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ARABIC SPRING AND THE WORK OF CULTURAL POLICY GROUPS – A BOTTOM-UP CULTURAL POLICY²

Summary

Since 2011, citizens' movements for democracy started to be developed throughout the Arab world, especially supported by civil society groups, artists and art collectives (Arab Spring). Majority of them had been involved in the last ten years in different capacity building programs in cultural management, organized by Cairo-based cultural organization Al Mawred (Cultural Resource). Thus, the idea offered to those activists by Al Mawred, to gather cultural operators in each country, and create an informal activist group to discuss how to change and influence cultural policy, was welcomed in all countries of the region and the first gatherings of cultural professionals were organized (Al Mawred was financing their work).

The aim of this paper is to evaluate the work and results of country specific national cultural policy groups (in this text later NCP group) especially regarding their impact on policy agenda setting and cultural policy making (bottom-up policies).

The evaluation had it academic, but also its operational aim: to foster the debate about future work of those analytical expert groups. Would it be good just to continue, or to substantially change ways of operation, to "professionalize" work of NCP groups, or at least of their research activities? It was important to come up with a new set of recommendations as it was obvious that pace of program development was different from country to country. Sometimes, this was easy to explain, taking in account regional differences

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like developed academic and cultural sphere in some countries (Lebanon, Morocco, Egypt) or completely inexistent civil society in culture in others (Libya, Yemen) or extremely bad political situation – wars and conflicts (Iraq, Syria, Yemen). For that reason, it was necessary to make an overview which would take into account the reality of each country, but also specificities of each group, sometimes composed only by practitioners from independent sector, sometimes with researchers or even with the representatives from the public sector. The research methods included desk research, field trips, Skype interviews (Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, Syria, and Mauritania) and questionnaires (Iraq, Yemen).

Key words

Arab countries, cultural policy, bottom-up cultural policy, civil society, agenda-setting, cultural policy education

Introduction

Although not very much developed, civil society in art and culture, as well as artists and cultural operators contributed to a large extent to different movements for democracy that spread since 2011 throughout the Arab world. For several years prior to that, a specific form of networking – through capacity building programs of Al Mawred Al Thaqafy was established among cultural professionals. Political processes, demonstrations, artistic energy that exploded in public spaces created a specific pan-Arab public realm in whom many actors wanted to go further and to really contribute more to cultural, social and political changes in their countries. Al Mawred offered logistic support to cultural activists willing to create groups for analytical and policy work, focusing on cultural needs, challenges and issues that needed to be solved by innovative cultural policy instruments. Throughout the region members of Al Mawred Board and their ex-grantees organized first gatherings of cultural professionals. The process of creation of *national cultural policy groups* (NCPG) was different from country to country, depending on its socio-political situation, capacities and vision of member founders, their research capacities, but also, depending of the readiness of the public employees in cultural field to participate, and readiness of independent sector to collaborate with them.

After 4 years the moment came when this process should be evaluated in order to foster the debate about future work. Would it be good just to continue, or to substantially change ways of operation, to “professionalize” work of NCP groups or at least their research activities? It was important to come up with a new set of recommendations as it was obvious that pace of program development was different from country to country. In every country state of the arts of cultural policy is different, including level of cultural rights protected by cultural policies (freedom of expression, cultural diversities, accessibility of culture). At the same time, the level of university education, especially in the field of social sciences and humanities, is different (in accordance with the level of freedom of expression), thus, in some countries there are numerous academic institutions that are dealing with relevant socio-cultural and political issues (Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt), while in many others, there are none. The specifically difficult situation for finding enough interested cultural operators to work in a field of cultural policy related to some countries where it is not easy to create ONG and where is no civil society in culture like (Libya, Yemen) or where the political situation – wars and conflicts (Iraq, Syria, Yemen) is extremely bad.

The premise of the whole endeavour was that in the Region there are a number of common challenges and issues related to cultural sector development and specifically regarding introduction of cultural policy debate within society (Al Mawred Al Thaqafy 2010). At the same time, it was clear that huge discrepancies exist in cultural field in which crucial social battles are lead symbolically: Islamism vs. laicism, national mono culture (Arabisation) vs. recognizing diversities; tradition vs. globalization and Westernization; rigid social structures vs. modernity, etc. Specifically important is the sense of humiliation (Moisi 2010) that in cultural sphere is leading toward radicalisation and islamization, and thus cultural policy should be one of the key agents in combatting this feeling that is distorting the whole region.

Specifically, the intention of this Program was to provide an opportunity for cultural researchers, practitioners and artists to reflect constructively on crucial issues affecting cultural life in their countries, trying to find responses and advocacy arguments which can be translated as cultural policy instruments, and even more, public policy instruments enabling more democratic civic participation.

Methodology

The aim of the research was to assess ability of each national group's to play a role in improving the cultural working environment in its country; to analyze how democratic the creation of each group was, and how representative it was; how appropriate and efficient, for the objectives they adopted, were each national group's structure, working mechanisms, resources, and experience? Finally, are they capable for continuing independently, without their relationship with Culture Resource (what were their impacts and already achieved results, as well as group's needs: legal, financial, administrative, organizational, cognitive, etc.)?

