



## Cultural Policy in the Arab Region Programme

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#### Summary Updates to the Compendium Profile On Cultural Policy in Tunisia 2015

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## Introduction

After the technocrat government in 2014, Tunisia knew three governments during the period from 2015 to 2016, which reveals a state of political instability in the government action and an ongoing search for political agreements contributing to the creation of a clear governing mechanism. The ministry in charge of culture was not distant from these changes, where it witnessed three ministerial appointments ((Dr. Latifa Lakhdar (February 2015 - January 2016) and Ms. Sonia M'barek (January 2016 - August 2016) and Dr. Mohamed Zine El Abidine (August 2016- to date) in less than one year and a half, and where the name of the Ministry of Culture was changed to "The Ministry of Cultural Affairs," starting from August 2016.

Given the short tenure of each government official in the Ministry of Culture, none had the chance to implement radical reforms that would affect the reference legal frameworks of the cultural sector (similar to the legal framework of an artist, or the development of cultural industries) or mechanisms for sectorial programs implementation in arts or folklore, whether on the level of support or promotion of decentralization. However, the essential reform objectives associated to each new government remained the same:

- Enhancing of decentralization and local governance of cultural work,
- Promoting cultural and creative industries,
- Developing artistic and creative professions (including artist status development)
- Developing cultural tourism
- Enhancing of the horizontal dimension of the cultural sector with other sectors, including the education and youth sectors.

Communication was observed among the ministers of the successive governments in dealing with the preparatory programs of the cultural sector reforms, whether at the level of committees and working teams in charge of preparing and studying reform programs, or at the level of enhancing counseling about it with the civil society in cultural sector (including: artistic and creative professions, developing the role of culture in different areas, changing public support mechanisms, developing the cultural sector financing, restructuring the ministry..).

Due to the growing phenomenon of terrorism during 2015, the government engaged the cultural sector in a terrorism-combating program through new projects aimed at eliminating the resources of extremist ideology and making arts and heritage new sources for local development and cultural action in the different regions. "Creators for Life"<sup>1</sup> program was developed during 2015 and completed at the beginning of 2016, as well as the new program at the start of the Government of National Unity work (August 2016), named as "Arts Cities"<sup>2</sup> program which aims to enhance decentralization, boost the cultural action in the different country areas, and bring arts to the daily life of citizens, including focusing on the role of the private sector (private cultural spaces) in arts development. These programs are linked to the current international trends and recommendations on the role of arts and culture in the prevention of violent extremism and terrorism, and as reactions to the extreme and violent discourse.

In spite of the political instability, Tunisian cultural production achieved new successes during 2016, especially among young artists and creators, where, for example, Inhebbek Hedi "We Love You Hadi" movie won the Silver Bear Award for Best Actor, for actor Majdi Mastoura, in the International Film Festival in Berlin 2016. A new youth art movement, similar to Rap style (the most watched Tunisian artists on YouTube)<sup>3</sup> and graffiti art<sup>4</sup> (similar to Volunteer Artists Association to paint murals at schools, cultural centers and institutes) has emerged and used art to address social issues, and as a form of protest, and to beautify public squares.

Moreover, 2015 and 2016 witnessed intensive contribution of sectors, other than the Ministry of Culture, in the cultural action directed to children and youth, especially the Ministries of Education and Youth, through fostering the cultural work inside these institutions, educational programs and youth programs. The civil society witnessed new cultural initiatives, funded by either the Ministry or external parties, or been of voluntary nature. Such initiatives gave new momentum to the cultural movement which may indicate the start of moving out of the governmental frame of culture towards the independent culture phase. This explains the current discrepancy between a segment of young artists who try to diversify the funding

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<sup>1</sup> Article in Middle East journal on 19/ November/ 2015 about Creators for Life program (electronic version) (<https://goo.gl/hfYmcN>)

<sup>2</sup> Article in Morocco journal on 28 / September /2016 on the Cities of Arts program (electronic version) (<https://goo.gl/ocQT5w>)

<sup>3</sup> Article in Alchourouk journal on 5/February/ 2016 (electronic version) (<https://goo.gl/RTf5lt>)

<sup>4</sup> Article in Jeune Afrique journal (in Arabic) on 1 / October 2016 about the growing phenomenon of drawing on walls in Tunisia (electronic version)

sources for their cultural production and look for reducing the public funding, and the older age group, which remained tied to the traditional role of the Ministry of Culture and looks forward to enhancing the public support for its cultural production.

