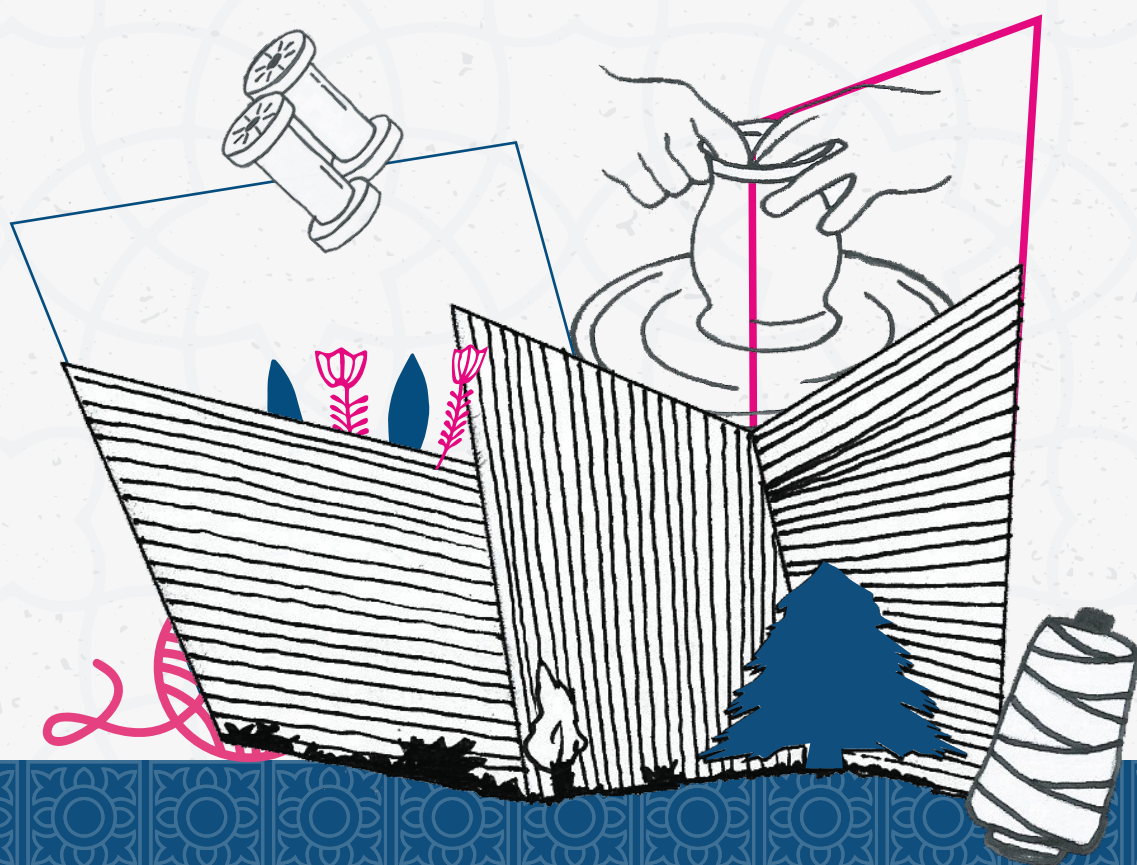


Craft for Impact

Supporting Craft as a Socio-Economic and Cultural Development Vector



A Cultural Policy Paper by Nicole Hamouche

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Lebanon and Syria



THE SAMIR KASSIR FOUNDATION

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THE SAMIR KASSIR FOUNDATION

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Lebanon and Syria

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Seeds for Legal Initiatives provided a study on the legal framework of the craft sector in Lebanon, available in the appendix of the Arabic version of the present document.

Special thanks (in alphabetical order): Najwa Bdeir, *Ministry of Social Affairs*; Karim Chaaya, *Blatt Chaaya*; Nada Debs, *Studio Nada Debs*; Youssef Fawaz, *Al Majmoua*; Roula Haidar, *L'Artisan du Liban*; Isabelle Hélou; Souraya Khalidi, *former director of Artisans de l'Orient et du Liban*; Georges Mohasseb, *Woodandco*; Zena Sabbagh; Ralph Stéphan, *Kafalat*; Camille Tarazi, *Maison Tarazi*; and Hassan Wehbé, *Syndicate of Craftsmen*.

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Introduction

Lebanon has a longstanding tradition of craft: weaving; embroidery and tapestry; glass wind blowing; wood and marquetry; coppersmithing; and more. In contemporary times, the sector has lost some of its erstwhile glory, as industrialization has shifted attention towards mass-produced items, which are also generally less expensive than their artisanal counterparts. Rapidly growing global markets meant that Lebanon was flooded with more affordable, modern products produced in places with cheap labor supply and production costs, such as India and China. The slow disappearance of craft is a threat, as this sector, which also conveys stories about communities, is a major component of heritage. In parallel to preserving heritage and transmission, craft in Lebanon has the potential to play a substantial role in the development of the economy. This is all the more true at a time when the country is experiencing an unprecedented financial and economic crisis, whereby imported products are no longer affordable for much of the local population, and the de facto capital controls make importing very complicated. Also, at a global level, recent years have seen a general trend towards returning to fair trade, ethical consumption, handicraft, and a demand for products that carry a story.

Crafts require low capital investment, and can be an important channel for job and revenue creation, poverty alleviation, and economic growth, if given the adequate attention and managed and developed properly. Many initiatives have been undertaken to support the sector in the past; mostly funded by foreign organizations on a short-term basis; but these remained scattered and uncoordinated. A number of studies have also been published about the sector, leading to no further action. In the absence of a central public authority recognizing the importance of the sector and its economic and social value, and creating the momentum and a clear coherent environment for the industry, the chances of it reaching its potential are minimal. Categorized for years as part of the responsibilities of the Ministry of Social Affairs, its potential as a productive sector and factor of social cohesion was under-estimated and under-exploited. The preamble of the Lebanese Constitution recognizes that the balanced development of Lebanon's regions on all levels; cultural, social, and economic; is an essential pillar of the unity of the State and its stability.

Lebanon has the framework, as well as the international affiliations, to enable it to capitalize on the craft sector's potential. This framework, however, needs to be leveraged and better exploited. This paper examines the current status of Lebanese crafts, and the challenges the sector faces, and outlines suggestions for appropriate strategies and actions to develop it. We hope it may serve as a road map for reform-oriented decision-makers, should they prioritize policies that both improve social conditions and revive local heritage.

General Landscape

Key Features of the Sector

An informal sector

Craft is a particularly informal sector with a relatively small scale of production. Because of their size, smaller enterprises are especially vulnerable to the problems of bad governance, poor policies, and weak institutions. They are also adversely affected by high bureaucratic costs. Hence, they remain in the unregistered, informal sector, which places significant constraints on their growth, as it reduces access to financing, public services, and contracts they may otherwise have signed with larger-scale commercial partners.

No statistics and data

According to Najwa Bdeir, head of the Craft Department at the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSa), whom we have interviewed for the purpose of this study, the last mapping on craftsmanship dates back to 2000. There is little accurate information and statistics regarding the sector; what exists amounts only to a few fragmented figures of questionable sourcing. A total of 500 craftsmen have been registered at the Syndicate of Craftsmen, according to its current President, Hassan Wehbé, whom we have also interviewed for this study, although at present there are only 90 registered members.

The Association of Lebanese Industrialists mapped 700 to 800 actors involved in the wood value chain, including wood workers, upholsters, glass, engraving, and so on.¹

A vulnerable sector

Craftspeople tend to comprise a vulnerable community, in need of support, and have been placed under the jurisdiction of the MoSA. According to a Medcities study on urban development in Saida, 3,000 households earn their living from crafts in the region; 65.6% of whom live under the national poverty line, making less than USD 4 per day.²

An aging population

62% of craftsmen are above the age of 50.³ In Saida, specifically, more than 70% of the owners of craft businesses are above 55 years of age.⁴ 72% of mapped businesses date back more than 25 years. Only 8% were founded within the past five to ten years.⁵

Most craftspeople say they would prefer their children did not follow in their footsteps, because of the lack of economic security and revenues. In any case, their children are often not interested in taking their businesses over.

