



للثقافة و الموروث  
S C E N E  
CULTURE & HERITAGE



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British Council, Libya  
Scene for Culture & Heritage

Descriptive Report

# Culture Connects Us: Summary of Preparatory Workshop

Held on: 12 and 13 February 2022

## Introduction

In partnership with the British Council Libya and within the Culture Connects Us programme, Scene for Culture and Heritage organised two preparatory discussion workshops; one in Tripoli and another virtually. The workshop was attended by a group of 28 Libyan activists from various areas of practice within the culture and heritage sectors, who

were selected through a public Open Call. The selected individuals represent a sample of leading actors from the public, private, civil society and academic sectors as well as individuals; who participated in the workshop as Key Informants to provide an overview of the needs of the field and its stakeholders in general in addition to personal opinion.

The event commenced with words of welcome to the participants by Scene and the British Council, followed by a networking activity among the participants to introduce individuals and encourage exchange in an animated and fluid manner. During the open discussion session that followed, the attendees were invited to suggest main topics of interest that are deemed important and urgent within the two sectors today, from their points of view. The participants were then invited to vote for the topics that are of most concern and which are sectorially relevant and/or shared by many actors. The final list of topics voted upon from the general basis to be elaborated on and detailed during the group discussions later in the workshop, and which in turn identifies the main topics and sub-topics that will be taken forward by the regional Talks in March 2022.

The general topics that were proposed and voted on are:

- Cultural Policies;
- Understanding Cultural Rights;
- Development and Innovation;
- Documentation and Research, and Educational and Cognitive approaches;
- Marketing, Consumption and the Cultural Market;
- Intra-sectorial Channels of Communication and Cooperation;
- Funding and Support;
- Stereotyping and the Public Impression;
- Moral Values and Concepts;
- Preserving and Educating on Cultural Heritage; and
- Preserving and Transferring Cultural Symbols.

After voting on the main topics, the participants were divided into five groups according to their areas of practice; namely:

1. Cultural policies and administration;
2. Fine arts, literature, and performing arts;
3. Tangible cultural heritage; and
4. Intangible heritage.

<b>List of topics and sub-topics selected, discussed and presented by each group:</b>	
<p><b>The Cultural policies and administration group</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Administration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Governmental Administration.</li> <li>○ Non-Governmental Administration.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Lack of sources and data for pre-conceptual research.</li> <li>● Confusion between Arts and Ethics.</li> <li>● Concepts of Arts.</li> </ul>
<p><b>The Fine arts, literature, and performing arts group</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The role of artistic and literary culture in influencing the public, its impacts and general conditions.</li> <li>● The importance of the administrative basis in nurturing and preserving artistic and literary culture.</li> <li>● Methods of developing cultural and literary practices.</li> <li>● Creating an identity for Libyan arts and literature, and the space for innovating in it.</li> <li>● Laying a legal basis for preserving copyrights.</li> <li>● Promoting a culture of creative initiatives and volunteering.</li> <li>● Opening channels of communication locally and globally, such as intellectual forums.</li> <li>● Material and moral support.</li> </ul>
<p><b>The intangible heritage group</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Local literature.</li> <li>● Symbols and inscriptions.</li> <li>● Traditions.</li> <li>● Documentation and research.</li> <li>● Education.</li> <li>● Identification.</li> <li>● Channels of communication and cooperation.</li> <li>● Support and development.</li> </ul>
<p><b>The tangible heritage group</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Community awareness.</li> <li>● Management focuses on the needs and specificities of the local context and culture.</li> <li>● Inclusion of the importance of heritage in school and higher education curricula.</li> <li>● Countering looting by education and documentation.</li> <li>● Create a local database.</li> <li>● Increasing excavation efforts.</li> </ul>



Summary of the group discussions:

During the group discussions, the participants exchanged opinions about the specific topics to understand and analyse the conditions of the cultural and heritage practices today and the factors affecting their sustainability, prosperity and development. The groups addressed aspects of opportunities, challenges and weaknesses in scopes ranging from individual experiences to local, national, and international levels. In the outset of the discussion, a participant from the civil society sector highlighted observable improvement in the cultural field today as can be identified by the **increase in the number of cultural facilities** in the city of Tripoli. This increase indicates a **relative prosperity in cultural activities** compared to the past; however, this observation is not shared by participants from other Libyan cities.

