results were discussed within an expanded dialogue circle with some of the practitioners and experts in the local Arts and Culture sector. The training was held on June 23 and 24, 2020, while the interviews were conducted between July and November 2020. It is worth noting that the August 2020 Beirut blast took place during the

field research period, so a decision was taken to postpone the research for five weeks, after which it continued with additional questions regarding the impact caused by the blast.

A desk review which included the general cultural context was carried out, and there was an initial assessment of the cultural policy, identification of the key actors, the legislative structure including the labour and tax laws, defining funding challenges and work requirements in the sector, as well as the development of field research tools that consist of questionnaires for individuals, experts and organization representatives. The field researchers were selected, the training was carried out, and the questionnaires were tested before implementation.

The coordination team prepared lists of experts in the performing arts sector based on the following criteria: experience in the performing arts sector, objectivity and integrity, inclusion of technicians, inclusion of different geographic areas, consideration of gender balance, and the inclusion of all political, cultural, generational, and refugee backgrounds. In addition to that, the measures for selecting the organizations working in the performing arts sector were to include the public and the private, civil society and international, large and small enterprises, the old and the new, the traditional and the contemporary, as well as refugee organizations.

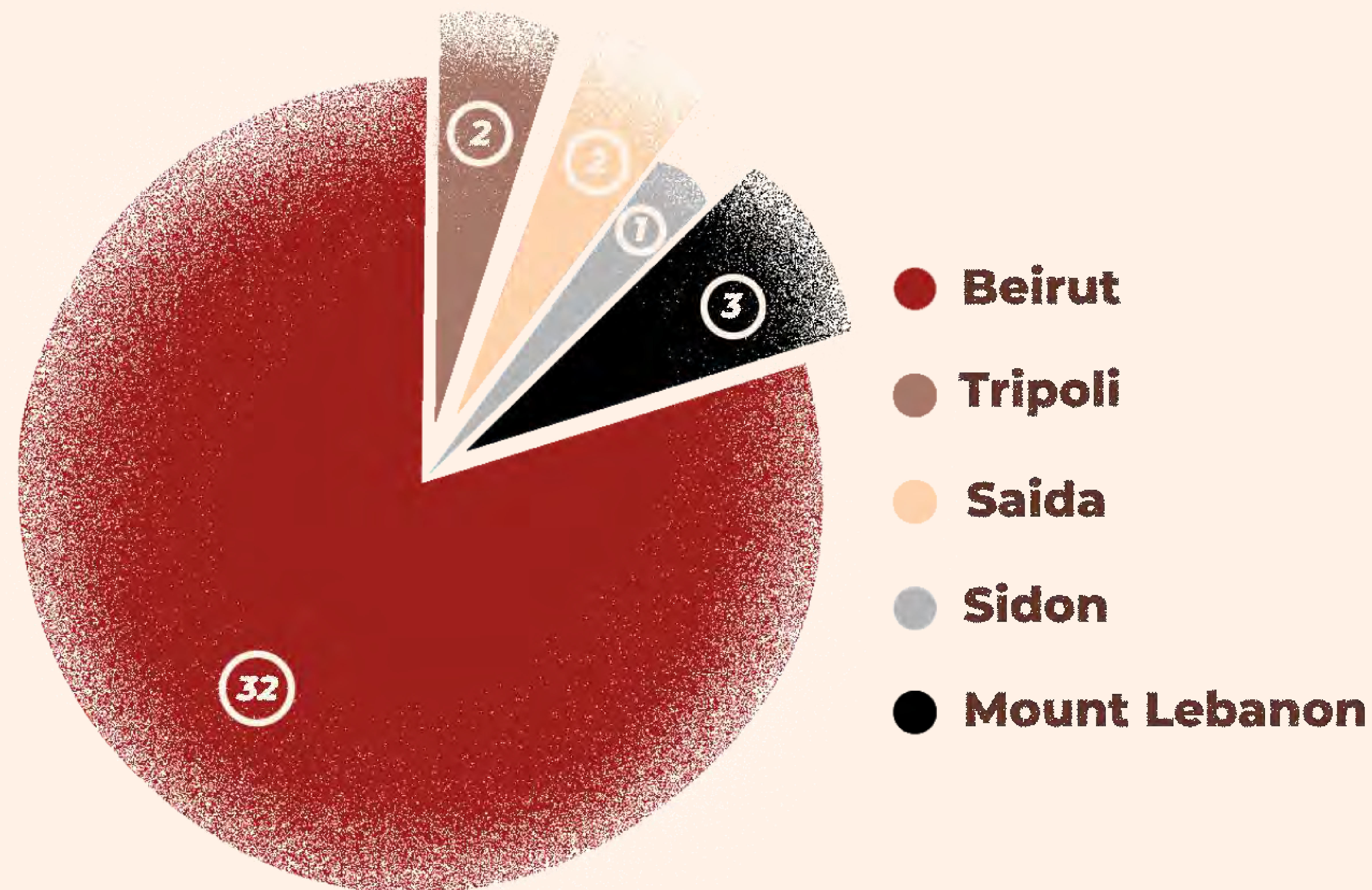
After identifying the list of practitioners to be researched, they were contacted by the field researchers, **and 87 interviews were conducted with the experts, with the average length of each interview being around 90 minutes. Additionally, 40 people were interviewed as representatives of organizations and collectives working in the sector;** bringing the total number of qualifying interviews to 127 (Table 1).

TABLE 1: Conducted Interviews and Average Interview Length

Sample	Individuals		Organizations and Collectives		Total	
	Number	Average Interview Length	Number	Average Interview Length	Number	Average Interview Length
Total	87	90	40	98	127	92

Source: Needs Assessment of Performing Arts Sector in Lebanon 2020, Ettijahat.

FIGURE 2: Geographical distribution of organizations and collectives in the sample

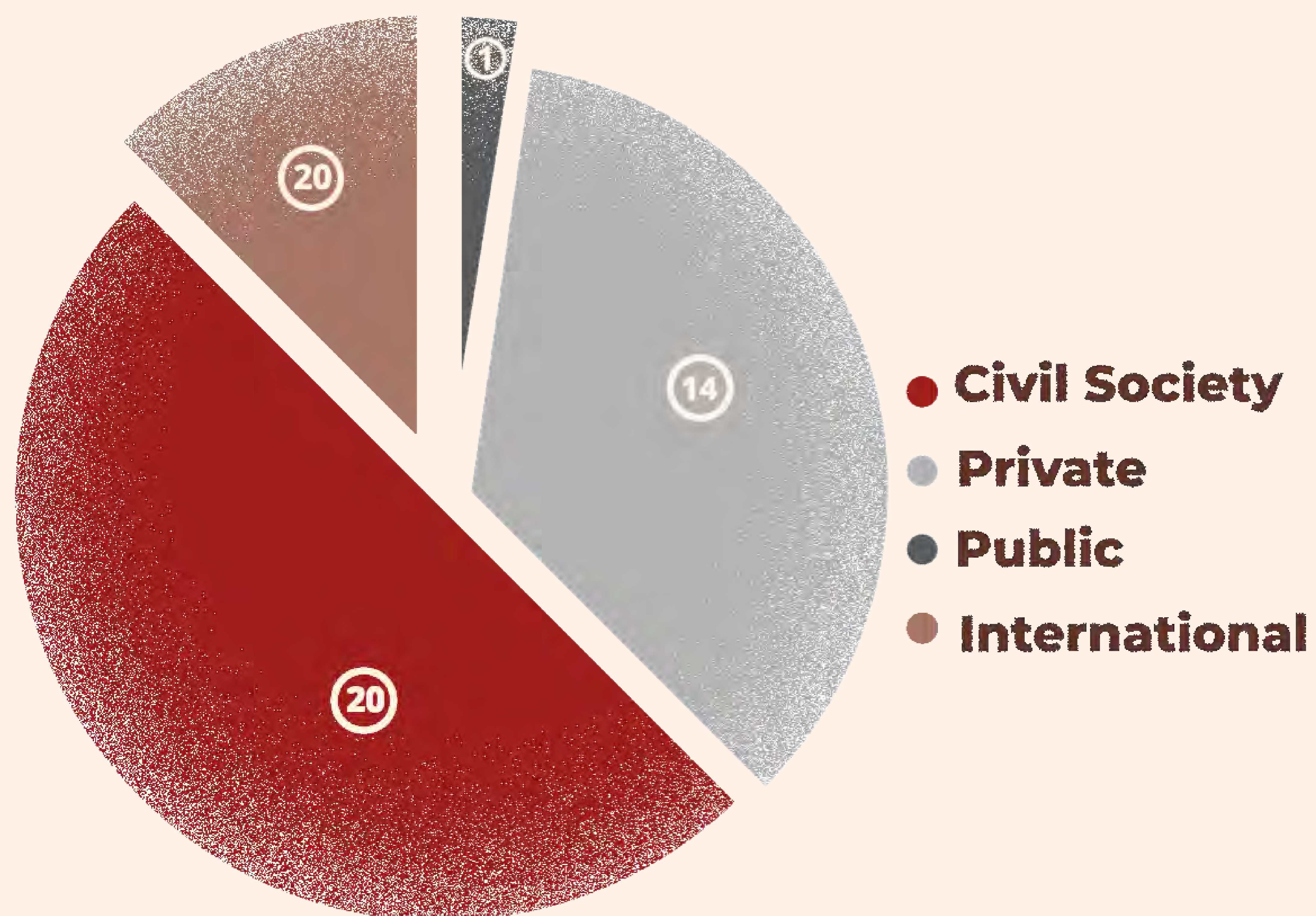


●● RESEARCH SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Organizations and collectives: The organizations came from five different regions: Mount Lebanon 3, Tyre 1, Sidon 2, Tripoli 2, and Beirut 32. The sample reflects the major concentration of organizations working in the art sector in Beirut, while the number is much lower in other regions (Figure 2).

Source: Needs Assessment of Performing Arts Sector in Lebanon 2020, Ettijahat.

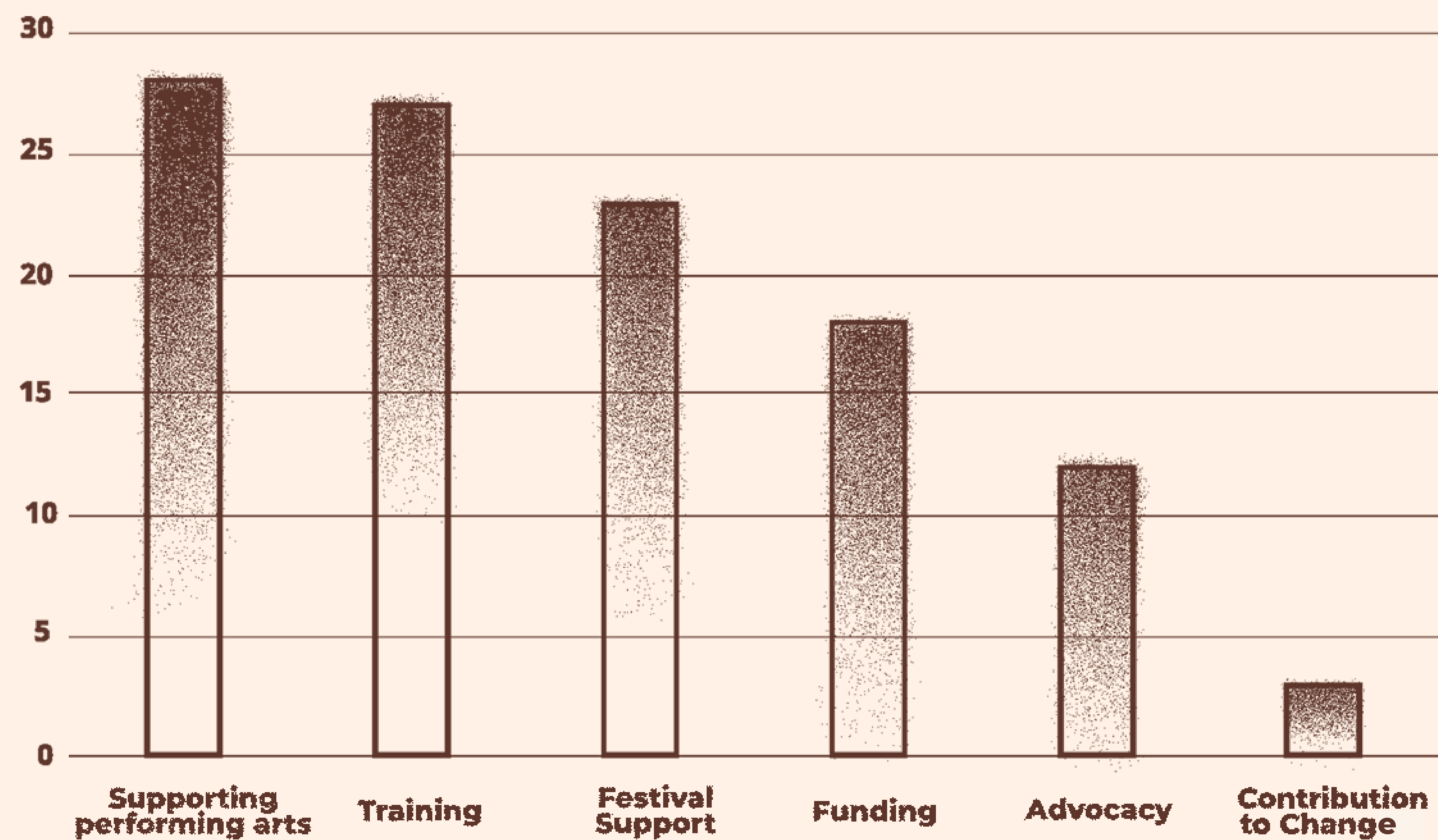
FIGURE 3: Type of organization within the sample based on sector



The sample of organizations based on sector were distributed as follows: twenty civil society organizations, fourteen private sector organizations, five international organizations (i.e. licensed outside Lebanon), and one public sector institution. The sample reflects the performing arts sector primary dependence on civil society, and to a much lesser degree on first the private and secondly the international sectors. Public sector participation is very limited.

Source: Needs Assessment of Performing Arts Sector in Lebanon 2020, Ettijahat.

