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# Cultural Ecosystem in the Arab Region: Strategic Insights for Supportive Resources and Policies

Policy paper  
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# BEFORE WE START

## INTRODUCTION

This policy paper delves into the intricate cultural landscape of the Arab region and the evolving conditions of cultural practices at work. It serves as a guiding compass for policymakers, fund holders, philanthropists, intermediaries, and private sectors by providing them with evidence-based insights to inform future decision-making processes on resource allocation in the region. Additionally, it caters to cultural actors who aspire to play more strategic and catalytic roles in their respective environments.

### Unveiling Opportunities through a Grounded Strategic Discourse

In this exploration, the policy paper draws upon invaluable lessons from the Thaqafa Dayer Maydoor or **All Around Culture** (AAC) program. Co-funded by the European Union and executed over a four-year period (2020-2024) by Culture Resource, L'art Rue, MitOst e.V., and the MMAG Foundation, this collaborative initiative provides tangible representations of the evolving dynamics in urban and rural settings across seven Arab countries. By delving into emerging opportunities and grassroots energies, this document skillfully navigates the turbulent, uncertain, and hostile work conditions, with the goal of contributing to the development of a resilient cultural ecosystem across the Southern Mediterranean contexts. We aim at bridging the gap between high-level decision-makers and the realities on the ground, particularly amidst periods of unrest.

Rather than limiting our focus solely to the observed outcomes of the program, we present a strategic discourse that introduces fresh perspectives on cultural resources in the Arab region. We actively encourage stakeholders to delve into cultural contributions within their respective contexts, fostering a comprehensive understanding that takes into consideration immediate challenges and emergency viewpoints. However, the aim is to go beyond this and strategically reflect on the alternative approaches needed to support the ecosystem of resources, networks, rights, and working conditions of actors at a structural level.

### Shifting Priorities Amidst Global Challenges

By transcending traditional aid outlooks, we underscore the need to bring cultural work to the forefront. In times of crises like the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, the Gaza genocide, wars, and economic upheavals, decisions on priorities and resource allocation may be faced with conflicting concerns. Culture often takes a backseat. However, the paper highlights the pivotal role culture plays in sustaining life ecosystems and enhancing the quality of life. It challenges the downplayed role of culture in the face of various challenges and crises.

### The Downplayed and Challenged Role of Culture

Culture is not detached from the contexts of concern, irrelevant to societal resilience, or solely endorsing the role of entertaining or creative production for marketable purposes. Acknowledging interdependencies between culture, places, and governance is crucial. Culture and cultural practices shape beliefs, mindsets, imagination, and the ability to protect life-worlds, survive, and

propel societies forward. They inform the ability to respond, pause, reconstruct, and envision a different pathway to stand firm in the most challenging conditions.

In the Arab region, the cultural field grapples with a dual challenge, encompassing both surveillance and agency. Internally, there is a struggle against a less supportive public sector and conservative public attitudes. Externally, there is a battle against double standards and colonial discourse, particularly heightened after the events of October and amidst the ongoing tragedy in Gaza. Navigating this complex situation involves recommending policy changes through thoughtful introspection within cultural institutions about their role in addressing external pressures and hostility.

While the paper does not address all the questions raised by the cultural field after October 2023, it draws upon the four-year experience of All Around Culture, offering practical insights to navigate these uncertain and challenging times. It sheds light on the dynamics at play from 2020 until October 2023.

### **Testament of Resilience: All Around Culture Program**

Over the past four years, the region grappled with the Covid-19 pandemic, economic inflation, political pressures, occupation and war, extreme weather events, and environmental upheavals. All Around Culture (AAC) stands as a testament to resilience, spotlighting how cultural practitioners in the region continue working firmly despite hurdles. AAC and its pool of actors, amounting to 93 organizations and initiatives, offer a unique opportunity to produce a contextual understanding about cultural practices and their roles in the Arab region: how is culture practiced? In what sectors and forms? From where and for what purpose?

By profiling this sample of supported realities, we conduct an analytical review of portfolios/collaborations and propose a framework for the co-production of practice-based knowledge. This framework seeks to inquire about the benefits of culture in the region and its embeddedness in the provision system of ecosystem functions, services and rights. This specific ecosystem, grassroots, and geo-referenced approach to understanding cultural practices does not only challenge traditional economic techniques for capturing cultural impact but also addresses the limitations of strictly profit and market-based cultural policies. It also emphasizes an outlook that delves into the resources and assets on which practitioners rely to fulfill their roles. This approach paves the way to interpreting cultural impact within an interdependent system of contributions. It investigates the quality of interactions between the natural and built environment, communities, social well-being, goods, and systems of knowledge and capacitation.

### **A Clear Objective**

Therefore, the policy paper embarks on a grounded analytical journey to chart a course toward long-term agile working conditions for a culture woven into the fabric of societies, possessing the power to bring about change. In the first chapter, we offer 4 guiding stars to un-bias the perceptions about the region at local and international levels and guide the perspective to support systemic change. In the second chapter, we outline a set of recommendations necessary to support the various impact fields and structural conditions to maintain an agile cultural ecosystem in the long term. By initiating a strategic, comprehensive yet non-exhaustive exploration of the resources on which cultural actors rely, the paper unveils distinct levels of proposals and needs essential for a sustained and active existence, all rooted in empirical evidence. For readers with the time and curiosity for a deeper understanding, the paper concludes with an exploration of the

socio-ecological role of All Around Culture (AAC) practices in the third chapter. This exploration yielded critical insights that inform resource and policy alignments. The overarching objective is to provide recommendations for future policy and program design decisions, grounded in narratives originating from grassroots intentions and ecosystem perspective, fostering a regional collective imaginary.

## OVERVIEW OF ALL AROUND CULTURE

### Empowering the Cultural Ecosystem

The All Around Culture Program (AAC) aims at strengthening the cultural ecosystem in the Arab Region, specifically in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan, and for the diaspora from Syria and Libya. The primary objective is to establish an enabling environment for the political, social, and economic inclusion of young people. This is crucial, given that youth constitute a substantial portion of the population in the region, and investing in their creative and cultural engagement is considered a means to promote social cohesion, well-being, and economic growth. The initiative aligns with Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, promoting freedom of expression and adopting a rights-based approach. AAC employs an ecosystem approach, emphasizing collaboration, diverse funding opportunities, education for emerging talents, and support for cultural initiatives and professional infrastructure. It addresses the weak cultural infrastructure beyond urban centers and involves diverse groups: established cultural organizations, promising initiatives/organizations, and young artists/collectives/cultural operators. Notably, at least 55% of the funded action activities materialize as sub-grants for [Cultural Alliances](#), [Youth-Led initiatives](#), [South-South-North Collaborations](#), and learning opportunities.

Drawing insights from previous initiatives, such as the 'SouthMed CV and Drama, Diversity and Development program', AAC integrates skills development and learning at various levels during the project. This involves building the capacity of over 90 organizations and initiatives, facilitated by three [ecosystem academies](#) and peer-to-peer mentorship. An [online toolbox](#) developed to support organizational development and collaboration is now available. The EU DG NEAR, the funding body, attests to the intervention's effectiveness, supporting access to resources for cultural and artistic production in underserved areas. Key achievements include establishing 11 local cultural alliances, supporting 31 young cultural actors in research, and completing 23 production projects focused on community-based underserved areas, along with 10 regional collaborations involving 30 cultural actors. The project did not only foster successful working relationships but also laid the groundwork for future collaborations, offering valuable opportunities for grantees, including networking, and technical and artistic guidance.

### Policy Paper: A Forward-looking Knowledge Sharing

In response to the need to draw more attention to the region and the cultural field, this policy paper aims at filling a crucial gap by providing a concise overview and sharing strategic recommendations for understanding and supporting a vital ecosystem for cultural work in the region. Reflecting on both past and future perspectives, interventions like AAC are rare, due to limited donor agencies. However, AAC is considered a valuable reference for future programming. Several high-level dialogues have been initiated: The AAC's coordinator engaged with the European Parliament to advance cultural cooperation and the inclusion of civil society in future European cultural programs. Furthermore, in late 2022, the author facilitated discussions among

stakeholders in the region to develop the new Action Document for the upcoming EU granting scheme. These dialogues, hosted by the Cultural Relations Platform, included AAC grantees, partners, funders from the Arab region, and EU delegations. This led to the EU DG NEAR approval of an Action Document in 2023, guiding future proposals to support eco-cultural systems.

### A Shift in Methods

Regarding the policy paper development, a regional forum in Jordan, unfortunately disrupted by the ongoing events in Gaza, was intended to inform the content of this text with the contribution of 60 key actors and provide a ground for exchange between policy experts, makers, and practitioners. The tragic events in Gaza, Palestine, necessitated a shift in data collection methods, resulting in a knowledge-focused policy paper based on evidence from various sources. Primary sources involve a strategic profiling of AAC grantees, conducted by the author in collaboration with work package leaders of the All Around Culture Program, as well as secondary sources (mid-term evaluation reports, including EU ROM report, research papers on challenges and alternative models, and other literature on the region). Insights from the policy paper underwent a series of feedback loops and dialogues with key actors from the Arab region and Europe. Furthermore, integrating the reflection on challenges and achievements has contributed to the contextual reflection presented in this paper.





# CHAPTER 01

## CULTURAL WORK IN THE ARAB REGION: EXPLORING EMERGING PRACTICES, CHALLENGES & GUIDING “STARS” FOR FUTURE POLICY DESIGN.

### Challenges and Alternative Models for Sustainability

The shortcomings in cultural policies in the Arab region may be attributed to the limited involvement of cultural actors in formulating policies that directly impact them. This lack of engagement hinders flexibility and innovation within cultural institutions. Numerous studies<sup>1</sup> highlight various issues contributing to this failure, including inadequate government funding, political restrictions, unfair distribution favoring profitable sectors, difficulties in securing international funding, and obstacles related to institutionalization and legislation affecting cultural initiatives<sup>2</sup>. Commissioned researchers countries, in the frame of All Around Culture, conducted in-depth interviews with the program actors and grantees (*mainly alliances*) to identify the challenges in operational modes and identify alternative models (Borham A., El Mouled S., 2023). Key emerging themes encompass obstacles in developing joint action and alliances, shortcomings in government and foreign financing, and challenges related to institutionalization and legislation.

The study argues that the conventional practice of regarding cultural value solely as an economic resource has imposed undue pressure on cultural actors. This shift has transformed collective responsibilities into individual burdens, resulting in the abandonment of cultural activities. The "Creative Biotope" model proposes an alternative system that aims at restoring balance across four domains (Local, Peers, Market, and Civil) by endorsing the concept of commons. This approach encourages resource sharing and solidarity frameworks among cultural actors. While these elements are pivotal for supporting economic sustainability and overcoming legislative challenges, this chapter introduces four guiding stars. These stars shape a strategic perspective that transcends biases hindering policymaking and supportive efforts, advocating for a broader, decolonized approach to resource the region's cultural ecosystem.