The research was done by combining several methods: *field visits* (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Lebanon, and Egypt) with *interviews* of the individual members and representative *focus groups* (usually, core group of member founders or groups of potential beneficiaries, independent cultural operators); *Skype interviews* (Jordan, Iraq, Palestine and Mauritania) and *questionnaires* (Yemen). Some of those field visits were happening in another country: in Egypt for Sudan, where numerous cultural practitioners are living escaping repression, and in Lebanon for Syria where even NGOs as well as individuals have moved. Of course, it has its consequence of research results as the researcher did not have access to the people still living in the country.

The timing of the research was not good for those groups whose work have only started and then was interrupted by war and internal conflicts (Iraq, Yemen, and Syria). On the other side, it was the last moment to do the research in countries such as Egypt, Morocco and Algeria where groups had excellent results, but for different reasons are now on the crossroads. It was also important for groups which have been initiated but unfortunately have not started to work (Tunisia, Jordan and Lebanon). Because of all that, although it was conceived as *evaluative research*, I saw my role in a proactive way, thus introducing methods of *action research* (influencing and stimulating interlocutors to re-discuss, restart or start their operations according to their stage of development).

Document analysis was important part of the research and it included both documents produced by NCPGs, but also other similar texts and documents produced by other authors inside and outside region. *Content analysis* of the video campaigns (Egypt, Sudan) was done in a qualitative and not a quantitative manner. Sometimes, the report will make "digressions" about certain

policy measures or issues such as art education, but it seems to me that it would give more arguments for later country-specific recommendations.

Methods of interpretation and modeling, necessary for every evaluative policy research were used for the final presentation of the research results. After several visits, it became obvious that it will be difficult to imagine general set of recommendations for all NCP groups and Al Mawred. Thus, this report is conceptualized country by country with the set of specific recommendations for each NCP group and with the final set of recommendations for Al Mawred and the Program as such. In this final set of recommendations I took into account the opinions and suggestions given by different groups, but modified according to wider research results in order to come up with solutions which might be acceptable throughout the Region (as sometimes, recommendations were contradictory like in case of “registration” or too country-specific or group-specific).

The evaluation of the work of NCP groups had to offer response to the question: what were the roles and outcomes of the NCP group work, but also, what might be their roles in future? Have those roles changed throughout the process, and how groups reacted on different pressures coming from inside (cultural sector) but also outside (government, or social turbulences)?

Research findings

Present context and future perspectives; Cultural operators are employed by state, often not according to their capacities, while numerous artists are left to survive on a non-existent market, not even having possibility to work in schools (art education is or non-existent or deteriorating).

Non-friendly policy environment; the groups had to work in non-friendly policy environment. There are other agents of change acting in these fields (of democratic transformation, public policy making), explicitly and implicitly (like human rights groups who fight for freedom of expression). Thus, the future success of NCP groups will be not a matter of the development of their skills and abilities – it is more about their efforts to cross with other agents and to develop coherent and comprehensive cultural policy ACTION RESEARCH.

Education in the field of cultural policy; Cultural policy is not defined and recognized as academic discipline and there is no institute which would systematically address this issue. However, there are some publications and individual research contributions, but stay un-discussed and unused by professional community (for example, the book *Pour un Maroc de la culture: actes du colloque*, offers numerous recommendations for public policy making, but there is no evidence of any follow-up). Thus, NCP groups have fulfilled this lack in trying to address numerous burning issues in contemporary cultural life. The scope of the issues addressed was very different – from freedom of expression (Dragičević Šešić, 2014) to status of the artists, from accessibility and right to culture to minority rights and use of their language. It is clear that needs are different in different countries as well as interest and capacities of the NCP groups.

The first phase of NCPG work was, in half of the countries, done successfully: raising awareness about cultural policy concepts and (non)democratic process of policy-making, and on the importance of its effects in daily life for artistic community, but even more for community at large (participation, accessibility, etc.). This awareness was and still should be raised among policy makers (politicians and public administration), media and critical public opinion, among cultural operators and in all other sectors that are related to culture – from education to creative economy and tourism. This interdisciplinary dimension of cultural policy research is still to be “discovered” in the Region.

Visibility of the NCP Groups: in discussing cultural policy in every country it was obvious that NCP groups had brought the policy debate in public arena. But, everywhere the role of the Ministry of Culture has been emphasized, as it is seen as a key agent of routine or of possible change. But, most of the groups had point out that major problem today is that ministries (and consequently policies) are changing often due to instability of governments. It is a sign of “personalization” of cultural policy, and lack of any systemic procedures in decision-making, although interviewed public officials insisted that numerous procedures (like competitions for projects and juries) have been instituted throughout the region.

Guiding tour through the Arab region – NCP groups

In this part, I will introduce summaries of the every single study case – country perspectives (arranged in an alphabetical order), with the emphasis on the countries where NCP groups achieved better results. To understand the context in which NCP groups are created and developed, it is necessary to compare their differences and their similarities in terms of evaluation's results, as well as in terms of complex political environments, revolutions, war conflicts, etc.

