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THE HANDICRAFTS SECTOR IN LEBANON: EVOLUTION
OF POLICIES, STATUS QUO AND RECOMMENDATIONS

by
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ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT OF

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This paper's purpose is to trace and deconstruct the policy framework concerning the preservation of handicrafts in Lebanon. It also aims at showcasing the current reality of the sector while highlighting the challenges craftspeople are facing, and finally, it draws on future prospects and suggests policy recommendations for the sustainable development of the sector.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Handicrafts constitute a subset of the arts that is frequently overlooked. They are defined as products and produce made by hand with the use of a specialized skill or simple tools. These goods are usually utilitarian or decorative (Pani, D & Pradhan, S, 2016).

Blown glass, pottery, weaving, copper, woodwork, jewelry, embroidery, basket making, and soap are a few of Lebanon's traditional handicrafts.

According to Charles Issawi (2009), the country's capital, Beirut, was transformed from a third rate Arab town into a flourishing commercial city and became an important financial center by 1849. Furthermore, each village across Lebanon was famous for a specific skill or particular traditional item it produced. Local craftsmanship played an integral economic and social role in the country.

In addition, as per Carolyn Gates (1989), throughout the 19th century, commercial exchange integrated Lebanon into the world capitalist market due to European capital investment in the region and through European manufactured goods being traded for Lebanese silk on one hand, and olive oil and other handmade products on the other.

By the end of the 19th century however, European colonialism drastically altered international trade with the Beirut– Damascus axis being the main commercial network over the Mediterranean (Nahas, 2020). While silk was exported to France, most manufactured goods from England invaded the interior market and that contributed to

the beginning of the decline of traditional handicrafts and local production (Traboulsi, 2012).

The decline of the handicrafts sector was further accentuated with the repercussions of Lebanon's civil war (1975-1990) and the advance of globalization and the industrial age in the last half of the 20th century. The period of reconstruction post-war was characterized with a heavy dependence on import and neglect of export and local production, with an over pouring amount of cheap products coming from Asian countries. The sector was consequently marginalized and competition for craftspeople became burdensome.

Most handicrafts are now only seen at the old quarters of historical cities of Tripoli and Saida which are currently the main centers of small industrial production, such as furniture and textile manufacturing and other traditional crafts. These handicrafts however are not being produced anymore in marketed quantities despite the passing of artisanal techniques amongst family members over the years. Furthermore, the sector relies mostly on tourism as most crafts are bought as Lebanese gifts and souvenirs.

From a public policy perspective, the institutional framework concerned with handmade craftsmanship in Lebanon is feeble and relies greatly on unsustainable and conditioned local and international organizations support and funding.

The sector's situation was further aggravated by the unprecedented and most recent social and economic upheaval in the country. In fact, as of October 17, 2019, significant popular protests surfaced in all prominent Lebanese cities, especially Tripoli, Saida and Beirut. People requested an end to decades of corruption and the resignation of the government; however they were faced with purposed procrastination and deaf

ears by relevant authorities. These circumstances are leading the country's brittle economy to slowly collapse if no urgent action is initiated.

In addition to that, the emergence of the COVID-19 global pandemic in 2020 had and is still having catastrophic repercussions on all productive sectors. The pandemic and its several lockdowns intensified the collapse of the local currency and accelerated the economic crisis by decimating small and medium sized enterprises including those in the handicrafts sector.

Prior to the crisis, Lebanon lacked foundations for a strong economy founded on investments in certain sectors such as the manufacturing, agricultural and trade sectors. At present, with the magnification of the crisis, urgent cries by experts and protestors for Lebanon's policies to strengthen its agriculture, industry and trade sectors to sustain itself and boost its economy are being heard. Hence, there is no better time to bring forth the topic of craftsmanship and revive the handicrafts sector.

In an effort to better understand the evolution of decision making and governance policies regarding craftspeople in Lebanon, this paper's main objective is to trace and deconstruct the policy framework relevant to handicrafts in Lebanon. First, it starts by consolidating several publications on handicrafts in the literature review. Second, it conducts its findings through a couple of interviews with prominent local experts with regards to policies on handicrafts to highlight shortcomings within the field. Finally, it dissects all of the data, to suggest policy recommendations for the sector's empowerment.

The research attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1- How are handicrafts defined?
- 2- What are the types of handicrafts available in Lebanon?

- 3- What are the policies that were planned and implemented regarding the handicrafts sector in Lebanon?
- 4- What is the current legal and social status of Lebanese handicrafts in Lebanon?
- 5- What are the policy shortcomings of the sector in Lebanon?
- 6- How can the policy framework relevant to the handicrafts sector in Lebanon improve to ensure its economic and social development?