The foundational concept extends beyond elucidating the challenges faced by cultural actors. It encompasses a systemic view that considers both internal opportunity dynamics responding to challenges and external disruptions that may alter working conditions in the near future. Once minds are aligned, the paper provides recommendations for future resourcing areas (Chapter 02), adapted to contextual, emerging forms and trends in practice. This is grounded in a

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<sup>1</sup> Intissar Kherigi, "Civil Society in a Time of Transition". *EUROMED Survey*. <https://www.iemed.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/01.Civil-Society-in-a-Time-of-Transition.pdf>; Freemuse report 2021 & 2022: <https://freemuse.org>

<sup>2</sup> *Complicated bureaucratic procedures and government restrictions in Algeria and Tunisia create challenges in the transfer of funds for cultural projects from foreign donors. Similar issues, such as funding restrictions and delays, are encountered in Palestine and Jordan, while Egyptian NGOs face lengthy approval processes for funding. Political instability and the lack of access to culture further compound the difficulties. In Algeria, there's limited access to cultural spaces, and in Egypt, obtaining permission for field research or public events is a challenge without local connections. In Morocco, the cultural context is evolving, but certain groups face performance restrictions during emergencies. Continuous aggression, occupation and war in Palestine restrict free movement, and destroy cultural assets. This underscores the need for streamlined processes and improved conditions for cultural initiatives across these regions.*

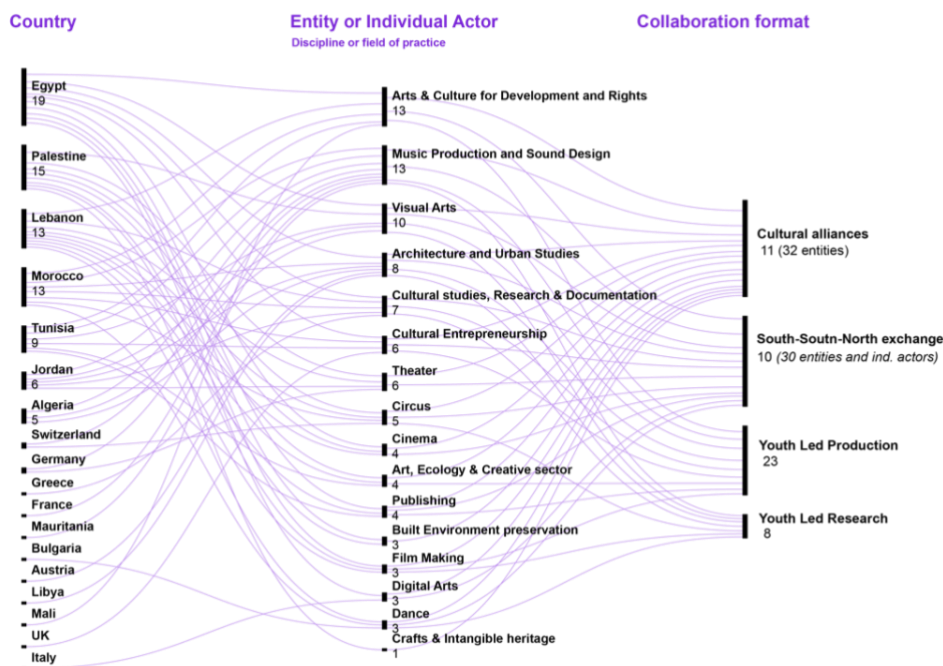


comprehensive and contextual understanding of cultural work and its contributions to the cultural ecosystem of services and rights (Chapter 03).

## GUIDING STARS FOR FUTURE POLICIES

### Guiding star 01 - Support Ecosystem Resilience through Facts and System Memory with Programs like All Around Culture.

Ecosystem resilience, shaped by factors like diversity, redundancy, modularity, connectivity, adaptability, transformability, and learning, is a complex concept, often abstract and difficult to interpret. The All Around Culture Program demonstrated the significance of diversity, connectivity, and learning across practice modes<sup>3</sup>, spaces, and locations, thereby providing a tangible overview of the contemporary cultural landscape.



Future programming and policymaking processes and stakeholders are encouraged to gain a thorough understanding of the profiles, geographical distribution, and assets of cultural actors to inform reflections on the determinants of ecosystem resilience. AAC supported 93 organizations and initiatives across seven countries in the Arab Region. A breakdown of sectors and disciplines reveals a diverse environment, with concentrations in Arts & Culture for Development and Rights (13.9%), Music Production and Sound Design (13.9%), Visual Arts (10.8%), Architecture and

<sup>3</sup> Profile 01: Established organizations play a strong role in their local context and region, demonstrating lasting experience in areas of interest (youth and remote areas, secluded groups of society), contributing to community development through socially engaged practices, especially in underserved areas. They exhibit strong capacities in cultural productions and public outreach, benefiting from a strong local network, especially with key players. They ensure a hub role locally, holding expertise, providing services and facilities (e.g. training, access to physical space, etc.), financially more robust than new initiatives. Profile 02: promising organizations, rooted in artist-led grassroots initiatives, engage in developing cross-disciplinary innovative practices, responding to local needs, and giving visibility to local talents (e.g. youth) and socially engaged initiatives in remote areas or reaching out to secluded groups of society. Profile 03: youth-led initiatives, ranging from young artists, artist collectives, to cultural operators, demonstrate a commitment to contextual work involving local communities. Despite a lack of sustainable visions or long-term plans, they bring forth new ideas, experiment with cross-disciplinary approaches, particularly in underserved areas, with the potential for impactful dissemination in the ENP-South region.

Urban Studies (8.6%), Cultural Studies, Research & Documentation (7.5%), Theater (6.5%), Circus (5.4%), Cinema (4.3%), Art, Ecology & Creative Sector (4.3%), Publishing (4.3%), Built Environment Preservation (3.2%), Film Making (3.2%), Digital Arts (3.2%), Dance (3.2%), and Crafts and Intangible Heritage (1.1%). The diverse collaboration focuses on cultural documentation (19.4%), arts and culture for development (29%), creative and cultural economy (9.7%), culture for community placemaking (10.8%), exploring new organizational modes of practice (16.1%), crafts and intangible heritage promotion (11.8%), and architecture and cultural heritage (3.2%).



Geographically, concentrations are observed in Egypt (20.4%), Palestine (16.1%), Lebanon (13.9%), Morocco (13.9%), Tunisia (9.7%), Jordan (6.5%), Algeria (5.4%), and Libya (1.1%). This distribution highlights varying levels of ease in reaching cultural actors among countries or the difficulty of operating as a cultural reality. Furthermore, although the program focuses on underserved areas, especially outside urban centers, 68 organizations are based in capitals or major cities (73.1%), 10 are located in rural or remote areas (10.8%)—mostly represented by youth-led initiatives—and around 16 operate from mid or small-sized cities, mostly serving underprivileged societies in their operation areas (including informal settlements, internal areas and poverty belts). Activities are primarily concentrated in urban areas (54.8%), while 34.4% of activities span both urban and rural or remote regions, and the remaining 10% of activities operate exclusively in rural areas. The easy access to essential resources often facilitated the establishment of organizations in urban areas, enabling them to implement strategies and connect with a chain of actors. In contrast, youth-led initiatives with flexible forms of exercise (not venue-based) highly rely on community-based production and research and find grounds in rural areas. They especially benefit from digital access or the tie with an established local community.

However, urban location does not prevent the development of a cultural portfolio for communities in peripheral and rural areas, especially in countries where geographic proximity plays a favorable factor (e.g., Lebanon, Tunisia, Palestine, and Jordan). Simultaneously, even when entities benefit from easier access to resources in urban contexts, they must preserve their ability and assets to

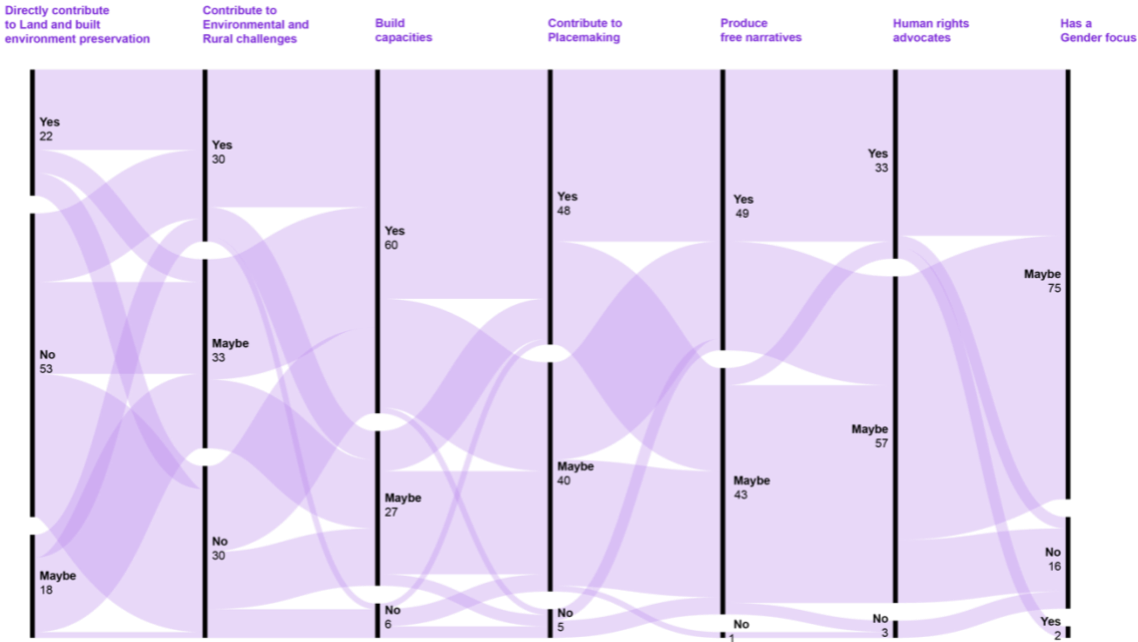
thrive amid an increasingly fragile political and economic environment. The impact of political instability on cultural activities is evident in Lebanon, where the centralization of arts and culture in Beirut has faced significant disruptions, especially after the 2020 Beirut port blast. Similar challenges have arose when the price of energy and basic needs have increased, affecting the running costs of venues (offices, cinema, theater, etc.). Organizations serve various roles, with 45.2% functioning as venue holders and 54.8% providing accessible production assets and commons. Established or community-led organizations often act as hubs for newly born actors. This interdependence, coupled with the diversity of sectors, geographies, and country needs, should inform future policymaking. Approaches should target diversity, support connectivity, influence the flow of energy and resources, ensure the presence of multiple functional groups, safeguard independent forms of practice, resource upskilling to adapt to technological advancements and integrate grassroots needs for significant transformability, including legal and economic transformability in response to challenges. In a qualitative inquiry, 70% of supported organizations and initiatives are exploring income stream diversification for long-lasting operational conditions.