FIGURE 4: Activities of sample organizations

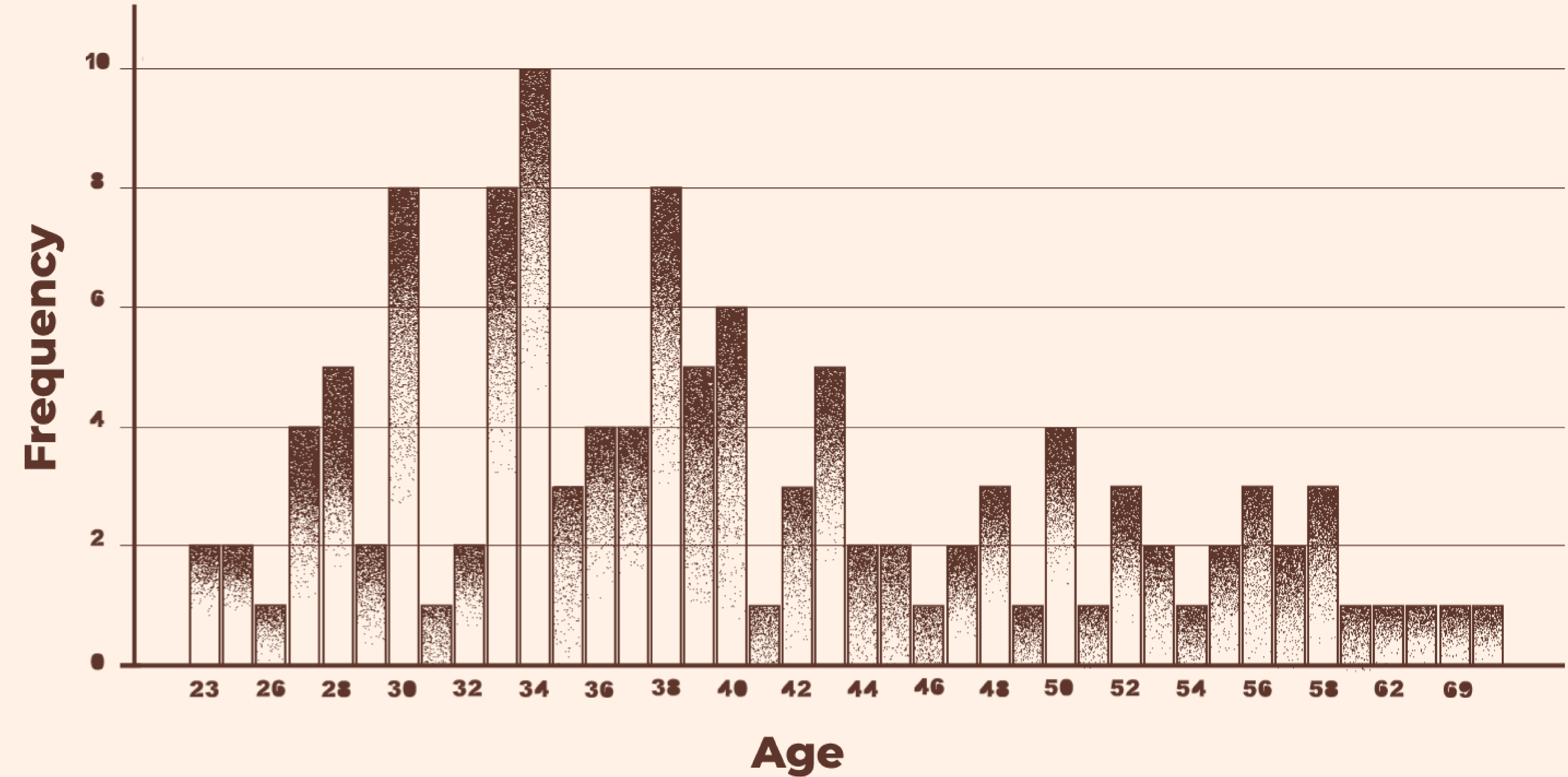


Source: Needs Assessment of Performing Arts Sector in Lebanon 2020, Ettijahat.

The average number of workers at the organizations and collectives within the sample was around 14, including civil society organizations averaging ten workers. As for the work volume, it was the highest among organizations working within the international sector, followed by the private sector and then the civil society sector.

The activities of the organizations in the sample were distributed between supporting the culture and art production environment, creating spaces for artists and creators, capacity building and skill development, supporting art as a tool for change, interaction with the audience, supporting amateurs and youth, academic research, studies and education, and funding support for organizations working in the sector. The sample also included some commercial for-profit companies. Most organizations focus on supporting performing arts, trainings and festivals in that order, and to a lesser extent on funding, advocacy, and contributing to changing legislation (Figure 4).

FIGURE 5: Age distribution of expert and organization representatives in the sample



The sample of organization representatives was 54% male, 44% female, and 2% others, reflecting a relative balance in the sample. As for the ages of the experts and organization representatives, the average age was 40 with an age range of 23 to 79 (Figure 5).

Source: Needs Assessment of Performing Arts Sector in Lebanon 2020, Ettijahat.

TABLE 2: Sample distribution based on education level

	Organization Reps	Percentage	Individual	Percentage
Elementary or below	1	2.5%	1	1.1%
Intermediate	1	2.5%	1	1.1%
Secondary	2	5%	4	4.6%
Vocational <i>(2 years post-secondary)</i>	1	2.5%	4	4.6%
University	12	30%	18	20.7%
Masters	17	42.5%	48	55.2%
Doctorate	6	15%	11	15%
Total	40	100%	87	100%

The sample researched includes high education levels as most interviewees carry higher education degrees, and only a small number of technicians have completed average or low education levels as shown in Table 2.

The sample of interviewees included administrators, artists, and technicians, while the sample of organizations included founders, administrative staff, and technicians. It is worth noting that a significant majority of people in this sample work in the performing arts sector, and that most of the technicians are male, while a large number of the performers are female. There is major crossover between those working in acting and directing, and sometimes even in production. Finally, most of the technicians in the sample are highly skilled and educated (Table 3).

Source: Needs Assessment of Performing Arts Sector in Lebanon 2020, Ettijahat.

TABLE 3: Sample distribution based on profession

Individual's Profession	Number	Percentage
Technician	3	3.4%
Technician with Advanced Training	14	16.1%
Actor, Dancer, Singer	25	28.7%
Musician	10	11.5%
College/Theatre Professor	15	17.2%
Writer	1	1.1%
Director	13	14.9%
Producer	3	3.4%
Administrator	3	3.4%
Total	87	100%

Profession of Organization Representative	Number	Percentage
Founder/General Director	25	63%
Art Director/Program and Project Director	15	38%
Total	40	100%

Source: Needs Assessment of Performing Arts Sector in Lebanon 2020, Ettijahat.

Table 4: Experts sample distribution based on work location

Work Location	Individuals	Percentage
Lebanon	29	33%
Activity divided between Lebanon and abroad	52	60%
Main activity outside Lebanon	6	7%
Total	87	100%

Source: Needs Assessment of Performing Arts Sector in Lebanon 2020, Ettijahat.

As for the main work location of the individuals/ experts, we find the following: the grand majority work mainly in Lebanon, and most also participate in festivals, shows and workshops abroad, especially in the Arab region. But there is a small minority that mainly works outside Lebanon. There are some who work with organizations, groups or initiatives in Europe and in the United States. It is noticeable that the current situation increased the use of the Internet (remote work), which allowed for work across borders to a large extent, but at the same time it shut down physical mobility as a result of the pandemic.

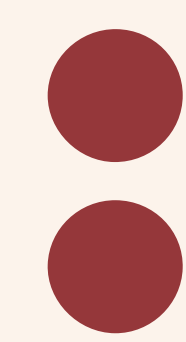


Postcards (programmed within MINA Festival 2021)



PERFORMING ARTS SECTOR IN LEBANON ..

POLITICAL & SOCIAL CONTEXT



Culture was defined by Raymond Williams as the production, dissemination and consumption of common meanings and values in society, even the contradictory and competing ones. Culture clashes with power structures in society, while political forces in many societies work to impose a cultural hegemony as defined by Foucault (Storey, 2017). Based on this approach, cultural studies have expanded cultural analysis to include the implicit values and meanings of institutions and daily practices of individuals in society. They have also identified the mutual relationship between culture and the nature of the political, social and economic system. Based on the above, this study analyses the performing arts sector within the general context that Lebanon is experiencing.

Despite Lebanon enjoying a liberal political system, and civil society having a special status since independence in 1943, the current make-up of the system, built on power sharing among local sects, led to the weakening of the role of the state and to a sharp political polarization that disrupted the effectiveness of public institutions, including the executive, legislative, and judicial authorities. The political

contradictions reached their peak in the civil war period (1975-1990), which struck public work at its core and led to major losses at the institutional, social and economic levels; among those the widespread emigration of Lebanese, especially the youth. Battling forces fed the contradictions through the politicization of identity on a religious and confessional basis, which cause rifts between regions and groups and cause harm to social cohesion and common values, direction, and traditions. As a result of failed cultural governance, Lebanon has lost the opportunity to benefit from cultural wealth and diversity during the war period, and the differences transformed into sources of tension and instability.

Lebanon was greatly impacted by regional and international contexts, stretching from colonial policies before and after independence to foreign interference in Lebanese affairs. Lebanon was impacted by regional conflicts led primarily by Israeli invasion and aggressions, regional conflicts between Arab countries, and between Arab countries and regional and global powers, such as the gulf war, the invasion of Iraq, and the Arab Spring, all the way up to the armed conflict in Syria. Foreign interference exacerbated the divisions among local groups and forces, and led in many cases to shutting the horizons of political and social solutions, even in the post-civil war stage.

On the economic side, Lebanon adopted economic liberalism, which contributed to

the expansion of the private sector and of private initiatives. This led to the significant development of the tourism, banking, real estate, education and healthcare sectors before and after the civil war. On the other hand, the state played a minor economic role, leading to the weakening of infrastructure and public services. The absence of implicit development policies also caused a weakening of the productive sectors and a major imbalance in wealth distribution between regions and between segments of society. The economy depended to a large extent on remittances of [Lebanese] expats on the one hand, and on regional and international funding on the other, and the latter was associated with interference by donor states and institutions.

The contradictory political, social and economic environment contributed to the cultural formation in Lebanon when it comes to values, directions, traditions, rituals and heritage. On the one hand, it contributed to the availability of freedom of expression, a public space, private initiatives, human capital wealth, cultural diversity, multilingualism in the development of cultural and creative production, excellence in the independent sector, and attracting regional and international talents and institutions (The Cultural Resource, 2014). But the weak role of the state, regional conflicts, foreign interference, and sharp tensions between local groups led to the obstruction of comprehensive growth of cultural production, dissemination and consumption, in addition to the negative impact on social capital.

The aforementioned contradictions did not prevent the return of rich and exceptional art production after the civil war, with the cultural agenda featuring thousands of cultural activities including cinema, musical concerts, theatre shows, dance performances and visual arts exhibitions (Cultural Agenda, 2016). Lebanon went back after the civil war to become a special meeting space for intellectuals, artists, and audiences from regional and western countries.

The pioneers in the cultural scenes contributed to maintaining an aesthetic and creative feel, community interaction, and resisting local and regional conflict conditions. They also worked on expanding cultural spaces despite funding challenges, censorship, and political polarization (Haddad, 2017).

The culture boom was reflected in the significant development of the cultural industries that center on creativity; as these industries were, according to the World Bank, a main factor contributing to economic growth between 2004 and 2015, and contributed about 4.75% to GDP according to UNCTAD. But this sector began entering a recession phase in 2018, along with the general drop in the performance of the Lebanese economy according to a study on “The Contributions of Cultural and Creative Industries in the Lebanese Economy” between 2016 and 2019, which was conducted by the Basil Fuleihan Institute for Economy and Finance. The study presented a thorough analysis of the theatre, festival, film, craft-making, music streaming, and video games sectors (Fuleihan Institute, 2020).

The collapse of the creative industries accelerated during the successive economic and social crises since the end of 2019. But most of the creative industries had adopted the neoliberal economic model built upon maximizing profit, competition, and marketing, which came with great influence

by the funding in art institutions and cultural content, in addition to exploitative conditions at work and the commodification of cultural content.

Within the framework of this research, the focus was on the performing arts sector during the years 2019 and 2020, taking into consideration the multiple crises that Lebanon was witnessing at this time, including that resulting from the conflict in Syria, causing the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon; as Syrians fleeing war flowed into Lebanon, their numbers reached 1.2 million refugees in 2015 according to UNHCR. The number dropped to 885,000 in May 2021, amounting to 18% of the total population living in Lebanon per the Central Administration of Statistics. **Lebanon also saw a socio-political mobilization in October 2019, which was characterized by its involvement in most Lebanese regions, diverse participation, and the aim to change the ruling political system. The mobilization was followed by a sharp economic crisis; as a structural crisis erupted in the banking sector as a result of the accumulation of private banks lending to the state at high interest rates and the government failure to pay off the accumulations over the past two decades. Therefore, the banks failed to give depositors their savings, especially those in US dollars, and the value of the Lebanese pound dropped sharply. The economic crisis spread to include the withdrawal of**

investors, a drop in local production, the inability to cover energy credit lines, which led to deep and dangerous economic and social fallouts. The country was then affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to dangerous health effects, and later to an economic and social downfall with the implementation of lockdowns and distancing measures, and to the fall in the production and service sectors internally and externally to very low levels. Finally, the Beirut port blast in August 2020 had a major impact, as it emphasized institutional flaccidity and the absence of accountability.

In order to survey the production conditions in the performing arts sector in light of the current crises, each of the experts and organization representatives were asked about the performing arts sector production mechanism before the recent crises (i.e. before autumn 2019), and about the comparison with the state of production in 2020.



Songe d'une Forêt Oubliée by Collectif Kahraba 2020

ARTISTIC PRODUCTION

QUANTITY AND QUALITY BEFORE THE FALL OF 2019

In the performing arts sector, most of the experts assessed the volume of production before the autumn of 2019 as good or very good, and it was described as prolific, major, or intensive production. The available theatres saw a good number of diverse shows, “There were many productions and many directors and theatre work...compared with the size of Beirut, the available theatres, and number of theatre practitioners, the production volume was good.” The performing arts production was centred specifically in Beirut; as one of the interviewees expressed that “Theatre production is in Beirut and its centralization needs to be moved. But generally, there are some artists that have this experience outside Beirut, like in Tyre and Hammana. And this requires support to be able to go outside Beirut.” The artistic work being centred in Beirut is the result of available infrastructure, tangible conditions, cultural



Corpse on the Sidewalk by Koon Theatre Group

institutions, the performing arts audience and main festivals. Many of the research participants mentioned the importance of the support from organizations and the private sector (like banks before 2019) to the different kinds of artistic production before the crises. But a limited number of the participants considered that the production volume was limited due to the absence of artistic and cultural policies, and the little government support, funding and number of theatres. Within this context, some of the participants differentiated between the art genres in terms of support, between theatre, music, expressionist dance and puppet theatre; as they pointed to the presence of a greater volume of music production compared to theatre. Others differentiated between independent art where its producers maintain the ability to have the final say in its design, but could tilt at times toward elitism, and the commercial art that takes into account profit and loss calculations, as they pointed out the little independent production compared to commercial production¹.

The majority of the actors also expressed that the production volume before the autumn of 2019 was intensive and prolific, especially when it came to cinematic production, that there were festivals that

helped increase production volume, and also that the private sector contributed to this increase in production. This increase also included the theatre, singing and dancing sectors. “Intensive production...the number of films increased”. But there were some organization representatives who considered the production level to be between acceptable and minor. That was because of the seasonality of the work, the lack of government support, the drop in private sector contributions in the field of performing arts, and the absence of a national theatre that can schedule shows and festivals year-round; that, in addition to the rising cost of production, “production in Lebanon is weak, and it’s not continuous but rather seasonal...add to that the high cost of show and training facilities. The artist has to bear the costs at every step.”