This report aims to provide a summary of the most important updates in the cultural sector in Tunisia, and the cultural policy during the period from February 2015 to December 2016, according to prioritized hubs, classified according to the most important themes adopted in structuring the cultural policy survey in Tunisia for 2015.

### **1- Updates related to the structural framework of the cultural sector and infrastructure:**

The structural framework of the Ministry of Culture did not experience new additions to the management level, and that was on the basis of adopting a new structural vision early 2015 which enables the ministry to fulfil its new role as a "facilitator" of the cultural work and not as a "direct intervener" in the implementation of cultural policy. Despite the lack of a significant structural change in the administrative system, features of decentralized administrative behavior started to emerge in the cultural sector.

During July 2015, financial and administrative independence was granted to the regional libraries in the form of public institutions with administrative nature under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture, and they are 24 regional libraries (regional library in the center of each region in the country) (Government Order No. 799 of 2015, dated 13 / July 2015 relating to the establishment of some public institutions for cultural work and controlling their prerogatives) which would give them the possibility of utilizing their financial and administrative resources according to their programs and without direct intervention by the centralized administration.

In regard to regulating the relationship among the houses of culture, the associations, the kindergartens and the public structures to use the houses of culture spaces for the activities and events of cultural nature, the amounts allocated for this purpose were unified within a structured schedule for the process, via the decision of the Minister of Culture on 29 July 2015 related to regulating the amounts spent on using the cultural spaces for activities and presentations of cultural nature. This decision would clarify the actual utilization of the houses

of culture spaces with the parties working with these houses, and determine the extent of their "cultural nature".

End of 2015, the "National Institution for the Development of Festivals & Cultural and Artistic Events"<sup>5</sup> was activated by appointing a general director. This institution came to compensate for the role played by the National Cultural Committee, the regional committees and their branching local committees in the implementation of activities, festivals and cultural events. In November 2016, a call was launched to promote the regional representation of this institution and support it in the cultural action at the regional level<sup>6</sup>. It should be noted that the events and festivals, especially international festivals and exhibitions, including the International Festival of Carthage, Carthage Cinema Days, Carthage Theatre Days, Hammamet International Festival and the International Book Fair, can invite this institution for financial and administrative supervision for more efficiency and transparency. There are other approaches to make these festivals independent and in the form of institutions financially and administratively independent, and even to enhance their independence from the Ministry of Culture. While organizing the 27th edition of Carthage Film Festival, there was great debate about the relationship between the edition Director and the Ministry, which later led to sending a committee from the Ministry of Culture (Ministry of Cultural Affairs) to examine the structural status of 5 major festivals that are directly supervised by the Ministry, such as the International Festival of Carthage, Carthage Cinema Days, Carthage Theatre Days, Hammamet International Festival and Carthage Musical Days. Major festivals and their protocols remain one of the important issues under discussion in the new cultural policy in Tunisia<sup>7</sup>.

In January 2016, and after various administrative and financial difficulties that faced the establishers of private cultural spaces, who most of them were artists due to the lack of an organized legal framework for the sector, a regulations booklet was issued to organize the management of private cultural spaces under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture (a decision by the Minister of Culture and Heritage Preservation, dated 11 January 2016, approving the regulations booklet related to establishing and using a private cultural center).