**Guiding Star 02: Move Beyond Aid: Embracing a Cultural Ecosystem Services Perspective with Embedded Emergency Response**

In the Arab region, it is essential for upcoming support initiatives to embrace an alternative perspective, moving beyond the conventional narrative centered on aid, needs, and emergencies. Our in-depth analysis of the AAC grantees highlights their substantial contribution to cultural ecosystem services, collectively shaping and enriching diverse cultural contexts and landscapes.

Within the AAC, 32.3% of supported organizations and initiatives address environmental and rural challenges, with an additional 23% of supported organizations and initiatives dedicated to the preservation of land and built environments. A significant 64.5% of supported organizations and initiatives actively contribute to enhancing the capacities of their surroundings, providing learning opportunities and training for youth, women, and local communities. Furthermore, over half (51.6%) of supported organizations and initiatives engage in placemaking, creating well-being experiences for the local population. Additionally, 52.7% of supported organizations and initiatives are involved in producing decolonized and alternative narratives on - underrepresented topics such as gender, cultural heritage, and climate. Notably, 35.5% of organizations champion human rights, addressing aspects like land rights, gender equality, access to water, public space, and labor.



Both non-material<sup>4</sup> and material benefits are derived from ecosystems through cultural practices and experiences<sup>5</sup>. Future support initiatives must avoid the potentially disempowering claim that culture is irrelevant, as these benefits significantly impact the context. The concept of 'cultural ecosystem services' (Fish 2016), if adopted and tested as this paper did, has the potential to guide future policy lenses, encompassing the life-enhancing contributions of ecosystems to human well-being, placemaking, and natural resource management (e.g., water, green spaces, rurality). This concept integrates culture into the framework of holistic resource management, placing ecosystem services within their cultural geography. The approach guided our profiling of the AAC grantees (chapter 3) to demonstrate the interdependence between environmental spaces (where people interact with nature and material environments), cultural practices (activities and interactions that connect people to each other and the built and natural world), cultural benefits (aspects of well-being associated with these interactions, encompassing

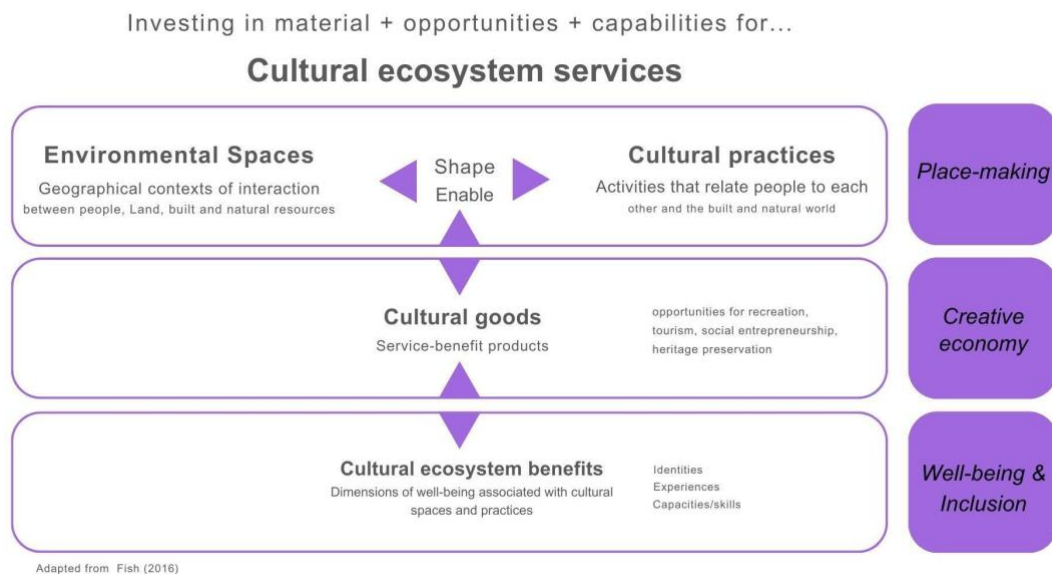
<sup>4</sup> Immaterial services include spiritual enrichment, cognitive development, recreation, aesthetic experiences, knowledge systems, inspiration, social relations, a sense of place, and cultural heritage values.

<sup>5</sup> Material benefits encourage exploring the role of cultural practices in placemaking, evident in public spaces and community venues, as well as their contribution to shaping and preserving the environmental spaces in which these practices occur, including built heritage and natural resources like water, soil, and land.

identities, experiences, and capacities), and cultural goods<sup>6</sup>.

We aspire to inform an approach for evidence-based decision-making on resource management and allocation to preserve vital conditions for cultural practices in the region, considering the “essential” roles they fulfill, the diverse forms they operate with, and the assets they employ. The integration of cultural ecosystem services into policy and emergency response planning can shift the perspective on aid and empowerment towards a more integrated approach, providing means for the expression of local strategies of development and preservation, aware of the assets that cultural actors stand on and employ to perform, and knowledgeable about the risks they face.

This becomes particularly crucial in the face of numerous factors that can disrupt cultural ecosystem services and compromise their resilience, including occupation, war, environmental degradation, urbanization, and socio-economic changes. Such disturbances can significantly impact cultural practices, leading to the destruction of life-worlds, erosion of traditional knowledge systems, and a decline in the quality of cultural experiences and production. Urbanization, land-use changes, political conflicts, and climate change contribute to the loss of cultural landscapes, altering traditional practices and even affecting energy provision necessary for sustaining cultural productions and venues.



### Guiding Star 03: Build Transformative Capacities for Sustainable Cultural Ecosystems in the Face of Contextual Disruptions

Transformative capacity development aims at instigating systemic change towards sustainability by empowering and influencing human-environment systems. Future supportive frameworks and policies should focus on nurturing the collective ability of stakeholders to conceive, prepare for, initiate, and implement path-deviant changes for achieving sustainability. This requires recognizing the intricate interplay between political, social, economic, and technological factors.

<sup>6</sup> Cultural goods represent both material and immaterial expressions of cultural practices, including local art, artifacts, media, stories, archives, festivals, performances, food, drink, fiber, ornaments, and other products of interest for creative and cultural economies. These goods contribute to a series of cultural benefits like human well-being by framing identities, enabling pleasant experiences, and shaping skills and capacities.

In future design and research, three key variables should be considered: the resource perspective, power dynamics, and disruptive forces.

### 1. Resource Perspective:

Understanding how various forms of resources impact capacity underscores the importance of resource availability and accessibility. Transformative capacity, defined as the power to bring about change, is rooted in empowered actors who can modify rules governing the interpretation and access to resources. Future actions should emphasize how resources are directed into or out of development and collaboration processes, beyond solely focusing on their current framing and availability. The emphasis should, therefore, extend beyond tangible resources to encompass intangibles, organizational dynamics, and the interplay between science, technology, society, and geographic location.

### 2. Power Dynamics:

The concept of 'capacity' in relation to 'power' varies. Some equate capacity development to the empowerment of subjects, while others focus on resource access as a source of power. Power, in this context, is the actors' capacity to mobilize resources to achieve specific goals, emphasizing the need to understand and navigate power dynamics, within organizations, among organizations, and between organizations and their context of practice (society – perception and education, politics – legislations and subventions).

### 3. Disruptive Forces:

Developing pathways for a vital and agile cultural ecosystem requires considering both contextual and disruptive factors and their translation at the local level. Disruptive forces in the region<sup>7</sup> include political instability, occupation and war, economic inflation and instability, funding constraints, digital and AI disruption, climate change, and demographic changes. These forces can hinder the development of cultural ecosystems, requiring proactive actions and resource channeling for adaptability and agility.

Recognizing the fragility of cultural ecosystems, integrating emergency response becomes imperative. The readiness to provide emergency and solidarity responses has proven fundamental in recent years, underscoring the pivotal role played by intermediaries, civil society, and cultural actors in maintaining essential service provision and preserving rights during times of crisis and contextual disruptions. In the Arab region, cultural actors navigate constant hostility and uncertainty, requiring continuous replanning and resource mobilization. Emergency response efforts directly contribute to maintaining the stability of these actors and their infrastructures, allowing them to persevere and continue fulfilling their vital roles. Sustaining this capacity over the long term forms the backbone of ecosystem sustainability.

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<sup>7</sup> *Many countries in the region have experienced political instability, which can lead to a lack of investment in cultural infrastructure and a decrease in cultural activities. Devaluation and economic restrictions are posing several limitations in the way cultural actors can manage their budget to cover their operations and develop their portfolio or reach their audience. Many actors in the region are not aware of the importance of cultural ecosystems, which can lead to a lack of support and investment. The rise of digital technology and artificial intelligence has disrupted many traditional cultural productions, ownership rights, which can impact the viability of cultural ecosystems. Climate change can have a significant impact on cultural ecosystems, such as damaging cultural sites, provoking shortcoming in energy provision or impacting outdoor cultural events. Population growth and changing demographics in the region can impact the demand for cultural activities and the types of cultural products and services that are in demand. The multiplication of conflicts as well as the rise of new cultural poles (Saudi Arabia) is expected to increase the brain drain of talents causing shortcuts in the local and creative value chains of cultural work in highly challenged contexts.*

To anticipate, where possible, and provide quick response to disruptions, it is essential to comprehend the operations of cultural actors and the specific destabilization and challenges they currently face or may encounter in the future. This understanding requires a deep knowledge of the ground reality, allowing for an exploration of internal ongoing transformations or challenges within the cultural landscape. Consequently, policymaking efforts should adopt several key considerations. These include sustaining intermediaries that facilitate reality-based institutional sense-making, and addressing the social and community needs integral to cultural ecosystems. Essential components for effective policymaking encompass an awareness of system(s) memory and energy, fostering transdisciplinary co-production of knowledge, and the development of a collective vision for alternative scenarios. Supporting community-based experimentation, ensuring access to resources at multiple scales (rural and urban, digital), and establishing supportive regulatory frameworks are critical aspects that should be prioritized.

### **Hence, we recommend focusing on strategic key topics in future agendas for Cultural Policy Research and Design:**

#### **The future crisis and cultural adaptation: artificial intelligence and environmental change**

The challenges posed by artificial intelligence and environmental change require a nuanced policy approach. The discussion on "Cultural Adaptation in a World of Disruptive Trends" (AI, Environment) provides insights into exploring cultural resilience. Future policies should strike a balance between harnessing AI as an enabler and mitigating its potential threats to the working and cultural ecosystem. Moreover, future policies should delve into the local impact of environmental change and structural risks on the working conditions of the cultural sectors.