This paper is divided into six chapters:

- Chapter 1: Introduction.
- Chapter 2: Literature review.
- Chapter 3: Research methodology and objectives.
- Chapter 4: Findings and challenges.
- Chapter 5: Analysis and recommendations.
- Chapter 6: Conclusion.

CHAPTER II

LITTERATURE REVIEW

A. Common Discourse and Definition

The common and institutional discourse about handicrafts defines them as tangible and intangible products that represent the cultural heritage and traditions of any country, region or local community (Mckercher, B & Lew, A, 2006). As commonly understood, handicrafts involve hand skills which are used to produce an object of a certain type and quality. Handmade craftsmanship is also defined as a skilled activity in which something is made in a traditional way with the hands rather than being produced by machines in a factory (AIACA, 2017).

In addition, handicrafts are most commonly known as artisanal crafts which are a type of traditional work where useful and decorative devices are made completely by hand or by using only simple tools (Shames, 2020). The concept was further defined by the French Le petit Robert dictionary in its reference to the word “artisanat”; which is the manual profession that is characterized with a traditional character and that is practiced alone or with the help of close relatives or a small number of people.

In Arabic literature, handicrafts are translated into “*Al-Hiraf al Yadawiyah*”; "الحرف اليدوية" which are defined by Al-Monjed (1984) as the handmade manufacturing industry that provides financial remuneration for a family (Republic of Lebanon, 2000).

Furthermore, craft is defined as the industrial work that dates back prior to the emergence of the capitalist industry. It was historically mixed with agricultural work and livestock breeding (Al Sibai, 1977). Initially, triggered by the need for tools to survive and protect themselves, people produced handicrafts from any material of their surroundings to hunt for their prey and defend themselves. 2.7 billion years ago, those

tools build the artistic foundation for the evolution of handicrafts. With the evolution of mankind, the craft evolved flourishing into a way of portraying the art, culture, and heritage of individual societies (Lucy, 2019).

Handicrafts offer great value and utility. In fact, they are principally rooted in utilitarian and functional aspects of life especially within local and rural communities. While creating them, the craftspeople rely on their mental and manual skills which develop through the practice of the craft itself (AIACA, 2017). Crafts also give their makers a greater sense of value and empowers their confidence in themselves, especially when the production is difficult or impossible to achieve using machines (Al Samad, 1981).

The Ministry of Textiles of India proposes the definition of Handicraft as “Item or product produced through skills that are manual, with or without mechanical or electrical or other processes, which appeal to the eye due to the characteristics of being artistic or aesthetic or creative or ethnic or being representative of cultural or religious or social symbols of practices, whether traditional or contemporary. These items or products may or may not have a functional utility and can be used as a decorative item or gift” (AIACA, 2017).

In addition, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization/Information Technology Community (UNESCO/ITC) Symposium on Crafts and the International Market, International Symposium adopted the following definition in 1997: “Artisanal products are those produced by craftspeople, either completely by hand, or with the help of hand tools or even mechanical means, as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product. These products are produced without restriction in terms of

quantity and using raw materials from sustainable resources. The definition adds that “the special nature of artisanal products derives from their distinctive features, which can be utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, creative, culturally attached, decorative, functional, traditional, religiously and socially symbolic and significant” (USAID, 2006).

Hence, overlapping with mostly small industries, the handicraft field is complex and insinuates that the making of handicrafts is an endeavor that has intersecting dimensions whether in the economy, society, and culture (AIACA, 2017).

B. Opposing Discourse on Culture

Contrary to the institutional and common discourse, multiple authors critiqued the notion of cultural identity and denominated it as an illusion. Cultural identity imprisons society as it denies it the right to borrow from other societies by its mere definition (Bayart et.al, 2005). The author suggests that the term “culture” is often used out of convenience and laziness in order to avoid complex political and social perspectives. In his book Bayart indicates that “concepts such as “identity,” “ethnicity,” “culture,” and “community” are constructed out of a social imaginative that is both historical and ultimately ambiguous” (Bayart, J, 2005). This point of view was validated by numerous research and publications arguing that political leaders build imaginary concepts and images based on cultures, which they then condemn communities to live by (Pype, 2006). This discourse unveils the dualism of the concept of culture in policy making (Nahas, 2021)

C. Earliest and Lasting Handicrafts in Lebanon

Traditional handicrafts in Lebanon and neighboring countries such as Syria, Jordan, Palestine and Iraq spread all over the region and the world, portraying distinctive features of different cultures and heritages as well as the taste and skill of its craftspeople. These crafts evolved from simple pastimes into forms of expression, and into professions passed down and inherited from one generation to another for their special value and out of fear of becoming extinct (Lucy, 2019). For craftspeople, handicrafts are considered an art of living; as they used any local resources and materials to create objects for practical, everyday use. In these countries, artistry effectively rose during the rule of the Roman Empire and consumers' taste developed especially in seeking luxurious items. Hence, many handmade objects flourished especially the craft of mosaic, pottery, textile, glass, among others (Shames, 2020).