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<sup>5</sup> Article in Alchourouk journal (electronic version) on 7 / December 2016, on the National Institution for the Development of Festivals & Cultural and Artistic Events (<https://goo.gl/PrSxKZ>)

<sup>6</sup> Minister of Cultural Affairs supervises the first meeting of the board of directors of the National Institution for the Development of Festivals & Cultural and Artistic Events "(30 November/ 2016) (see: <http://www.culture.tn/?p=4958>)

<sup>7</sup> See Al-Sabah (e-journal) article, on 12 April 2016 "Morning Microscope: Institutionalization of cultural events ... File" L'esprit de l'escalier "(<https://goo.gl/2lSeBE>)

Despite the completion of this new legal framework in favor of the private cultural spaces, these private institutions remain under frequent financial difficulties in their field, in addition to their weak resources compared to their expenditures<sup>8</sup>. And gradually, more attention is given by the cultural sector public funding to the private initiatives, taking into account the direct economic influence of these projects by lifting the operational action in this field, and their social impact in attracting young people for entertainment and arts practice. Early September 2016, the Ministry of Culture (Ministry of Cultural Affairs) devoted a program to support the private cultural spaces.

In December 2016, the Regional Culture Delegations were authorized to manage the regional expenditure of constructing, expanding, and preparing and equipping the cultural institutions, which were included in the central administration prerogatives (Government Order No. 1370 dated 2 December 2016). This includes the following regional cultural institutions: Delegations headquarters, the Houses of Culture, public libraries, dramatic and scenic arts centers, regional music institutes, as well as the contribution to the heritage and cultural infrastructure maintenance projects in the different regions. This authorization will allow to reduce the role of the central administration in developing the programs of constructing, preparing and equipping the regional cultural institutions, and allow flexible financial and practical act that enables the regional culture delegate to make decisions in accordance with the specificities of each region.

As for the infrastructure, 2015 witnessed a renewed interest in the "City of Culture" project, of which implementation was disrupted since 2011, as well as other interruptions since its listing in the Ministry of Culture budget in 1994, with a total cost then of 120 million dinars (around 118 million USD at the prices of 1994), where contracts and works were reconsidered and an agreement, on submitting new international bids to complete them during 2015, was made. It should be noted that the City of Culture project has started since 1992 by a decision of the President of the Republic at that time. The project lays over an area of 52 hectares in the capital center. The City of Culture will contain, upon completion of the first and second parts, several performance spaces, such as a public space for audience reception, three performance halls, 7 TV production studios, an audio-visual library, cinema library with 2 cinema halls, a house of artists, a national art gallery that consists of three exhibition halls with

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<sup>8</sup> See "The Press" journal article (electronic version) "Private cultural spaces between the legal vacuum and the financial difficulties" (<https://goo.gl/VvUFLZ>)

a section for preserving artistic pieces, a general administration of the city, a space for commercial activities, a "tower for culture", and a parking lot. The Museum of Civilizations will be added to the previous buildings, where its estimated cost is hundred million dinars<sup>9</sup>. The interest in this project continued during 2016 to complete its construction, with an expectation to open its first part in October 2017.

As for the branching infrastructure in the regions, such as the regional culture delegations, the houses of culture, the public libraries, and the regional music institutes, the problems, related to the obsolescence of buildings and equipment and the lack of human resources, prevailed, due to the financial pressure on the state budget and lack of financial resources, leading to a slow pace of performance and renewal. Regarding the institutions supervised by the ministry, the name of the "National Center for Translation"<sup>10</sup> was changed to "Tunisia Institute for Translation".

The interest in the cultural infrastructure increased in other sectors, particularly in the education sector, as early January 2016 the Ministry of Education decided to mainstream cultural clubs at schools<sup>11</sup> and equip them, especially with regard to arts. Civil society interventions were witnessed in the cultural sector creating cultural spaces at schools (example: "My Art In Spite Of Me" Association in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Germany<sup>12</sup>).

## **2- updates on the cooperation among the ministries and authorities (central and regional)**

Numerous joint agreements took place between the Ministry of Culture and other ministries during 2005 and 2006.