¹-Farah Makki, Lebanese Craftsmanship Insights for Policy Making, Case Study on Bourj Hammoud, Research Report, NAHNOO, July 2019.

Retrieved from http://nahnoo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Research-Report-Bourj-Hammoud-Crafts-NAHNOO_-June-2019-by-Farah-Makki-.pdf

²-Kanj Hamadé, Jad Chaaban, Ilin Srour, Saida Urban Sustainable Development Strategy, Strategic Diagnosis Report, Medcities. Retrieved from http://www.medcities.org/documents/22116/135803/4.+Saida_+Diagnosis_Traditional+Crafts+and+Trades.pdf/d4fc79a8-444a-4a9a-ae46-d06dbb7425ce Makki, Op. cit.

³-Hamadé, Chaaban, Srour, Op. cit.

⁴-Makki, Op. cit.

⁵-Ibid.

A high feminine representation

76% of artisans are women.⁶ Production takes place either at home, or in non-governmental organizations (NGOs), cooperatives, and training centers, and is marketed through alternative market outlets. For instance, one project supported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and managed by Zena Sabbagh, also interviewed, in Jabal Amel (South Lebanon) in 2013-2014 employed around 300 women.

Solo activity

45% of businesses rely on solo craft work, conducted primarily within a workshop or from home. However, women also often work through cooperatives and in associations.⁷ 35% engage with fewer than five employees; 11% with between six and 20; 3% with between 20 and 50; and only one organization – *Boisseliers du Rif* – contains over 100 employees.⁸

Syrian craftspeople within the local labor force

Syrian craftspeople are now considered part of the Lebanese crafts workforce by many designers, such as Nada Debs. Other Lebanese craftspeople view them as competitors, however.⁹

Local know-how

Each region has its own recognized know-how: pottery in Beit Chabab and Rachaya al-Fakhar; coppersmithing in Tripoli and Qalamoun; woodwork in Tripoli, Baalbeck, and the Chouf; blown glass in Tyre, and so on.

Few established players

There is only a limited number of craftspeople who have built brands and work with several market players: L'Artisan du Liban, La Maison de l'Artisan, L'Artisan du Liban et de l'Orient, Orient 499, and Mouftah El Chark.

Dependence on tourism, the diaspora, and intermediaries

Crafts production depends in large part on the demand generated by the tourism industry, and by the business activities of intermediaries, such as fair organizers, whether in Lebanon or abroad, in France, the United States, or the United Arab Emirates.

Outside these fairs, craft industry exports are still limited opportunities. Only a few online platforms sell Lebanese crafts abroad, and intermediaries take significant margins.

A touristic attraction

Local souks and events are an opportunity to showcase the crafts, which in turn contribute to the revival of several rural regions. Touristic handicraft-oriented destinations include the Soap Museum in Saida, Bkerzay for pottery in the Chouf, and the Terbol Museum in the Bekaa, among others.

⁶-Ibid.

⁷-Ibid.

⁸-Ibid.

⁹-Ibid.

A sector revisited by designers and entrepreneurs

Artisans have to adjust to shifting market trends and find new ways to make their products attractive to consumers in a modern market. In collaboration with up-and-coming designers, they are looking to introduce subtle, more modern-looking design twists, and to adopt new materials to make traditional goods more marketable. Several well-established and internationally acclaimed designers and entrepreneurs, such as Nada Debs, Karen Chekerdjian, Ziad Abi Chaker, and others collaborate with them.

Supported by foreign donors and organizations

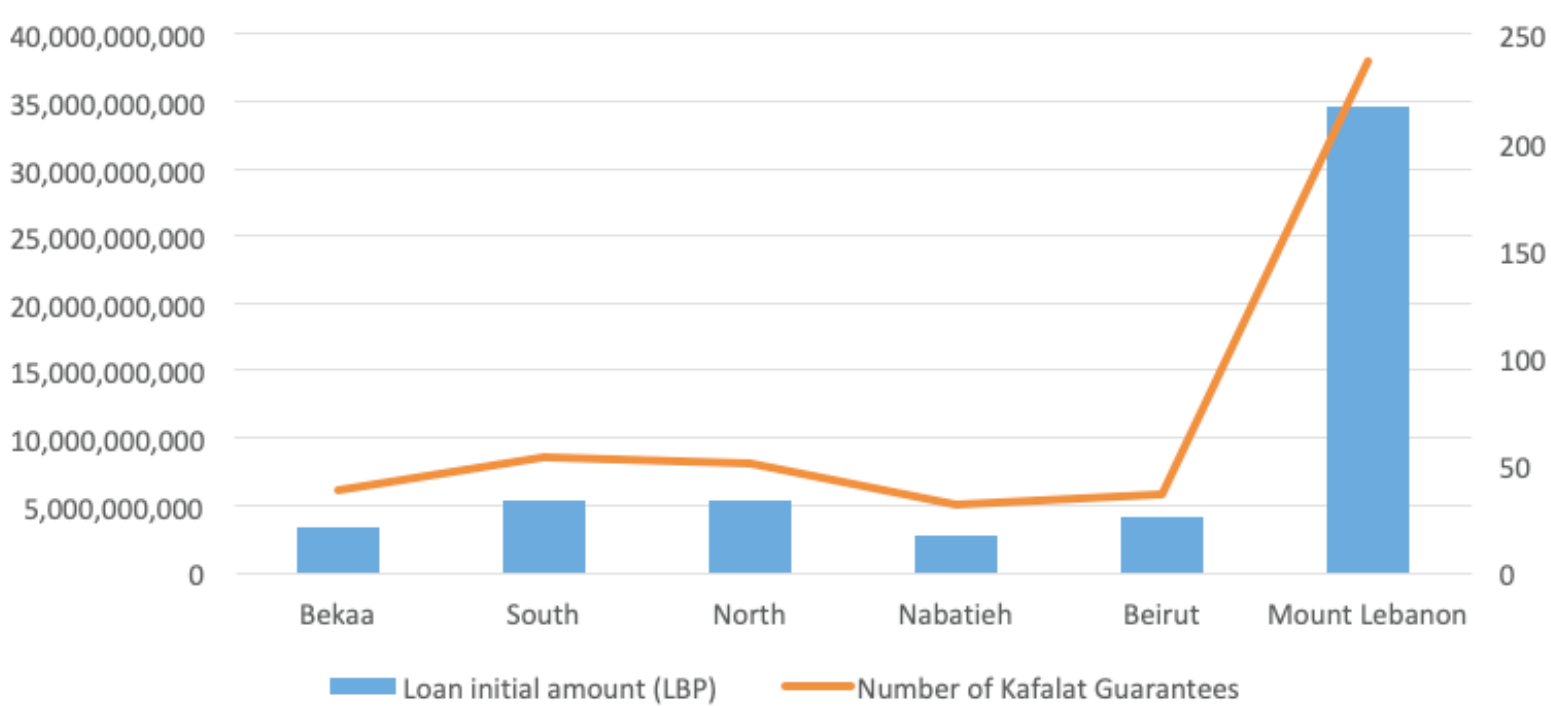
Most clusters, capacity building, and vocational trainings have been funded by foreign organizations, including various United Nations (UN) agencies and the European Union (EU). These trainings provided artisans with technical, industrial, design, and marketing support over the course of two to four years.

Contribution of microfinance institutions and Kafalat¹⁰

Microfinance institutions provide craftspeople and cooperatives with loans. The number of current active clients with the microfinance institution *Al Majmoua* is around 700, according to its Chief Executive Officer Youssef Fawaz, whom we have interviewed. Its outstanding portfolio amounts to around USD 765,000. Fawaz says these figures are probably on the low side, reflecting the current economic crisis.

Official numbers from Kafalat show that, from 2000 to 2020, support to crafts amounted to a mere 2% of the total portfolio, broken down regionally as follows: 0.84% of Kafalat loans in the Bekaa went to the craft sector; 1.87% in Beirut; 1.89% in the North; 1.99% in Nabatieh; 2.11% in the South; and 2.85% in Mount Lebanon.

Distribution & Amounts of Kafalat Guarantees to the Craft Sector
2000-2020



¹⁰-Kafalat is a Lebanese financial company that assists small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to access commercial bank funding, and provides loan guarantees based on business plans and feasibility studies that show the viability of the proposed business activity. Kafalat is 75% owned by the National Institute for the Guarantee of Deposits, and 25% owned by fifty Lebanese banks.