Some of the participants in the research had reservations about assessing the quality of the artistic production; as they see it as a relative. But most of the participants expressed their opinion when it came to the quality of performing arts, with opinions varying according to the following: **Most of the experts considered the quality of production before the autumn of 2019 to range between good and very good, as the Lebanese stage exhibits great courage in addressing various topics and tackling new ones. The Lebanese**

also benefited from partnerships with the Arab region and foreign countries to jointly improve production, “...Ideas, individuals and production started to settle in the right place... I feel that everything started to move on the right track.” The improved quality was reflected, according to some of the experts, in the nomination of some of the works for festivals, some of which received prizes. The improvement was visible in the quality of the content, form and the treatment and diversity of topics. The number and diversity of productions contributed to this improvement, along with the youth spirit, the experiences gained from mixing with the prominent artistic school abroad, and technological advancements, as the playwrights, musicians and dancers improved the quality of their works despite the limited budgets in many occasions, “...I noticed that the quality of production had become high, especially among young graduates and artists, across all cultural fields. And this runs in parallel with what I call a political awakening, which has led to the rise of a cultural awakening.” Some of the participants also pointed to the role of the directors and actors that came from Syria in enriching the Lebanese theatre scene.

¹ The research does not adopt the concepts of popular and elitist cultures, as it focuses on the deep understanding of culture as values, meanings and ways of life, and it does not draw borders between cultural products. But the interviewees tried to differentiate based on their points of view between the works that target the educated segments of society, and invest in contemporary arts and works that address the artistic work that is common at the societal level.

Most of the organization representatives agreed that the quality is very good – “The quality reached a more mature level”, – and contains a lot of diversity; as some of the individuals working in the sector contributed to raise the production quality. The association between artistic creation and political action and reality was noticeable, and the new generation entering the sector contributed to that. The refugee crisis, which also contributed to diversifying production “[artistic production], is distinct and committed. It adopts clear political stances and is profound and calls for free thinking.”

But some of the experts rated the production quality as not good, and that it is dominated by the consumerist commercial aspect, “Since 2009...the audience has turned towards commercial shows,” due to the lack of quality practitioners and funding, and a shortage of creativity and musical literary and theatre writing, despite the change in the form of performing arts shows (especially in theatre and music) with technological advancements in sound and lighting. Some of the participants mentioned challenges related to proposing topics that lack an aesthetic value, and the general direction in production towards work associated with NGOs and being influenced by donors’ priorities.

Lastly, these experts pointed to the absence of political theatre production, or even societal theatre, or how little of it there is. Also, some of the organization representatives rated the production quality between low and poor because most of the works are consumerist and lack openness towards international experiments “[The quality] is very poor. The commercial mentality of theatre that does not care for the theatre profession dominates the quality of production.”

It should be noted that some of the experts indicated a divergence in quality between good, average and bad shows, and they linked the quality of production before the autumn of 2019 with a number of factors that play main roles in the quality of production such as: funding, art project budget, work conditions including wages, the availability of facilities, keeping up with sound and light technology and “going digital”, and the professionalism of those supervising the work. Most importantly there is the impact of social and economic conditions “This is connected with the political and economic situation in the country. This is what impacts the entire social path of the people.”

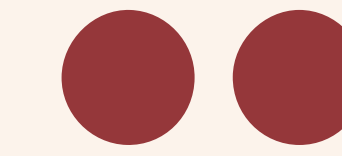
QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF ARTISTIC PRODUCTION AFTER THE FALL OF 2019

The October 2019 mobilization, which was characterized by wide community participation, was accompanied with an optimism that the creative areas would expand and enhance the organic connection between performing arts and community causes. Many artists and creators were involved in the mobilization, either directly or by presenting art works that represented the ambitions of protestors. However, the failure of the protests in creating political change or forming an organized political front led to the fragmentation of the mobilization and the spread of instability. Then came the economic crisis, which led to a sharp deterioration of the security and living conditions. After that came the disastrous health, economic, and social impact of the coronavirus pandemic, followed by the tragic Beirut port blast.

Most of the interviewed individuals agreed that work and production in the sector slowed down because of the crises that the country had witnessed, but it was the coronavirus pandemic that led to the complete disruption of all live activities and events. Also, the organization representatives agreed that production during the crises ranged between very little to none; and this is due to the economic and health conditions related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

There was also a major impact due to the lack of funding. Despite the production of some works related to the mobilization, these also ended with the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. “Almost all works stopped, except a few that had to do with the revolution.” Some of the experts saw that production still exists but it’s little, and pointed out that the volume of current work compared to before the crises is about 10-20%. The interviewees differentiated between the revolution and the coronavirus. During the revolution the art moved to the streets, and the actor would stand with the citizen through their work and representation of their concerns and demands, and continued until the economic crisis and the exchange rate problem hit. That’s when the work stopped, and the pandemic led to an almost completed stoppage of all work. “It was limited to a 20% production rate during the uprising, and reached 0% with the coronavirus pandemic.”

SECTOR GOVERNANCE & CULTURAL POLICY



The study titled “Insights into Cultural Policy in Lebanon” affirms the distinct position of the Lebanese culture scene at the regional level when it comes to providing a space for production, cultural and artistic interaction in the Arab region, giving opportunities to many artists and cultural creators from Lebanon and abroad in the fields of creativity, and diverse and pioneering cultural production.

This is attributed to the freedom margins and the cultural wealth that Lebanon enjoys. But cultural life in Lebanon, as the study mentions, is subject to great chaos. This is partly due to the fact that the newly formed Ministry of Culture and its organizational state still need plenty of work, which is progressing slowly. Therefore, foreign funding along with funds provided by private companies and private initiatives are the vital and dynamic cultural nerve, which confirms the main role of implicit cultural policies (Cultural Resource, 2021).

One thing that helps understand the contradiction between the boom in the cultural sector and the weak role of the Ministry of Culture is the differentiation presented by Ahearne (2009) between the concepts of explicit and implicit cultural policies. While the first depends on “Official

strategies of intervening and framing culture at the production, dissemination and consumption levels that is often done by government bodies”, while the latter depends on “strategies and interventions that do not claim cultural interference, but impact and frame values, definitions and traditions in a specific area.” Based on this distinction, Von Maltzahn presented a reading of the implicit and explicit cultural policies in Lebanon, concluding that despite the weak explicit cultural policies by the Ministry of Culture, there are many forces, especially civil society and the independent cultural sector, that contribute through an implicit culture policy to enhance creative, artistic and knowledge production (Von Maltzahn, 2017). But the implicit policies carry another aspect, as many political and social forces work on influencing the values, traditions and common or competing directions through the investment in media, artistic work and education, with interventions that are sometimes built on an identity or regional basis that is characterized by exclusion and bias against the other. These interventions also include foreign powers through their support for policies that impact the cultural narrative and production.



From an official cultural policies standpoint, the Ministry of Culture, which oversees the cultural sector in Lebanon is considered relatively new; as the Ministry of Culture and higher education was only separated from culture in 2000. The current structure of the Ministry of Culture was set on the basis of Law number 35 in 2008, which in turn underwent some amendments with Decree number 722 in 2014 (Cultural Resource, 2014).

Law number 35 aimed to restructure the Ministry of Culture in order to enable it to put forth sustainable cultural policies for the culture sector and those working it. It also aimed to unify the supervision of the sector that was scattered between a number of ministries. The law also focused on the important role of cultural industries and the knowledge community in economic and social development (Abou Harb, 2021). Law number 35 was not fully implemented when it comes to cultural policies due to the ministry's weak budget on the one hand, and to the lack of the needed human resources for implementation on the other. Also, many of the executive decrees needed for its implementation were never issued. Also, in 2008, the following laws were passed: Law number 36 relating to the organization of the public institutions that are connected with the Ministry of Culture ministry, Law number 37 dedicated to the designation and protection of cultural heritage sites, among them what are known as cultural spaces, and Law number 56 dedicated to legislating the organization of art profession in order to protect

the rights of artists, but it failed to include other workers in the cultural sector like technicians and administrators (Abou Harb, 2021).

The Ministry saw a lot of attempts to develop the cultural policy after the civil war, the last of which was in 2017, when the Ministry set a five year strategy to lift the cultural sector. The strategy was developed by a consulting firm and focused on the importance of expanding the capabilities of the Ministry of Culture so that it can perform its responsibilities towards the cultural sector.

The Ministry conducted consultative meetings with some active sides and individuals in the sector in order to develop the strategy, but their recommendations and the discussions did not include changing the strategy. Also, the lack of funding impeded the implementation of the strategy (Hajj Ali and others, 2021). In 2018, a report by McKinsey commissioned by the Lebanese government was published, where it put forth economic reform policies and projects for the different sectors. Within this framework, the report stressed on the creative industries and their organic relation with the culture sector, and focused on the importance of providing an enabling environment to develop these industries and improve their role in achieving economic development (McKinsey, 2018).

However, these plans and strategies never reached implementation as a result of the lack of political stability on the one hand, and the

weak financial resources on the other.

The official cultural policy faced many challenges, as it was never translated into legislation and applicable implementation mechanisms, and it did not identify the roles of the main actors, and the participation and funding mechanisms. This goes back to the weak performance of public institutions with the continued political divide and the contradictory interests of the different sides of the political class. This was accompanied by community polarization on a sectarian, regional and class basis, which limited the opportunities of developing an inclusive and effective cultural policy. Add to that the sharp shortages in financial resources for the government in general, and those dedicated to the cultural sector in particular. It is worth noting that the official cultural policy suffers from inadequacy in the fields of evaluation and accountability, as there were no measures prepared for Lebanon to review cultural activities, assess them or hold them to account, whether those planned by the Ministry or the activities carried out by other organizations.

The research showcases below the roles of the actors in the performing arts sectors, the weaknesses and strengths in the roles of each of them, and an assessment of the other sector governance aspects in terms of the organizations' effectiveness, financial components, funding, and relationship with the community according to how the interviewees see them.

AGENTS

GOVERNMENT

Most of the experts and organization representatives that were interviewed expressed that there is a strong weakness in the role of the state and the Ministry of Culture, "Their role is absent, there isn't any effective role by the Ministry of Culture or the concerned syndicates." The absence of government support is significant, along with the lack of policies that protect the rights of the artists and the workers in the performing arts sector. They also blamed that on the lack of implementation of legislation in the arts and culture fields in the country (appendix 2-4), and the lack of transparency in the public policy field.

The general weak funding for the culture sector, the failure to develop the infrastructure, and the absence of appropriate work conditions,

to be detailed at a later stage, all led to major challenges for workers in the performing arts sector.

Despite the attempts to unify the official focal point for the sector within the Ministry of Culture, many other ministries and institutions still oversee certain aspects of the sector, like the Ministry of Tourism (festivals), the Ministry of Interior and municipalities (establishing cultural centres), and general security (censorship).

Most of the interviewees indicated that the role of the state is limited to taxation and censorship, which limits the space dedicated to expression, especially since the censor is a security apparatus and not an artistic committee that is specialized in its field "... They treat the theatre like nightclubs, and we pay tax on each ticket." Exempted from this is the role of the Ministry in supporting some festivals, as the sector was revived after there was a competition between the municipalities. Some of the interviewees also pointed to the weak government role in education programs and at universities when it comes to studying performing arts, as well as the absence of a national theatre that brings artists together.



Corpse on the Sidewalk by Koon Theater Group



The interviewees pointed to the major weakness in the role of the art syndicates in protecting artists and the advancement of the sector, but some of them exempted the musicians syndicate. Some of the organizations representatives pointed to the importance of artist initiatives to pressure parliament and the council of ministers in order to pass laws and policies that would improve culture and advance it, as well as activate the syndicates to protect artists and technicians in all of their dealings. According to (Abou Harb, 2021), Law number 54 in 2008 as related to the organization of professions in the cultural sector does not cover workers in the sector who are not artists, such as administrators and technicians.

The researchers agreed that the working conditions that existed before the crises did not really change. Some stressed that they've become worse than before due to the lockdown: "It's the same situation but with a lockdown," whereas censorship increased compared to before the crisis, "censorship is stricter", and economic resources diminished.

THE INDEPENDENT (CIVIL) SECTOR AND CREATING AN IMPLICIT CULTURAL POLICY ●●

In light of the weak role of the Ministry of Culture, the independent sector in Lebanon took the initiative of attending to cultural affairs with the goal of spreading knowledge, deepening culture and advocating for community causes and concerns. The vital interventions and initiatives by the independent sector formed implicit cultural policies that contributed to the revival of cultural and creative life. The human capacity and the intellectually diverse talents working in the cultural space helped with this, along with the large number of independent cultural associations and councils that work in the sector. The independent cultural initiatives contributed to securing a suitable environment for dialogue about different themes and in different fields, between different currents and directions, which enabled a boom in creative cultural production, such as in theatre and music.

The work of the independent sector developed into working directly on cultural policy through independent cultural institutions with a regional scope such as The Culture Resource and the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture - AFAC. The Culture Resource, for example, took the initiative of studying and developing cultural policies in Arab countries in 2009, and as a result many studies and discussions were produced

about cultural policy in Lebanon and the role of the independent culture sector (Abou Harb, 2021). These initiatives were conducted in collaboration with Ettijahat - Independent Culture and a number of activists in the cultural field in Lebanon. The analysis and discussion of the cultural policy by the independent sector enhanced the potential to develop an enabling environment for cultural activities, coordinating between the different actors in the sector, and identifying the priorities associated with the performing arts.

Within this context, the majority of the interviewees asserted that civil society is a main actor in the performing arts sector, “They have the biggest supporting role”, and this support includes theatre, activists, individuals, maintenance work, qualification and training. We also find that it provides wide spaces for work and training, and it also works on organizing festivals in the art fields. Among the types of support there is also the production support for art projects, the publishing of books and art works, “its role [independent sector] is very significant in supporting production and offering services like locations and training”, as the independent sector tries to close the weakness gaps in the role of the state. The independent sector also works on community causes, like rights and citizenship, and opens discussions and horizons for many different cultural topics, “...it borrows the tools of performing arts to work on community causes.”

Some of the researchers stressed that the role of the independent sector is not limited to the organizations but stretches also to the private initiatives of the artists and workers in the cultural sector who secured the continuity in production despite the unfavourable political and economic conditions. But the suffering of the independent sector due to the lack of funding continued and made it dependent on the availability of funding via donors or foreign institutions.

PRIVATE SECTOR

The Lebanese economic model contributed to allowing major space for the private sector in culture production. However, this sector, which is based on profit and competition, impacted the nature of culture production and the working conditions of artists and technicians. The role of the private sector stands out through the commercial companies that work in the performing arts field, directly in the form of art production companies and indirectly in that of companies supplying technology and equipment, which occupy an important part of the sector’s activities. This sector also includes the private companies that contribute to the sector through sponsorship or funding, such as banks and insurance companies, which had contributed to supporting performing arts activities before the crises that hit the country. The private sector faces various challenges in

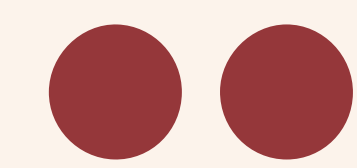
the performing arts sector, as creating profit requires wide investment in creative work and infrastructure and providing the proper environment for creative work production, dissemination and consumption. The culture sector creates indirect economic benefits for other sectors, such as tourism, but it is impacted sharply by crises, which increases the risks of investing in the sector. “There is no major investment in culture, because there is no profit in theatre production.”