#### **The democratic challenge: fair local and regional policies**

Addressing the democratic challenge within cultural ecosystems requires a dual focus: designing fair local and national policies and regionally addressing emerging double standard discourses and media propaganda around the Arab region. Policies should foster inclusivity, transparency, and representation at the grassroots level. Support should be extended to models navigating legislative constraints and promoting decolonized discourse and design within cultural ecosystems. Future discussions should shine a spotlight on critical questions raised by the cultural sector regarding the role of the public sector—whether it acts as a supportive force, imposes restrictions, or presents an opportunity for restructuring with input derived from emerging decision-making processes within the cultural field.

#### **Commons as a supportive pathway in contexts of government inaction**

The rise of solidarity practices in response to government inaction requires policies that support and amplify these alternatives. The exploration of "Commoning as a Supportive Pathway" reveals changing forms of practice needed to inform future policy design directions beyond traditional understandings of entities as self-reliant operational and legally structured bodies.

#### **Economic alternative models and strategic autonomy of cultural practices**

To support strategic financial autonomy for cultural practices, future cultural and policy dialogues should establish more dialogues over the reforms needed to connect with emerging economic models. The topic on "Economic Sustainability/Independence through Cultural Transitions" can inspire future concrete case mapping and strategic dialogues and mentorship to create a roadmap

for achieving economic sufficiency and independence for cultural practitioners. Policies can facilitate the transition of cultural practices into alternative economic models, considering models like Commons, Shared Economy, Social Economy, and Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI). It is essential to encourage efforts that avoid restricting the exploration of alternatives solely to the market economy and CCI. Cultural goods represent only one component of the broader spectrum of what cultural practices entail, contributing significantly to the Cultural Ecosystem of Services and Rights, as outlined above.

#### **Guiding Star 04: Take Risks in Policy/Program Evaluation & Design**

When addressing the challenges of cultural vitality in the region, a crucial aspect to consider is the evaluation of policies and its connection to risk-taking. The cultural ecosystem grapples with uncertainties, requiring a thoughtful approach to policy assessment. This becomes particularly challenging in a rapidly changing landscape, making it difficult to measure achievements against a shifting baseline. Cultural resilience relies on risk-taking, yet decision-makers' tolerance is shaped by how cultural activities are measured. The choice of evaluation methods can either discourage or encourage risk-taking. In bureaucratic frameworks, decision-makers' inclination to take risks diminishes, impacting actions and problem-solving. Traditional measures fall short in capturing the richness of cultural adaptability, hindering both actions and problem-solving. Decision-makers should evaluate policies using methods that promote learning and prioritize ground players' sense making, crucial for achieving objectives and alleviating accountability burdens during their missions.

To resource cultural capacities effectively, decision-makers must adopt nontraditional evaluation methods that foster adaptability. Decision-makers need to grasp the significance of experimentation and actively explore new solutions within the cultural context. Evaluation methods should, in turn, encourage learning and creative missions rather than solely focusing on measured results. Therefore, decision-makers must develop skills in navigating risks. Additionally, there is an imperative to start sharing and creating evaluation frameworks that support an open approach to risk, fostering an environment conducive to cultural ecosystem adaptability and sustainability.





# CHAPTER 02

## CULTURAL ECOSYSTEMS OF TOMORROW: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTIVE RESOURCES AND POLICIES

A grassroots-based policy and program design possess the potential to effectively allocate resources to diverse causes and endeavors promoted by on-the-ground actors. In this chapter, we propose key fields of support to ensure that the cultural ecosystem's impact is woven into the Arab region's collective grassroots energy. Resource allocation should consider local priorities, sector diversity, value chains, geographies, and emerging models to counter pressures and meet disruptions. The analysis of the socio-ecological landscape of cultural actors gives rise to different intervention fields, outlined in the table below and elaborated in chapter 03. The preceding chapter offers an evidence-based overview, catering to the curiosity of those eager to explore further and connect with tangible experiences from the region. This section presents proposals grounded in this evidence, with the aim of optimizing the reader's time by promptly highlighting areas worthy of support in upcoming resource allocation and supportive measures.

The presented proposals and strategic frameworks are crafted to capture attention and inspire future actions across a spectrum of stakeholders, including policymakers, governments, asset holders (private and public), philanthropists, investors, and cultural stakeholders such as program managers and intermediaries. These proposals advocate for informed decisions in future support areas, transcending traditional funding paradigms to involve stakeholders from various sectors, recognizing their potential for engaging creative skills. Consequently, the integrated resource strategy aims at engaging with different actors and sectors beyond the confines of conventional cultural spheres such as tourism, sports, industry, fashion, etc, extending its reach beyond the region's boundaries.

We initiate by presenting guiding elements for future strategic FAIR support aligned with the principles of Fairness, Accessibility, Inclusivity, and Resilience. Subsequently, we outline two cross-cutting proposals and six impact field proposals. These proposals have the potential to influence high-level measures, addressing various impact fields and practices, and collectively contributing to the resilience and sustainability of the cultural ecosystem in the Arab Region. They provide a strategic framework for policymakers, asset holders, and cultural stakeholders to make informed decisions over future supportive areas, considering the challenges and opportunities emerging in a rapidly evolving cultural landscape.

**Intervention field 01: community well-being, rights, and social impact**

Empowering gender & women initiatives  
Safeguarding community cultural rights  
Addressing dwelling, temporality, access to land and resources, and migration topics  
Community engagement in shaping rural futures

**Intervention field 02: environment, ecology and rights**

Encouraging multifaceted impact of art and culture in environmental sustainability  
Advancing transformative rural/urban development and environmental stewardship  
Integrating culture and ecology of natural resources (eg. water) and vernacular storytelling for just transition  
Tackling climate change through intercultural place-based perspectives

**Intervention field 03: creativity, education, and youth agency**

Nurturing creative digital art residency programs  
Establishing shared learning platforms  
Incubating artistic entrepreneurship initiatives  
Facilitating cultural events and touring for regular access to culture in underserved areas

**Intervention field 04: regeneration of cultural heritage and the natural environment**

Providing platform for improved built and natural environments regeneration and placemaking  
Utilizing archives and creative media for promoting cultural legacies amidst polarization and hate discourse  
Reviving crafts, craftsmanship and creative economy  
Preserving and innovating in the musical heritage

**Intervention field 05: changing economic models for cultural practices**

Strengthening cultural alliances and resource sharing platforms  
Exploring new modes of cultural production for economic sustainability  
Promoting self-finance and alternative revenue streams

**Intervention field 06: digital innovation and global connectivity**

Exploring digital collaboration of trans-local connectivity and co-production  
Enabling digital capacitation for cultural actors and creative industries  
Supporting creative media for alternative community engagement and outreach

## **BRIEF AREAS OF ACTION FOR FAIR SUPPORT**

### **1. Risk-taking support for creative individuals, organizations, and alternative collaborative alliances**

FAIR supportive frameworks shall adopt risk-taking mindsets to support experimental cultural grounds, acknowledging inherent risks and embracing opportunities for groundbreaking changes in evolving forms of practice. This includes adapting to emerging local priorities during times of economic and political unrest. Support should consider diverse practices, spanning from individual efforts to institutional initiatives.

### **2. Structural support for cultural venues and infrastructures**

FAIR policies are called to consider the structural needs of cultural venues, including maintenance, regeneration, and energy transition costs. This action is vital for ensuring the maintenance of existing structures or the redesigning of under-used space for sustainable access to culture. Conducting a mapping and assessment at the local and regional levels of the state of venues would support informed and supportive frameworks.

### **3. Resourcing digital ownership and experimental production for creative practitioners within an ethical AI perspective and fair economies.**

Rapid advancements in automation and machine learning have led to tools generating music, visual arts, and creative writing, raising concerns about artists' labor. AI algorithms impact discoverability, burdening artists with constant content creation demands and supporting surveillance capitalism. In response, artists globally explore alternative digital income models, aiming to unite communities for the common good. Artists and fans advocate for fair payouts from platform corporations, establishing community-owned platforms and cooperatives<sup>8</sup>. Fair policies are essential to support cultural actors and artists in owning emerging technological advancements, keeping communities updated on trends. To ensure fair digital adaptation, close conversations with cultural actors and ethical AI experts are crucial for grassroots-based decision-making over the resources and upskilling needed for the ethical integration of technologies in cultural practices.

#### **4. Community engagement and youth agency and access to Arts and culture in urban and rural areas**

FAIR policies can diversify support across urban and rural areas in the region to foster community engagement, youth agency, and access to arts and culture. Governments and fund holders are invited to fund projects driven by local communities and youth-led initiatives, ensuring the proper resourcing of diverse perspectives and grassroots efforts.

#### **5. Commons and shared resources**

FAIR investments can be directed toward initiatives that promote commoning practices, community-owned cultural spaces, co-production venues, open-source cultural platforms, and a cultural data commons. Ensure that shared resources contribute to the resilience of the cultural ecosystem. This requires comprehensive research and assessment of the ongoing emerging configurations and infrastructure of commons.

#### **6. Eco-cultural projects through grass-root critical placemaking lens**

Governments, philanthropists, policy actors, and supportive program designers are encouraged to invest in initiatives that intersect culture and ecology, promoting resilient habitats informed by grassroots agendas and priorities. The topic of water emerges as a focal point, tapping into critical questions of scarcity and access to vital natural resources in the region. This grounded approach is fundamental for formulating just transition agendas at the local level.

#### **7. Youth and cultural actors' solidarity networks in times of geopolitical tensions**

FAIR policies must consider the geopolitical context, providing mechanisms to understand and navigate tensions. They are urged to facilitate youth and cultural actors' engagement in shaping solidarity and collaborative networks, addressing the consequences of geopolitical complexities. This is crucial in a time of rising polarized and colonized speech around the Arab region.

#### **8. Free expressions without imposed agendas to let the local weaving of cultural ecosystem services and rights emerge**

FAIR policies should safeguard the freedom of cultural and artistic expressions without imposing agendas, allowing artists and cultural organizations to preserve space for expressing local priorities. The perspective on the cultural ecosystem of services and rights employed in the analytical review for AAC grantees can provide a future ground for research and assessment of intrinsic responses proposed in the region to uplift the role of culture in supporting vital ecosystems of living.

#### **9. Collaborative knowledge co-production for cultural insights and long-**

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<sup>8</sup> <https://platform.coop/>

## **term structural ecosystem adaptation**

Within the cultural domain, particularly among intermediary players, inherent efforts are being made to unite and create spaces for collaborative knowledge building, looking to influence evidence-based program and policy design. These initiatives involve addressing pressing questions raised by cultural practitioners, such as the need to invest in cultural institutions, grappling with the responsibility burden, addressing precarity, the lack of services, and contemplating role-playing within the complex ecosystem of resources, networks, pressure, and workers and artists rights. Future supportive frameworks can fuel these efforts, catalyzing and scaling collective institutional sense making, fostering a decolonized imagination, undertaking courageous trials, and establishing strategic advocacy connections. The goal is to identify pathways and enact structural changes that safeguard essential conditions for sustainability at both local and regional levels in the long term.