The Traditional Crafts

Crafts are listed under the section entitled “Cultural Tourism, Handicrafts” on the Ministry of Tourism’s Destination Lebanon website.¹¹ The website lists a multitude of crafts, including but not limited to glass blowing, Jezzine cutlery, weaving, and embroidery. Some other crafts, like the making of fishing nets and floor tiles are not part of the Ministry of Tourism’s list. We have chosen, however, to highlight the main crafts listed on the ministry’s website, while excluding jewelry and traditional food, as these are very specific markets, which do not face the same challenges.

Blown glass

Glass blowing is a very ancient technique, the oldest among the handicrafts. Blown glass workshops appeared in all Phoenician cities, and more particularly in Tyre, Saida, and Tripoli. Glassmakers create various shapes and colors as water glasses, wine glasses, beer mugs, water pitchers, vases, and candle sticks. Currently, only one glass blower remains highly active; the Khalifeh family in Sarafand; 14 kilometers south of Saida. The glass they produce is clear, transparent, and free of air bubbles. There is also another manufacturer in Baddawi, near Tripoli.

Weaving

In weaving, many methods are used with horizontal looms to create tablemats, jackets, abayas (traditional Arabic cloaks), and caftans in wool decorated with motifs. Others use vertical looms to create tents and carpets from goat hair or sheep’s wool. The major weaving centers in Lebanon are now Baskinta (Metn – Mount Lebanon), Zouk (Kesrwan – Lebanon), Barja, Bchetfine, Baadaran, and Shehim (Shouf – Mount Lebanon), Kousba (Koura – North), Fekha and Ersal (Baalbeck – Bekaa) and Bkifa (West Bekaa). They are mainly produced by women. Baalbeck is very famous for its unique combinations of silversmithing with weaving. Many projects currently involve cooperation between Lebanese women and refugees, mostly Syrian.

Pottery

Whether dyed yellow or gray, pottery encompasses soup bowls, platters, meter-high jars (used for conserving provisions such as olive oil, vinegar, and arak), coffee or tea sets, bowls, wine glasses, *mezze* plates, or spouted water jars (used to cool water). The major ceramics workshops in Lebanon are located in Beit Chabab (Metn), Aita al-Fakhar and Rachaya al-Fakhar (West Bekaa), Assia (Batroun – North), Jisr al-Qadi (Aley – Mount Lebanon), Jamhour (Baabda, Mount Lebanon), Al-Mina (Tripoli, North), Khaldeh (Shouf), and Ghazieh (Saida, South Lebanon). Ramzi Selman has created a pottery center in Bkerzay in the Shouf.

Copper

There are four techniques used by artisans to manufacture copper, brass, and silver artifacts: hammering, chiseling, embossing, and filigree. After long hours of concentrated work, metal is transformed into such objects as oil lamps, tapered spears, carafes, platter covers for plant pots, and chandeliers. Copper craft workshops are concentrated in Tripoli and Qalamoun (North), Beirut, Zahleh (Bekaa), Saida, and Baalbeck, as well as Beit Chabab in particular.

¹¹-Destination Lebanon, Cultural Tourism, Live Love Lebanon:

<http://www.destinationlebanon.gov.lb/en/tourismtype/details/17>

Woodwork

Woodwork in Lebanon comes in various forms, including veneer, painted, turned, or sculpted wood. Inlaid veneer is used to decorate furniture in Arab-styled households: chairs, small tables, chests, and mirrors, as well as chess sets, game tables, pencil holders, and boxes. This type of handicraft requires a master craftsman for composing and setting the inlay.

In turned wood, workers use cedar wood to turn them into coffee cups, vases, and bowls. Artisans also use designs based on geometric and floral patterns. Wood craftspeople are currently concentrated in the suburbs of Beirut and the old souks in Tripoli.

Cutlery with carved handles

Cutlery including table services, salad servers, pocket knives, and bottle openers may be adorned with handles shaped like birds' heads, for example. At present, the center of handicraft cutlery is Jezzine, a small town in South Lebanon. Jezzine workshops use materials such as ivory, buffalo, and goat or sheep horns, as well as stainless steel, silver steel, and copper.

Embroidery

The two techniques used in embroidery are *Tarq* and *Oya*. The *Tarq* is a dress embroidered with silver thread using black, beige, or brown muslin held in hoops. The *Oya* is somewhat similar to crochet, but made with a needle and thin cotton thread. The *Tarq* and *Oya* techniques are specific to craftspeople in the Baalbeck region. *La Maison de l'Artisan* looks after a large number of embroidery workshops, supporting them financially, technically, and helping them sell their products.

Embroidery works are showcased and sold in the regions, reflecting the specificities of each area: in the North in Tripoli, Batroun, and Zghorta; in Mount Lebanon in Zouk Mikael and Jounieh; in the Shouf in Deir el-Qamar and Baaqline; in the Bekaa in Zahleh, Baalbeck, and Jibjennine; and in the South, in Saida and Tyre.

Perfumed soap

Perfumed and colored balls of soap have been made of olive oil for many centuries. *Khan al-Saboun* (the soap souk) in Tripoli is among the landmarks of this craft.

Basket making

Weaving baskets, mats, and prayer rugs has been an art of Lebanese rural villagers for centuries. The main components are reeds and palm leaves. These baskets are useful for fruits and vegetables, while other reeds are woven into mats of variegated colors. Today, they provide more useful items, such as straw hats or covers for potted plants. With the help of *La Maison de l'Artisan*, the Lebanese authorities encourage wicker workers to perpetuate their tradition.

Near Jbeil, in Amchit (Mount Lebanon), wicker workers have developed the craft of palm weaving to produce caps, baskets, and flower pot baskets. In Kouachra (Akkar – North), 3 km from the northern frontier, *halfah* or esparto grass is used to manufacture multicolored mats and large trays. Meanwhile, in the town of Hermel (Bekaa), workshops weave prayer mats with colored corn straw. Finally, other towns such as Zghorta and Helweh in the north, and Kafra and Saida in the south, are specialized in braided cane or wicker, with which they manufacture large baskets for the transportation of fruits, especially citrus fruits.

The Main Stakeholders of the Sector

Crafts are affiliated to various ministries and entities. However, there is a lack of coordination between the many stakeholders, and the industry is left scattered among different jurisdictions.

Ministry of Social Affairs

The responsibilities and prerogatives of MoSA's Craft Department are relatively comprehensive, according to Article 45 of Decree 5734 (pertaining to the organization of the Ministry), and could cover all fields of intervention should they be fully applied. In reality, the intervention of the Department has been primarily limited to delivering training.

According to the Decree, the development of craftsmanship and the support of craftspeople is managed by MoSA. The department of crafts and handmade products falls under the Direction of Social Development. According to Article 43, it is divided into one branch for crafts and another for the marketing of crafts goods. According to Article 44, the mission of MoSA regarding craft development includes mapping and locating the network of crafts and handmade productions; identifying the number of workers and elaborating a study for their development; providing craftspeople with the necessary financial, technical, and artistic support; delivering training for developing prototypes with potential for high economic revenues; delivering training within MoSA centers to learn light handmade production with good quality and marketing potential; and elaborating a study on the economic value of handmade productions and crafts, and disseminating it amongst craftspeople.¹²

After the war – MoSA was founded in 1994 – the Ministry developed programs to support the community of craftspeople by offering short informal vocational training courses through its 220 social development centers located all over the country, as well as through NGOs. These 220 social development centers allow the Ministry to establish a local presence, facilitating local development projects.

MoSA's activity in the sector only began effectively in 2011, when its funds were allocated and specific programs were put in place. 500 craftspeople have been registered with MoSA; Najwa Bdeir says there are thousands more, but they are mostly undeclared. In 2015-2016, approximately 351 trainees were enrolled in short, informal, craft training courses, mostly making kilims, soap and wax products, and sewing. With its limited budget, MoSA does not offer courses on wood, brass, glass, or pottery, due to the relatively high costs of equipment for these crafts. MoSA also provides its own certification of graduates upon successful completion of the vocational training courses. To increase its role in certification and training, MoSA is engaged in an ongoing study and series of roundtables operated by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in collaboration with UNICEF to set the National Strategic Framework for Technical, Vocational Education and Training in Lebanon for 2018-2022.¹³ The main recommendations related to the sector are grouped under three objectives: enrolment and provision of services; quality and relevance; governance and systems. The recommendations include the institutionalization of crafts' standards and the elaboration of a register for craftspeople. Eligible practitioners receive an official membership card, which offers rights to access programs of training and marketing and economic incentives on raw materials.