Conversely, a participant from the academic field (higher art education) described the situation of the Libyan arts today as “miserable” due to **weaknesses in administration**, noting that administration is

a critical factor that determines the success or lack-of for sectors and practices and is therefore a factor that renders suffering for the actors in the cultural and arts. Others added that as a result of **stereotyping and centralization in cultural management**, it is noticed today that the cultural activities within the governmental and nongovernmental spheres are both dominated by a limited circle of individuals, groups and/or organisations. Furthermore, participants add that most of the administrative and management positions and those involved in decision-making are dominated by non-experts that do not specialise in cultural management and other relevant cultural expertise, and are therefore unqualified and/or unaware of the processes, structures and requirements of cultural management, amid a complete absence of opportunities for cross-group and cross-stakeholder participation in management and decision-making.

Based on these administrative weaknesses which form the basis of the sector, the participants shared that consequences of administrative weaknesses are indicated in the significant **lack of planning for cultural development** in addition to the **lack of studies and data** that constitute the necessary foundational basis from which planning and management are built upon. Consequently, there is a decline in innovation and development on the executive level within activities and events that generally **do not respond to the needs and interests of the local communities and contexts**, in addition to weaknesses in output level such as art products in exhibitions and the art market which already suffer from a weak public interest and support.

**The absence of a strong cultural market** is a common concern shared between both culture and the heritage sectors; whether this be on one hand, the general demand for art products such as paintings, sculptures, theater, films, books, and others (which also suffer from **a shortage of opportunities and resources to support the process of art production and marketing**) or, on the other hand, the heritage industries including tourism and the traditional crafts market. If supported, both these arts and heritage markets innately hold **economic potential to contribute to the local prosperity for cities, villages, local communities and/or individuals**. However, as a result of the lack of interest in nurturing a strong cultural market, both sectors do not strongly **fulfill their social and educational values**. The absence of a market and financial returns additionally create **a problem of sustainability** for institutions, facilities, and individuals.

One of the contributing factors to these problems, according to the participants, is the **absence of communication between the generations** of cultural actors that would facilitate the exchange of experiences and knowledge about approaches, resources, and techniques for their enrichment. On the other hand, this absence of interest in the exchange of opinions is mostly noticeable in the lack of participation in the decision-making and policy-making processes in Libya. The problem of non-participation continues beyond legislative levels considering also that **communication between actors in the cultural field and the society in general is rarely considered**. Moreover, the communities engaged in cultural activities are often restricted to certain recurring groups, in addition to the domination of cultural activities by certain groups and which therefore tends to lean towards elitism or other specific cultures exclusively. This results in:

- firstly, **weak public and cross-group participation** from other cultures and groups, and
- secondly, **restricting others' access to opportunities** for support, whether those provided locally, regionally, or internationally.

Proceeding with the discussion, the participants added that one of the contributing factors to this domination by certain groups is the **weakness of local support provided by the Libyan State** for Libyan cultural actors. This is a critical absence particularly when compared to the availability of foreign support from regional and foreign donors - despite that this too is limited. While foreign support is more easily accessible to certain groups, for example, speakers of other languages, members of certain networks, or those proficient in digital tools, other groups are organically excluded from these opportunities.

Amid this absence of local support for the cultural field, the important role that the cultural sector can play for nation-building is overlooked and unrealised. While this characteristic distinguishes it from other sectors, culture uniquely stands within **close proximity to societies considering its nature as a people's means of expression**. For that reason, cultural tools are a means to both communicate with society, and for society to communicate whether within social groups or between social groups and State. In addition to its role as a tool for expression, the cultural sector has a fundamental role in social cohesion, post-conflict recovery and nation-building due to three approaches:

- **Human rights approach** , which guarantees for the citizen:
  - (1) **the right to recognition** of culture and belonging,

(2) **the right to expression** of culture and identity,

(3) **the right of access** to cultural services for psychological, recreational and social benefits, by which culture contributes to social harmony and hence the stability of the state;

- **Security approach** , where the state can maintain its national security by countering any incoming hostile ideologies and narratives, as well as its position among the neighbouring, regional and international communities through Cultural Diplomacy and regional and international cooperation;
- **The economic approach** , where art and heritage products and markets can contribute to the stability and prosperity of individuals, groups, and localities.

Accordingly, the participants stressed the **importance of guaranteeing cultural rights** in the constitution, legislations and policies of the state, and emphasised the need for **updating laws** (such as the law for protecting intellectual property rights, and the law for protecting archaeological and historical sites). Additionally, constitutional guarantees and laws must be supported by ensuring their implementation on executive levels; where some participants expressed **satisfaction with the existing laws and the international conventions and agreements ratified** by the Libyan State, but noted that **the weakness lies in the implementation of and commitment** to these laws and agreements on one hand, and on the other hand the **weak interest of non-governmental stakeholders to learn and advocate about them**. Among the consequences of the absence of these guarantees are the threats on safety, **harassment** and complexity of procedures that cultural activists are subjected to, as well as the lack of clear definitions of terms (e.g. within regulations) and permissible limits, and reasons for them, in order to enable some clarity and stability to allow cultural actors to carry out their roles and responsibilities.