As for Lebanon, it witnessed a rich heritage of handicrafts activity in various fields due to its geographical location and its natural characteristics. Each of the historical periods known to Lebanon led tangible effects on today's handicrafts sector. The making of handicrafts was a human activity that was prevalent in various production patterns among the Lebanese society before the rise of capitalism until the end of the twentieth century (Republic of Lebanon, 2000).

Basket weaving is one of the earliest crafts in Lebanon. The Phoenician period witnessed the creation of baskets to ease the process of harvesting crops and other agricultural activities. Created from raw material such as reed, grass, and palm leaves, the weaving of baskets was sustained by rural communities for centuries and generations as part of their living heritage. Today, diverse regions specialize in making these baskets such as *Amchit* situated in Mount Lebanon which is famous for its unique

basket weaving with palm leaves. *Zgharta* in the north of the country, *Kefraya* in the *Bekaa* and *Saida* in the south are known for using reed and grass to make bigger baskets to carry fruits. In other areas, baskets are woven from bamboo or wood (Shames, 2020).

Loom weaving is another form of handicrafts dating back to the Phoenician era. The loom is an old machine that was used to produce tablecloths, carpets, silk bags, abayas, kaftans, robes and jackets. These crafts were specially and uniquely made using Tyrian purple dye by the Phoenicians. It is interesting to note as well that the first three flags of the country were woven in the *Zouk Mikael* tapestry in Mount Lebanon. Weaving from goat hair was also popular especially to make tents and carpets. In many rural villages such as *Kousba* and *Chehim*, ancient vertical looms are still preserved and used (Republic of Lebanon, 2000)

Furthermore, embroidery was mainly the craft of women in rural communities. The practice was that as soon as a girl turned ten years old, she would start embroidering her bridal attire on her own; this included personal (clothes, undergarments, bags, etc..) as well as household related pieces (tablecloths, pillow covers, bed sheets, etc...). Nowadays, embroidery workshops can be found in many villages across the country and visitors are welcome to explore and buy embroidery items (Al Hayek, 2019).

Another distinguished craft in Lebanon is the making of pottery. The use of pottery items is widespread in almost all kitchens in rural areas such as platters, tea sets, jars, etc... Traditional pottery workshops can still be found in the backyard of some houses with ovens and local material such as olive oil for the glaze. Pottery workshops are common in *Rachaya el-Fakhar*, the *Chouf* region, *Tripoli*, *Beit Chabab*, *Assia*, and *Aita el-Foukhar* (Al Hayek, 2019).

The craft of glass blowing is yet another very ancient and distinctive handicraft practiced in the rural areas of Lebanon. Phoenician cities *Tyre*, *Sarafand*, *Tripoli* and *Saida* were known for this type of artistry. Today, the most famous workshop and one of the few ones left is in *Sarafand* in the south of Lebanon where the technique used is still authentic and traditional. The *Baddaoui-Tripoli* workshop in the north of Lebanon also represents an ancient and rare technique of glass blowing artistry. Vases, glasses and candle holders are made in opaque glass with tiny air bubbles in several colors (Republic of Lebanon, 2000).

In addition, one the most ancient handicrafts is the making of traditional soap from olive oil, known for its unique purity and healing benefits. According to Nahas (2020), there was a direct commercial line between *Tripoli* and the French city of *Marseille* where soap made out of olive oil was exported from the Lebanese city, and called “Savon de Marseille”. Each family had their own secret mixture and stamped their soap bars with their initials or special symbol. Today, traditional soap is still very prominent in *Tripoli*.

Further to the above mentioned handicrafts, other widespread ones are still found in many villages and towns of Lebanon spread from the north to the south. Among these are the craft of knitting wool with the most important manufacturing centers located in the *Hermel* in the *Bekaa* area and in *Akkar* in the north of the country; the making of rugs out of wool threads, acrylic, goat hair and livery and cotton is highly popular as well in Mount Lebanon in the village of *Baskinta*. Stitch work to make table covers and flags is popular in *Baakline* and *Deir El Qamar* in the *Chouf* region. Folkloric toys of different sizes with traditional dress are still mainly found in *Douma*, *Batroun*, and *Saida* villages in the north and south of Lebanon. Furthermore, steel blade

and ox-horn handle knives are found in *Jezzine* in the south; silver jewelry at *Rashaya al Wadi* in the *Bekaa* region; copperware tools for homes and decoration in *Tripoli* and *Kalamoum* in the north and furniture and bags in *Beirut* (Republic of Lebanon, 2000).