¹²-Makki, Op. cit.

¹³-Ibid.

MoSA exhibits artisans' production in a prime location; at *La Maison de l'Artisan*, a spacious shop on the seafront in Beirut's Ain el-Mreisseh district. Until recently, the store attracted tourists and an international and Lebanese clientele. Since the economic crisis beginning 2019, however, prices have skyrocketed, due to the plummeting value of the Lebanese pound, and the store is facing challenges related to the sustainability of its activities.

MoSA conducted a feasibility study of four sectors: glass blowing, rattan art, pottery, and textiles. The study recommended that the practice of glass blowing be done within cooperatives, and textiles within associations. Pottery can combine both, while rattan art may be practiced solo.

Ministry of Tourism

Most if not all crafts are listed on their website, promoting the regions to which they pertain.

Ministry of Culture

The Ministry of Culture deals with heritage, which is defined as the various works of creativity emanating from society that are tradition-based, reflecting the cultural and social identity of Lebanese society with all its groups, regions, and historic eras. Heritage is circulated verbally, or through other forms of expressions, including arts, crafts, culture, and traditional architecture.

Crafts could benefit from Law No.35/2008 pertaining to the organization of the Ministry of Culture. The law created two funds in the Ministry, entitled the "Cultural Activities and Industries Support Fund" and the "Antiquities and Historic and Heritage Establishments Fund." The first fund aims to support programs and activities on areas within the jurisdiction of the General Directorate of Cultural Affairs, and contributes to financing the production of cultural industries and the knowledge economy and its activities, while also supporting the production and marketing of films, documents, and audio-visual publications in particular. The second fund specializes in financing public and private projects designed for prospection, excavation and detection of archeological, heritage and historical sites, groups and installations, as well as maintaining protection, reconditioning, development, and preparation to be used by the public, in addition to the enhancement and restoration of the collection of movable archeological property. However, executive decrees to effectively organize these two funds have not yet been issued. The entire budget allocated to the Ministry of Culture nears 1% of the global budget; of this, 50% is allocated to the National Conservatoire of Music, and the rest is distributed between the General Direction of Antiquities and the General Directorate of Cultural Affairs, which is concerned with the preservation of cultural heritage.

Ministry of Culture regulations also encompass the protection of craftspeople and the promotion of their activities in festivals and fairs.

Ministry of Industry

The Ministry of Industry is involved in several initiatives of support for craftsmanship. Since 2013, the Ministry has generously provided a venue for the Syndicate of Craftsmen on the ground floor of the Ministry building. There are, however, ongoing discussions between MoSA and the Ministry of Industry to transfer the venue to MoSA.

The "YAD Crafts Collection" that was developed by the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in partnership with the Ministry of Industry in 2019 is the property of the Ministry. Its future, however, is unknown, as the UNIDO project ended for lack of funding.¹⁴ The Ministry of Industry said that it had no objection to transferring the propriety of YAD to MoSA or even to a foreign investor.

¹⁴-Nicole Hamouche, Platforms supporting Designers, Goethe Institute, April 2019, p.2. Retrieved from

http://backend.institutdesfinances.gov.lb/wpcontent/uploads/2020/09/platforms_supporting_designers_fantasmeem_findings_nicole_hamouche.pdf

Another development project, called “Lebanese Creative Industries,” was also undertaken in collaboration with the Ministry of Industry.

Syndicate of Craftsmen

The Syndicate of Craftsmen was created in 2000 at the initiative of the Ministry, according to Najwa Bdeir. The Syndicate’s new president, Hassan Wehbé, has said he is working to reform its internal regulations and incentivize craftspeople’s membership by boosting protection, funding, and visibility, *inter alia*.

There were only 90 members registered in the Syndicate as of October 2020. The affiliation card offers several advantages to the artisan: it facilitates, among other things, visa delivery and formalities at the Ministry of Finance. Affiliation with the Syndicate also provides access to training opportunities provided by the Syndicate or external organizations such as the UN Development Program (UNDP). Artisans are also invited by the Syndicate to festivals across Lebanon, such as those in Hammana and Bhamdoun. The Syndicate has its own showroom on the Ministry of Industry’s premises. In Tripoli, the Syndicate has a boutique, called Souk Artesano. Subscription fees comprise a first time payment of LBP 150,000, followed by LBP 80,000 annually thereafter.

La Maison de l’Artisan

Located on the Beirut waterfront in a prime location, *La Maison de l’Artisan* is an initiative of the Ministry of Social Affairs for the promotion of local crafts. This initiative concerns hundreds of craftspeople throughout Lebanon who participate in the process of conserving old manufacturing methods.

In 2006, *La Maison de l’Artisan* was separated from MoSA to directly refer to the Minister. It is now an independent organization, managed by a committee of nine people, although the designation process may have been politicized, without clearly defined terms of reference. In the past, MoSA used to buy artisans’ products directly and take on the risk of them not being sold. Under the current system, *La Maison de l’Artisan* sells the products only under consignment, which is much less appealing for the artisan.

L’Artisan du Liban

L’Artisan du Liban is a social enterprise created in 1979. Its main shareholder is the *Mouvement Social*, an NGO. *L’Artisan du Liban* works with craftspeople across the country. It accompanies women in training, providing them with machinery and equipment, and works with three informal collectives in Akkar, and one in Tripoli, as well as micro-enterprises for wood and brass works; the latter mostly employing men. Its direct beneficiaries number between 300 and 350 people, with 800 indirect beneficiaries, according to its director, Roula Haidar. It employs 30 people.¹⁵ *L’Artisan du Liban* also sells the products of ten NGOs that work with craftspeople.

L’Artisan du Liban operated a store in Paris from 2001 until 2016 in a high-end location. Its French operations did very well before the financial crisis in Europe. They even financed the Lebanese activities in the 2005-2006 period; years marked by a wave of assassinations of political figures in Lebanon and the July War with Israel. *L’Artisan du Liban* also took part in Souq Lb, an incubator for social enterprises funded by the British embassy.

¹⁵- Hamouche, Op. cit.

Artisans du Liban et d'Orient

Artisans du Liban et d'Orient was founded in 1967 by May el-Khoury, the late wife of one of Lebanon's most prominent contemporary architects, Pierre el-Khoury. It sold traditional handicrafts made by local artisans. At that time, it was an innovative concept, blending commerce and activism. It revived a traditional industry that was on the verge of fading away into a viable profession once again. May el-Khoury sourced raw materials in Turkey and Syria, and personally designed new interpretations of traditional crafts, or revived patterns no longer in use. The store began to lose money when the drop in Gulf tourists began to take its toll, and Nadia el-Khoury, who had taken on the direction of the activities after May, searched for a buyer to purchase *Artisans du Liban et d'Orient* as "an institution." This did not happen.

Orient 499

Orient 499 is a boutique, as well as a workshop, featuring handicrafts and designer's creations. Items vary from antiques to modern furniture, clothes, and accessories, mainly made in Lebanon, but also Turkey, Egypt, and Morocco. The vision of the brand is to create sustainable luxury using handicraft legacies in the region.

The company both directly and indirectly employs over 200 artisans, including coppersmiths, woodmen, glass artisans, soap makers, weavers, printers, dyers, embroiders, and couturiers.

Mouftah el Chark

Starting in 1996 with a small shop in Zouk, it has grown and expanded to seven branches across Lebanon, including one at Beirut Airport Duty Free.

Bkerzay

Created by the architect Ramzi Selman, who was interviewed for this study, Bkerzay is intended as a preservation project. A curated space is dedicated to exhibiting and selling Lebanese design and culinary products from Lebanon. One of its main attractions is its pottery center, which Selman views as a training center for youth from the region. A master potter from the famous Egyptian Al Fayyoun was recruited to train local artisans. The destination also sells the works of famous Lebanese ceramists.