The participants believe that this general inaction in improving the status and role of the cultural field may be due to the **prevailing view that limits culture to its entertainment value only**, and therefore classifies it as a luxury and a non-essential sector in the current pivotal stage of Libya's history; despite the critical role that culture proved to provide in other countries for post-conflict recovery. For that reason, cultural activities and the cultural community are isolated by and from society to some extent, owed to the general perception that culture does not provide considerable benefit amid

Libya's pressing priorities; especially considering the **focus on political, security, and economic solutions only** and which are utilised by and speak to the elite and specific groups only.

According to the participants, this segregation of the cultural sector and its actors creates a **disintegration and loss of the collective cultural identity**. This led to a noticeable **tendency towards individualism** instead of the collective. Overshadowed by individualism as a result of exclusion, while practices in the culture and heritage sectors do educate about the marginalised cultural groups of the Libyan society, they are however centered on the differences that identify individuals/groups and do not, in many cases, promote the notion of diversity and pluralism as innate characteristics to the Libyan identity with its various cultural and historical layers.



Following the group discussions summarised in the previous section, each group presented a summary of their discussion around the topics and sub-topics. Scene recorded these outputs from the in-person and online workshops collectively, which:

- 1) will be published online to inform the public, community of interest and researchers as a survey of sectorial matters deemed important by the stakeholders; and
- 2) Will provide the basis upon which the upcoming Talks within the Culture Connects Us programme will be built, and which will take place in several Libyan cities.

The topics and sub-topics as the outputs of the Main Event are :

- **Cultural Policies:**

- Cultural values: (the human rights approach / the security approach / the economic approach).
- Participation in the process of creating, reshaping and updating cultural legislations.
- Constitutionalising cultural rights (the right of access to cultural services and the right to cultural expressions and activities).
- Some laws need updating.
- Laws are available but their enforcement is weak.
- Confusion or institutional conflicts regarding law enforcement responsibilities among governmental institutions.
- The mis-use of laws and regulations in line with certain interests of groups.

- **Understanding Cultural Rights:**

- Right of access to cultural services.
- Right of expression.
- Right of participation in formulating policies.
- Right to knowledge development.
- Intellectual copyrights to guarantee the safety and stability for the artist, which enhances creativity.

- **Administration (governmental and non-governmental):**

- The importance of the administrative basis in nurturing and preserving artistic and literary culture.
- Stereotyping and lack of flexibility and participation.
- The centralisation of administration prohibits the prosperity of localities/communities.

- Weak qualifications and lack of awareness of the cultural management process; therefore, the role of management becomes an obstacle rather than a facilitator.
- Politicisation.
- The lack of strategic cultural planning for effective cultural management.

- **Development and innovation**

- Lack of innovation and art colleges that adopt modern/interactive teaching methods
- The digital developments in arts and literature must be taken into account, especially within the law for protecting intellectual property.

- **Documentation and research, education and cognitive approaches:**

- Lack of interest in research to understand the context before planning and implementing actions.
- Lack of resources and data to conduct research.
- Lack of support.

- **Marketing, Consumption and the Cultural Market:**

- Weak quality of art products and production.
- Weak quality at the academic level.
- Weakness in marketing for cultural and artistic activities.
- Weak sustainability.

- **Channels of communication and cooperation:**

- Lack of communication and the relationship between the artist and society.
- Lack of communication between generations within the cultural field.
- Domination of the cultural field by certain groups.
- The need to focus on exchange of experiences/knowledge locally and internationally.

- **Support:**

- Lack of local/national support in Libya.
- International support outweighs local support for culture in terms of the state's management of cultural resources and its economic role (the lack of financial resources in particular).

- The importance of moral support for the creative spirit.
- A need for attention to the creative/cultural economy.
- A need to increase cultural funding streams.

- **Stereotyping:**

- Sudden threats and vulnerability (including personal safety).
- Society's segregation of art and artists.

- **Ethical values and concepts:**

- Confusion between concepts and definitions.

- **Cultural heritage:**

- Tangible**

- Inclusion of the importance of heritage in school/university curricula.
- Combating looting and smuggling.
- Lack of surveys and excavations.
- Absence of local and accessible databases.

- Intangible**

- Local inventories.
- Recording symbols and inscriptions.
- Recording customs and traditions.

- **Cultural symbols**

- Creating and promoting a collective identity.
- Diversity and plurality versus individualism.
- The role of symbols in the upbringing of children for inclusive future generations.
- The importance of heritage symbols for a national identity-creation and position in the international community.





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