# **CROSS-CUTTING PROPOSALS**

## **CLUSTER 01 ON RISK-TAKING SUPPORT**

### **Risk-taking support for youth and cultural initiatives and entrepreneurs**

Support youth-led and creative initiatives that can stretch the boundaries of cultural expressions and rights. Offer resources and encouragement to amplify creative endeavors that may face challenges in conventional funding avenues or restrictions in public funding streams. Endorsing free independent experimentation contributes to the dynamic cultural landscape, allowing local priorities, critical narratives, and creative expressions to emerge.

### **Risk-taking investments in changing organizational forms, governance model, alliances, and eco-system-driven practices:**

Support organizations that are looking to challenge their traditional structures. Long-term investments can be directed to collaborations and initiatives that explore the practice of ecosystem and/or commons to rethink the boundaries and contexts of practicing cultural work within a larger picture of sustainability. Future support frameworks can offer flexible learning and long-term planning structures to support organizations in dedicating time to develop innovative partnerships and structures. This support can help organizations explore alternative models to maintain existing practice or/and explore the feasibility of transitioning into alternative forms of practice, facilitating the legal and economic transformation steps with the help of ad hoc experts in the field.

## **CLUSTER 02 ON COMMONS AND STRATEGIC ALLIANCES**

Commoning and alliance-building emerge as a potential alternative approach to collaboration and practice. Future supportive frameworks could aid organizations expressing interest in pooling shared resources, including finance, equipment, venues, and expertise. This collaborative sharing manifests on the ground as a means for entities facing legal and economic restrictions to access essential resources. It enables them to leverage assets and exercise collective ownership and management. In all the following scenarios, support the availability of economic and legal experts to guide the organizations in shaping their collaborative governance and financial management.

### **Economic alliances for co-production, revenue and resource channeling:**

**Joint Revenue Generation Models:** Encouraging joint revenue generation models, where economically stable organizations share profits to support those constrained by legal or financial challenges, fosters a sense of collaborative sustainability. These can include, for example:

- **Co-Productions and Profit-Sharing:** Organizations can collaborate on co-productions, sharing both the creative and financial responsibilities or even the collective management (ex. the cooperatives model).

Revenues and assets generated from these joint ventures and structures can be distributed equitably to support projects facing legal or financial constraints.

- **Subscription Services and Revenue Pooling:** Cultural entities creating joint subscription services, pooling revenues to fund initiatives in need, offer a sustainable income stream beneficial to the entire ecosystem. Strategic partnerships with existing platforms can provide better and faster connectivity and implementation.

### Shared funding platforms:

**Crowdfunding Initiatives:** Establishing crowdfunding platforms specifically tailored for the cultural sector allows financially unrestricted organizations to channel resources to support projects facing legal barriers, which would foster a sense of community-driven support.

**Pooled Funds:** Creating pooled funds, where organizations and funding institutions combine and contribute to a shared pool of resources, creates a larger, diversified portfolio for resource allocation, especially for initiatives facing legal barriers.

**Collaborative Grant Programs:** Implement collaborative grant programs, where economically more stable organizations collaborate to fund initiatives/projects facing financial barriers. Support emerging local intermediary bodies, and build their capacity to play this role.

### Commons and resource-sharing networks:

**Centralized Resource Hub:** Developing a centralized hub, where financially unrestricted cultural actors share resources, including expertise, facilities, and equipment with those facing legal or economic constraints, ensures efficient and targeted support.

### Shared Facilities and Co-production Venues Programs:

- **Shared Facilities:** Creating programs, where organizations with surplus facilities share them with those lacking adequate space due to legal or financial limitations, optimizes the use of existing infrastructure.
- **Networks and Venues of Co-production:** Supporting the aggregation of cultural and creative value and production chains, equipment and talents. Creative districts and Fab Labs are examples of spatial aggregation that brings value chains together. The diversity of cultural sectors requires a reimagining of adaptive models that fit the ad hoc value chains of production and resource pooling.

**Skill Exchange Platforms:** Establishing platforms for skill exchange allows organizations with financial stability to provide mentorship, training, or specialized skills to those in need, fostering a collaborative environment and strengthening the overall capacity of the cultural ecosystem.

### Cross-Sector Economic Collaborations:

**Corporate Cultural Support Programs:** Encourage connections between cultural practitioners in the region and corporations, based within and outside the Arab region. These include financial contributions through Corporate Social Responsibility practices (CSR), in-kind support through access to resources like equipment or venues, or joint collaborative initiatives exploring creative and cultural resources in cross-sectoral cooperation settings. Such connections can help overcome legal restrictions and fund dependency by multiplying and widening the landscape of revenue generation opportunities and collaboration networks.

**Cross-Sector Investment Platforms:** Creating platforms that connect cultural organizations and creative minds with investors and businesses from other sectors (e.g. fashion, tourism, food, sports, industrial packaging, among others) can unlock new revenue generation opportunities and strategic alliances, transcending legal and economic constraints.



## IMPACT FIELD PROPOSALS

### IMPACT FIELD 01: COMMUNITY WELL-BEING, RIGHTS, AND SOCIAL IMPACT

AREA OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CULTURAL ECOSYSTEM OF SERVICES AND RIGHTS		POTENTIAL AREAS TO INFORM SUPPORTIVE MEASURES		
Impact field	Grassroot declinations - <i>informed by all around culture grantees profiling of intervention fields</i>	Impact field examples of proposals	Risk taking cross-cutting proposals	Strategic economic alliances and commons
Impact Field 01: Community Well-being, Rights, and Social Impact  Synergy with impact field 2, 3 and 4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gender &amp; women initiatives</li> <li>2. Safeguarding community cultural rights</li> <li>3. Dwelling, temporality, access to land and resources, migration</li> <li>4. Community engagement in shaping rural futures</li> </ol>	<p><b>Support:</b></p> <p>Community cultural safe spaces in underserved areas</p> <p>Culture and artistic programming for social impact (right-based)</p> <p>Art production and installation, and circulation for public engagement</p> <p>Cultural events and touring for regular access to culture in underserved areas</p>	<p><b>Support:</b></p> <p>Risk-taking financial support for youth and cultural initiatives and entrepreneurs</p>	

## Brief description of examples of measures Cluster 01 (Impact field 1)

### **Community cultural safe spaces:**

Supporting initiatives for community cultural safe spaces ensures local communities have a stake in accessing, preserving, and managing these venues. This collaborative approach enhances community resilience and fosters a sense of collective ownership, making cultural assets integral to community free expression and economy.

### **Culture and artistic programming for social impact (right-based):**

Designing and funding large-scale programs that support arts and cultural endeavors that contribute to social impact (gender, land and migrant rights, youth, elderly, access to healthy natural resources, etc) is essential. Special focus can include addressing challenges of injustice and inclusion arising from the exodus and migration flow, be it the movement from rural to urban areas or migration due to conflicts, occupation, and war. Dialogues with « Impact investment » sector may also offer new avenues for resource pooling. However, discussions need to be made to overcome strictly economic-driven profitability of social impact investment.

### **Art production, installation, and circulation for public engagement, audience outreach, and artistic visibility:**

Investing in art production, circulation, and interaction with local communities, especially in highly challenged contexts for practicing/exhibiting art in public domains, can contribute to audience outreach, increased access to cultural rights and artistic visibility at local and international levels. On one hand, disseminating artworks in public and community spaces can create opportunities for social gatherings, cultural participation, and enhance social well-being and expression, especially in underprivileged areas. On the other hand, international circulation can support the dissemination of narratives from the region, providing artists with platforms to exhibit their work and establish strategic curatorial partnerships.

### **Cultural events and touring for regular access to culture in underserved areas**

Supporting strategic cultural events and tours in underserved areas (also at a regional scale) enables regular access to diverse cultural experiences.



## IMPACT FIELD 02 ENVIRONMENT, ECOLOGY AND RIGHTS

AREA OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CULTURAL ECOSYSTEM OF SERVICES AND RIGHTS		POTENTIAL AREAS TO INFORM SUPPORTIVE MEASURES		
Impact field	Grassroot declinations - <i>informed by All Around Culture grantees profiling of intervention fields</i>	Impact field examples of proposals	Risk taking cross-cutting proposals	Strategic economic alliances and commons
Impact Field 02: Environment, Ecology and Rights. Synergy with impact fields 1, 3 and 4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multifaceted impact of art and culture in environmental sustainability</li> <li>Transformative rural/urban development and environmental stewardship</li> <li>Ecology of water through vernacular storytelling</li> <li>Tackling climate change through intercultural place-based perspectives</li> </ol>	<p><b>Support:</b></p> <p>Culture, ecology and habitat intersections for place-making and just transition local actions</p> <p>Community-owned and cultural spaces with sustainable infrastructure, challenged by environmental change.</p>	<p><b>Support:</b></p> <p>Risk-taking financial support for youth and cultural initiatives and entrepreneurs.</p>	

### Brief description of examples of proposals Cluster 02 (Impact field 2)

**Culture, ecology and habitat intersections for place-making and just transition local actions**

*(place-based research, collaborations, productions, place-based policymaking, etc.).*

Invest in and support projects that explore the intersection of culture and ecology, habitat informing critical discourses/actions around the management of natural resources in the region (ex. water), public engagement and more just development processes.

**Community-owned and cultural spaces with sustainable infrastructure:**

Extend support for community-owned cultural spaces with an emphasis on sustainable infrastructure. Invest in energy-alternatives technologies and green building practices to support the resilience of infrastructures to extreme disruption events (energy shortcuts, heat-stress, etc.). An assessment of such needs at the local and regional levels would provide a baseline for informed resource allocation planning.





## IMPACT FIELD 03 CREATIVITY, EDUCATION, AND YOUTH AGENCY

AREA OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CULTURAL ECOSYSTEM OF SERVICES AND RIGHTS		POTENTIAL AREAS TO INFORM SUPPORTIVE MEASURES		
Impact field	<i>Grassroot declinations- informed by All Around Culture grantees profiling of intervention fields</i>	Impact field examples of proposals	Risk taking cross-cutting proposals	Strategic economic alliances and commons
Impact Field 03: Creativity, Education, and Youth Agency Synergy with Impact field 1, 4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Creative digital art residency programs</li> <li>2. Shared learning platforms</li> <li>3. Artistic entrepreneurship Incubation</li> <li>4. Cultural events and touring for regular access to culture in underserved areas</li> </ol>	<p><b>Support:</b></p> <p>Shared and alternative educational programs and channels</p> <p>Open-source digital platforms for learning with certifications and collaboration with existing educational platforms.</p> <p>Experimental residency programs for youth-led initiatives wanting to explore the nexus of periphery, creativity, learning, and engagement</p> <p>Imagination skill practice within decolonized frameworks production.</p>	<p><b>Support:</b></p> <p>Risk-taking financial support for youth and cultural initiatives and entrepreneurs</p>	

## Brief description of examples of proposals Cluster 03 (Impact field 3 and 6)

### **Shared and alternative educational programs and channels:**

Cultural organizations forming alliances to create joint educational programs and alternative spaces can enrich the educational experience by sharing knowledge, facilities, and resources. This collaborative approach enhances the overall capacity and educational offerings within the cultural ecosystem and multiplies the informal education streams, reaching outside the niches and addressing the weak offer in public and classical educational channels.