Other initiatives

Other private companies that successfully and substantially employ craftspeople or refer to craft as a heritage technique or design are inspirational models to look at in the sector. Most of these success stories have strong export activity. Those include, but are not limited to, Blatt Chaaya in floor tiles, Maison Tarazi in wood marquetry and inlay, Georges Mohasseb in wood, Nada Debs, and *Images d'Orient* (though the latter is more about heritage design than pure craft).

Some art and design galleries, such as Carwan Gallery, have also chosen to promote craft through the designers they pick. Since the blast at Beirut port on August 4, 2020, Carwan Gallery has moved to Athens. In exhibitions, as well as in its primary space, Carwan features the work of cutting-edge Middle Eastern designers of unique contemporary objects such as limited-edition furniture, lighting, and art objects.

Challenges

Challenges range from lack of awareness of rights and protection methods, clear referrals, management and organizational issues, to marketing and funding, and finally recognition. Craftspeople face high degrees of precariousness and complain that they do not feel recognized. Other challenges are political in nature: many initiatives undertaken by official bodies, and notably by the Craft Department at MoSA, could not be implemented for unclear bureaucratic reasons; lack of efficiency or interest in the administration; or even pure negligence. The same holds with respect to the management of government-related bodies such as *La Maison de l'Artisan*, the “official” flagship window of Lebanese crafts, which has been stagnating. The macro-economic context also presents its own set of challenges, including competition from imported goods, and the increase in raw material prices, especially in light of the depreciation of the Lebanese pound.

The general framework has a number of features that could benefit the crafts industry, were they to be leveraged. Problems of overlapping jurisdictions and harmonization among administrations, and the lack of awareness of the availability of support tools, may partly explain the stagnation of the sector.

Legal Issues, Rights, and Affiliations

Craftspeople's status

Most craftspeople are not registered with any official institution, including MoSa and the regional Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI), and work instead in the gray market. The Syndicate of Craftsmen has lost more than 80% of its members. Craftspeople's lack of registration prevents them from benefiting from social protection programs.

Craftspeople's mindset

When their children are not interested in taking over the family tradition, craftspeople show little willingness to transmit their know-how to newcomers on the market. There is also a general feeling that their craft is not recognized or valued, and so they tend not to encourage their children to follow in their footsteps. There is also a certain resistance to innovation and externally-imposed ideas, not only from craftspeople themselves but also MoSA.

“Made in Lebanon” label – Certificate of origin

The craft sector faces challenges in obtaining the “Made in Lebanon” certificate required to export. This label is provided by the Ministry of Industry, based on a set of criteria that is not adapted to craft. The criteria include area of production, number of machines, and number of employees. Seldom do craftsmen meet the required standards.

Exporting also requires a registration certificate with the CCI, which imposes stringent conditions on craftspeople.

Weak regulatory bodies

Despite its official affiliation to MoSA, the craft industry suffers from a lack of interest from decision-makers, and from the absence of an independent and empowered regulatory body responsible for organizing and developing the sector. The Syndicate of Craftsmen has been generally inactive, and counts very few members, and so cannot be considered truly representative of the sector.

Absence of a database

The last mapping of the sector was done in 2000. The data needs to be updated and documented so that MoSA can channel subsidies and other relevant aid programs to registered and well-identified craftspeople; include them in capacity-building and training initiatives; and promote their products abroad.

Lack of law application

MoSA has not yet fully leveraged all its prerogatives. Nor has the Ministry of Culture's heritage fund been extended to support crafts.

Absence of trade agreements with potential export markets

While Lebanon has signed a number of trade agreements with international partners, including the EU and various Arab states, there are other potentially major export markets, such as the United States, Canada, Australia and Mercosur (with a significant Lebanese diaspora), with which no bilateral agreements have been enacted.

Lack of coordination among ministries and official bodies

Several institutions have a role in supporting the craft sector: MoSA, the Ministry of Economy and Trade, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Industry, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There is, however, no unified strategic orientation common to them all.

Production and Logistics

Access to raw material

Local craftspeople cannot import if they do not have a clearance from the Ministry of Finance with respect to the taxes and social security contributions they have to pay. Currently, and in recent years, most institutions and craftspeople have faced challenges covering all their tax obligations. In addition, raw materials have become extremely expensive due to the depreciation of the Lebanese pound.

Quality standards

The need for quality certifications depends on the nature of the product. Quality assurance is needed only when products may be hazardous and/or come into contact with food; for instance, copper or pottery products.

LIBNOR standards for quality control do not include specific criteria for crafts goods.

Cost of shipping

Since war broke out in Syria, land transportation to export markets in Jordan, Iraq, and Gulf Cooperation Council countries has been disrupted. Exports now have to go through the airport and/or port, causing a loss of competitiveness, especially when the shipping is made by DHL, FedEx, or other private companies.

Commercial Challenges, Marketing and Visibility

Intermediaries, whether distributors or the designers themselves, charge substantial margins, and pay back very small amounts to the artisans, which accentuates craftspeople's feelings of being undervalued. Very often, artisans lack information about existing opportunities, as communication about international fairs and events is not widely spread and does not reach them.

Craftspeople also face difficulties accessing international fairs, having to incur high exhibition fees and the cost and inconvenience of transportation. Nonetheless, exports are vital for their survival given the small size of the local market.

Crafts face competition from more affordable, modern products designed in Europe, and produced in places with cheap labor supply, such as China and other southeastern Asian countries. In addition, Lebanese craftspeople have yet to enter the digital marketplaces, which create both competition and opportunities.

Political Considerations and Hurdles

Lack of transparency

Both Najwa Bdeir and Hassan Wehbé decried the lack of transparency in the selection process for artisans to participate in fairs and events organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, such as the craft exhibition in 2019 in Rome or other foreign-financed opportunities.

Negligence, lack of commitment, interest, and efficiency

In 2016, Morocco expressed its will to assist Lebanon and share its expertise in the crafts sector with MoSA. The matter was not pursued. In 2018, Egypt also expressed interest in sharing its expertise, notably in the creation and management of craftspeople's cooperatives with MoSA. A memorandum of understanding was even prepared and handed to MoSA, and financing was secured from UNICEF. To date, the project has not gone ahead.

MoSA has also worked with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on a USD 5 million agricultural project involving craftspeople. The idea was that, instead of buying expensive raw materials and dyes from abroad for textile-related products, for example, such as carpets, the raw materials would be produced in Lebanon, using natural products, in collaboration with farmers.

Corruption at Customs

Designers and industrialists complain of corruption at the port and airport, which has been confirmed by the UNDP-backed Anti-Corruption National Strategy.¹⁶ In 2015, then-Minister of Finance Ali Hassan Khalil said corruption at Customs was costing the Lebanese state USD 1.2 billion annually.¹⁷

Funding

International funding comes in the form of short-term projects extending to a couple of years at most, which does not allow sufficient time for the programs to mature and bear fruit. Also, they often concentrate on only one aspect of the whole chain, and hence do not enable the project to reach its full potential. YAD and Minjara¹⁸ are examples of this. Furthermore, foreign funding is not always aligned with the needs on the ground; a large chunk of the funding goes to finance studies and experts and consultants rather than the craftspeople and their activities per se.

Kafalat, which had identified traditional crafts as one of the main sectors it would support, is now unable to give any guarantees, as the banks themselves have stopped giving loans since October 2019. Microfinance institutions, which are among the main financiers of the sector, are also more reluctant at the moment given the crisis, which has led to a decrease in demand for microloans given the low market prospects. *Al Majmoua's* Youssef Fawaz points to the lack of visibility and confidence from craftspeople and their partner entrepreneurs, who are afraid to take out loans in the current context.

All these difficulties are piling up in the absence of mechanisms for effective subsidies, subsidized loans, tax breaks, and other incentives to those in the sector who are still committed to work in the formal market.