The Case of Algeria

The Group is well known and appreciated throughout Arab world, but also in their cultural community. The members of this NCP group are committed, well-educated and with ambition to raise cultural policy standards by firstly raising the knowledge about its concepts and instruments within civil society. Considering that Algeria is a state with centralized and non-democratic cultural policy, this group has positioned itself in confrontation with present government and Ministry of culture. Their criticism is well-grounded in both what Ministry of culture do, like big investment projects (ANGRGPC 2012; Toumi 2012), 7 major festivals spending huge money, etc, and in what Ministry of culture do not do – restructuration and new governance for the houses of culture in vilayet, for example. Their intent is to develop further their work by joining the process of mapping (as initiated by *Racines* and *Arterial network* in Morocco) in order to create a kind of *cultural atlas* which would serve as a base for further debates among civil society.

Legal issues regarding civil society associations; there are numerous artistic collectives and associations which do not have a legal status like *Jahedia*, association of one famous novelist. This association wants to start its work as a group collaborating with someone who has the legal status and a space where they could meet. Unfortunately, they cannot count on University to be a partner in their future process and research. Cultural operators and activists are spread everywhere.

Relations among cultural operators of three Maghreb states; as the major challenge, the NCP group sees the lack of the intensive cultural relations in between cultural operators of the three Maghreb states. Isolation of Algerian cultural operators due to the political situation in 90's when majority of links had been cut, has still its repercussions today. Cultural operators feel isolated

from the Regional cultural processes as they are not part of the Abarra program and their cultural operators are rarely receiving grants from Al Mawred.

The other opportunities for continuous professional education in Algeria, such as European Diploma in cultural project management or Connections educational programs, are not widely known and those who benefited those programs mostly come from civil society and are not included in the processes of cultural development. (Participants on European Diploma, or on Diploma of MENA region, are freelancers now in Algeria although with the huge capacity to help processes of development of cultural policy).

The Case of Egypt

Egyptian group was the first NCP Group in the region, created immediately after publication of the first Egypt cultural policy country profile (Menha El Batraoui & Nermeen Khafagui in: Al Mawred, 2010). It consisted of independent activists, governmental representatives and academics. The group started its work by opening up a general discussion on cultural policies. But, an inner conflict between the independent and governmental members of the Group prevented any result to be achieved. When the revolution took place, the governmental representatives were immediately excluded from the group as “it was a moment of revolutionary tide” (Ayman). The group’s new structure consisted of 25 members: artists, independent activists and academics. This group started intensively to work from January 2011 till June 2012, when Muslim Brotherhood took over the control of the country. Then, new conflicts and disagreements in the group started. Thus, the group has not completed a written cultural policy proposal. They succeeded in writing a brief proposal for a general framework for a new cultural policy in Egypt (ENCPG, 2012). It was more an introduction to the whole cultural policy review and this document was submitted to the parliament committee. The review of cultural policy according to the Arterial network design concerned only four out of 11 chapters.

Arab spring gave a push for the Group work, but at the same time contributed to the creation of other groupings such as The Coalition of Independent Culture which engaged 60 organizations and 100 persons (many of the NCP group members were members of this coalition). Its main cultural action was called “Arts Square”, engaging numerous artists to perform in public space. But, all of their actions finished abruptly with military coup

in 2013. After June 30th 2013, everything can be presented as a National security risk.

Thus, some organizations are banned to work in Egypt under accusation that they are threats to National security. Public institutions do not dare to open their spaces for independent projects fearing repression. Auto-censorship in public sector and media is on the raise. Many of cultural operators think about leaving the country. Those changes were discarding nearly all achievements gained through revolution in 2011, marginalizing the role of the National Council for Culture, of all committees created within the Ministry, and even of the projects of public servants aimed to raise capacities of artists working in provinces. Current laws are preventing civil society to act, as the public space is not available any more, ban on foreign money is raised and suspicion towards anyone registered abroad is being widespread. Although law prescribe that committees are supposed to give recommendations for the strategies to Supreme Council of Culture, this is not implemented. Already before revolution, the situation within the Ministry was similar as the structure of the Ministry was not transparent and inhibiting for cultural operators.

Achievements; NCP Group also organized several conferences that also brought many recommendations regarding inter sectorial coordination (with Ministry of Education, Religion, Education, etc.). All of that is now in the Ministry, but forgotten and rejected. Besides all of these barriers and interruptions, Egyptian NCP Group achievements are visible, done in the complex situation and working on the reforms in the field of the art and cultural policies. As the most successful project of the NCP group they named a project *Cultural policy for all Egyptians*. They even see possible future for this project, to be developed together with Ministry of Education and find its place in school manuals. How effective this project was is shown in the fact that slogans from this action can still be heard in Egypt and throughout the Region. Achievement of the Group is existence of different proposals to reformulate laws related to freedom of expression. The Group reviewed and discussed all existing relevant law and proposed adequate changes together with legal experts and artists. Those proposals are ready to be published in a form of book. Very important achievement of the Group is the document about new Egyptian cultural policy sent to the committee for the culture of the Parliament which has approved this document on the very day when the Parliament was dismissed. (Cultural policy report was done according to Arterial network questionnaire).