### **Open-source digital platforms for learning with certifications and collaboration with existing educational platforms:**

Open-source digital platforms for learning, with modules delivered by the cultural ecosystem, enhance accessibility to educational resources. This approach fosters knowledge-sharing and collaboration while adapting to the evolving digital landscape.

### **Experimental residency and production programs for youth-led initiatives:**

*(nexus of periphery, creativity, imagination, learning and engagement)*

Tailored residency and production programs shall be designed for risk-taking artists, based in or working on topics in connection to peripheries and injustice, and wanting to take advantage of creative media (including digital) to mobilize collective imagination, experiment with the local communities, and/or overcome geographical barriers for cultural production in peripheries and/or underprivileged societies.

### **Imagination skill practice within decolonized frameworks production:**

Conventional perspectives on society, narratives, economics, and well-being shall be challenged in order to provide individuals and organizations with spaces so they can cultivate creative abilities. These environments act as safe havens for experimenting with ideas, exploring diverse viewpoints, and envisioning a world that transcends dominant unfair approaches. The cultivation of imagination skills can seamlessly integrate decolonization frameworks. This integration facilitates the exercise of imaginative skills, enabling the deconstruction and restructuring of models for cultural practice, collaboration, narrative creation, and outreach.



## IMPACT FIELD 04 REGENERATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

AREA OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CULTURAL ECOSYSTEM OF SERVICES AND RIGHTS		POTENTIAL AREAS TO INFORM SUPPORTIVE MEASURES		
Impact field	Grassroot declarations - <i>informed by All Around Culture grantees profiling of intervention fields</i>	Impact field examples of proposals	Risk taking cross-cutting proposals	Strategic economic alliances and commons
Impact Field 04: Regeneration of Cultural Heritage and the natural Environment  Synergy with Impact field1, 2, 3, 4 and 5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Platform for improved built and natural environments action and knowledge sharing</li> <li>2. Archives and creative media for promoting cultural legacies amidst polarization and hate discourse</li> <li>3. Reviving of crafts, craftsmanship and creative economy</li> <li>4. Preserving and innovating in the musical heritage</li> </ol>	<p><b>Support:</b></p> <p>Creative media production for cultural legacies (including international exchange residencies)</p> <p>Promotion of crafts and craftsmanship</p> <p>(Non) digital archiving for cultural legacies preservation and promotion</p> <p>Built and natural environment preservation, architecture, and rural-urban regeneration projects</p> <p>Investment in cultural infrastructure maintenance</p>	<p><b>Support:</b></p> <p>Risk-taking financial support for youth and cultural initiatives and entrepreneurs</p>	

## Brief description of examples of proposals Cluster 04 (Impact field 4 in synergy with 1, 2, 3 and 5)

### **Creative media production for cultural legacies:**

*(including. international exchange residencies)*

This measure facilitates international collaborations by providing residencies for artists to preserve the opportunity for cultural exchange, creative media production, and promotion of diverse cultural legacies in times of media polarization.

### **Promotion of crafts and craftsmanship:**

The support for initiatives that safeguard cultural heritage and traditional craftsmanship and work on establishing a connection with contemporary creative figures, technologies and economies is key. It can lead to the revitalization of cultural assets, the promotion of creative skills and entrepreneurial streams. Conducting a strategic regional assessment and mapping of resources across the region will enhance the understanding of the existing cultural landscapes of traditional knowledge and making. In this regard, it is imperative to build on the collective knowledge of past and ongoing initiatives by cultural practitioners, some of which are supported within regional frameworks, such as SAFIR, UNIDO, EIT Culture and Creativity, etc.

### **(Non) digital archiving for cultural legacies preservation and promotion:**

The investment in digital and non-digital archiving projects is key to supporting decolonized perspectives and narratives on the Arab worlds, especially in light of the ongoing genocide in Gaza and land rights in Palestine.

### **Built and natural environment preservation, architecture, and rural-urban regeneration:**

The preservation of built environments, coupled with rural-urban regeneration and placemaking, involves collaborative activation in under-used cultural contexts. Provide structural and long-term portfolio support for organizations that foster knowledge-sharing, attractiveness, and sustainability of cultural assets and landscapes.

### **Investment in cultural infrastructure maintenance:**

Direct investments in cultural infrastructure maintenance, including theaters, galleries, cinemas, and alternative/underground venues, are crucial for preserving access to cultural experiences. Allocate resources for mapping and assessing the state of venues at local and regional levels to inform a supportive framework, ensuring targeted interventions and sustainable upkeep.



## IMPACT FIELD 05 CHANGING ECONOMIC MODELS FOR CULTURAL PRACTICES

AREA OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CULTURAL ECOSYSTEM OF SERVICES AND RIGHTS		POTENTIAL AREAS TO INFORM SUPPORTIVE MEASURES		
Impact field	Grass-root declinations - <i>informed by All Around Culture grantees profiling of intervention fields</i>	Impact field examples of proposals	Risk taking cross-cutting proposals	Strategic economic alliances and commons
Impact Field 05: Changing Economic Models for Cultural Practices  Synergy with Impact field 3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cultural alliances and resource sharing platforms</li> <li>New modes of cultural production for economic sustainability</li> <li>Self-finance and alternative revenue streams</li> </ol>	<p><b>Support the development of alternative venue streams:</b></p> <p>Economic innovation in the cultural sector</p> <p>Digital and physical cultural marketplaces</p> <p>Cultural tourism initiatives</p>	<p><b>Support:</b></p> <p>Risk-taking investments in changing organizational forms, governance model, alliances and eco-system driven practices</p>	<p><b>Support:</b></p> <p>Joint revenue generation models (e.g. co-productions and profit-sharing; subscription services and revenue pooling)</p> <p>Shared funding platforms (e.g. crowdfunding initiatives; pooled funds; collaborative grant programs)</p> <p>Commons and resource-sharing networks (e.g. centralized resource hub; shared facilities and co-production venues programs; skill exchange platforms)</p> <p>Cross-sector economic collaborations (e.g. corporate cultural support programs; cross-sector investment platforms)</p>

## Brief description of examples of proposals Cluster 05 (Impact fields 3, 5)

### **Economic innovation in the cultural sector:**

The cultural and creative alternative economy, including social economy, shared economy, and creative entrepreneurship, provides diverse opportunities for alternative revenue. Supporting cultural practitioners in recognizing the potential within their assets for alternative economic models is crucial. Cultural entrepreneurship incubators and alternative resources like cultural post-growth economy academies play a vital role in fostering an environment for exploring innovative business models. Future advisory resources should complement incubators, offering specialized guidance to create a comprehensive ecosystem that empowers cultural endeavors economically beyond profit-based logics.

### **Digital and physical cultural marketplaces:**

Creative hubs and online platforms play a pivotal role in commercially promoting cultural goods produced by artists and practitioners. They do not only facilitate international export and commercialization but also enhance global visibility. Future support initiatives can focus on mapping available cultural goods at the local and regional levels, facilitating matchmaking with revenue streams.

To strengthen regional identity and branding, adopting a unified label like "Made in" the Arab Region is recommended. This does not only serve as a branding strategy but also fosters alternative narratives about the region. Collaboration with trade organizations and artists' associations is crucial for participating in global art fairs, exhibitions, and markets, meeting the international demand for unique cultural products from the Arab Region. Clear coordination and strategic partnerships will amplify the impact of these efforts.

### **Cultural tourism initiatives:**

Cultural initiatives curate cultural experiences that attract visitors while promoting local businesses and places. This does not only contribute to the economic vitality of the region but also showcases its rich cultural heritage and supports community-based economy. Future support may focus on fostering strategic partnerships between tourism agencies/platforms and cultural institutions, embedding authentic and alternative experiences within the promotional offers of the Southern Mediterranean region as a cultural destination.

+ see proposals under cross-cutting cluster 2 (above).



## IMPACT FIELD 06 DIGITAL INNOVATION AND GLOBAL CONNECTIVITY

AREA OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CULTURAL ECOSYSTEM OF SERVICES AND RIGHTS		POTENTIAL AREAS TO INFORM SUPPORTIVE MEASURES		
Impact field	Grassroot declinations - <i>informed by All Around Culture grantees profiling of intervention fields</i>	Impact field examples of proposals	Risk taking cross-cutting proposals	Strategic economic alliances and commons
Impact Field 06: Digital Innovation and Global Connectivity  Synergy with impact field 1, 2, 3, 4, 5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Digital collaboration of trans-local connectivity and co-production.</li> <li>2. Digital capacitation for cultural actors and creative industries</li> <li>3. Creative media for alternative community engagement and outreach</li> </ol>	<p><b>Support:</b></p> <p>Collaborative productions for intercultural and cross-sector innovation (culture, digital, AI)</p> <p>Creative media for alternative community engagement, outreach, and augmented public space.</p> <p>Open data commons for cultural insights</p> <p>Ethical and digital ownership programs designed for cultural practitioners</p>	<p><b>Support:</b></p> <p>Risk-taking financial support for youth and cultural initiatives and entrepreneurs</p>	

## **Brief description of examples of proposals Cluster 06 (Impact fields 3, 5 and 6)**

### **Collaborative productions for intercultural and cross-sector innovation** (culture, digital, AI):

Establishing online platforms fosters cross-disciplinary collaborations and creates a virtual space for artists, technologists, and cultural practitioners.

### **Creative media for alternative community engagement, outreach and augmented public space:**

Providing structural support, including digital access and technology upgrades, is key for initiatives that are developing alternative creative media for public outreach and engagement and renewing the interaction and use of physical public space.

### **Open data commons for cultural insights:**

Supporting open data initiatives ensures that valuable insights are accessible to cultural organizations, artists, and policymakers. Investments in AI for data analysis can provide deeper cultural insights, enabling informed decision-making and adaptation to evolving audience needs.

### **Ethical AI and digital ownership programs designed for cultural practitioners:**

Directing strategic investments towards capacity-building programs is key for cultural organizations, focusing on AI integration into improved cultural practices (e.g. production, audience outreach) and conversations around ethical AI practices. The participation of cultural actors into ethical AI policy conversation is fundamental to deconstruct the critical narratives and imaginaries around the Arab world. Within this process, collaborate with AI experts and educational institutions to design practitioners-driven courses that support artists and cultural professionals to navigate, take advantage, and gain ownership of the digital resources.