According to the interviewees, the private sector includes individual artists and organizations such as theatre and musical groups, dance troupes, companies that provide staging facilities, spaces and halls that organize many activities, and cultural institutions. The private sector provides artistic production through the implementation of art works, organizing workshops, or providing services such as promotion, marketing, and supplying equipment.

Within the research framework, most of the interviewed experts described the role of the private sector in the sponsorship and funding aspect as modest, as it is limited to the funding by banks, insurance companies, restaurants, print shops, and car companies. “The sponsorship is only from banks and insurance companies.” Also, this type of funding is predicated on personal relations with the sponsors and this support or sponsorship is usually partial and does not cover the entire

production. Some of the interviewees saw that the private sector is semi-absent when it comes to sponsorship and funding, and that this support is not clear and not effective when available, as it does not impact the arts sector, “It’s very little, and currently non-existent.”

FOREIGN SECTOR



The sector includes embassies, foreign cultural centres, companies and foreign organizations working in the performing arts field. The majority of the interviewees expressed the importance of the role played by the foreign sector in production in the performing arts field. The foreign sector performs its role through embassies and their cultural centres, foreign NGOs, and some companies, which fund the arts and provide them with direct support by funding organizations, organizing festivals, providing travel facilities, cultural exchanges and institutional support. But a limited number of the interviewees see that the sector is weak, and others see bias in accessing foreign support, and that they impose their priorities without building partnerships with the community, “The negatives are that this cultural production is growing without being in touch with the community or with the current situation.” Some of the interviewees pointed to the role of some of the foreign companies that have huge financial resources and greatly impact art production as they impose their priorities on the production and the artists, such as Rotana.

Most of the interviewees agreed that the role of the foreign sector diminished in the past two years, as the instability and complications of the economic situation led to the reduction of the contributions of many foreign actors.


INSTITUTIONAL & ADMINISTRATIVE CAPABILITIES



The research looked above all at the weak capabilities of public institutions working in the sector, including the Ministry of Culture, from drafting public policy and implementing programs and projects, to the provision of services. As for civil and private organizations including theatres, most of the interviewed experts indicated a weakness in administration and effectiveness and a lack of funding, “Bad administration (80% of the cases), and the lack of knowledge in some cases.” They focused on the need to raise the organizational level in the sectors as well as the professionalism of the institutions. A smaller number of participants said that there are some highly capable institutions despite the lack of funding, “I find that the capabilities vary from one organization to another, but they are generally good.” The organization representatives also agreed

on the weak capabilities due to low working professionalism, and the lack of organization and experience in the management of cultural spaces and productions. Add to that, the unhealthy relationship in some cases between the employees and the organizations. Some pointed to a big divide in the work and capabilities between Beirut and outside the capital, due to the difference in resources, equipment, and culture management, “... the relationship between the employees and the organizations is not good...it’s far from professional.” As for educational institutions, most of the participants agreed on the need to have new and diverse specializations in universities when it comes to performing arts.

The interviewees agreed that in the past two years the situation got worse: “the situation is worse due to the absence of shows”. The lack of shows, the financial situation of the organizations, the coronavirus pandemic and the lockdown and social distancing procedures that came with it, and also the financial crisis that Lebanon is going through.



But many of the organization representatives stressed the important impact of the October 2019 mobilization in developing the role of performing arts organizations, by expanding the participation of performing art practitioners in the mobilization, the intertwinement of art and politics during that period, the emergence of many interactive initiatives that express the main concerns of the community, and the expansion of ambition in wider spaces for the cultural contribution to political and social transformations, “During the revolution three shows were staged, despite the conditions and crises we insisted on working.” But the political powers that are in control were able to confront the path of change, and that was reflected in a major let-down for the mobilization and increasing the state of instability. Then the economic crisis exploded, reflecting accumulations of structural flaws in the general direction of the economy and the practices of the economic elites, including the banking sector, which led to a sharp decline in the purchasing power of citizens, the loss of job opportunities, and a huge rise in poverty levels. This was reflected in the performing arts sector, as the production, funding, and demand started to drop.

Then the coronavirus pandemic had a huge impact, as work in the sector came almost to a complete halt, while expenses rose and the possibilities of rehearsals and shows stopped: “There are no rehearsals and it’s not possible to help the youth in the current conditions. Risks are very high currently. This was followed by the Beirut Blast that damaged some institutions and pushed the depression to unprecedented levels due to the lost hope in public institutions, and the deteriorating economic and social situation. The sector started to suffer from the migration of artists and technicians. But some did keep a minimum level of staff and activity, and there was a direction towards initiatives that support the organizations and collectives, boosting the concept of solidarity in the time of crisis, or towards the staging of shows over the internet, which was an international phenomenon to overcome the impact of the pandemic. There was also increased focus on remote education and exchanges of experiences during the lockdown period.”



Bachar Mar Khalife at Beirut and Beyond International Music Festival Home Grown Edition 2020

PRIORITIES OF ORGANIZATIONS IN THE ARTISTIC SECTOR

1 PRODUCTION

The responses of the interviewees varied when it came to priorities according to their field of work. Art production came in first place in many forms, including direct production, supporting initiatives, and helping artists to produce their shows. **But the successive crises – political, economic and health – led to a huge drop in the number of artistic productions due to the closure of stage facilities, theatres and studios, the freezing of the deposits of organizations in banks due to the financial crisis, and the shortage in logistical needs such as electricity,** as well as the shortage in students, teachers and foreigners working in the performing arts sector due to them leaving the country. Also, some of the organizations were forced to work with very small budgets, and at times without any at all, and all festival participations were cancelled. These crises led to a number of transformations, including moving art activities to virtual spaces and replacing live shows and theatre performances with video productions.

2 USING ART FOR SOCIAL GOALS

The majority of organization representatives participating in the research affirmed that the goal of arts in the first place is to spread social and human values. **The organization representatives considered that the successive crises negatively impacted the use of arts for social goals, as these crises led to stopping most projects after the popular mobilization due to the coronavirus,** even though the mobilization created possibilities to produce ideas and artistic material that address social ambitions and political themes, as well as the production of works specific to the mobilization and close to the beat of the street which would [in turn] support the mobilization. The organizations also resorted to the digital world to spread awareness and build an audience that supports social issues, women, and youth-targeted causes, “the participation in the revolution from a feminist standpoint, and creating room for the mobilization and for the creation of visual material.”

Many of the interviewees mentioned that a lot of the performing arts producers before 2019 had focused on the refugee cause, and their activities were directed towards the refugee camps, and empowering youth in certain groups with skills, and social cohesion between refugees and host communities, combating child marriages and gender discrimination, advocating for the freedom of expression and combating pollution and garbage, with production developing to using art as psychological therapy and music for persons with special needs: “the work in the camps with Syrian refugees...and social inclusion in the host community.”

3 CULTURAL EXCHANGE AND TOURING SHOWS

Most of the organization representatives interviewed indicated that cultural exchanges between Lebanese institutions and their foreign counterparts are active and take different shapes, such as trainings, workshops about cultural management, hosting experts, artists and musicians, and receiving invites for participation in film festivals. Cultural theatre exchanges included the exchange of scripts, visit exchanges and learning new techniques. The organization representatives focused on the importance of rotating shows and programming them, including theatre shows, in the continuous film and music festivals outside Lebanon, and programming has also started to take an internal geographic nature, as the shows tour the entire Lebanese territory.

During the crises, most of the interviewees focused on the fact that the discontinuity or postponement of funding which halted the implementation of cultural exchanges, since the purchasing power of the local currency deteriorated and so did the possibilities of funding in foreign currencies, preventing exchanges and travel, and reducing the ability to host [foreign] artists, “There is no funding to implement exchanges... Most of the expenses are in local currency.” But at the same time, the cultural exchanges moved into the virtual space, expanding the possibilities for dialogue and mutual learning at a lower cost. The organization representatives described the situation of programming and rotating shows during the crises as having stopped along with the production halt, which also led to the cancelling of shows and festivals and a move towards thinking about remotely programmed shows for music, films, theatre and dance: “programming shows online.”

4 TRAINING

There are some organizations that specialize in training and qualification such as universities that provide academic training, for instance the Lebanese University, the American University of Beirut, Saint Joseph’s University, and the Lebanese American University, or organizations specializing in theatre or musical training, which provide trainings that are directly linked to the needs of the performing arts organizations or practitioners. Within this context, the organization representatives stated that there were many trainings held before the crises, and they included the training of children, youth and also professionals and amateurs, as well as involving performers in many fields including theatre, cinema, filming, painting, and dabke dancing both in and outside of Beirut. A number of interviewees also indicated that the trainings were continuous, regular, and live as they were held on stages and in studios.

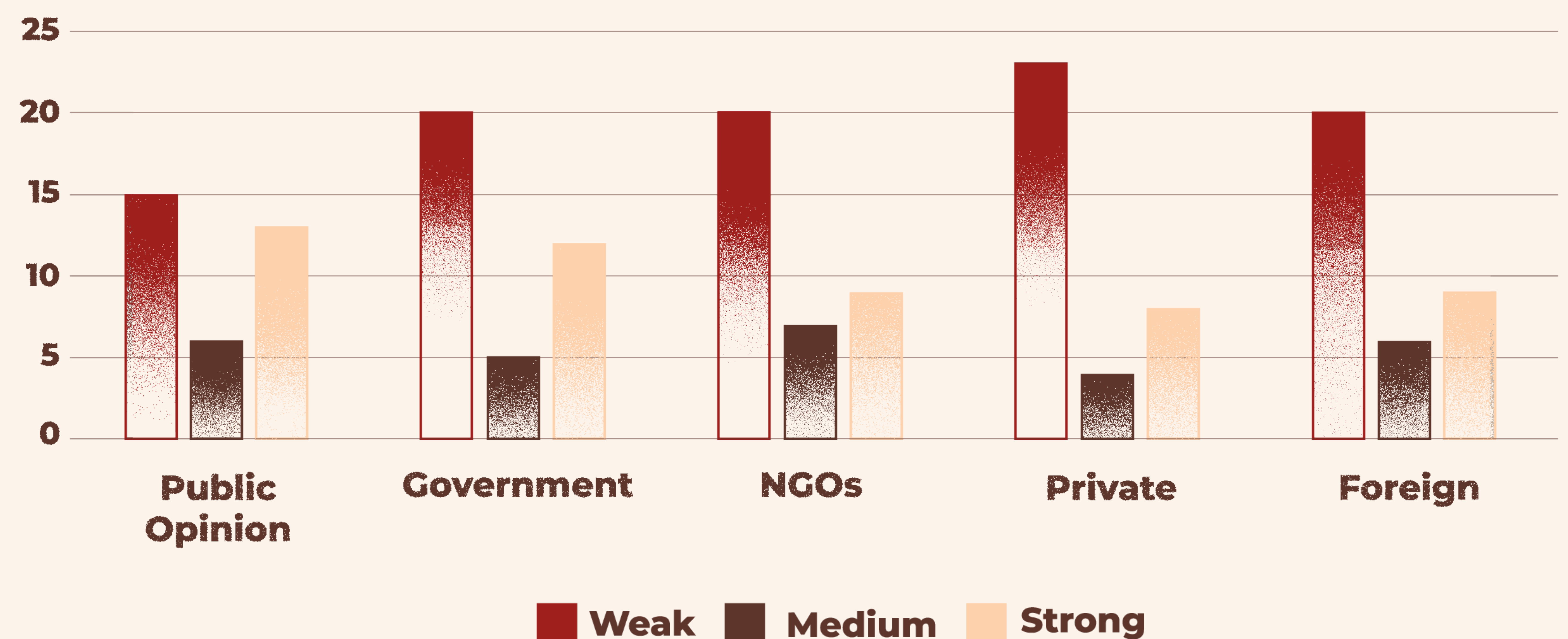
PRIORITIES OF CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS & THE RELATIONSHIP WITH PRACTITIONERS

But **the crises led to a significant drop in the number of trainings held in the performing arts sector, noting that there were attempts to conduct trainings during the mobilization, but the coronavirus crisis shut down most activities, reduced live trainings and moved them from halls, classrooms and stages to virtual spaces** and apps such as Zoom: “Training was remote, and the halls, classrooms and theatres were empty of people and students.”

The organizations’ capabilities are associated with how independent they are in setting their priorities, and how much influence they have over the main actors in the cultural sector (government, civil society organizations, private sector, foreign sector, and public opinion). Within this framework, there was a divide in the assessment of organization representatives (Figure 6) of how much influence there is on the decision-making process within their organizations. The participants considered that public opinion wielded the most influence on the decision-making process, as the goal of art is to reach the audience and interact with it, keeping in mind the principles and rules adopted by the organizations: “We do not challenge public opinion, but at the same time we do not abandon our principles.” That included the interaction with the mobilization and its direction, like boycotting working with banks. But a portion of the organization representatives asserted that the organization decisions are not affected by public opinion: “In most cases, public opinion is emotional, and it does not see in the project what we see in the long term.” In second place, in terms of influence came the government, especially with the obligations towards its laws and decisions, as many interviewees stressed having to oblige by the shutdown and exchange rate decisions: “Most of the time yes, we are affected by the lockdown decisions of the coronavirus.” But other interviewees stressed their refusal to comply with censorship over content, and stood against the shackling of creative freedoms: “The priorities and decisions are not influenced by the censorship apparatus.” In third place came the CSOs: “Positive influence, because most of our partners come from civil society work.” This is evident in supporting lifting censorship on art work, and launching discussions and initiatives between artists and art organizations. But a larger number of interviewees considered the influence to be weak, and that is in order to preserve decision making independence and due to the lack of cooperation mechanisms.

FIGURE 6: The level of influence of the main actors on the decision-making process and setting the priorities within cultural organizations

Then comes the influence of the foreign sector, which occurs through funding: “These institutions are the main funder of our organization, and its influence is naturally big on the decision-making process.” Meanwhile, the majority of the organization representatives expressed their rejection of the foreign sector influence on decision-making in their organizations. This influence takes many shapes, such as financial or material support, or direct participation in production: “This impacts funding sustainability – the private sector is the one that funds.”