¹⁶-Launching the "Anti-Corruption National Strategy" Project and its Executive Plan, UNDP. Retrieved from:

<https://www.lb.undp.org/content/lebanon/en/home/projects/LaunchingtheAnti-CorruptionNationalStrategyProjectanditsExecutivePlan.html>

¹⁷-"Khalil: Corruption at Customs Costing State 1.2 Billion Dollars," Naharnet, February 12, 2005. Retrieved from:

<http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/167128>

¹⁸-Minjara is part of the EU-funded Private Sector Development (PSD) Program and targets the revival of the furniture manufacturing industry,

with the objective of helping small producers of traditional designs elevate their skills and give them a broader access to market, through the Minjara label.

Recommendations

Lebanon has signed a number of international conventions, including the Convention for the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO on November 16, 1972. The sector has a general framework that would enable multiple supportive actions, were it leveraged. The point should be to give the sector the consideration it deserves, acknowledging its productive potential, rather than deeming it a vulnerable sector the management of which should be aimed only at ensuring basic survival. The sector offers substantial value and could thrive if given the right environment and tools. Alongside the economic value it could produce, it is also a factor of social cohesion. Therefore, a clear national strategy for supporting the sector needs to be devised and implemented.

Laws and decrees relating to the Ministry of Culture and to MoSA have been passed, giving room to broad possibilities. These regulations define the competencies and responsibilities of the bodies in charge, such as the Craft Department at MoSA and *La Maison de l'Artisan*. Crafts could also benefit from the National Strategic Framework for Technical and Vocational Education and Training 2018-2022,¹⁹ and from the Ministry of Industry's Lebanon Industry 2025 Plan.²⁰ Tools and mechanisms are available, but are not being used. A voluntary strategy of encouraging and supporting crafts across all regions, especially amid the current financial crisis, would also encourage stakeholders to take action and ownership. Aside from contributing to local production at a time when imports have become unaffordable for many Lebanese, it is also a powerful tool of social cohesion, among Lebanese but also between Lebanese and the communities of displaced persons and refugees living in the country.

The priority of such an integrated national strategy should be primarily to increase the volume of activity and create jobs. To spur the activity, it is necessary to create awareness and demand. A national strategy inspired by the "Development Strategy Vision 2015"²¹ adopted by Morocco, which proved to be very successful, could be adopted. In the Moroccan vision, authenticity was the main growth driver, and job creation a priority. Notably, the Moroccan authorities have in the past expressed to MoSA their readiness to share their expertise with Lebanon. Tunisia also has an active crafts sector, which provided 350,000 direct jobs in 2019 and contributed – thanks to more than 2,400 enterprises – 4.58% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with an annual export value of TND 85 million (nearly USD 32 million).²²

¹⁹-National Strategic Framework for Technical and Vocational Education and Training, co-published by UNICEF, ILO, the Lebanese Government's Ministry of Education and Higher Education, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Labor, and the National Employment Office. Retrieved from:

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_633487.pdf

²⁰-Ministry of Industry, UNIDO, The Lebanese Industry Plan 2025, 2018. Retrieved from:

[http://www.industry.gov.lb/getattachment/PublicationsAndStudies/Genral-final-en-\(1\).pdf?lang=en-US](http://www.industry.gov.lb/getattachment/PublicationsAndStudies/Genral-final-en-(1).pdf?lang=en-US)

²¹-Royaume du Maroc, Vision 2015 de l'Artisanat: notre authenticité moteur de notre essor. Retrieved from : <http://www.abhatoo.net.ma/maalama-textuelle/developpement-economique-et-social/developpement-economique/artisanat/politique-artisanale/vision-2015-de-l-artisanat-notre-authenticite-moteur-de-notre-essor-contrat-programme-2006-2015>

²²-Samir Dridi, Secteur de l'artisanat : 2020, une année fort prometteuse, La Presse, January 30, 2020. Retrieved from:

<https://lapresse.tn/46382/secteur-de-lartisanat-2020-une-annee-fort-prometteuse/>

All the designers working with crafts and heritage to whom we spoke are convinced there are vast possibilities to be explored. They also affirm that craftspeople are willing to work, and are fully capable of producing in volumes, as long as they get commissioned; yet demand needs to be bolstered first. Craftspeople say the same in terms of readiness and capacities, so long as they know they can sell. In addition to the importance of demand creation, the strategy must also address the entire value chain – from production to marketing and sales – in order to bear fruit. If one of the chain links is missing, the entire strategy will collapse.

Lebanon's uniqueness also lies in its openness to integrating various cultures, and its capacity to promote Middle Eastern craft and heritage, not restricting itself to mere Lebanese heritage. Examples are such successful concepts as *Artisans du Liban et de l'Orient*, under the leadership of Nadia el-Khoury, and *Orient 499*, which are particularly reflective of the world we live in, with moving and flexible borders, where innovative products are the ones that mirror diversity and reflect a blending of cultures, thus catering to a wider audience. Also, according to Camille Tarazi from *Maison Tarazi*, the Lebanese have the possibility to satisfy European taste in terms of quality and flexible responsiveness. Should the country once again enjoy a certain level of security and stability, Lebanon could also become a production hub for foreign companies looking for skilled labor at lower cost (not least after the collapse of the local currency). Hence, not only does Lebanon need to focus on increasing exports and tourist demand, but it can also serve as a production place for Western companies looking for a sourcing platform. To raise awareness and draw international clientele and producers, more communication and intervention from public authorities ought to be undertaken.

To tap into the sector's vast potential and make craftsmanship sustainable, the work and policies need to address several aspects: business environment enhancement, promotion and marketing, recognition and protection of artisans, product quality, production cost, modernization and design, cross-sectoral interactions including public private partnerships (PPP), and funding.

Craftspeople's Status and the Institutionalization of the Sector

- **Protect the rights of artisans** by establishing a social insurance system for professionals in the sector.
- **Legalize the status of craftspeople** by creating legal entities adapted to the sector's characteristics (with often a sole proprietor).
- **Provide institutional capacity-building** for organizations representing craftspeople and businesses involved in traditional crafts.
- **Create a comprehensive database** of all craftspeople in Lebanon with their detailed specialties. This would enable Lebanese designers, associations, and foreign investors and clients to find the resources they need and have access to Lebanese craftspeople.
- **Revive and reform the Syndicate of Craftsmen**, which has a very small number of members and has been dormant for many years.
- **Create a professional association for Lebanese designers.** Whether in the form of a syndicate or other type of associations, this group would enhance the benefits of its members and, consequently, also benefit craftspeople, by negotiating, for instance, pooled shipments, and hence better shipping and export conditions and logistics.
- **Create a regulatory and organizing body;** a Chamber of Crafts or Craft Development Agency; such as Morocco's *Maison de l'Artisan*,²³ which advises on and executes the government's policy for the sector and is dedicated to organizing and promoting it. Such a body would need to be established by decree. The Craft Department at MoSA enjoys all the necessary prerogatives, and could play this role if endowed with adequate human resources and budget. Giving it autonomy and financial independence by taking it out of the ministry would free its hands to operate without the political influences and considerations that have been hindering its development.
- **Adopt a clear and inclusive definition of craft and craftspeople.** The question of definition is essential. Whether or not a product is qualified as craft, and its producer as a craftspeople, determines whether or not one may benefit from the many aforementioned services. It is preferable to choose a broad definition to include modernized and revisited crafts. For this reason, UNESCO's definition appears the best adapted; UNESCO being the global organization that deals with the matter on an international cross-border level.²⁴ Linkage with UNESCO's activities in the sector would give local crafts broader horizons.

²³-La Maison de l'Artisan is the public institution in charge of promoting Moroccan handicraft products, at the local and the international level. It was created in 1957.