# CHAPTER 03

## THE SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL ROLE OF CULTURAL PRACTICES: CRITICAL INSIGHTS FOR RESOURCE AND POLICY ALIGNMENTS IN LIGHT OF CULTURAL ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

This conclusive chapter explores the transformative impact of diverse artistic and cultural initiatives funded through the All Around Culture program. The showcased realities and projects illustrate their determinant role in shaping a cultural ecosystem of services and rights in the region. They include vital aspects such as community well-being, placemaking, and the sustainable management of natural resources. As we navigate through the multifaceted dimensions of these endeavors, our primary objective is to present compelling evidence. This evidence serves as a clarion call, urging policymakers and funders to recognize the importance of investing in cultural initiatives, as they play a decisive role in shaping the determinants of sustainable development. The alignment of these endeavors with broader objectives, encompassing cultural exchange, sustainability, community well-being, and transformative capacity, underscores their importance in shaping present and future societies and living environments.

### Analytical Profiling of Cultural Actors

In our analytical profiling of cultural actors (93) and collaborations (52 ranging from [Cultural Alliances](#) to [Youth-Led initiatives](#) and [South-South-North Collaborations](#)), we identify distinct fields that encapsulate the diverse intervention fields of these initiatives:

1. Community Well-being, Rights, and Social Impact
2. Environment, Ecology and Rights
3. Creativity, Education and Youth Agency
4. Preservation of Cultural Heritage and Built Environment
5. Changing Economic Models for Cultural Practices
6. Digital Innovation and Cross-border Connectivity

This comprehensive exploration seeks to shed light on the tangible outcomes within each impact field, providing a nuanced understanding of the interplay between cultural practices and broader societal goals. As we unravel these connections, our aim is to provide a robust foundation of evidence, urging stakeholders to recognize and invest in the transformative potential of cultural ecosystem services. Thus, we emphasize the significance of understanding and preserving the assets and streams on which cultural actors and practitioners rely and operate from.

### INTERVENTION FIELD 01

#### COMMUNITY WELL-BEING, RIGHTS, AND SOCIAL IMPACT:

10.8% of the AAC collaborations (52 in total<sup>9</sup>) are dedicated to culture for community placemaking, while a significant 29% of collaborations engage in arts and culture for development. Over half

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<sup>9</sup> 31 Youth-Led initiatives including 8 Led Research and 23 Youth-Led Production . 10 South-South-North collaborations involving 30 organizations, and 11 Cultural Alliances shaped by constellations of 3, with one established organization and two pioneers (totaling 32 organizations).

(51.6%) of the supported organizations and initiatives contribute to placemaking, providing well-being experiences for locals. Furthermore, 52.7% of the organizations are actively involved in producing decolonized and alternative narratives on underrepresented topics such as gender, cultural heritage, and climate. A noteworthy 35.5% of organizations champion human rights, addressing various aspects like land rights, gender equality, access to water, public space, and labor. Additionally, 2.2% of organizations have a specific focus on gender issues.

### Gender & women initiatives

Several organizations stand out in their dedication to challenging stereotypes and preserving cultural diversity:

- Beyn Collective's Intersectional Feminism Project challenges stereotypes surrounding Arab women, fostering cultural diversity and understanding.
- Libyan Women's Music Project, titled "Titfaker" (Do you remember?), documents Libyan identity through podcasts and visual documentation, contributing to the preservation of artistic productions and oral traditions.
- Haven for Artists' Queer Feminist Art Archive curates a visual queer art archive, ensuring that marginalized voices and artworks are preserved and showcased.

### Community cultural rights initiatives

Organizations focusing on community cultural rights exemplify initiatives that bring cultural experiences to underserved audiences and decentralize cultural activities:

- Rural Encounters (Lebanon) establishes an alliance to bring cinema to underserved audiences in rural areas, connecting narratives with national debates on the environment, decentralization, and social cohesion.
- Network for Cultural Outreach (Lebanon) aims to decentralize culture by creating a sustainable network for performing arts, providing year-round work opportunities for artists and technicians, and producing accessible works that can tour villages, reaching diverse social categories and audiences.

### Dwelling, temporality, access to land and resources, and migration

Projects like "Fruits of Barzakh" in Jordan explore temporality, engaging with themes of relocation, movement, dwelling, and relation to the land in times of pending states.

### Community engagement in shaping the future and imaginaries of rural areas

Initiatives like "Sensitive Mapping in Semmama" (Tunisia) and "The Wind that Shakes Dreams" (Algeria) involve youth-led projects that reflect on the cultural ecosystem and the future development of rural villages, using sensitive mapping, photography, and sound research.

## INTERVENTION FIELD 02

### ENVIRONMENT, ECOLOGY AND RIGHTS

A significant 32.3% of initiatives actively contribute to addressing environmental and rural challenges, while 23% of the initiatives directly engage in the preservation of land and built environments. In this impact field, we explore the profound and diverse interplay between art, cultural practices and environmental sustainability, showcasing creative initiatives that do not only raise ecological awareness but also deepen the connection between communities and their natural

surroundings.

### The multifaceted impact of art in environmental sustainability

Artistic initiatives, exemplified by projects like the youth-led initiative "Thirst Republic," play a pivotal role in spotlighting environmental challenges and advocating for sustainable practices. The project, addressing the scarcity of drinkable water in Nefza, seamlessly blends scientific research with artistic expression, creating a unique intersection between environmental science and art. By involving both the local community and experts, the project effectively bridges the gap between science and culture, fostering a holistic understanding of environmental issues.

### Transformative urban development and environmental stewardship

Dataland's proposals (Youth-Led) for Cairo's built environment emphasize the transformative potential of adaptive reuse. Through visual catalogs and online platforms, Dataland contributes to the cultural ecosystem by inspiring architects and involving local residents in envisioning opportunities for transformation. This approach does not only promote sustainable urban development but also nurtures a sense of community engagement in shaping the evolving urban landscape.

### Water tales, cultural ecology, and vernacular stories

Les Contes Imbriqués focuses on understanding and celebrating the cultural significance of water in North Africa, placing a strong emphasis on community involvement and collective performance projects. By intertwining artistic expression with cultural narratives, the project sheds light on the importance of water and encourages a communal celebration of cultural heritage.

### Climate change and intercultural place-based perspectives

The Ard Residency Project (S-S-N) tackles the impacts of climate change, land degradation, and seed sovereignty in affected communities. Through a co-created skill-sharing residency among partners and subsequent workshops addressing local land issues, the project actively engages with communities facing these challenges. By intertwining artistic initiatives with place-based perspectives, the project advocates for sustainable solutions to environmental issues.

Advocating for the integration of artistic initiatives into broader environmental policies, this section underscores the importance of fostering a harmonious and sustainable future for the Mediterranean region. It emphasizes that art, with its unique ability to inspire, inform, and engage, can play a crucial role in shaping a positive and environmentally conscious trajectory for communities and societies.

## INTERVENTION FIELD 03

### CREATIVITY, EDUCATION, AND YOUTH AGENCY

A substantial 64.5% of All Around Culture's supported organizations and initiatives actively contribute to building capacities in their surroundings, providing learning opportunities and training for youth, women, local communities of practice, or the wider public. All Around Culture's supported practices show a dynamic intersection of artistic initiatives with technology, fostering cross-cultural collaborations, driving technological advancements, integrating arts into education systems, and upskilling initiatives for youth agency.

### Creative digital art residency programs

Initiatives like New Virtual Gardeners exemplify the transformative potential of creative digital art residencies for young and emerging artists. By offering a platform for experimentation and collaboration through digital means, these programs overcome mobility and geographical barriers, allowing artists to explore innovative avenues in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

### Shared learning platforms

Undercurrents (Morocco) (Alliances) is pioneering a common learning platform for capacity building and organizational development in Morocco. Addressing structural needs and organizational concerns, the initiative employs practical and discursive trainings along with theoretical conversations designed as public programs. This approach ensures a holistic integration of art into education, fostering a culture of continuous learning and development around macro-themes, including building capacities of open community archives, contextual pedagogies (multilingualism frameworks), collective working processes, and shaping cultural policies.

### Incubators for artistic entrepreneurship

The Cinematographic Stations Program (SHOBBAK) (Alliances) establishes an incubator for youth groups, providing essential support for artistic entrepreneurship and sustainable platforms for youth to thrive in the creative industries. By nurturing creativity and innovation, this initiative contributes to the growth and sustainability of the cultural ecosystem, empowering young artists to shape their creative endeavors into viable and impactful enterprises. Despite challenges in implementing a common pool for action, each entity possesses a robust and stand-alone portfolio in supporting creative entrepreneurship in Tunisia.

### "Mobile" cultural events for youth engagement

Initiatives like Rural Encounters in Lebanon (Alliances) seek to build inclusive and collaborative pathways to audiences, particularly youth, by bringing cultural events, such as cinema, to underserved areas. By ensuring accessibility to cultural experiences, these initiatives not only engage young audiences but also contribute to the democratization of the arts, making cultural events more inclusive and diverse.

Underscoring the significance of fostering a culture of innovation and youth empowerment through artistic initiatives, policymakers are strongly encouraged to prioritize these areas. Recognizing the transformative power of art in shaping the minds of the youth and driving technological and educational progress, investments in these initiatives can pave the way for a more vibrant, inclusive, and forward-thinking society.

## INTERVENTION FIELD 04

### REGENERATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE, THE NATURAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Recognizing cultural heritage as the bedrock of identity, this section delves into AAC initiatives actively contributing to the preservation of the rich cultural landscape of the Arab region. Among the supported organizations and initiatives, 23% of them are directly contributing to land and built environment preservation. Additionally, 19.4% of the collaborations are working at the intersection of cultural documentation and storytelling, 11.8% of the collaborations are involved in crafts and intangible heritage promotion, and 3.2% of the collaborations address the topic of architecture and built cultural heritage. Cultural heritage preservation encompasses both tangible and intangible elements. The efforts dedicated to promoting and maintaining material and immaterial cultural

landscapes reflect diverse approaches and concerns, providing an organic interpretation of needs based on contextual priorities. The following fields of intervention underscore the importance of preserving cultural heritage and the built environment, emphasizing their role not only as repositories of the past but as essential contributors to present and future cultural identities and decolonized imaginaries about the Arab and South Mediterranean region:

#### Knowledge-share platform for built environment improvement

In contexts where there is a consistent effort and contribution from cultural actors to preserve built heritage, particularly in historic cities like Cairo, organizations recognize the importance of forming coalitions to establish a shared knowledge system. One such alliance within the All Around Culture framework addresses this specific need by establishing a Knowledge-Share Platform for Built Environment Improvement. This platform focuses on examining the built environment through the lenses of equity and sustainability, integrating aspects of urban development, heritage management, and urban studies. The aim is to foster a comprehensive understanding of the built environment. The project employs academic formats and internships to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, skill development, and community capacity building. Through these initiatives, the Knowledge-Share Platform seeks to promote collaboration among diverse stakeholders and enhance the collective efforts to improve and sustain the built environment.