The case of Iraq

Opinion which prevails in the group is that this work will be a step toward introducing cultural management in the country and to set the basis for the institutional cultural system in Iraq (“which has many artists but few managers and administrators”). Thus, as major activities they foresee campaigns to influence public opinion regarding numerous issues of cultural policy such as copyright, access to Iraqi publications, legal environment for Iraqi culture, etc. The aims of their work were defined as to introduce the concept of ‘cultural policy in the Arab world’ to Iraqi cultural and social milieu, but also make sure that this voice could be heard by the state’s executive and legislative bodies. Other aims were to make a change in the legal framework of cultural work in Iraq and to conduct a survey the notion of cultural policy in Iraq.

Needs: The division of Iraq territory and ongoing war creates different options for the future political development. There is a serious need for a dialogue between the Arab and Kurd communities regarding future perspectives of cultural development in for the first time decentralized country. It seems to me that there is a need to enlarge group with significant Kurd and other minority presence and to discuss questions related to minority cultures even “across the frontiers”. It seems that group wants to see Iraqi culture as unified as it used to be. As Al-Daradji pointed out: “Culture can sort out the war of Iraq (...) Make more theatres, make fewer terrorists”. Afterwards, the situation got even worse as Islamists are deliberately targeting top scientists. Thus, exit from Iraq is massively demanded and experts are easily accepted in the West. It seems that in majority in Arabic countries researchers and artists are not seen as “national treasure”.

The case of Jordan

The group is still at its beginning as they feel that they lack both information and knowledge. The group is aware that their results are very small and the fact that they succeeded in bringing together a group of people (mostly curators and artists) willing to participate and share their scarce knowledge is already a success. There is no adequate NGO or cultural institution where they could meet, keep books and other necessary materials which they are bringing from different trainings.

The case of Lebanon

In this very moment the core group, with highly competent activist members, is proposing a concept of work and an action plan which include organization of serial seminars as preparatory structures for a big conference. Main issues of those seminars will be related to financing (basically about state financing mechanisms), festivalization (with emphasis on the role of municipalities), education and art education (intersectorial approach with culture education research); then, judiciary seminar presenting relevant case studies from Lebanon courts and media censorship.

Core group discuss possibilities to be linked to one organization ready to offer its services. The “tender” can be open for both independent organisations, but also to research institutes and university departments. This organization would not be considered as a leader and project owner, but as a project coordinator. The next step would concern creation of a local/national network of cultural policy agents such as citizen initiatives (Beit Beirut (House of Beirut), *The Civil Campaign to Protect the Daliéh of Raouche* and *Campaign for Beirut theatre*), researchers, university departments, activists NGOs, all those with explicit or implicit results in the domain. Then, throughout the work, the network should be enlarged with experts from other related areas, such as law, financing, urban planning, tourism, education etc., in order to create interdisciplinary working platform. The work will demand high level of engagement but also ethical, inclusive approach, enabling experts from all three sectors to participate equally, avoiding “civil society sectarianism” and expert authoritarianism (task: articulating and maintaining ethical standards).

Case of Mauritania

Mauritanian NCP group was extremely active and they started as a group of 5 but quickly succeeded to enlarge the group to 35 members. The most active period was 2014 when they were officially registered as a group, although they were created in 2013. Theirs’ main role is to monitor cultural policy development and to update data base on cultural stakeholders (cultural organizations) and compiling relevant texts. The main activities included *training, research and conferences*. The training component was realized through two workshops: support workshop for Nouakchott municipality (with majors of the nine provinces and the main NCPG team). This training was financed by Ministry of culture and UNESCO national committee. The Group is very satisfied with its relation with the Ministry of Culture (their main contacts

were officers of Ministry of culture, director of programs, director for dissemination, etc.) and other ministries where their work is always well received. However, there are no major political actions or decisions coming from this collaboration yet. What was promising in the moment of NCP group creation was the fact that the new Minister for culture and crafts – FatmaVall Mint Soueinae was coming from cultural field and that knowing all complexities of Mauritanian culture, she tried to create 5-year program for cultural development. In order to achieve that, she launched the dialogue between public and civic sector. However, in January 2015, she was nominated Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, and new Minister for Culture and crafts came –Mme Hindou Mint Ainina with visions also oriented toward development, but even more to “national cohesion”, expressing that “*a common moral reference which would revalorized Mauritanian plural identities*” would be needed.

Mauritanian NCPG has shown great competence not only in succeeding to enter in public dialogue with authorities, but also in analyzing the work and using the results of groups in other countries (even the work and results of Senegal colleagues which are not connected to Al Mawred). This interest is a proof of their commitment and readiness to develop further NCPG actions.