Retrieved from:

<https://www.maisonartisan.ma/en/about-us/presentation-and-missions/>

²⁴-“Artisanal products are those produced by artisans, either completely by hand, or with the help of hand tools or even mechanical means, as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product. These are produced without restriction in terms of quantity and using raw materials from sustainable resources. The special nature of artisanal products derives from their distinctive features, which can be utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, creative, culturally attached, decorative, functional, traditional, religiously and socially symbolic and significant.” Retrieved from:

<http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/craft-or-artisanal-products>

Harmonization and Coordination among Stakeholders

- **Clarify roles of, and promote cooperation among, ministries** and other crafts' official affiliations to avoid duplication, conflicts of interests, and dispersed energy. All of the following institutions have links to the craft industry: the ministries of Social Affairs, Tourism, Culture, Industry, Economy and Trade, Labor, and Foreign Affairs, the CCI, Kafalat, the Investment Development Authority of Lebanon (IDAL), and La Maison de l'Artisan.
- **Engage and coordinate with municipalities** that often have more substantial and flexible budgets than ministries and can initiate local projects in coordination with civil society groups and international donors. A municipality can be an essential focal point; it should play a coordination, networking, and institutional support role. An example is the municipality of Jezzine, with the YAD collection developed by UNIDO in collaboration with the Ministry of Industry. This would require municipalities in areas with strong craft know-how to include a number of projects related to supporting the sector in their yearly budgets. The selection of these regions could be made in collaboration with the ministries of Tourism, Social Affairs, and the Interior and Municipalities.²⁵
- **Capitalize on the YAD collection** that is the property of the Ministry of Industry as a pilot project. Assess if it needs to stay within the Ministry of Industry or should be transferred to a more competent authority on the subject, such as MoSA. A PPP could also be considered.
- **Mobilize and coordinate among various stakeholders**, domestic and foreign, private and public, and local and international funding sources, to put together pilot projects and attract financing with long-term prospects.
- **Identify UN agencies and programs** within UNESCO, UNDP, UNHCR, UN Women, and ILO, which could correspond to national needs with respect to the crafts sector, and coordinate between them. For example, in Morocco, UNESCO designed and implemented the "Handicrafts and Employment Generation for the Poorest Youth and Women" ²⁶ project, in which the development of small handicraft enterprises was used as a poverty eradication tool. In this approach, income and employment generation were the strategies used to address the problems of extreme poverty and hunger.

Capacity Building and Vocational Training

In 2018, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) released the National Strategic Framework for Technical and Vocational Education and Training 2018–2022,²⁷ with the support of UNICEF and ILO. The consultations involved a wide array of local stakeholders, including the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Agriculture, MoSA, the National Employment Office, the National Vocational Training Center, private sector representatives, and NGOs.

A framework thus already exists and has been recently upgraded; the point is to take advantage of it and encourage both formal and informal education in the crafts sector. Such education support could take various forms:

- **Train artisans** and upgrade their skills.
- **Create technical institutes** and upgrade existing ones.

²⁵-The Ministry of the Interior and Municipalities is responsible for municipalities, and is involved in approving their budgets and expenditures.

Richard NOELLA, Handicrafts and Employment Generation for the Poorest Youth and Women, UNESCO, 2007

²⁶- <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000156772>

²⁷-Ibid.

- **Leverage the training capacities of MoSA and NGOs** by reaching out to a larger number of potential trainees, especially among the youth.
- **Introduce craft curricula in universities;** hence, at the same time, changing the view that the industry is only a second-best, for the underprivileged. Refer to the examples of technical schools and institutes in Germany, and to university degrees in Morocco.
- **Bridge the education gap between the maker and the designer.** In Lebanon, so far and in general, the educated are the designers, who do not know how to make, and the less-educated are the makers, who lack the capacity to create.
- **Determine projects to empower the most vulnerable** and include both Lebanese and non-Lebanese communities; women; and youths.
- **Introduce craft activities for pupils in schools,** including public schools, to raise awareness of the sector.
- Seek partnerships with UNESCO for skills training in craft trades and **know-how exchange** among countries, reinforcing South-to-South cooperation.
- **Create networks** through local community learning centers, where initiatives are shared among craftspeople and villagers (leading to improvements in quality, new designs, networking with consumers, and so on) inspired by the Cambodian experience in the sector.²⁸ Through municipalities, and with potential UNESCO support, encourage, support, and incentivize adults in the villages to lead workshops and pass on knowledge to the younger generation, and thereby give them a sense of pride in their work.

Design and Positioning

Modernizing traditional designs to create competitive products in today's markets is a necessity. Lebanon needs to find the right positioning, by giving the craft products made in Lebanon global market characteristics. Small twists can make a difference:

- **Improve the quality of the product** and adapt it to market demand.
- **Establish an expert committee,** which would decide whether the projects proposed by foreign agencies and other donors can be best leveraged to support the sector, rather than having MoSA and UN agencies employees decide – arbitrarily – whether a product is craft or not (refer to the YAD experience).
- **Allocate research and development (R&D) budgets** for pilot projects.
- **Explore new raw material combination and multiple variations of traditional crafts** (cement, straw, embroidery, and so on). For example, with the artisans of Qalamoun, copper can be integrated in light fixtures; it can also be combined with wood and furniture. Collaborations between multiple professions may also be considered.

²⁸-In Cambodia, training on basketry, batik, screen printing, and basic business techniques were provided to impoverished women and youth. Organizational and management trainings were provided to improve participants' production and marketing systems. One of the key results was the revival of the traditional Khmer silk. (Richard Noella, Op. cit.)

- **Focus on the medium- and high-end markets**, where Lebanon is well-positioned, rather than competing with largely mass-produced cheap wares that appeal to broad audiences.
- **Create partnerships with NGOs** to help upgrade product quality to adapt to foreign and urban needs and tastes. For example, in Morocco, Terre des Femmes realized that the pottery made according to archaic techniques drew less interest than the urban pottery. Terre des Femmes has oriented the design of pottery to adapt to the needs and tastes of the clientele and has organized encounters between local producers and professional ceramists from Spain and France.²⁹
- **Issue quality assurance certificates.** ISO and other international certifications are expensive; create credible Lebanese standards in cooperation with LIBNOR and the Industrial Research Institute at the Lebanese University, which give quality assurance stamps but are not specifically concerned with crafts. Such a process can lead to the creation of an official label; “Craft Made in Lebanon;” with its own clearly-defined eligibility criteria.

Improving the Business Environment and Logistics

- **Encourage the creation of cooperatives** and the regrouping of craftspeople in such structures. It is possible to benefit from the Egyptian expertise in this realm; the Egyptian authorities had previously proposed to share their expertise to MoSA on the subject, according to Najwa Bdeir. Cooperatives are exempt from taxes, unless they hire people as employees, in which case they must pay taxes on wages and contributions to the National Social Security Fund (NSSF).
- **Give tax breaks or incentives and NSSF exemptions**, depending on levels of revenues, employment of new staff, and purchases of equipment.
- **Incentivize companies that work with crafts**, such as *Boisseliers du Rif* and family businesses, or SMEs such as *Maison Tarazi*, which are engaged in the sector and contribute to the transmission of heritage and the industrialization/professionalization of the sector by increasing production capacities.
- **Benefit from IDAL’s support**, as craft could be related to the tourism sector, which falls into IDAL’s scope; and from export support mechanisms inspired by the ones developed for the agriculture sector (Export Plus then Agri Plus).
- **Facilitate procedures and modify the criteria required to obtain the Certificate of Origin**, which is needed to export, as the current criteria apply to industrial products in a manner not adapted to crafts. The same applies with respect to registration at CCI, which is needed to obtain the Certificate of Origin.
- **Suspend the clearance from the Ministry of Finance** necessary to import raw materials if directly imported by craftspeople. It is worth noting that most raw material is not imported by craftspeople, but by large wholesalers, who impose their own conditions on the former.

²⁹-Retrieved from: <http://terresdesfemmes.over-blog.com/>

- **Consider customs duty exemptions** on raw materials imported directly by craftspeople.
- **Consider a purchasing center of raw material for craftspeople** that would not charge margins, as wholesalers do; potentially a role fulfilled by the aforementioned cooperatives.
- **Provide artisans with free spaces to work and exhibit in**, potentially using several un- or under-used government- or municipality-owned buildings.
- **Include craftspeople's workshops in Industrial Free Zones (IFZ)**. The Ministry of Industry's Lebanon Industry 2025 plan does not include crafts in its list of beneficiaries. IFZ provide full infrastructure to various industries; craft could highly benefit from such an environment.
- **Create offices across the regions** for the proposed Chamber of Crafts or the Craft Development Agency, which will facilitate all the necessary procedures for entrepreneurs, craftspeople, and designers to complete the required paperwork, access the commercial registry, as well as obtain tax cards and licenses for carrying out their projects.