TANGIBLE CAPABILITIES

(INFRASTRUCTURE & EQUIPMENT)



The sector suffers from a major shortage in the number of theatres (some of which closed recently), and their numbers drop greatly outside Beirut, which denies wide segments of the audience from the possibility of participating in it, thus turning this art form into one that is centred in the capital. Despite that, there were some positive signs, such as the establishment of Hammana Artist House, the opening of the Rural Theatre Zebdine, the opening of Istanbuli Theatre in Tyre, the Hamra Cinema, and the opening of Ishbilia cinema and theatre in Saida. It is also worth noting that some theatres were launched in a number of villages, but their role rapidly vanished due to the centralization of theatre shows in the capital, the missing link between what is taking place in the capital and what could be suitable for the villages, and the weak role of municipalities in activating a cultural life away from song and folklore festivals. This shortage in the number of theatres reflects negatively on the number of professional and amateur theatre troupes. **Within this context, the majority of the interviewees pointed to the fact that the proper infrastructure for arts and culture is missing:** “The weakness of spaces...There are no spaces equipped for multimedia shows, and the theatres are

not equipped for dance shows.” **As for the equipment, they are very costly, and so is their maintenance:** “The installations are naturally in dollars, and they are very costly.” This has led to the scarcity of equipment in addition to having a problem with the electricity supply. The organization representatives concentrated on the challenge posed by missing the necessary funding for the development of the infrastructure, and acquiring the equipment and tools that keep up with technological advancements: “We are in constant need of technological equipment, as most theatres do not possess enough equipment and we often have to make do with what is available, which affects the quality of the production.” These responses also pointed to the challenge relating to staging and training facilities and the poor infrastructure of the theatres, including the lack of safety requirements and the high cost of theatre rentals. But a small number of interviewees assured that the equipment varied depending on the theatre, as there are good theatres, especially the private theatres that provide good facilities: “The private theatres are equipped, good and sufficient.”

HUMAN CAPACITY



The Ministry of Culture, which oversees the sector, suffers from a lack of qualified staff who are capable of overseeing, following up and providing consultations and support to the organizations, artists and technicians in the sector. This is due to many reasons, including the limited role of the Ministry and its small budget. **The majority of the interviewees also focused on the lack of technicians in the arts sector, attributing this to the lack of academic specializations or specialized technical institutes. Moreover, the learning process in this field relies on experience, self-improvement and accumulated expertise,** noting the lack of opportunities to accumulate experience due to a lack of work and a shortage in writers and production management specialists: “That’s a major weakness! It requires us to qualify administrative, artistic, and technical staff so that art becomes a profession.” On the other hand, a smaller number of interviewees saw no shortage in human capacity, considering them available, capable and participating in international events: “Our human expertise is good, and many of us are self-taught and self-trained,” but the challenge is in the work conditions: “We are not lacking anything in Lebanon, we have amazing human expertise! The challenge is in the difficult work conditions.”

As for during the crises, most of the interviewees indicated that the situation went from bad to worse due to the financial crisis and the inability to pay dues, which led to a large migration of expertise: “Everyone is unemployed; some migrated, while others are struggling to get a job to secure an income.” As for those who have remained, they are either without work or have turned to other sources of income to cover their living expenses. “There are many people who turned to other types of work,” and that is despite efforts to support the sector and alleviate the negative impact of the economic and health crises on the arts sector in general.

FUNDING ●●

The financial support policy adopted by the Lebanese Ministry of Culture for theatre shows, troupes and festivals has as a prerequisite an assessment of all other available sources of support from private sector enterprises, NGOs, embassies and international organizations. This shows that the spending role of the Ministry of Culture in a sector that falls under its jurisdiction is very minor. The share of the Ministry of Culture in the general state budget is barely 0.2%², which equals the combined budget of some of the international festivals that are held in Lebanon: Baalbek, Beiteddine, Byblos, Tyre, Zouk, and al-Bustan. On the other hand, before the crises the larger municipalities

used to allocate special budgets for cultural activities and festivals, such as the Beirut municipality. The private sector contributed to funding culture through direct involvement in the production or sponsorship through banks, companies and clubs. As for the independent sector, many of the civil society organizations and associations **The outcomes of the expert interviews indicated that the lack of funding is considered among the most important challenges facing the sector:** “The financial return is very little, and so is the funding.” Most of the interviewees clarified that the already weak government support goes mostly to the salaries and wages within the Ministry, while funding mainly depends on private initiatives and individual efforts of the artists, NGOs and non-profits: “the absence of local or government funding places a great pressure on donors.” A few of the interviewees considered the funding to be sufficient and available, but it depends on relations and who you know.

As for the government representatives, most of them saw that funding is a constant challenge in all of its forms, whether it’s local or foreign, that there is a major lack of funding, and that many of the smaller organizations cannot compete with the larger ones. “The work requires support and funding and this greatly affects the quality.” Some of the interviewees also pointed to the emergence of intermediary

organizations, such as AFAC, the Cultural Resource, and Ettijahat - Independent Culture, which offer for financial and administrative support. Also, some of them shed light on the fact that donors often only provide support in Beirut. “Donor organizations only provide support in Beirut.” Lastly, a number of the organization representatives focused on the challenge of donors having an agenda that they impose on recipients: “The problem is that donors have a private agenda that recipients have to adhere to.”

Most of the organization representatives clarified that during the crises the funding was in decline due to switching priorities during crises and due to the major difficulties to carry out banking transactions, which became near impossible, along with the coronavirus pandemic. Thus, the festivals declined, and there was no courage to produce new projects, which prompted funders to pull back from investing in the sector. This pushed the organizations working in the sector to look for foreign funding, or search for alternatives and ideas away from funding. Also, the decline in the purchasing power of the audience demand led to a decline in the income of cultural organizations generated by their art activities.

² In the 2020 draft budget, the allocations to the Ministry of Culture was 49.8 billion LBP, and that amounts to only 0.2% of the budget allocations. The Ministry provides financial support to the Institute of music and theater shows including the permanent theaters and theater troupes, as well as participation in festivals abroad, children’s theater, dance shows and children and youth participation in supported activities.



Action for Hope - La Bokra Concert

Meanwhile a limited number of interviewees expressed that there were signs of funding that appeared during the crisis from organizations that dedicate their interest and attention to the cultural and artistic situation in Lebanon. And there is also some funding for youth who want to produce certain activities, especially after the Beirut Blast: “Funding agendas turned to Beirut, especially after the blast.”

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE AUDIENCE

The relationship with the community in general, and with the audience in particular, is considered among the most important aspects of governance that reflects the level of the organic relationship between the cultural sector and the surrounding social environment. The performing arts sector, specially the independent one, is distinguished by its strong connection with the challenges and concerns of Lebanese society. It has also built a relationship with its local audience and its audience in the Arab region. However, the majority of participants in the research stated that the performing arts audience is limited in numbers, and is concentrated in a particular geography and social class: “The audience in Beirut is also limited, and it is the same one that overlaps with the artistic environment. The centralization of the art projects contributes to limiting the audience.” A smaller number of interviewees said that there is a wide audience

and there is extensive demand for artistic projects: “The audience in Lebanon is available, and there is demand for shows.” Some of the interviewees posed the challenge of reaching the audience: “...but there is a crisis in knowing how to reach the audience as a long-term investment.” Lastly, there are a number of interviewees that linked the audience with the quality of the work, that is, if the work is good it will enjoy a wider audience. The organization representatives posed similar challenges, among them the lack of big festivals, which resulted in little contact with the audience, in addition to the high cost of promotion and advertising and the astronomical cost of tickets.

This relationship deteriorated with the successive crises, as most of the interviewed experts stressed the limited size of the audience, and that the coronavirus and the economic crisis magnified the challenge of the audience size, especially in light of the lockdown, social distancing, and the financial crisis: “Much fewer people are able to go to the theatre due to the dire economic situation.” A small number of interviewees said that the audience is available and it will return when the conditions improve: “The audience and their interest in the arts will return, but not immediately, because priorities are different now.”

The organization representatives explained the impact of the crises on the relationship between art activity and the audience, as

audience numbers have declined to the point of non-existence: “The audience declined gradually until it reached null.” There was a sharp decline in the number of shows, and then there was a challenge of trust to return to the theatres which became a major one during the coronavirus pandemic period. Many of the interviewees indicated that arts are not a priority right now, as after the crisis hit people turned to securing livelihood priorities. Also, a large number of the audience headed towards electronic platforms, while others left Lebanon due to the successive crises that hit. Despite that, a small group of interviewees explained that the audience still demands arts, theatre and culture, despite all the existing challenges.

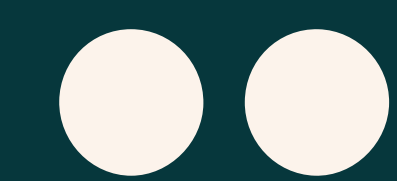
The first part of the research showed the structural flaws that the performing arts sector in Lebanon faces, where there is a weak explicit culture policy, a dominance of implicit policy, and a modest role for the Ministry of Culture against a large role for the independent sector and private initiatives. That is in addition to the vital funding role by the foreign sector. It is clear that there are important challenges related to work conditions and infrastructure, and the availability of training and academic qualification, as well as professional work. The crises added catastrophic dimensions to the challenges faced by the sector, which makes it necessary for the actors to join efforts in designing and implementing interventions that can alleviate the impact of the current collapse, and to set a foundation for developing the sector in the future. In the second part, the research addresses the issue of technical work in the performing arts sector when it comes to staff availability, training, job opportunities, work reality and conditions when it comes to legislation, wages, insurance and protection, and the relationship with other workers in the sector, in addition to identifying the main skills that the technicians in the sector currently need.



Chyno (programmed within MINA Festival 2021)



TECHNICAL WORK IN THE PERFORMING ARTS SECTOR





The technicians in the performing arts sector are the staff that provide specialized support for art production in the fields of production management, stage directions, the theatre crew, and light, sound, recording and broadcast technicians.

They are supposed to have knowledge and experience in using and maintaining the equipment and installations in order to best serve the artistic production. The research focused on assessing the availability of the technicians in Lebanon, their qualifications and their work conditions when it comes to laws, protection, wages, work hours and the relationship with the rest of the art production team. The research also focused on the type of the training and qualification opportunities, and the main skills that require training programs. The interviewed experts and organization reps presented their assessment of the impact of the crises that Lebanon is going through on the technicians and their work reality, and gave suggestions to improve the work conditions of the technicians and train them.

TECHNICIAN AVAILABILITY ●●

The majority of the interviewed experts explained that the sector suffers from a scarcity of technicians due to migration or their involvement in work in other sectors that provide them with better income:

“Unfortunately, we suffer from a lack of professional technicians, and if they are around, there are few of them.” The majority of the organization representatives confirmed the scarcity of technicians and their weak skills, as they considered that the existing numbers are not enough to cover all projects and that they need training: “[There is] a small group of professional technicians, who work on all the art projects, and they need constant training.” They pointed out the lack of training of technicians at the university level: “There are no university majors for technicians, not even at the private universities, where the classes they give are not enough; the technicians learn from their own experience.” But a smaller number of the interviewed individuals and organization representatives considered that there are sufficient numbers of technicians: “They are available, they were never hard to find,” and that they range between new ones who want to learn and professional ones with good experience.

The opinions of the interviewed experts and organization representatives varied regarding the availability of technicians during the crises, as some considered the technicians to be available but have no work during the crises: “They are available but there must be work first.” Other interviewees, meanwhile, indicated that there were a lack of technicians before the crises, and with the current deterioration their numbers dropped greatly due to migration and travel, or moving to other career fields: “They seek to travel...and some of them have left... and others are trying to find different work.”

The grand majority of the interviewees affirmed that the technicians specialized in performing arts also work in other sectors for many reasons including the fact that their specialization allows them to work in other fields, or because the economic situation and the work conditions in the sector push them to work in other sectors. The main other sectors where specialized technicians work are renting and selling sound and light equipment, advertising, television, cinema, teaching, events (weddings, corporate parties), night clubs, and restaurants.

THE REFUGEE CRISIS & TECHNICAL WORK

The grand majority of responses saw that the refugee crisis impacted the performing arts sectors in different ways, as it gave a great push to the sector in Lebanon when talents came from Syria, whether in theatre, writing, acting, technicians or music. These were experienced in their work and came from different schools than the art and culture schools in Lebanon, which led to an exchange of experiences, techniques and schools of thought that translated into rich work and production, which in turn increased both in quantity and in quality. New issues were explored as well as new ideas, and thus there were new work opportunities for Lebanese and Syrian artists. There was also acceptance by the audience of this richness and diversity and the works that were showed “had a positive impact, more work, more funding...and contact and exchange of expertise among the technicians.” But in recent years, laws have shackled Syrian talents, which led to widespread migration from Lebanon towards Europe.

A number of the interviewees also mentioned that the crises were accompanied by negative challenges and impact like the low wages of Syrian technicians, which created a competition with their Lebanese counterparts, and thus opportunities would go to the Syrian technicians because of their lower wages: “I think that the issue with Syrian technicians is that they work for lower wages, and thus many hire them at the expense of Lebanese technicians.” Also, many funding sources were exclusively for refugees and refugee-related topics, which limited the freedom of choice of art topics, and forced turning to what the funding for the Syrian crisis demanded.

TECHNICIANS' WORKING CONDITIONS ●●

Technicians in the performing arts sector face many challenges that prevent the majority of them from enjoying suitable work quality. The sector suffers from the lack of work opportunities that match the capabilities and ambitions of the technicians, in addition to the absence of fair compensation and physical and mental protection conditions,

social security and stability, and finally the absence of an environment that enables freedom of expression, organization and participation in social dialogue. This is due to structural flaws in the Lebanese economy, which suffers from weakness in the productive sector and a hegemony of the established economic and political elite, as well as the discrepancies between regions and social segments, in addition to weak legislation and policies that guarantee a suitable work environment. Informal work is prominent in the Lebanese economy. According to a survey of labour force and living conditions of households in Lebanon in 2018-2019 ³, which provides an important indicator on the employment situation in Lebanon before the crises, the informal labour market formed around 55% of workers in Lebanon. As for the arts and entertainment sectors, informal workers formed 59% of the work force in the sector. Informal work is linked to the rights of workers to a fair wage, social protection, contracts, etc.

The successive crises led to deteriorating work conditions when it comes to the availability of job opportunities, compensation and protection. Within this context, the interviewees focused on the main challenge in the near future being that of relaunching the art production cycle, maintaining its continuity, and creating job opportunities for the

artists and technicians. After that comes the challenge of raising wages and compensation so that they're fair and sufficient to provide a decent life: “Fair wages and contracts.” The interviewees also mentioned the importance of providing protection and general safety conditions at work and guaranteeing the rights of technicians working in the field, including providing proper work conditions.

Within this context, the interviewees focused on the need to have policies and legislations that regulate the cultural field in general, and technicians in particular, or a union to protect their rights, protection and safety laws for artists and technicians, and setting a minimum wage. They also asserted the importance of developing the role of the main actors who support artistic and technical work by expanding the role of official institutions represented by the ministry of culture, so that it is more capable and supportive through policies, coordination, and funding for the sector in general, and for technicians in particular. Add to that the important role that can be played by the municipalities by expanding the scope of cultural work throughout Lebanon. The interviewees focused on the importance of maintaining the role of CSOs and enhancing them, by providing financial, material or technical support, for example AFAC, The Cultural Resource, Ettijahat - Independent Culture, Action for Hope, and many others, in

³ Central Administration of Statistics (2020): Survey of labor force and living conditions of households in Lebanon, 2018-2019, <http://www.cas.gov.lb/index.php/all-publications-en#labour-force-and-household-living-conditions-on>



Corpse on the Sidewalk by Koon Theater Group

addition to individual initiatives, enhancing the role of private entities that provide support, such as banks, hotels, the service sector, universities, the role that the international and regional organizations play in supporting the sector, such as the European Union, UN agencies, embassies, cultural centres, and European and Gulf INGOs, focusing on the empowerment of technicians, and providing them with a proper work environment as a priority within the work of the performing arts sector.