Case of Morocco

The members of the NCP group see themselves mostly as *a committee for reflection and discussion about cultural policy issues in Morocco*. The major part of their work was the analysis of legislative system and collection of relevant case studies (done by students of MA program in cultural mediation). The NCP group consider a possibility to link further with 4 to 5 universities which have departments related to arts (theatre, visual arts, cultural studies), to develop connections and collaborations and to create center of excellence in future, possibly UNESCO Chair in cultural policy and management.³They organized one national conference about regionalization as 12 Regions in Morocco has been created. The aim of the conference was to raise awareness of the parliamentarians for the issues of cultural policies and to make clear that culture is a public issue. The NCP group thinks that territorialization of the public policies in Morocco is a crucial issue in democratizing society (deconcentration and regionalization of the power).

3 The University Hasan II will start MA program in cultural policy and management for the students in the Region in English language with the help of Hildesheim University in Germany, and this opportunity should be largely used.

Two teams, two different perspectives; Today, there are two active groups in the field: the NCP group financed by *Al Mawred*, and another team for analysis and reflection about cultural policy, engaged by NGO *Racines*, which in this moment is also heading the *Arterial network* (network devoted to mutual support and cooperation among African artists and cultural operators in relation to cultural policies; created in 2007, today has 28 African countries membership). There are huge differences between the two teams. First team, The NCP group is linked to the Trade Union of Artists and the House of Poetry, associations with history in Moroccan cultural movements. Those two organizations have important part in cultural memory and they are respected in the society, especially in the intellectual circles. Their work is based on passion for the arts and on principles of voluntarism. On the other side, *Racines* team⁴ is based on the circle of young, urban activist with cosmopolitan vision (francophone), working full time and demanding professional remuneration. They have larger international perspectives, they are better informed about foreign funds and possible donations, and thus they created a systemic research project of cultural mapping engaging 25 persons in researching 18 interdisciplinary domains and 6 cross disciplinary themes. Beside research, each Wednesday *Racines* is organizing meetings with professionals on different themes with the aim to identify some recommendations for policy makers. As a consequence, one day of reflection “Etats generaux de la culture” has been organized on 12 November 2014. To complement those debates, 3 round tables with the Ministry have been organized in presence of international experts.

Those two groups seem to be ideologically and generationally divided, not participating in each other projects. As the NCP group has not developed a strong program to be able to fundraise outside of the usual routine, their only financial resource, besides initial one from *Al Mawred*, is coming from the Ministry of Culture. Although the Group considers that as a huge achievement, in fact it shows that in the present situation they don't have the strength for ambitious project for which it could be possible to fundraise and to achieve more, and to compete with the results of the *Racines* team.

4 I have discussed with Aadel Saidani and with Dounia Beslinmane, 18th May 2015.

The case of Palestine

From its founding at the beginning of 2014, the Group has not been very active, but they joined other initiatives and created numerous partnerships in Palestine in order to raise awareness about the importance of cultural policy. The Group also wanted to develop research and data collection about cultural policies on different Palestinian territories. They were collaborating with UNESCO to educate a team for the implementation of the convention 2005. They advocated at UNESCO for a development of national statistics in the area of culture. As Palestinian network of performing arts organizations (13 members) was created due to a help of the most important cultural player in Palestine, Al Qattan foundation⁵, the NCP group will develop partnership with them.

The initial idea was to work on developing skills through training, but this work on capacity building program has been stopped, and in this moment, they are developing more lobbying and advocacy actions: their project of the campaign about importance of cultural policy is under investigation for financing in the program MED culture.

The war conflict which is still present on Palestinian territories is making discussion about arts and cultural policy undesirable and obsolete. Israeli authorities are clearly preventing mutual collaboration of Palestinian artists, artistic organizations and researchers, as the mobility of the people living in Gaza is extremely limited. On the other side, the problems with political instability of Palestinian government prevent long term planning and development of the concrete action plan. For example, NCPG developed collaboration with NGO “Palestine tomorrow” which is dealing with sustainable development. The NCP group introduce to them an idea about culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development, but the Palestinian government closed this NGO under the pretext that they have been laundering the money. Each time, when the government and the Ministry are changing, the NCP group is practically on hold, as well as the whole civil society scene. Another big obstacle for the work of the Group is that Palestine is not any more regional priority. Since war in Syria, political situation is affecting funding trends. Ford foundation and many others pooled out from the Palestine: the others that stayed are focusing more on humanitarian issues.