D. Governance of Handicrafts in Lebanon

1. The Turning Point in 1958

During the first part of the Independence of Lebanon in 1943 and the end of the French Mandate, the government created a specialized unit entitled ‘Social Affairs’ within the Ministry of Economy in 1943, responsible for dealing with labor and worker issues (Nahas, 2018). In 1952, a Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs was established. However, the government’s impact was limited to organizations and orphanages and based on confessional grounds (Kanaan, 2008). Beirut was the sole focus and rural communities and villages were neglected. Hence, the economic and social situations were extremely dire and the government failed miserably at securing any type of social justice.

All of the above led to the 1958 Lebanon crisis further instigated by political and religious tensions (Kanaan, 2008). That period was characterized by frail institutions and high unemployment and social problems drastically weighed on the nation’s infrastructure. Furthermore, people were calling for closing disparities between urban and rural communities and establishing developmental balance and institutional frameworks,

The arrival of head of army General Fouad Chehab as president by the end of 1958, offered a glimmer of hope. Chehab’s motto was about “building the independent

state” by means of primordially reinforcing its institutions (Kanaan, 2008). Consequently, 1958 marked a turning point for the Lebanese policy framework.

2. The Creation of the Office of Social Development in 1959

1958 was a turning point for the establishment of the first public policy framework for social affairs that included the handicrafts sector (Kanaan, 2008). The Lebanese government, headed by Chehab, started to plan and implement social policies under the headline of establishing a modern and independent state. Accordingly, and as part of a restructuring of all government institutions, the “*Maslahat al Inaash al Ijtimai*”, مصلحة الانعاش الاجتماعي or the Office of Social Development (OSD) was created by legislative protocol in 1959. As per the protocol, the OSD was an autonomous entity responsible for social development especially in rural areas. As for the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, it had only a supervisory function over the OSD.

Chehab wanted to empower the institutions of the state and prioritize socio-economic development to fight underdevelopment, regional disparities, and protect the country from destabilizing external influences. The objective was also to counteract the dissatisfaction of rural communities after the 1958 crisis out of fear of political and security turmoil again (Nahas, 2018). Hence, the OSD developed a large network of social development centers in rural areas to closely work with local stakeholders and decentralize social care (Kanaan, 2008).

Special attention was given under the OSD to the handicrafts sector due to its social, economic and cultural foundations. Hence, the OSD founded and managed “*Bayt al-Mohtaref al-Lobnani*”, "بيت المحترف اللبناني", *Maison de L'Artisan Libanais* or *House of the Lebanese Craftsperson* in 1968. The house was an outlet for the

marketing and selling of handicraft production. Its modern architecture and location were very telling of the vision given for the handicrafts sector. Situated along the coastline of *Ain el Mraisseh*, the 900 square meters glass building was called a work of art, cleverly evocating tradition with modernity with its long arches and airy forms (Hage, 1999). The Maison showcased the importance of preserving the heritage of the Lebanese craftsman and was perceived as a revolutionary act for handmade crafts.

Furthermore, the OSD's creation was an important milestone for the country's political and administrative levels. It changed the methodology of governance and led to the creation of new institutions and departments putting policies to good use. It also formed the social infrastructure in the reform period in the beginning of the 1960s and its achievements were the basis of the creation of the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) as a stand-alone institution in the 1990s.

The objectives of the OSD were (Verdeil, 2004):

- Increasing national income to cope with the ever growing population;
- Improving the use of national resources and wealth in agriculture, poultry and livestock breeding, manufacturing industries and the likes;
- Preserving the service sector level and developing it in the fields of trade, finance, tourism and employment;
- Achieving social justice through a better distribution of national income and securing satisfactory standards of living for those most vulnerable;
- Reducing regional disparities in the following areas:
 1. Equipment and infrastructure
 2. Means of transportation and communication
 3. Health services

4. Education services
5. Social services
6. Administrative decentralization for all services
7. Agricultural development
8. Balance between trade freedom and protection of national industries.

As for its tasks, they included: setting in place a long term methodology for the social welfare of the country, monitoring its implementation, contributing to the assistance given for the implementation of new and existing social projects, guiding youth towards career education in gap areas and providing guidelines for vocational schools. It had an extremely flexible policy making scope of work with the following motto: ‘we start and then we assess’. Finally, the office also had financial independence from other state institutions hence its swift ability to conclude contracts and agreements with organizations and individuals to implement its policies (Kanaan, 2008).