#### Preserving cultural legacies: archival initiatives amidst media polarization and hate discourse on Arab and Muslim cultures

Cultural initiatives are unfolding various projects dedicated to generating alternative discourses and providing access to unbiased truths through the development of narratives based on archival practices. Among these intercultural efforts is the Mirrors project, a collaborative endeavor spanning Lebanon and Greece (S-S-N). Mirrors stands as a testament to the significance of archival initiatives, ensuring that the historical and cultural legacy of coastal regions remains vibrant and accessible. This initiative extends to national efforts in challenging contexts, such as Palestine. All Around Culture has hosted two projects that exemplify the commitment to producing alternative narratives and preserving truth well before the invasion of the Gaza Strip and addressing ongoing issues like the genocide. The "Taariikh" Project (Historiography) (Youth-Led) aims at documenting the history and presence of Palestinians, both pre-and post-1948 displacement, through films created with the involvement of young people. The goal is to preserve overlooked aspects of Palestinian history, asserting the right to safeguard their heritage as the original inhabitants of the land. Another project, Gaza Stories (Youth-Led), seeks to showcase the true, positive aspects of Gaza often overshadowed by Israeli oppression. This initiative involves creating reports and documentaries depicting daily life, broadcasting diverse programs, training young media and cinema students, and aspiring to transform "Gaza Stories" into a streaming web channel.

The rising discourse characterized by double standards, dehumanization, and the unwarranted association of terrorism with the Arab region, along with acts of violence and the deliberate erasure of cultural landscapes and knowledge systems, highlights the crucial need to preserve a space for cultural expressions and archival practices. This preservation is essential for facilitating triangulation and ensuring an unbiased representation of the truth.

#### Reviving crafts, craftsmen, and creative economy

- RCTH (Reviving the Crafts and Tangible Heritage of Jordanian Cities) (Youth-led): Focused on exploring the history of traditional crafts in two Jordanian cities, this research project aims at empowering craftspeople, youth, and women. The intention is to establish a collaborative hub where handicrafts can be sold, with profits supporting craftspeople and funding community projects, creating a sustainable system.
- 56Zoom Project "Moul Tifazat" (Youth-led): Focused on Casablanca's technician-handyman, this

project emphasizes creative and innovative skills in recycling and repairing household appliances. The research traces the journey of goods from Europe to Morocco and involves know-how exchange groups that merge technical expertise with artistic approaches. The collaboration aims at creating unique functional objects, showcased in a public sale and exhibition.

### Musical preservation and innovation

ConverSons (Morocco, Mauritania, France) (S-S-N): A collaborative project supporting artists and musical production, ConverSons emphasizes electro and hip-hop genres. It aims at archiving and documenting traditional/heritage music while integrating it into innovative electronic and hip-hop music. The involvement of artists from the diaspora brings a fresh perspective to traditional music, promoting innovation.

## INTERVENTION FIELD 05

### CHANGING ECONOMIC MODELS FOR CULTURAL PRACTICES

Advocating for a transformative shift towards collaborative and self-sustaining economic models anchored in the principles of resource sharing, self-reliance, and cultural alliances, this section underscores the significance of individual reflections on one's role within the community. The focus lies on fostering innovation, sustainability, and community empowerment within the cultural and creative industries.

#### The potential of cultural alliances and sharing resources platforms:

Approximately 16.1% of the AAC-supported initiatives explored innovative organizational modes, while 34% of them experimented with alliance configurations forming constellations of three, including one established organization and two promising ones. Most endeavors expressed interest in establishing a pool of commons for accessing tools, talents, and equipment, optimizing knowledge co-production, and, at times, streamlining administrative operations and budget allocation maneuvers while addressing legal restrictions or cutting indirect costs. The evolution of collaboration forms and the potential exploration of "commons" as a network-based resource management introduced challenges related to budget management and power dynamics among teams and organizations, emphasizing the importance of alternative governance models and legal structures to accommodate the complexity of the shared economy.

The Ecosystem Academy, a component of the project, has proven to be instrumental in exploring questions of governance including horizontal management. This format has provided participants with the time to pause, reflect, and engage in practical and reflexive learning. The practice is as valuable as ad hoc mentorship, but it requires securing time from individuals mainly involved in project-based work, who may not allocate resources for strategic planning.

#### New modes of cultural production and economic sustainability

The pursuit of new modes of cultural production and the endeavor to bridge gaps in value chains are evident within the AAC, whether established initiatives or those driven by youth, illustrating a shared commitment to innovation and sustainability:

- Alliance / Cairo Capsules (Arab Digital Expression Foundation – ADEF, Makouk, and Medrar) illustrates the type of alliance encouraging collaborative projects, encompassing performances, experiments, games, and digital tools, thereby fostering co-production, creativity and innovation.
- Youth-led initiative / The Sustainable Fashion Initiative by the SYKO Project addresses the lack of infrastructure in the Palestinian fashion sector by introducing an eco-responsible clothing line. The process looks for connected local value chains within the Creative and Cultural Economy.



### Self-finance, alternative revenue streams

A noteworthy 71% of initiatives within AAC are looking for diversified income streams, with 10.8% of them already embracing alternative revenue sources. This shift is significant as these initiatives seek to reduce dependence on traditional funding models. Initiatives are adopting various strategies to diversify income, including co-working, rental services, learning and training programs, streaming, and the creation of commercial Creative and Cultural Industries (CCI) goods such as games and fashion. Within AAC supported organizations and initiatives, venue holders constitute 45.2%, and providers of accessible production assets and commons amount to 54.8%. Additionally, those engaged in the production of cultural goods, digital platforms, and archives account for 23.7%, while cultural products like music, film, and exhibitions contribute 46.2%. The potential for commercial CCI goods stands at 14%, and festival producers make up 7.5% of the AAC network, with 64% involved in providing educational and training activities.

These diverse assets present opportunities for exploring alternative revenue streams. However, cultural practitioners must be informed and supported in exploring the potential within their own assets to establish an alternative economic model, rather than solely responding to external requests of funders or investors.

## INTERVENTION FIELD 06

### DIGITAL INNOVATION AND GLOBAL CONNECTIVITY

In an era defined by digital advancements, this section explores the transformative potential of digital innovation within artistic initiatives. Notable AAC projects, such as Jusoor and New Virtual Gardeners, exemplify contextual and experimental approaches that leverage the digital era to facilitate artistic expression. These initiatives break down geographical barriers, encouraging cross-cultural collaboration and actively contributing to the democratization of creative voices on a global scale. The rise of digital art in a global context is contributing to changing forms of practice. The

digital revolution has dismantled traditional constraints, empowering artists to transcend borders, co-produce and share their creations globally. AAC collaborations showcase how digital innovation is reshaping artistic practices in the Arab region, facilitating the organic development of:

#### New era of trans-local connectivity and co-production

- VR Artworks for Future Imagination (Egypt, Palestine, Italy): Virtual Reality (VR) emerges as a frontier in digital innovation, offering immersive experiences that challenge artistic norms. This project explores the symbiotic relationship between the literary form and virtual reality to expand imaginations beyond conventional boundaries.
- New Virtual Gardeners: This project works on the convergence of digital innovation, community engagement, and global connectivity. Through a Creative Digital Art Residency, it provides a platform for young and emerging theater and visual artists to explore and develop collaborative digital artworks and storytelling. The initiative transcends geographic and political barriers by creating global Interactive Encounters, fostering a truly global audience and providing cross-border collaboration opportunities that overcome geographical and mobility obstacles, particularly in peripheral areas lacking physical assets.

#### Digital Capacitation addressing geographical divides

Jusoor's Palestine Cultural Alliance is committed to establishing robust cultural methodologies through dynamic cross-disciplinary cooperation, fostering interaction among partner entities and creating communal learning labs in marginalized communities. Recognizing the pivotal role of digital capacitation and technology adoption in overcoming geographical barriers and alleviating pressures from occupation on cultural spaces, the alliance has taken significant steps to make their cultural spaces accessible online. Features include the 3D tour of Mandaloun ArtLab in Hebron. Looking ahead, Jusoor aims at providing more user-friendly digital tools, ensuring effective audience engagement and preserving collaborative environments, despite mobility barriers. The digital capacitation serves the continued ecosystem of practice and collaboration among cultural initiatives.

#### Creative Media for Alternative Community Engagement and Outreach:

KITVERSE - Imagination Space Creation (Youth-led): This project creates a space for diverse youth communities to imagine and articulate new narratives through a game-based approach and community activation. By building bridges and shifting perspectives, it aims at fostering a cultural resistance force through collective imagination.



## CONCLUSION

In our exploration of the multifaceted intervention fields within the cultural ecosystem of the Arab region, we reveal a dynamic landscape of actors and contexts. These organizations and individuals consistently strive to create possibilities and address local priorities within interconnected networks, sustaining their efforts with care, ambition, and creative strategies amid highly pressuring working conditions. Whether preserving space for free expression, exploring digital frontiers, engaging in the preservation of cultural heritage, or co-creating just ecological imaginaries, the collective energies showcase the deep integration of cultural practices into the fabric of Arab societies.

As we bring this exploration to a thoughtful conclusion, this paper is a call for policymakers, funders, governments, and private sectors to recognize the depth and breadth of contributions from cultural actors. Establishing supportive frameworks is imperative for steering towards a more sustained and resourced ecosystem. A grassroots-based policy and program design can allocate resources to the diverse causes and endeavors promoted by actors on the ground. All Around Culture collaborations reveal shared concerns, local inquiries, and concrete solutions to global issues. The potential of these initiatives stands out prominently, advocating for sustained support in crafting a nuanced global narrative and connected actions, and touching upon the transformative essence of culture and art and their contribution to the structural ecosystem of services, rights, and roles. This encompasses:

- Engaging in critical reflections on cultural narratives, particularly during times of polarization, to address colonized and double standard discourses.
- Exploring alternative economic models to address diverse challenges and operation modes.
- Establishing common learning platforms for improved collaborative working frameworks at the local and regional levels.
- Encouraging digital and virtual collaboration to expand the boundaries of future production and outreach.
- Incorporating climate change and place-based inquiry for just transition.

This paper sets the stage for a future supportive environment, where the narrative of resourcing the cultural ecosystem is defined by transformative capacities, creativity, connectivity, and collaboration. We count on the appreciation and deep understanding of the cultural richness of this region, to support emerging cross-cutting priorities, grounded collective imaginary expression, and changing forms of practice in the Arab region's contemporary era.

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