5 See at <http://www.qattanfoundation.org/en/cap>

The case of Sudan

The core organizer of the work of the NCP group is NABTA center, situated in Cairo, which was a grantee of Abarra program in 2012. NABTA is connecting all Sudanese intellectuals and artists who live now in Cairo.⁶ According to the NCPG, cultural policy is a new concept for Sudanese artists and intellectuals, so majority of them do not even know what it is about. To understand at least part of the complexities that NCPG is facing, it has to be said that in Sudan there are 300 tribes and hundred local languages, thus the major reason for conflict is a “culture”. It is conflict of identities. The major priority of official cultural policy of Sudan is *Arabization and Islamization* of the country. Thus, the Group sees as their major task to fight against racism embedded in official policies. The Group has to focus on roots of the problem – how to make this diversity accepted as a value, how to make this diversity sustainable, how to develop policy of Sudanism. It should be a national project where questions of religious tolerance, diversity of heritage, tribal immaterial heritage, etc., should be discussed. Beside this, the major activity is Campaign *Art vs. War*⁷ against racial prejudices and for acceptance of racial diversity. In that light, the Group developed 7 activities focusing on fighting racial discrimination which means engaging in educational activities, law changes, public activities and media, art practices against war, etc. Campaign started with 4 designers, but now they are enlarging the team with theatre and music people and a filmmaker who created a video with music for peace which today is spreading around Sudan using social networks. But, the organizations in Sudan are not allowed to receive funds from abroad. Reports which were done weren't precise and authentic. The authors have not had deep insight and the research is on the surface. The culture of people could not be felt. The Group sees that they have to enlarge and to connect to other groups in the Region who are engaged in similar activities such as U40 Africa, U40 Arabesque, but also through UNESCO and other organizations in Sudan to lobby Government to do something (at least UNESCO conventions are signed).

6 In fact, all members of the national cultural policy groups are living today in Egypt, some of them as refugees, and some as “economic migrants”. (According to them, majority of Sudanese intellectuals were forced to leave Sudan. It is obvious that there is no freedom of expression in Sudan and that many authors are submitted to censorship. The censorship is a major problem in Sudan as manuscripts should be submitted to censorship before and after printing. The minimum punishment for breaking the law for a writer or a journalist is 5 years of prison.

7 See at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZJXOeRSEQI>.

The case of Syria

As majority of the Syrian intellectuals and artists are today living throughout the world, it is very difficult to form a group only with those who are now settled in Syria and who do not have relevant information from the groups in another countries and first of all in Syria itself. My objection to the presented document (Ettijahat 2013) is that it does not take into account actual situation and war conflict. Even the premise sound as a wishful thinking: “We believe that the transformations taking place now are not only political transformations, but are in their depths a matter of cultural transformations”.

It would be very important to reconsider list of priorities derived from the questionnaire done in 2012-13 which mixed localized cultural actions in refugee camps with larger actions in the field of cultural advocacy such as “defending culture as a right to each Syrian citizen.” The work of Task Force should be built on all of those nine priorities, but in coordination with different organizations and actors throughout the key countries where the Syrian people are now situated. As much as it is important to research creative expression and cultural production in times of wars, it is even more important to identify urgent issues and connect all forces in lobbying and advocacy with immediate solutions such as the action lead from British Council Syria (situated now in Beirut) *Save Palmira!*

One of major issue would be to introduce culture in the international agenda for Syria and to try to identify narratives which would offer alternative to usual media representation of Syria as a country of war in-between regime on one side and Isis on the other side. Voices which were active before (Savah Wael 2012) and heard at the beginning of Syrian revolution are dead, imprisoned, or in exile, asking asylums, silenced by regime, or depressed and withdrawn from public life.

The case of Tunisia

To understand discrepancies and divisions in Tunisian cultural sector, it is important to re-consider the role of art education and education for cultural mediation, which is very developed compared to other countries in the region. During the Feasibility study research for a Regional MA program, the research group identified a large network of universities in Tuni-

sia⁸ which have different type of art mediation and cultural policy education. Unfortunately, it seems that many of them are “socially isolated” from the real agents of cultural field (objectively, those are not strong university departments, and average student comes with mark of 12 points from secondary school), as none of them was invited to participate in the process of the creation of NCP group. Thus, staying “among ourselves” to avoid the risk, was this time extremely risky for this project and in fact prevented its achievement.

Tunisia is in the constant change – 4 governments in 4 years. After revolution a cultural sector went through two phases: phase of hope and phase of stagnation. Unfortunately, NCPG started to work exactly in this period (November-December 2014), and the focus went on the Ministry was doing: the Sponsoring Law and the Status of the artists. There is no reflection about necessity to create national cultural markets for every domain of the arts, and to invent cultural policy instruments and measures to endorse a regional cultural market. However, what is better in Tunisia then in other Arab countries is art education and thus every year a new generation of artists is entering the field, fighting for their space for work, perform, exhibit. The process of the cultural policy research should be led always in parallel throughout the Arab world as it has to include analysis of mutual cultural cooperation, exchange and trade: on one side the cultural market (with its inequality, or predominance of certain countries like Egypt for the film, etc.) or on the other, public festivals and events – lacking systemic contacts and exchange.

The case of Yemen

The Group immediately started to work and the first “paper” was issued in September 2013, a booklet (in Arabic) entitled ‘General Framework for National Cultural Policy’, that contained the main outcomes of a conference named the *Cultural Policy and Cultural Development Conference* that took place May 6-8, 2013, organized by the Yemeni Ministry of Culture. A new cultural policy was devised at the conference, and the ministry announced that they approve of this new cultural policy proposal. The Yemeni group highlighted this conference and its outcomes at that time, since it was the result of a joint effort between the Ministry of Culture and the Yemeni NCP group, ‘with the participation of a wide spectrum of workers in various gov-

8 See: Al Mawred Feasibility Study to develop MA program in cultural policy and Management, <http://egypt.eunic-online.eu/?q=content/pan-arab-postgraduate-qualification-cultural-management-feasibility-study-eunic-egypt>.

ernmental and independent cultural fields, with the aim of developing a national cultural strategy that is up to date with the major changes Yemeni society is undergoing as well as sustainable for the future culture of modern Yemen. ‘The major aim of the document was to lobby the Government to develop more precise cultural policy framework. They have chosen this approach thinking that it is most important first step to press the government in changing the constitutional articles related to culture. They publicly announced the creation of the group and have informed about its activities in a variety of mass media. As few other NCP groups they have launched a media campaign for the right to culture.