On 23 May 2016, the Ministry of Culture (Ministry of Culture and Heritage Preservation) signed an agreement with the Ministry of Justice under which special cultural programs and performances for prisoners<sup>13</sup> are designed. The agreement included several points, including

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<sup>9</sup> For more details about the project, see the article published in Nawaat electronic magazine on 14 August 2015 (<https://goo.gl/Om68Kh>) (the paragraph is excerpted from this article)

<sup>10</sup> Assabah Electronic newspaper article about the National Center for Translation on July 23, 2016 (<https://goo.gl/78GUJF>)

<sup>11</sup> Assabah newspaper article about mainstreaming cultural clubs at schools (<https://goo.gl/W4bJoR>)

<sup>12</sup> The website of "My Art In Spite Of Me" Association (<http://fanniraghmananni.org/projects/>)

<sup>13</sup> The Ministry of Justice website about the chapters of the agreement (<http://www.e-justice.tn/index.php?id=2298>)

organizing of recreational classes in prisons and rehabilitation facilities in the field of reading, theater, cinema, painting and music, as well as facilitating the misdemeanor children attendance of the cultural and creative presentations as well as their visits to museums and festivals.

Also, on 11 October 2016, a joint cooperation agreement was signed between the Ministry of National Defense and the Ministry of Cultural Affairs aiming to determine the general framework of cooperation between them in the field of preservation of historical and archaeological heritage, completion of the national archaeological map, structural promotion of heritage and museums and inventory of national cultural properties.

### **3- Updates pertaining the international cultural cooperation:**

2016 witnessed the start of implementation of the largest project of bilateral international cultural cooperation between Tunisia and the European Union "to support the Tunisian cultural sector". The EU will provide a fund of 6 million euros for activities aiming at supporting cultural decentralization and cultural civil society in the implementation of cultural projects.

In addition to this project, the European Union supported the execution of studies for the cultural sector, including studies on legal status of artists in Tunisia, and promoting and developing the role of culture.

### **4- Updates on fields linked to the cultural sector:**

#### **Media and diversity of content:**

Media field has experienced a significant change in its structure and composition due to the High Independent Audiovisual Communication Authority focus. 2015 and 2016 witnessed several decisions from the Authority varied between closing radio and TV stations, suspending programs broadcasting, and drawing the attention of programs presenters. Most of the closure decisions were due to these channels or radio stations disrespect of the legal procedures related to their establishment. While the decisions related to the suspension of a part of a



program or re-broadcasting a program were due to moral issues or because they advocated for violence and hatred. These are signs of the start of training on how to enhance freedom within legal regulations. However, the risk of interpretation or political agenda still exists due to the lack of clear boundaries between what is moral or immoral (holy or unholy) according to the new Tunisian constitution, in addition to the up-to-date political pressures on media.

As a proof of independence of the High Independent Audiovisual Communication Authority (HAICA) and the independence and freedom of the audiovisual field, it rejected the intervention of the Supreme Islamic Council in the Tunisian radio programs, when the latter sent a letter to the Director General of the Tunisian radio station, in which he expressed his opinion about an intellectual who highlighted some points of his religious thought in one of the TV programs<sup>14</sup>. In addition to this, in Ramadan 2016, HAICA produced a Ramadan evening about drama works in Ramadan (Critique approach) after the criticism directed to the quality of drama production broadcasted during Ramadan<sup>15</sup>.

#### **Civil society in the cultural sector:**

Due to the evolution of the role of associations in Tunisia, new and serious statistics and follow up, especially through IFEDA Center for Associations, emerged. According to the latest statistics of IFEDA Center for Associations<sup>16</sup> on 1 December 2016, the number of associations interested in culture and arts hit 3515 associations, 18% of the total associations were represented by activity (there are 17 specialized activities), and they came in the second rank after school associations (23.5 %) and before the sports associations (10 %). This may be a positive sign in terms of quantity, but there is no accurate study on the number of “active” cultural associations in the sector, including the number of interventions in this sector and the relevant quality and topics. Most associations are based in Tunis (20 %), while Zaghouan Governorate recorded the lowest percentage in the number of cultural associations (around 1%). The following table points out the distribution of the cultural associations by governorates (depending on IFEDA statistics on 1 December 2016) in the following order:

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<sup>14</sup> Assabah Electronic journal article on 3 July 2015 (<https://goo.gl/RkBN9E>)

<sup>15</sup> About HAICA Seminar- Ramadan 2016(<https://goo.gl/x79xHK>)

<sup>16</sup> Statistics in IFADA Center website (<http://www.ifeda.org.tn/stats/arabe.pdf>)

<b>Governorate</b>	<b>The number of associations in the cultural sector</b>	<b>percentage</b>
Tunisia	690	19,6%
Sfax	295	8,4%
Nabeul	231	6,6%
Sousse	201	5,7%
Ariana	190	5,4%
Gafsa	168	4,8%
Ben Arous	159	4,5%
Medenine	153	4,4%
Bizerte	138	3,9%
Gabes	134	3,8%
Monastir	133	3,8%
Sidi Bou Zid	124	3,5%
Mahdia	105	3,0%
Kebili	101	2,9%
Kasserine	91	2,6%
Tataouine	89	2,5%
Manouba	88	2,5%
Siliana	74	2,1%
Jendouba	72	2,0%
Al-Qayrawan	68	1,9%
Beja	66	1,9%
Tozeur	59	1,7%
Kef	54	1,5%
Zaghouan	32	0,9%

The need for qualitative analysis of the civil society in the cultural sector, similar to "CIVICUS"<sup>17</sup> indicator, as been previously presented in the report of 2013, remains of importance to perceive the real contribution of associations in the cultural sector. In an initiative funded by several foreign parties, with the contribution of several arts and heritage associations,

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<sup>17</sup> CIVICUS Indicator for civil society is the result of a civil international initiatives to follow up the civil society in the world, and citizen participation in the associative work (for more details : <https://civicus.org/csi/index.php>)

“Jamaity”<sup>18</sup> website was accomplished. The website contains a map of several associations in Tunisia with their projects and geographical distribution.

In the framework of an EU-funded project, under the name of "supporting civil society in Tunisia" (Programme d'appui à la société civile - PASC), a joint program was developed in 2016 with the Ministry of Culture (the Ministry of Culture and Heritage Preservation) to execute participatory seminars with civil society in the regions, on several topics of importance in the cultural sector. This experience started with the heritage, by conducting around 20 consultation seminars<sup>19</sup> with the participation of more than 500 associations interested in heritage sector. It should be noted that this program has included the participation of the cultural sector associations in multiple activities, and also in activities that support the associations' management and performance capabilities.

Some associations have developed their functions and abilities to implement projects and cultural activities, which encouraged many foreign well as Tunisian donors to sponsor their initiatives and fields of intervention. Among the emerging activities, empowering artists and associations on the cultural policy and rights, as well as empowering the civil society and issuing of artistic residencies for foreign and Tunisian artists. We can mention "l'Art'Rue" "Art Street" as an example of the evolution of these cultural sector associations which executed projects and activities in new fields such as cultural rights<sup>20</sup>, culture and development, artists empowerment, artist residencies...

Regarding consultation on the cultural policy in Tunisia, a seminar was held in November 2016 in the city of Sfax to develop a new cultural policy stemming from civil society, with an initiative from civil society in the cultural sector, and with the support of the private sector and the program of supporting civil society, and the participation of Tunisian General Labor Union. The seminar came up with several recommendations such as supporting a new legal framework for artists and increasing the support for the cultural civil society, with a call to diversify the

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<sup>18</sup> The web address : <http://jamaity.org/>

<sup>19</sup> An example of the consultation workshops on heritage in the city of Gafsa (<http://pasctunisie.org/portfolio-item/le-patrimoine-de-gafsa-et-son-cachet-/culturel-au-coeur-des-debats> )

<sup>20</sup> The association website about the training workshops ([http://www.larttrue.com/fr/formations\\_dr.php](http://www.larttrue.com/fr/formations_dr.php) )

cultural production resources and reduce dependence on public financing support to ensure independence<sup>21</sup>.