AVAILABILITY OF WORK OPPORTUNITIES

The research participants considered that the performing arts sector was providing an acceptable number of work opportunities before the crises, and that was accompanied by an audience demand for performing arts activities, but that it was focused in the capital, and a large part of it depended on foreign funding. However, the sector activity started to decline in 2018, and the political, financial and health crises since the end of 2019 had an impact on the art work field. There was a consensus among the interviewed experts on this issue. The majority of them asserted

that job opportunities became non-existent, that projects stopped entirely, and that artists and technicians lost their work with the stoppage of production, theatre and cinema. “There are no work opportunities because there are no shows.” A limited number of the interviewees indicated that there were rare and poor work opportunities during the crises, and what remained of work was due to the existence of foreign funding, and individual initiatives that were insistent on continuing despite all the challenges: “The absence of funding changed civil society and friendships.” This was repeated by the organization representatives who affirmed the absence of artistic productions, which reduced a lot the availability of work opportunities for technicians: “With the collapse and stagnation, there are no work opportunities in theatre.” But some organization representatives indicated that funding increased momentarily after the Beirut Blast, as the blast brought increased attention to the region and to the country and its suffering.

Funding is considered a constant and continuous challenge, as the availability of funding is a main precondition for the continuity of art working in general, and technician work in particular, especially in the absence of government funding for arts and culture. Some organization representatives pointed to the importance of allocating budgets for technicians since they are main partners in the work, because funding generally focuses on

the work as a whole and does not concentrate on proper budgeting for technicians.

WAGE LEVEL ●●

According to the interviewed experts and organizations representatives, wage levels are set based on the type and volume of work, the time required to complete it, and also based on the available funding, **though it is commonly known that the wages of technicians are generally low:** “the wages are disastrous, that’s why technicians abandon their work in the sector, or travel to work abroad.” The wages differ greatly between production managers and sound and light engineers on the one hand, and stage, sound and light technicians on the other. Also, Syrians get paid lower wages than Lebanese. However, during the various crises, wages dropped sharply and so did the work opportunities with the decline in art and cultural productions. According to the interviewees, the wages of technicians before the crises was between \$30 and \$150 per day or a \$733-\$1000 monthly salary. Technicians receive around \$50 per day for the installation and de-installation of equipment. As for the stage director or production manager, their wages are in the \$150-\$300 range per day. The salaries of sound and light engineers’ range

between \$1000 and \$4000 per month. On top of the low salaries, many of the technicians do not receive additional compensation for working extra hours, as work pressure increases during seasonal work, and the technicians are not compensated fairly for the long hours they work.

According to a World Bank report (2021), the Lebanese GDP dropped to \$20 Billion due to the crises, compared to \$55 Billion in 2018, which means that the economy shrunk by 64% in only three years. This was accompanied by a rise in unemployment levels from 11.4% in 2019 to 40% at the end of 2020 (World Bank, 2021). This dangerous economic recession caused a sharp drop in the value of the local currency whose value in November 2021 became only about 6% of its value in August 2019, and this was accompanied by a sharp increase in consumer prices and living expenses as the inflation level between September 2019 and September 2021 reached about 464%. This is similar to the inflation average in the entertainment and culture sector which was 456%. As for the inflation average for food products, it reached 1890% over the same period, which reflects the danger of a deterioration in living conditions and a rise in poverty.⁴ **The interviewed experts agreed that the collapse of technician wages and compensation due to the complete loss of work opportunities, the drop in wage value due to the currency collapse, and the scarcity**

of work led to the technicians working for very low wages: “The drop in the purchasing power of wages and salaries.”

WORK HOURS & SUSTAINABILITY

The work in the sector tends to be seasonal, as it increases in tourist and cultural seasons, such as during the summer and holiday festivals. Most of the interviewed experts and organization representatives confirmed the temporality and seasonality of work all over Lebanon, and that it depends on volume of production for freelancers, while employees in theatres and public institutions have permanent work, but are few: “It’s temporary for the freelancers and permanent for theatre employees.” Technicians suffer as a result of temporary and seasonal work, which leads to widespread informal work and the absence of guarantees and insurance of steady work that would provide them with a minimum of social protection.

The interviewees reported a wide range of actual work hours, ranging between 4 and 12 hours per day, and possibly extending to around the clock work before shows or during the running of shows. The number of work hours per day

depends on many factors, as work pressure increases during the final hours of preparation, from rehearsals to installation and coordination: “Often the workday is 8 hours, but in season there are double shifts, (and they may reach 24 hours),” and also during the running of the show. The organization representatives confirmed the above and all said there are no set hours and no commitment to the laws that limit work hours, as technicians are exploited all day and night. Some of the interviewees pointed out that the policies vary between different producers and art production companies: some institutions, or the majority of them, do not give the technicians enough time to prep for the work, which increases work hours before and during the shows, taking place in unsuitable work conditions when it comes to breaks or compensation for extra hours, with a few exceptions by some institutions and producers.

⁴ Inflation averages were calculated based on the 2021 data from the Central Administration of Statistics (Consumer price index).

PROTECTION, INSURANCE & SOCIAL SECURITY

There is agreement among the interviewees that in most cases there is no insurance, social security or protection in the field of art production, and that is due to the absence of the role of the unions and of the laws in insuring and protecting the employees:

“There are no contracts, social security, or insurance, except for the major festivals.” Those who enjoy contracts and insurance are the employees in the theatres as legislation has focused on artists and their work conditions and granting them the right to unionize, but the laws did not include technicians, which weakened their ability to negotiate for their rights and work conditions. Many of the expert participants indicated the absence of safety procedures at times, and not dealing seriously with the safety rules and procedures at others. The organization representatives pointed to the prominence of oral agreements without any written contracts between producers and technicians, which deprives them of insurance and social security, with the possibility of losing their job at any time. Despite the fact that some theatres insure their workers, many of the technicians do. Some of the interviewees

mentioned that some institutions and producers do not pay end of service indemnity even to those under contract, and that the absence of social security includes Syrian workers, as even when they are registered with social security, Syrian technicians do not receive social security compensation. The risks associated with the technicians’ profession, as well as the absence of guarantees, impact the quality and stability of the work and pushes technicians towards other sectors.

EQUIPMENT & INSTALLATIONS

The availability of the right installations is considered a main part of the work environment of technicians and a precondition to achieving a professional performance. In this regard, the organization representatives see that the equipment is available at their minimum levels in some theatres, and unavailable in others, as equipment and installations are limited and not up to date with technological advances, pushing teams to resort to companies that specialize in sound and light and other technical devices and renting modern equipment at high costs: “Most of the time the equipment is rented because there is an importation problem...We cannot keep up with advances.” As for the groups owning the equipment,

that is an exception, as most groups resort to the equipment in the theatres or the companies. During the crises the equipment and installations problem was exacerbated, as the value of the local currency collapsed, which increased the cost of the equipment that is imported from abroad. Also, the money transfer crisis made it difficult to import even when the funding is available. This also complicated the possibility of acquiring spare parts, which led to more damages and increased maintenance costs. With the coronavirus pandemic and the cessation of the grand majority of shows, the equipment deterioration and loss of value quickened, and also some equipment were damaged as a result of the Beirut Blast: “A major equipment crisis [emerged] because maintenance costs have become very high.”

THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE REST OF THE ARTISTIC TEAM ●●

The relationships within the work team is a major factor in creating a suitable work environment that entices people to produce and create. In this regard, the interviewee responses varied as most of them mentioned that the relationship is often good, the work is done with team spirit, and there is cohesion in the theatre or the workplace. However, there could be differences in some points of view, and “they treat technicians like any other member of the team.” Most of the organization representatives agreed with that.

But some of the interviewed experts saw that the relationship depends on the professionalism of the people and the ability of the director to instil team spirit between the artists and the technicians, “It depends on the persons and one cannot be definitive with this type of relationship.” Another number of interviewees indicated that there is no interaction between the artistic and technical teams, as the former looks down at the latter, and that this relationship is often tense and cold: “Rarely are technicians part of the work team... there is always flawed communication and a lack of coordination between technicians and the work team.”

The opinions of the interviewees varied regarding the role of the technicians in assisting in production and management,

as a small majority expressed the absence of such a role by the technicians, due to the specialization and division of labour: “They do not help in production” and “They do not assist in administrative affairs.” But a portion of the interviewees expressed that technicians do sometimes contribute in these aspects and that depends on the show, the person, the type of relationship with the project management, and if there is major work pressure “...If the work involves a group of friends, then the work is collective.”

As for assisting with aspects other than production and administration, a number of interviewees see that the technicians work in many matters such as logistics, set, wardrobe, light, sound and electric works, and they could help with direction, especially when there is work pressure and when everyone works as a team. There was agreement that technicians should arrive days before the show so that they can execute the instructions related to the set, lighting and sound, and there were also some interviewees that indicated that the technicians should participate from the beginning of the project, at the brainstorming stage of the work in order to be in on all the details of the project: “Ideally at the brainstorming stage...but actually they participate days before the show.” A few of the interviewees said that participation is necessary at all stages.

The majority asserted that there is space for technicians to share their opinions on the artistic

work: “...there is room for any suggestion, but the technicians are often hesitant due to their lack of experience and specialization.” The possibility of participation is up to the director and the personality of the technician and their experience in dealing with the work. A number of interviewees expressed that there is no space for technicians to share suggestions, and that they must stick to their work, or that there is very limited space.



QUALIFICATION & TRAINING

(or Self-Training) ●●

The majority of the interviewees asserted that professional training and qualification is self-taught, and that the technicians in this field work on developing their skills on their own through their work. “[Training] is rare, they depend on self-expertise and training.” As for training by others, the majority opinion was that they were few and poor and sometimes they had a high cost. **Most of the training is through the universities that have varying programs in terms of comprehensiveness and keeping up with technological advances. Also, some private companies and non-profits give limited programs for the training of technicians.** Some of the participating experts pointed to the fact that many technicians depend on available sources on the internet to develop their technical skills, and this increased during the coronavirus pandemic, as the number of online sources increased.

With the scarce training and qualification opportunities, the interviewees suggested opening more learning and qualification doors, and following up on the latest developments in the profession, as well as establishing academic specializations, expanding specialization

choices, and opening up schools, institutions and training institutes at an acceptable cost: “creating an academy for technicians.” The skills that need training will be showcased in the following section.


SKILLS OF PERFORMING ARTS TECHNICIANS IN NEED OF DEVELOPMENT

As mentioned above there are some institutions that work on teaching, qualifying and training technicians, and these institutions include universities such as the Lebanese American University, the Lebanese University, Saint Joseph’s University, and the Lebanese International University; and specialized workshops that are organized by NGOs or the private sector such as Zoukak Theatre Group and Koon Theatre Group, Ettijahat - Independent Culture, Maqamat, Ashkal Alwan, and Action for Hope, or technical workshops facilitated by individuals such as Hagop Derghougassian, Mohammad Farhat, and Alaa Minawi. As for the quality of the education and training, the researchers indicated that they are good, although they are missing diplomas from the training institutions, need more professionalism in the universities, and are very costly.

The points of view of the experts and the organization representatives were close when it came to the skills that require development

among the technicians. Figure 7 shows the rank of these required skills based on priority, as the interviewees saw that the technical knowledge is the most important skill that is required, and it requires development by developing specializations at universities and educational institutes, increasing specialized workshops for new technologies to include the technical staff, in addition to developing these skills through work and focusing on continuous training. This includes mastering special effects, light, sound, design, installation, operation and stage management, in addition to learning the direction dimension of the techniques and knowing the type of equipment and tools along with all their methods of maintenance.

In second place, the interviewees chose the theoretical concepts that are associated with both the technical and artistic work, so that technicians can interact organically with the creative work at its different stages.



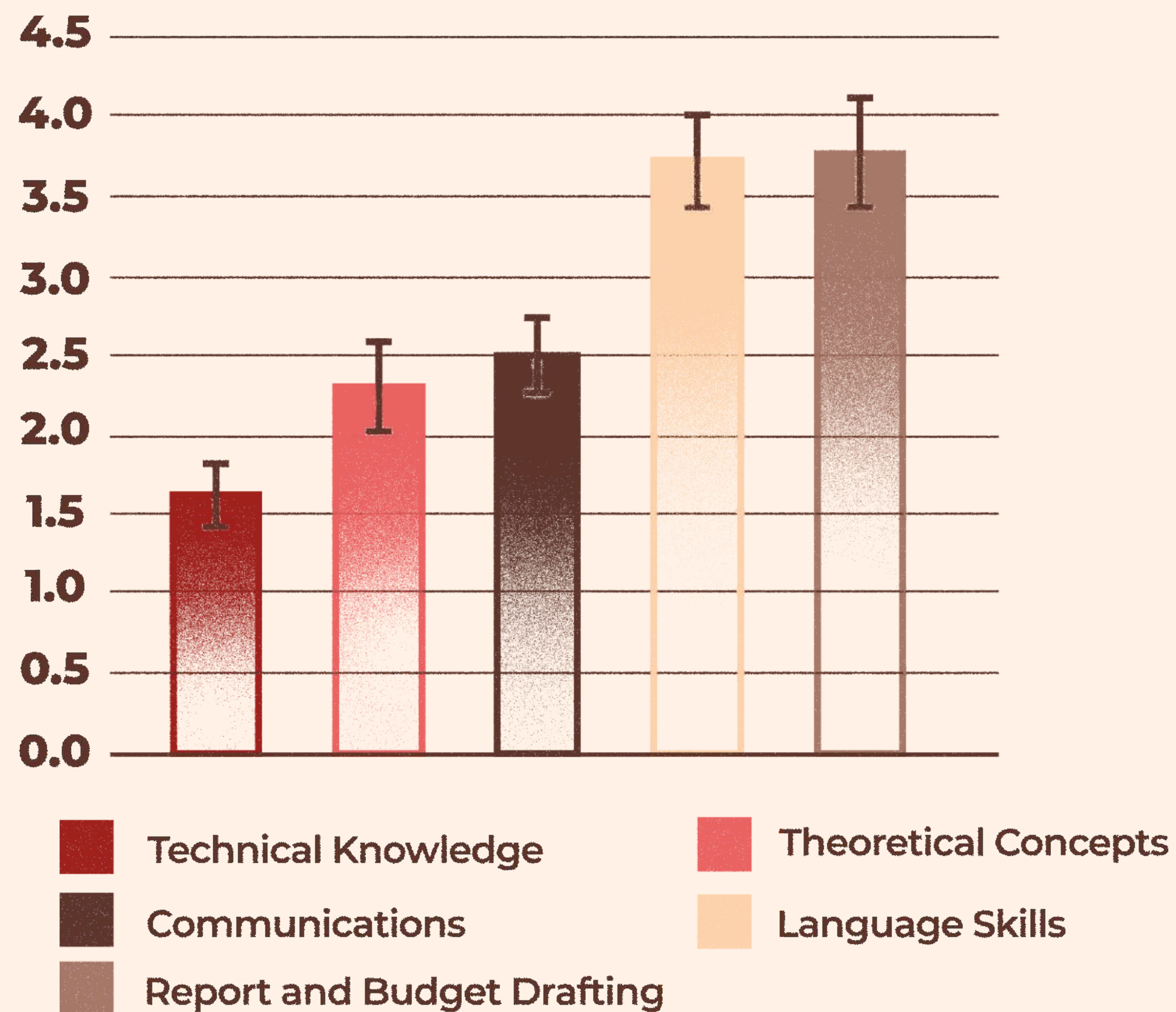
This includes knowing the basics of creative work and its concepts, the ability to read a script and analyse it, and knowing the work environment and its relationship with the surrounding context. The technicians need this theoretical knowledge in addition to an artistic sensibility in order to design and implement the project in a creative manner that fits its objective and meets the job requirements at the same time, so that their contribution is constructive without intruding on the other specializations of the work team.