Although at the beginning of the Arab spring it seemed that political circumstances are improving (till September 2014), since, the situation changed completely as armed militia took control of the capital. The situation is extremely difficult in cities like Taiz (considered as the cultural capital of Yemen) and in Aden (where the most important cultural activities are concentrated). The most difficult is in Sanaa as it was seized by the Houthis who are intolerant toward arts (even against traditional wedding music). In fact the last meeting of the group was held in April 2014. State organizations and administration collapsed, civil war expanded to a regional war, which is still lasting. Both Ministry of culture and the whole civil sector are paralyzed, which according to Ammar, interrupted the functioning of the Group.

Conclusions

As a result of the research, I had come up with numerous recommendations to Al Mawred, regarding the further governance of the Program and a need to develop mutual synergy in such an endeavor (Dragičević Šešić, 2010). First, I advocate greater use of partnership schemes, whereby NCP groups can collaborate with relevant local organizations or leaders. This would create wider bases of knowledge, and broaden the network of similarly focused actors both domestically and internationally. Second, I recommend establishing general rules and procedures concerning the selection of groups’ participants that would prevent that initial group of few, like minded individuals, close its doors to other cultural operators, thus risks isolating other sectors of civil society. Third, an international advisory and orientation body of the Program should be established. Its primary responsibilities will include pan-regional coordination and international dialogue aiming for more communication and collaboration, particularly with similar groups in Europe, Asia,

and Africa. Also, the groups from Arab francophone countries should utilize their links with other francophone nations (that might bring insight with a variety of different cultural policies, as well as lobby groups, serving as examples for future work).

In terms of strengthening the groups themselves, it should be considered crucial to recruit experts from more diverse fields, including law, economics, education, and many others, to raise level of debate and to raise standards in inter-disciplinary research (partnership with academic sphere). By supporting and working with doctoral students and researchers and providing research training schemes, national groups will be able to diversify their efforts and open themselves to original perspectives and, in turn, help to develop more precise strategic focus. This should lead to greater fulfillment of local needs, including the issues of censorship and freedom of expression in each country, which are presently underrepresented.

The issue of naming and registering of groups is slightly confusing. Policy of “free”, independent groupings and no name policy prevent groups from advertising themselves, submitting research papers to think-tanks, and connecting with other bodies around the region and the world. In order to move forward, this should be addressed as quickly as possible; the group should be registered as think tank NGO, and find an easily identified, acronymic or symbolic name.

The evaluation process in itself was stimulating for the group work, but also it was success regarding possibility to have a real insights into the groups’ work. In general, groups are well- created, with competent and energetic people. If these recommendations will be taken seriously and implemented, the possibilities of accomplishment are high, even in non-policy friendly environment; to summarize, the future is promising for cultural policy research and development in the Arab region but not in the countries distorted by war and inner conflicts, where cultural policy agents are facing imminent danger.

In short, the survey has shown the following outcomes:

Each national group has expressed different ability to play a role in improving the cultural policy and cultural working environment in its country; groups with more knowledge and commitment, with stronger leadership and organization behind them, have had more influence in the domain of cultural policy and in raising cultural policy on the governmental agenda. The main

weakness relates to the creation of each group that was done in different way, but mostly in a relatively close circle of colleagues and friends (rarely the group was representative for the totality of the independent cultural sector and of the diversity of cultural field). The major problem in the functioning of the groups was its managing mechanisms. This was the weakest part of the whole program, as the work relied mostly on enthusiasm and motivation of its members. Thus, in the future, more appropriate model of functioning and governance should be identified, to ensure efficiency and impactful outcomes of the group work. Nearly all elements: national group's structure, its working mechanisms, links to available resources, and to individual experiences and knowledge (involving young professionals who gained their degrees abroad, for example), have to be rethought.

In this moment NCP groups, with few exceptions, are not capable to develop their work autonomously without a help of Al Mawred or similar resource organization (such as *Racines*). Although each of them has developed different work plan and have adopted different strategies, from the moment when Al Mawred withdraw from the scene (due to the political situation in Egypt) nearly all of the groups stopped working. This was mostly linked to the lack of financial and other resources (no possibility for money transfer) but also to the lack of regional and local leadership (withdrawal of Basma el Hussein, from Al Mawred, perceived as a strong regional leader, also added to the process of slow-downing of the activities). To be able to work autonomously NCP groups should solve their legal existence, whether deciding to operate as separate legal entities or as groups attached to a capable organization. However, NCP groups with recognized local leadership (Algeria and Mauritania) had succeeded in developing their work more autonomously.