In addition to these activities funded by foreign actors to support associations and civil society in Tunisia for the implementation of initiatives in the cultural sector, 2015 and 2016 witnessed numerous initiatives of the Tunisian civil society, funded by Tunisian individuals and cultural sector institutions, for the benefit of certain age groups or in order to promote certain topics in the cultural sector or to solve social problems. The following examples highlight the multiplicity of these interventions:

- "I bought a book" Campaign<sup>22</sup>: an initiative by young people whose ages do not exceed thirty. The campaign aims at encouraging the purchase and reading of the old valuable books and having open discussions about them.
- "The prisoner has the right to read" Campaign: A Tunisian female activist started this campaign at social media networks. The campaign aims to collect books and distribute them on Tunisian prisons to give them to the prisoners<sup>23</sup>.
- The launch of an electronic platform for lending books and sharing them for free (Yalla Read<sup>24</sup>): an initiative by a Tunisian university student, aiming to develop a network for exchanging books among young people in Tunisia, and reduce the cost of buying them. The initiative contributed in creating more reading opportunities for this age group<sup>25</sup>.
- Volunteers for painting murals at schools, houses of culture, institutes and stations (graffiti art)<sup>26</sup>: A number of young artists drew drawings on the walls of schools, institutes and regional institutions, as well as on walls of stations and bridges to beautify them and give artistic feature to their surroundings.
- The Land for All Association to protect young people from illegal immigration: an initiative by a citizen in one of the popular neighborhoods, where it depends on voluntary activities such as painting, theater and music to convince young people not

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<sup>21</sup> An article in the La Presse journal on 12 November 2016 (in French) <http://www.lapresse.tn/11112016/122800/pour-une-politique-culturelle-emanant-de-la-societe-civile.html>

<sup>22</sup> The campaign website (<http://clavo.me/old-world-hospitality-tunisia-books-digital/>)

<sup>23</sup> An article in CNN- in Arabic, on 18 April 2016 (<http://arabic.cnn.com/world/2016/04/18/prisoner-has-right-read>)

<sup>24</sup> Platform address : <http://www.yallaread.com/>

<sup>25</sup> An article in Al Jazeera network on reading initiatives in Tunisia, on 21 November 2016 (<https://goo.gl/p3Rnej>)

<sup>26</sup> Jeune Afrique journal article (in Arabic) on 1 October 2016 about the growing phenomenon of drawing on walls in Tunisia (electronic version) (<https://goo.gl/04Poy9>)

to migrate illegally to Europe. The initiative helped persuading several young people to dismiss the idea of escape<sup>27</sup>.

It should be noted that the Ministry of Education has signed a framework agreement with more than 250 associations. Some of those agreements are to develop the cultural activities at schools and institutes. Moreover, the Ministry of Culture activated the agreement signed with the Arab Institute for Human Rights and began conducting joint activities on cultural rights.

It can be noticed that most of these associations, whether those contributing to international projects or locally-funded associations which succeeded in fostering new orientation for their activities and effectiveness in the cultural sector and reinforced the principle of benefit for all, contributed to attracting youth people, aging between twenty to thirty, and who in turn contribute to the effectiveness and successes of the associations. This promises of a new spirit in the cultural civil society that will change the map of the associative cultural work in the coming years, and allow gradual separation from public funding, which is treated sensitively due to the political agendas arising when relying on this fund. Such separation will support the independence of the cultural work in case these conditions, suitable for changes in the cultural sector, continued to exist.

But the civil society, especially in the cultural sector, remains fragile in the face of political agendas, whether related to parties or foreign funding, as the Constitution did not explicitly mention the exclusion of cultural institutions or culture from political pressure. Moreover, funding is unclear, with the absence of an actual evaluation of the projects. Thus, young people between twenty and thirty become the clear glimmer of hope to establish new cultural practices in Tunisia, especially to establish the culture of freedom of expression and respect of the cultural diversity and to continuously express it.

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<sup>27</sup> Reportage for France 24 in Arabic (<https://goo.gl/J8Umm0>)