After that came the focus on communication skills and collective work, needed in order to develop a common understanding, an exchange of ideas, and provide suggestions to confront challenges within the work team and with the surrounding environment. Within this context, the interviewees focused on the importance of respecting the opinions of others, rejecting discrimination or marginalization in relationships within the work team, and commitment to professional work ethics that guarantee the safety and respect of practitioners in their work, respect for time, discipline, patience, taking initiative and being creative. The interviewees added that the main skills for technical work are knowledge and the commitment to the important safety and protection procedures in order to provide a proper and secure work environment.

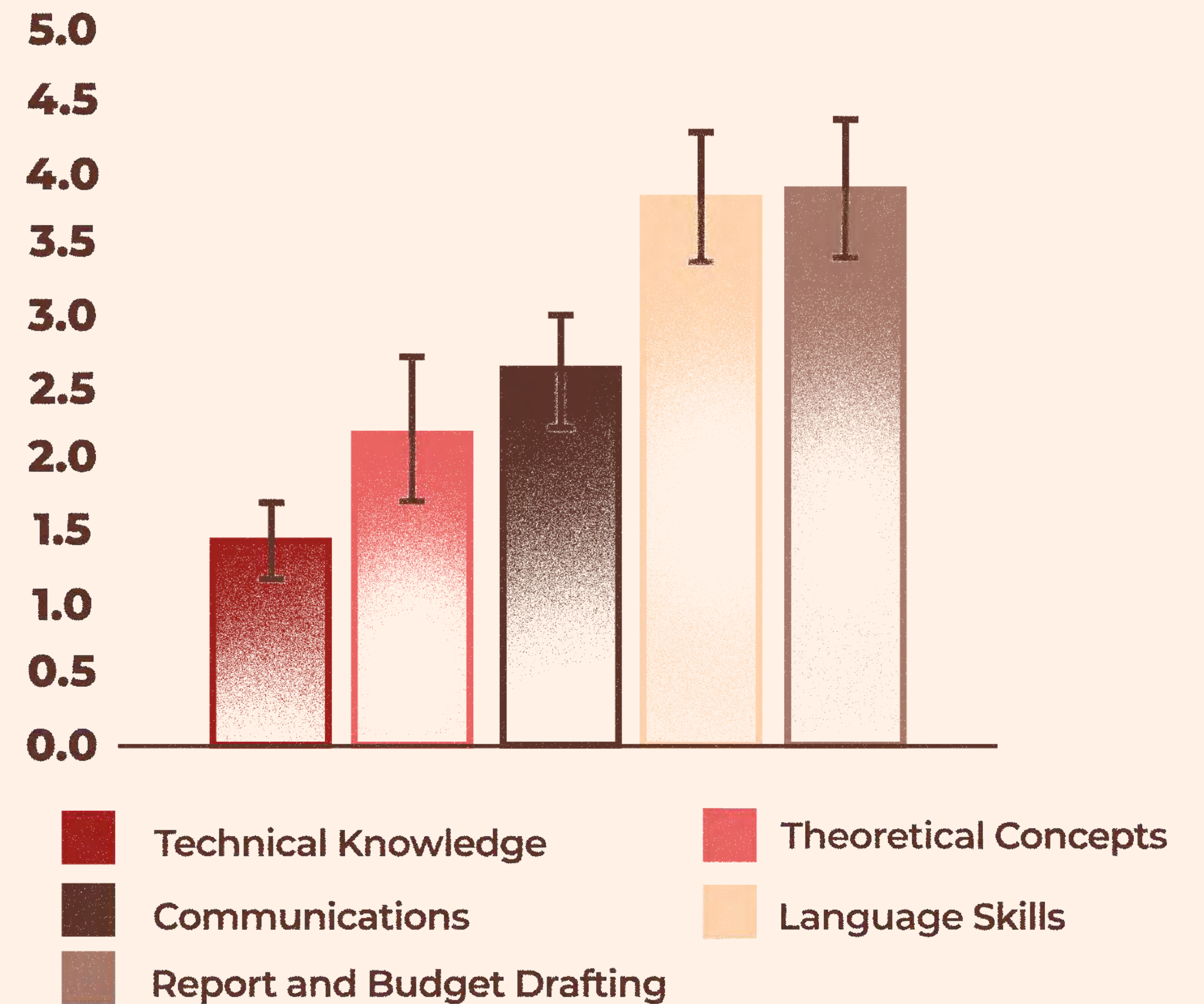
A smaller number of interviewees focused on language skills so that they can be able to follow up on new techniques and interact with technicians from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds, especially with the remote learning and communication options that are readily available. The interviewees then ranked the report and budget drafting skills, so that they can assist in the administrative and financial field.

FIGURE 7: The ranking of skills that require development in order to achieve professional performance (1 High Priority, 5 Low Priority)

A EXPERTS



B ORGANIZATIONS





Return of Danton, written by Mudar Alhaggi and directed by Omar Elerian

CONCLUSIONS

This research adopts a composite analytical framework from a cultural political economy context and a look at the capabilities and opportunities in order to analyse the governance of the performing arts sector and the effectiveness of cultural policy, the role of actors, and the impact of the successive crises that were inflicted on Lebanon since 2019. The research also identifies the capabilities of technicians working in the sector and discovers the main characteristics of the technical staff in the sector with the aim of thinking of wide reaching and comprehensive forms of intervention to support this sector and improve the work opportunities associated with it, in addition to designing training content within a Maharat program that is dynamic and works on closing the theoretical and practical gaps.

The research was designed to include 127 thorough semi-structured interviews with experts and representatives of organizations working in the performing arts sector, and was implemented by researchers from the performing arts sector. The initial outcomes of the research were discussed with experts and actors in the performing arts sector in Lebanon and the Arab Region.

The research led to the identification of the structural challenges that the performing arts sector suffered from before the crises, which turned into existential challenges following the series of political, economic, health and security crises. Leading these challenges is the lack of political stability and the tense security situation, which creates an unsafe environment for artistic and creative work, threatens the existence of organizations, foils initiatives and endangers the safety of cultural sector staff. These are accompanied by a suffocating economic crisis that has led to a sharp decline in living conditions, funding sources, and the tangible and logistical components of projects and initiatives. The investment environment marred by the spread of corruption and favouritism pushes investors away from the sector and the country. The health crisis of the pandemic comes as a decisive factor in suffocating the most important area for creative work, which is the contact between cultural staff and the audience and community.

The challenges that preceded the current crises continue, and most important among them are the absence of cultural policies, the weak government role in the governance of the sector and supporting it financially and legislatively, the lack of laws that encourage the sector and protect the artists and technicians, or the lack of implementation of existing legislation: “The absence of any policies or legislation that could contribute

to the renaissance of the sector.” Despite the margins of freedom, some pointed out to the negative role of censorship on the scripts. Also, there is no active role for syndicates in protecting and representing the rights of the workers in the sector, for both organizations and individuals.

The research showed the weak capabilities of most of the organizations working in the sector, linked to limited resources, the favouritism in the field, and the lack of professional management: “We are still lacking a lot in artistic and cultural management, and this affects the quantity and quality of creativity.” The lack of resources is embodied in the weak facilities, especially the training facilities, and the high cost of logistics, equipment, maintenance and electricity. There is also a significant shortage in specialized facilities, spaces for shows, and a lack of general safety conditions. This situation worsened sharply after the crises. Along with that came the very high operation costs, which were exacerbated by the energy prices and the devaluation of the currency.

The research highlights the economic challenge and the lack of funding, as the majority of the research participants focused on the funding challenge, having to depend on foreign funding, and its concentration in Beirut. The crises exacerbated the funding challenge that was accompanied with problems in transfers and in the banking sector along with difficulties in applying for grants. In this atmosphere small enterprises and initiatives disappear.

From a human resources standpoint, there are few professional technicians and a surplus of actors. Also, there is a lack of commitment and professionalism amongst workers, in addition to a lack of specialization, missing artistic and administrative work, and a lack of specializations in educational institutions: “There are no graduates in certain specializations.” After the crises the situation deteriorated greatly, with the stoppage in production and the migration of specialists: “Everybody today, both artists and organizations, faces choices such as shutting down, traveling or migrating.”

There are also challenges that have to do with the audiences given the elitism of theatre, its concentration in Beirut, and the drop in purchasing power which reduced demand for paid work. The audience

absence worsened with the health pandemic and the absence of political security: “The audience decreased gradually until it reached nothing.” “But art could contribute to alleviating the impact of the crisis...The people want theatre that resembles them and speaks about their suffering and pain.”

With regards to the technicians, the research deduces many main challenges. Most important among them are the shortage of professional technicians before the crises, which is the result of the lack of academic and training institutions that provide continuous contemporary training. Add to that the unsuitable work environment where technicians work, where laws do not guarantee their right to a safe work environment and proper work conditions. Most of the technicians work on a seasonal or temporary basis, without insurance or social security, with poor safety and protection conditions, long work hours, and low wages compared to the precarity of the work, or compared with the rest of the workers in the sector. In most cases, the organizations do not offer the proper training to technicians so they depend on self-training. They also aren't involved as an organic part of the work team. The successive crises led to a decrease in work opportunities and a reduction in the income of the workers, which threatens the loss of the available practitioners to migration or to work in other sectors.

The research also identified the priority skills that technicians need. Most important among them were the contemporary technical knowledge and how to capably use it to serve the creative work objectives, knowing the theoretical concepts in order to comprehend the content and context of the creative work, and to develop a common language with the rest of the work team. The research focused on the importance of developing the artistic and creative sensitivity of the technicians, so that they contribute to creating the proper technical solutions for the work. The research also focused on the importance of improving work ethics when it comes to respecting the opinions of the participants in the work team, as well as the discipline, patience, time commitment, cooperation and effective communication. Add to that – albeit to a lesser extent – foreign language skills and report and budget drafting skills.

The participants in the field research and workshops presented various suggestions to develop the performing arts in general, and the work of technicians in particular, which will be presented in the next section.





FUTURE CHOICES TO DEVELOP AND SUSTAIN PERFORMING ARTS IN LEBANON

Based on the interviewees' vision and suggestions and the workshop discussions, a number of priorities were identified to save the performing arts sector from the suffocating crises it is going through, and these visions are based on **three pillars. The first one is solidarity** among workers in the sector and with the other segments and organizations in the community, as confronting the structural crises requires the recovery of social capital, enhancing the values of cooperation, volunteerism, trust, thinking of others and justice, as well as abiding by these values in order to develop connections and institutions that are capable of representing the will of the community forces, the cultural diversity and the human capacity that Lebanon possesses. Solidarity allows for overcoming community fragmentation, enriches cultural creation, guarantees effective cooperation in confronting the current crises, and enables the development of institutions that are capable of providing an inclusive and sustainable governance environment for the sector without discrimination or exclusion. **The second pillar is a cooperative cultural economy**, as the cultural economy represents the advanced relationship between the political, the cultural and the economic, and identifies cultural sectors from an economic perspective with regards to production, distribution and consumption. Policies and interventions have been developed to invest

in the cultural economy as a source of growth and employment and as a means for lifting and sustaining the cultural sector. But the risks associated with these policies are the commodification of creative work and entering into the cycle of exploitation and disparity associated with dominant economic policies. This is why some critics have expressed the importance of merging the cultural economy with the solidarity economy, where the latter is a cooperative way of producing the necessary products and services, disseminating and exchanging them, while guaranteeing that the workers or consumers are not exploited (Rodrigues, 2014), preserving environmental sustainability, and being inclusive of justice and respect for local heritage and culture. **The third pillar is cultural governance**, which includes qualified governance of the sector by providing a proper and just environment for creative work, guaranteeing participation and empowerment, and enhancing participation, transparency, and accountability mechanisms.

The needed transformation process – to overcome the crises and develop the performing arts sector – requires different roles from the main actors in the sector, while adopting the pillars of solidarity, cultural economy and governance. Civil society, with its NGOs, local initiatives, independent cultural sector, artists and technicians forms the main player

in deciding the priorities of the performing arts sector, the development of the cultural and artistic production environment, and contributing to the adoption of unofficial cultural policy that works on enhancing creative work, community solidarity, improving the capabilities of sector practitioners, and expanding their opportunities. The role of civil society manifests itself directly through production, empowerment and community interaction, and indirectly through advocacy and core coordination in order to influence the roles of other actors in a way that serves the sustainable overcoming of the crises.

The success of the role of civil society requires a government response in the development of an official cultural policy, including the amendment of legislations, activating the role of the state in protecting the work environment, preserving the workforce and infrastructure, and allocating resources to invest in creative work and overcoming the disparity between local regions and communities. The private sector is also considered a main partner in the transformation process. This sector needs to expand its social role in partnership with civil society, in order to protect the components of the sector and guarantee its relaunch in the future, while also contributing to the development of a cultural economy and securing its sustainability. The foreign

sector plays various roles which should be based on supporting the priorities of the sector as identified and adopted by the local actors, especially civil society. In this framework, the foreign sector would invest in the technical and material support of the sector, the institutional change, the development of human capital, and linking between Lebanese and international cultural activity. Within this context, the focus will be on a number of interventions and policies that adopt the three pillars, and a gradual method that focuses on the short and middle term, while indicating who the main stakeholders are:

IN THE SHORT TERM

Solidarity within the sector between organizations and individuals in order to preserve the components of the sectors, which requires a leading role from civil society, artists and technicians, by founding spaces and connecting with other actors. This requires a response from the private sector through its participation, from the state through coordination and providing facilities, and indirect support from the foreign sector.