Impact of each group was different as its capacity and conditions in their local context were different. Thus, their outcomes are described in country specific analysis. On the general level, it can be considered that their most important results relate to the raising awareness about importance of cultural policy within public policy making (for the development of cultural sector), but also for the wider sustainable development of the country as such. The second achievement is creation of an environment of reflection and debates where concepts such as *public space* and *art for social change* are introduced, showing possibilities of art and culture to participate in wider democratic socio political reforms (El Sheikh, Heba 2015). In this respect, the important media campaigns were held in Egypt and Sudan, as well as conferences in other countries. Another important result concerns collection of data, de-

velopment of research and mapping practices and spreading the meaning of CP mapping and its methods among large community of practitioners (cultural operators). Majority of the NCP groups try to establish a small network of collaborators around themselves in a way that we can speak about *two-level network* of cultural policy researchers and organizations: regional (their mutual links) and national (links within the country). These local informal networks are different from country to country: in Morocco, House of Poets collaborated with University and different regional and professional associations; in Egypt, the Group even succeeded in linking representatives of public sector in their work; in Mauritania all organizations of independent sector, etc.

The lacking name of the Program and of the each group, which would act as one of the “identity” pillars, but also a mobilization agent, is preventing smooth public relations clearly identifying distinction between different stakeholders and organizations which are now appearing in the region willing to do the same task. This incapacity to find a name which would be acceptable for everyone, and use of the word “national”, is bringing even more confusion to the task, as this word is often used for official programs. Numerous are needs that each of the group has to be able to fulfill in future to continue in an efficient and in an independent way. Understaffed groups/organizations, or those who relied only on Al Mawred funds, could not achieve much. But to be able to do so, the whole Program would need serious reconfiguration in order that such a complex tasks and roles can be implemented.

To conclude, in spite of the huge differences among the work and results of NCP groups (without results as they have not started to operate: Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Tunisia and Yemen; sporadic research and actions: Syria, Sudan; visible results of different qualities: Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco and Egypt) all their activities were at least partially impactful and discussed among cultural operators, setting cultural policy issues on public agenda.

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ARAPSKO PROLEĆE: CIVILNO DRUŠTVO U BORBI ZA NOVU KULTURNU POLITIKU

Apstrakt

Širom Arapskog sveta, građanski pokreti za demokratiju šire se počev od 2012. godine, posebno podržani od strane udruženja građanskog društva, umetnikâ i umetničkih kolektiva (tzv. „Arapsko proleće”). Većina tih aktera je, tokom proteklih deset godina, bila uključena u programe izgradnje kapaciteta unutar menadžmenta u kulturi; programe je organizovala kulturna organizacija „Al Mawred” (Kulturni resurs) iz Kaira. Ideja koju je ta organizacija ponudila aktivistima sastojala se u tome da se okupe delatnici sa područja kulture u svakoj od zemalja, kao i da se oformi jedna neformalna aktivistička grupa koja bi razmatrala načine uticaja na kulturne politike, kao i njihove promene. Ideja je prihvaćena u svim zemljama regiona, tako da su organizovana prva okupljanja profesionalaca sa područja kulture (finansirana od organizacije Al Mawred).

Cilj ovog eseja je evaluacija rada i rezultata grupa za nacionalne kulturne politike, (specifičnih za svaku od zemalja), naročito u pogledu njihovog uticaja na formulisanje političkih agendi, kao i na kreiranje kulturne politike (politike koje se stvaraju od nižih ka višim nivoima). Evaluacija je imala kako naučni, tako i operativni cilj: da pokrene diskusiju o budućem radu ovih specijalističkih grupa za analizu. Da li samo treba da nastave svoj rad ili da značajno izmene način rada, da ga „profesionalizuju”, ili da, barem, profesionalizuju istraživačke aktivnosti? Bilo je važno iznaći novi niz preporuka, usled očigledne činjenice da se ritam razvoja programa razlikovao od zemlje do zemlje.

U nekim slučajevima, bilo je lako objasniti postojanje regionalnih razlika kao što je razvijena akademska i kulturna sfera u nekim zemljama (Liban, Maroko, Egipat), ili potpuno nepostojeće civilno društvo u drugim kulturama (Libija, Jemen), ili pak ekstremno loša politička situacija ratnog stanja i konflikata (Irak, Sirija, Jemen). Iz tog razloga, bilo je nužno napraviti jedinstven pregled koji bi uzeo u obzir stvarnost svake od ovih zemalja, ali takođe i specifičnosti svake grupe, koje su se ponekad isključivo sastojale od delatnika iz nezavisnog sektora, a ponekad od istraživača ili čak predstavnika

javnog sektora. Metodi istraživanja su obuhvatali kabinetsko istraživanje, odlaske na teren, intervjue putem Skype-a (Jordan, Palestina, Irak, Sirija i Mauritanija) i upitnike (Irak, Jemen).

Ključne reči

Arapske zemlje, kulturna politika, kulturna politika od nižih ka višim nivoima (bottom-up policies), civilno društvo, postavljanje agende, edukacija o kulturnim politikama