Customs Reform

- **Seek a cooperation agreement with a well-positioned foreign customs authority** that can deliver its assistance and expertise to upgrade Lebanon's customs.
- **Adopt a nuanced approach to protective customs measures**, which would be linked to unfair competition, quality standards, and other measures to increase the competitiveness of Lebanese crafts.
- **Facilitate the direct import of raw materials** for craftspeople.
- **Facilitate formalities to Lebanese craftspeople and designers who attend fairs and exhibitions** abroad, and exempt them from duties; whether on the way out of Lebanon, or on the way back, when they repatriate the merchandise.
- **Establish logistics centers** at the ports of Beirut and Tripoli, and Beirut Airport, with all-service, one-stop-shop customs points, to reduce the time required for releasing cargo, benefiting Lebanese craftspeople as well as industrialists and traders in general.

Marketing and Promotion of the Sector

Craftspeople need to have access to markets where they can sell their products. On the one hand, they need increased exposure to both the urban Lebanese market and export markets; hence, visibility and awareness of the sector need to be raised, both locally and internationally. On the other hand, awareness needs also to be raised among local communities and the youth about the sector's potential as a productive field to engage in. The image of the sector must be revisited and upgraded. Awareness-raising about the sector would enable demand creation, which is the key element to re-igniting the spark of craftspeople and the passion of transmission. Strengthening links with the tourism sector is another key means of boosting crafts production and the sector's sustainability.

- **Create a “Craft Made in Lebanon” label** to foster brand recognition.
- **Subsidize the attendance of craftspeople to selected international fairs** on a regular basis.
- Provide artisans with a **database of events and fairs** they can attend.
- **Support the organization of local exhibitions** and festivals dedicated to crafts, involving municipalities in the process, in parallel to the creation of a major, permanent craft fair in Beirut or Tripoli as a craft platform for the Levant region.
- **Capitalize on Lebanon’s representations abroad**, such as the Lebanese embassies and their cultural and commercial attachés, and, in the past, the Lebanese Tourism Office in Paris, to act as a channel for the promotion of Lebanese crafts. Build bilateral relations with other the chambers of commerce (e.g., the French-Lebanese, German-Lebanese, and so on).
- **Create competitions to promote visibility** and bolster the recognition of craftspeople on the model of *Meilleur Ouvrier de France*,³⁰ which values various professions. Various recognized players can be part of the jury, including professors in fine arts and design universities, to increase both awareness and visibility. Refugees may be included to recognize their contribution, and to highlight the collaboration possible between host and refugee communities. Competitions could also be considered at the regional level with the objective of valuing local know-how.
- **Cooperate with a non-profit private local initiative or cluster** that would cater to the needs and promote a number of designers working with craftspeople. House of Today³¹ in the design field is an example. Create similar partnerships that would help promote Lebanese craft internationally, following the model of *Morocco’s Terre des Femmes*, and launch an institutional communication campaign in Lebanon and internationally, involving international media.
- **Leverage distribution channels**, both public and private, by, for example, displaying and distributing in hotels and at Beirut Airport Duty Free to reach tourists and the Lebanese diaspora; in museums beyond the National Museum and Sursock Museum; and in large retailers where urban residents shop.

³⁰-The Meilleurs Ouvrier de France (MOF) is a craftsmen competition held in France every four years. In it, candidates are given a certain amount of time and basic materials to create a masterpiece, aiming to attain perfection. The final result; but also the chosen method, the speed, the know-how, and the respect for the rules of the trade; are verified by a jury. The winning candidates retain their title for life. See:

<https://www.meilleursouvriersdefrance.info/concoursmaf.html>

³¹-Founded in 2012, House of Today is a non-profit organization that identifies, nurtures, mentors, curates, showcases and connects emerging Lebanese designers to create a relationship with design experts, regionally and globally. Retrieved from:

<https://www.houseoftoday.com/About-Hot/Mission-Vision.aspx>

- **Create and promote an e-commerce platform** for MoSA that would also sell products from other registered craftspeople in competitive conditions. In parallel, facilitate business for and incentivize private e-commerce platforms that sell craft products.
- **Provide artisans with a list of delivery/logistics start-ups** which can help their products access markets beyond their own local areas.
- **Create responsible and sustainable tourism destinations** articulated around crafts. There are examples to build upon: Fayoum and Nagada in Egypt, Bkerzay in Lebanon itself, and several *Terre des Femmes* projects in Morocco, whereby the association has encouraged rural lodges and bed and breakfasts to receive tourists in search for human contact and cultural encounters.
- **Renovate and upgrade old souks** across regions such as Saida, Tripoli, and Anjar.

In light of the economic and job creation potential they offer, certain sectors should be addressed as priorities:

- *Textiles* (weaving, embroidery, carpets, tapestry, etc.): Thousands of women are involved in the sector across multiple regions, notably in marginalized areas such as Akkar and the northern Bekaa. Many initiatives have brought together Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian women and UN agencies; UNHCR, in particular, has been involved in the sector. The example of Wissa Wassef Art Center in Egypt³² can be an inspiration.
- *Pottery and ceramics* are trendy worldwide. Though potters import raw material, it is possible to explore local soil. Fayoum Pottery School³³ can be used as a model.
- *Woodwork*, given Tripoli's potential, and the Minjara initiative, if it is still possible to capitalize on it.
- *Copper and brass*.
- *Soapmaking* is relatively easy to develop, as it does not require significant capital investment, and Lebanese soaps have been well-received in regional fairs, according to MoSA's Najwa Bdeir. The availability of olive oil is also a plus that can be leveraged, in cooperation with municipalities and the Ministry of Agriculture.
- *Straw*: the availability of the raw material makes it easy to develop; however, production costs remain high compared to southeast Asian competition, and innovation in designs is largely missing.

Some sectors would take longer and require greater efforts to upgrade, such as wood and brass, whereas soap, for instance, is easier. Nevertheless, for the purpose of a national long-term strategy, we would prioritize sectors with strong export and growth potential. For an optimized selection, detailed market and feasibility studies must be undertaken.

³²-Near the pyramids at Giza, the Art Center was founded in the early 1950s by the late architect Ramses Wissa Wassef as a weaving school. It has since evolved to comprise workshops and showrooms, a pottery and sculpture museum, houses and farm buildings, constructed entirely of mud brick. Retrieved from:

<https://archnet.org/sites/212>

³³-Established in the 1970s by Swiss artists, Evelyne Porret and Michel Pastore, this school, which trains children and adults in the local pottery traditions, is set in the Fayoum oasis, 130 km southwest of Cairo.

Funding

Access to financing in an independent fashion, and moreover for marginalized, vulnerable communities, is essential. Most funding has come from international organizations such as the EU, the UN and cooperating agencies, and cultural NGOs such as the British Council, funding projects designed by the funders themselves. These have mostly concentrated on vocational training, capacity building, and quality upgrading. Funding has also been limited in duration, whereas developing a crafts industry takes time; hence the need for recurring and long-term support and funding across the entire value chain.

Many of the recommendations below are currently difficult to implement amid the financial and economic crisis through which Lebanon is going. Nonetheless, they remain key for the revival of the sector, and some may be adopted through private or international initiatives.

- **Allocate a budget to MoSA's Crafts Department and *La Maison de l'Artisan*** in accordance with their prerogatives.
- **Allocate a budget to the relevant departments** within the ministries of Culture, Tourism, Industry, and Economy and Trade that can support the craft sector, each according to their powers.
- **Allocate a budget for crafts within selected municipalities** that have the financial means, particularly the largest cities.
- **Establish partnerships with both local and foreign microfinance institutions** such as PlaNet Finance³⁴ and crowdfunding platforms.
- **Establish partnerships with Lebanese diaspora associations** and platforms that are looking to give back to communities in the homeland.
- **Allow and favor mitigation of financial institutions' risk** via refinancing and appropriate risk-sharing programs. **Re-orient Kafalat's role in view of the current financial crisis** and endow it with the role of managing credits and grants allocated to the sector. The organization has currently stopped giving guarantees as banks are not providing loans.
- **Propose a program designed by Lebanese stakeholders** and competent authorities and submit it to international donors and institutions, rather than the other way around.

³⁴- PlaNet Finance is an international non-profit organization, which aims to alleviate poverty by contributing to the development of the microfinance sector.

www.planetfinance.org

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