- Participatory coordination between the civil, public, private, and foreign, within the framework of general open dialogues that serve the public good represented in the protection of artists and creators, and the sharing of spaces, experiences and equipment in a manner that reduces loss and improves the chances of recovery.
- Boost collective creative production that is inspired from the current challenges and crises on the one hand, and from the rich Lebanese cultural particularity on the other, which requires building connections that are trans-regional, trans-cultural and trans-sectorial.

Include a plan to save the performing arts sector within the proposed project to overcome the socio-economic crisis or overcome the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. The main actor in this policy is the state, by adopting an action plan that rescues the performing arts sector and invests in it as one of the engines to overcome the current crises. This requires a response from the main active foreign sector in reform and recovery planning. The role of civil society is considered central in the advocacy and participation to influence the role of the state and the foreign sector, which are drafting the recovery plans.

- Establish participatory and transparent mechanisms to compensate organizations and individuals in a way that allows them to maintain a decent life, continue to produce, and avoid migration or abandoning the sector.

- Maintain the infrastructure and components of artistic and cultural spaces.
- Lay the foundation for a creative economy, as one of the components to overcome the current decline and for future prosperity.

Develop the arts through the digital space and maintain contact with the audience, artists and technicians, both locally and internationally. The leading role in this field is for civil society and the private sector to develop digital work through initiatives and take advantage of the accumulated expertise in that field, requiring cooperation from the foreign cultural sector to provide the technical and financial support.

- Artistic projects that cross local and international borders.
- Develop the income and compensation possibilities from digital platforms (crowdfunding).
- Interaction with the audience, creators and technicians across the world, and exchanging support and expertise.

Address community challenges in the current crises through creative art work, with the main role in this field falling on civil society with collaboration from the rest of the actors.

- Assess the concerns and ambitions of Lebanese society and develop alternative solutions through performing arts.

- Reach marginalized and vulnerable groups affected by the crises.

- Confront the powers that work on exploiting the crises through political oppression, politicizing identity and capitalizing on favouritism.

Invest in training and experimentation to prepare for future launches. This investment is centred around the initiative of civil society and private initiatives, and the provision of support by the foreign sector.

- Take advantage of times of discontinuity to transfer expertise and skills from creators and technicians to the widest segment possible within the sector, especially the youth.

- Develop collective learning through joint projects.

IN THE MID-TERM

The research showcases a number of policies that are centred around social solidarity within the sector and with the community, and the inclusive and professional institutional performance, in addition to the cooperative cultural economy.

- Preserve the independent and developing sector governance and alternative policies and initiatives.

Lebanon is characterized by its cultural wealth and diversity and possesses exceptional practitioners in the field of performance arts. It also enjoys freedom margins for creative work and a developed independent sector. But these advantages are threatened due to the weak governance of the sector, the absence of cultural policy, and community polarization which makes it imperative to develop a participatory and original cultural policy to preserve the components of the sector and rise with it.

This policy should revolve around a main role for civil society in order to develop the unofficial political choices, along with the role of the state in the sector's governance and official policy:

- Develop the role of the state with the active participation of the actors within the sector and the audience in order to draw a dynamic cultural policy capable of creating a space that is enhancing of creation and arts – one that interacts with community priorities and invests in the components of Lebanese culture. This requires a capable Ministry of Culture that is inclusive and probing, along with an active role by civil society to put pressure towards change.
- Develop special legislation and laws for artistic production and protect the rights of contributors to the sector, expanding the space of freedoms, organization and collective work, including the activation of the role of unions, the judiciary and the media.
- Develop the role of the independent sector through community, government and foreign support and improve its effectiveness in crafting cultural policy, and building interactive partnerships of equals

with the rest of the actors in the sector. This depends on the ability of civil society to build institutional initiatives that work on enhancing its role in the culture sector on the production and governance sides.

- Establish the transparency and questioning foundations at the organizations working in the sector, with a main role for civil society and support from the foreign sector and responsiveness from the state.

Develop community inclusion and solidarity:

- Build networks and institutions outside the existing logic of division between regions, sects and parties, and work on overcoming the elitism of cultural work and its concentration in the capital. This centres around a main role of civil society to develop these institutions, and support from the state in providing the proper work environment.
- Develop performing art activity that is connected to the concerns of the community and public affairs, which contributes to bringing the community closer together and develops the culture of democracy which is reliant on the role of civil society,

along with cooperation from the private sector.

- Increase cooperation between the actors in the sector and other sectors in order to confront the damage caused by the crises through participatory and innovative ways that do not reproduce the former structural flaws. Develop ways that work on the interaction between the cultural, the economic, the social and the political, which requires a major role from the state in building these links, along with advocacy by civil society.

Preserve the human capital, develop trainings and experimentation opportunities, and a productive and safe work environment:

The human is the focal point of culture and creative work, which makes the securing of the people's dignity, consideration and rights the core cause for a rise of the sector. This requires building a cultural policy built around the human and standing on rights. This depends on a main role by the state to develop an environment appropriate for work and investment, and direct contribution from civil society and the private sector, along with technical and material support from the foreign sector.

- Guarantee a safe and enticing work environment for artists and technicians built on enhancing collective work and proper work conditions when it comes to treatment, income, work hours, safety, and matching the knowledge and experience of workers.
- Advocate for the rights of workers, artists and technicians, especially freelancers and "...legislate laws for workers in the arts and culture sector so that they can contribute to quality production."

- Widespread investment in training, knowledge and skills development through the specialized institutions such as universities, specialized organizations and companies, in addition to continuous training within performing arts institutions. "Prioritizing education in building professional human capacity."
- "Work on developing the skills of trainers, teachers and professors, and the mechanisms for qualifying the human element and graduating them." Also "establishing a professional academy for technicians in the performing arts field in Lebanon that contributes to the development of the sector."
- Count on experience and knowledge sharing among the workers in the sector in Lebanon and abroad.
- Provide tangible and intangible incentives to keep practitioners from moving to other fields or emigrating.
- "Provide equipment so that training is good, and build networks between technicians, workers and artists."

Enhance the cooperative cultural economy as a source of sustainability:

In Lebanon and in light of the suffocating crises, the importance of developing investments and initiatives in the performing arts sector from local and international networks that are based on solidarity and investment in creation becomes apparent. This should involve widespread participation that contributes to resisting a decline on the one hand, and building new components for the future on the other. In this field, the role of the private sector is significant as a main contributor to economic advancement, with the need for the state to be responsive in advancing the proper environment for the culture economy and investing in it directly. That, in addition to the role of civil society in advancing the sector towards sustainable cultural production that boosts community relations, and one where the foreign sector would be an international partner in this economy and a contributor to investment and dissemination.

- Invest in cultural research and development on the national level, and at the level of the organizations working in the sector.
- Establish cooperative organizations to work in cultural affairs, develop investment in tangible and intangible cultural resources, human capital and infrastructure, while respecting the principles of transparency, solidarity and serving the public good.
- Develop the relationship between the private, civil and public, while preserving the space of independent culture, and the rights of artists and technicians.
- Develop the relationship with the audience by encouraging contributions from those who can, and reduce the fees for those who lack the resources.

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● APPENDIX I: ● RESEARCH ETHICS

Field researchers are asked to adhere to the following instructions in order to protect their safety and the safety of the interviewees, and guarantee the safety of the data and information, and the quality implementation of the field study. The implementation instructions include the following:

1. The field researcher must adhere to the personal safety measures relating to them and the key informant, and not take any personal risks in order to complete the questionnaire. The risks are evaluated through a discussion with the research team on a regular basis, and specifying the necessary procedures.

2. The field researcher must explain the survey goals to the key informant, how the data will be used by the entities participating in the survey, and clarify the option of not providing any personal information such as the name, phone number or address, upon their request. They also should explain who the entities that would be able to access the raw data are.

3. The field researcher must commit to receiving a clear expression of approval by the key informant to participate in the survey.

4. The field researcher should inform the research team in case of any conflict of interest between them and the key informant. The coordination team would evaluate the cases of conflict of interest in the research field and make sure there are none, as conflict of interest often affects the accuracy and veracity of the given data and information.

5. The field researcher must fully abstain from recording the interview until after getting the consent of the key informant.

6. The field researcher must explain to the key informant that they have the right to decline to answer any question that may, according to their own judgment, place them in a sensitive or precarious situation, and the field researcher must contact the coordination team to inform them in case this happens. The field researcher must explain to the key informant that they can withdraw from participating in the research if they wish to do so.

7. The field researcher must take in to consideration that the questionnaire is long and requires a great effort from their side and the key informant's side and that is why they should act calmly and be understanding if the key informant asks for a break to rest, or requests to postpone finishing off the interview to another time. In case there is no possibility to conclude the interview due to logistical reasons or reasons related to the safety of the field researcher or the key informant, it should be discussed with them to find ways to continue the interview in the same session, or find alternative ways of doing so. They can withdraw from participating in the research if they wish to do so.

8. Due to the difficulty of the questionnaire, explaining the questions by the field researchers, after a thorough reading of the researcher's guide, will be key to collecting accurate and correct data. This is why the researcher should resort to the researcher's guide whenever necessary, and should contact the research team in case there are any confusing questions or answers for the field researchers.

9. The field researcher should coordinate and arrange the procedures with the coordination team before commencing the field research (collective procedures for the field research team).

10. The field researcher must prepare well for the interview.

11. The field researcher should consider and respect the norms and traditions of the interviewees' community with regards to language, clothing and general conduct.

12. The field researcher must act in a neutral and objective manner towards the information received from the key informant, and not direct the interview towards personal preconceptions under any circumstance.

13. The field researcher must commit to the accuracy and reliability in reporting and writing the information coming from the key informant.

14. The field researcher must respect the time and situation of the key informant.

15. The field researcher shall never cancel or end an interview with the key informant unless it is their personal wish.

16. The field researcher must commit to the confidentiality of the information received, and not use it outside the framework of the research regardless of the reason.



APPENDIX II: LEGISLATION RELATING TO PERFORMING AND MUSICAL ARTS

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The following table shows a number of laws relating to performing and musical arts:

Regulating the National Music Institute, Decree # 2884, issued 16-12-1959	This decree regulated the National Music Institute which was founded in 1910.
Rights of Musical print innovators, Law #20/69, passed on 23-5-1969	Amendment stating that the author, who innovated a literary book or artistic print, alone has the right to publish it and republish it in any form they want, and the author alone, or their heirs, has the right to license the copying, translation, performing in front of an audience, adaptation, or transformation of the work, or part of it.
Establishing a public institution called “The National Higher Institute of Music – The Conservatory” Law #431 passed 15-5-1995	“The National Higher Institute of Music – The Conservatory”, but it is placed under the oversight of the Ministry of Culture, and it enjoys academic, administrative and financial independence.

Establishing the National Symphonic Orchestra – Conservatory issued 19-10-1998	Update to the National Symphonic Orchestra law.
Amendment to the Board Decision on 19-10-1998 related to the regulation of the Symphonic Orchestra, Decision #1 issued 24-5-2001	Updates the regulations of the National Symphonic Orchestra.
Decree #9806 signed on 28-1-2013	Regulates how the board of the Higher institute of Music – Conservatoire is formed, specifies its missions, powers and rules of operation.
Law #35 dated 16-10-2008	Regulating the Ministry of Culture.
Law to regulate art professions – Law #56 issued on 27-12-2008	Regulating art professions, joining art professional syndicates, special regulations for non-Lebanese artists, syndicates and unions of artists, and information on the mutual cooperation fund.
Decree #622 dated 18-9-2014	Regulating the units in the general directorate for cultural affairs and the joint administration in the Ministry of Culture and specifying their missions, staff and hiring conditions.

APPENDIX III:

TAX LAWS

When the Lebanese government adopted a Value Added Taxation system, some of the features of the taxes on what the Lebanese law called Amusement Tax changed. Under this title came cinemas, theatres and places that offer the enjoyment of scenes, singing, dancing, music played by bands, sports arenas, circus and amusement parks.

Decree #7333 issued on 31-1-2002, stated the implementation procedures for Law #379 dated 14-12-2001 (Value Added Tax) related to the exemption from indirect taxes, where there were segments nullifying what was in legislative decree #66 issued on 5-8-1967 as follows:

(Article 4)

The following is nullified and replaced with the Value Added Tax starting from the date the law becomes valid: the amusement fee levied based on legislative decree #66 dated 5-8-1967 and its amendments for natural persons or legal entities that are subject to the tax by obligation and choice, and this fee remains applicable to the persons who chose not to be subjected to the tax and also individuals who do not meet the conditions of being subjected to the tax.

(Article 5)

A 5% fee and the amusement tax is levied on the person considered not to be subjected to the Value Added Tax after the approval of the tax administration to cancel their registration.

The places that are particularly considered places of diversion or amusement are:

1- Places that are limited to live or recorded presentations (cinemas, theatres, sports arenas, circus, amusement parks, etc....)

2- Places that offer in addition to entertainment (scenes, song, dance, live music) products for consumption.

3- Places that offer patrons personal amusement methods (sea resorts, swimming pools, betting parlours, ski resorts, etc....)

APPENDIX IV:

LABOR LAWS ●●

There is no specific labour law for workers in the culture field in Lebanon as they are subject to the labour law that is applied to all workers since its issuance on September 23, 1946. It is well-known that the law has been amended multiple times, the last of which were in the year 2000. At the end of 2008 (December 30th), the law regulating art professions was issued and terms relating to art work from musical work to theatre work were defined: Audio-visual artistic work, performing arts work, advertising work, literature work, visual arts work and traditional art work. The mentioned law contains a section that asserts that its rulings “apply to artists, their syndicate, unions and mutual cooperation funds established in accordance to the law, taking into consideration other applicable rules and regulations.” Then the artist syndicates that were regulated by said law were put under the Ministry of Culture instead of the Ministry of Labour as stated in Article 8: “The Ministry of Culture shall take the place of the Ministry of Labour with regards to all capacities listed in the labour law and decree #7993/1952 concerning the professional syndicates of artists, including those relating to the establishment, oversight and dissolution decisions.”

The above applies to the workers in the fields of culture and arts belonging to the private sector. As for the employees working at the Ministry of Culture, they must meet, according to the regulations of the Ministry of Culture (#35 dated 16-10-2008), the conditions of Item 1 of Article 11 of legislative decree #112/59 (employee regulations), which applies to the employees of the public sector, and “The Second category employees at the Ministry of Culture staff are hired based on a hiring competition based on titles according to the norms. The third category employees are allowed to participate in it along with candidates from outside the public staff, and all candidates, whether public employees or not, must meet the education qualifications required according to each position.” According to the same law, the Ministry can hire through contracting: “The Ministry may, after this law goes into effect, fill the third category jobs within the Ministry of Culture staff (the General Directorate for Cultural Affairs and the General Directorate of Archaeology) from among those meeting the hiring conditions for these positions, except for the age and hiring contest conditions, through contracting, and that shall be done in according to the norms and after the approval of the civil service council, as long as those under contract do not exceed overall 50% of the number of positions available in the staff of the mentioned category.”

ON PROTECTING IMAGINATION & CREATION

Needs Assessment for the Performing Arts Sector
in Lebanon in Light of Accumulated Crises



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