Nevertheless, 1975 marked the beginning of the Lebanese civil war which greatly affected the social infrastructure of the country and crippled its institutions. With an absent government, large amounts of donations were received from Arab and International organizations to support civil societies in their emergency and assistance response. Part of the donations went to the creation of a new public entity entitled “Al-Haya’a al Olya Lil-ighatha”, الهيئة العليا للاغاثة or the High Relief Committee and some of the OSD’s branches were transferred to become executive ones to work under this committee. Furthermore, the office’s central building was destroyed, staff dispersed, and documents lost and burnt. There was difficulty in conducting regular and efficient communications between the projects’ departments. Moreover, in this period, civil

society organizations grew tremendously in size and impact and dissociated themselves completely from the government.

Due to all of the above, the OSDs' projects were discontinued and leaders expressed their wish to merge the office with the Ministry of Health for two reasons: the minister was convinced of the organic relationship between social work and health issues and because developed countries had the same ministries. As such, in 1983, shortly after the Israeli invasion, a legislative decree to merge both entities was drafted to take away OSD's autonomy and incorporate it as general directorate of social affairs within the Ministry of Health. However, this decree was never passed nor implemented until the Ministry of Social Affairs was created in the 1990s (Nahas, 2018).

3. The Creation of the Ministry of Social Affairs in 1993

Post-war, the country's infrastructure was destroyed, the number of displaced people and orphans rose extraordinarily, unemployment and illiteracy rates were very high, youth delinquency and drug addictions amplified and there was a high increase in economic and social disparities between cities and villages.

The Taef agreement in 1989 ended the war leading its lords to come into power (Nahas, 2018). Consequently the government started to partake in the reconstruction phase to where it shifted all of its attention. (Kanaan, 2008)

In parallel, the Ministry of Social Affairs was created in 1993 and the OSD was transformed into the general directorate of social affairs under that ministry (Kanan, 2008). The ministry's mandate was concerned with dealing with the social repercussions of the war (Nahas, 2018). Hence, it inherited the OSD's work plan and

developed it to further include those most affected by the war, such as children, the disabled, women and the elderly (Kanaan, 2008).

Elias Hobeika, member of the Lebanese forces party, was appointed the first minister of social affairs (Kanaan, 2008). In addition, the ministry was composed of a general director, two technical directorates, ten implementing departments and 6 regional sections for each governor. It also included a Central fund for social affairs with its own legal identity and financial independence for financing social projects. However, the fund was never really established (Nahas, 2018).

As successor of the OSD, the Ministry of Social Affairs became the legal guardian that regulates craftspeople and handicrafts (Makki, 2020). It was hence responsible for rebuilding *Maison de l'Artisan* in 1999 as part of a plan to revive the handicrafts sector. The Ministry aimed to make it a venue to display and sell local handicraft and a center for training craftspeople in their work. However, rebuilt under the Built, Operate and Transfer agreement (B.O.T), the store now occupies only a quarter of what it used to and seems hidden amongst many fish restaurants and cafes.

Specific sections in the ministerial decree that founded the ministry clearly define the relationship between the ministry and the handicrafts field. For instance, among the ministry's many objectives, was the interest towards preserving handicraft activities, especially those within rural communities, and working on their development. It had also the objective to manage the development of craftsmanship and the support of craftspeople (Republic of Lebanon, 1994).

The decree also specifies that the department of handicrafts, falling under the directorate of social development, is divided into two sections; the first for the development of

handicrafts and the second dedicated for the marketing of products (Republic of Lebanon, 1994).

Moreover, according to article 44 of the decree, the tasks of the development of the handicrafts section include (Kanaan, 2008):

- 1- Conducting a mapping for handicrafts, identifying the number of craftspeople and their characteristics and elaborating a study for their development;
- 2- Providing craftspeople with the adequate financial, technical and artistic support;
- 3- Providing training to develop new designs that can bring higher revenue;
- 4- Providing training on marketing good quality small handmade productions;
- 5- Conducting a study on the economic value of handicrafts and disseminating it among craftspeople.

Furthermore, article 45 states the tasks of the marketing of products section as the following:

- 1- Identifying the type of goods that have marketing potential within local and foreign markets and steer its production towards market demand and need;
- 2- Getting access to the know-how by gathering information on the cost, time and quality of labor involved to produce crafts;
- 3- Conducting quality control in partnership with expert institutions and organizations;
- 4- Determining the prices of handicrafts sold at the *Maison de L'Artisan* according to their quality and material used;
- 5- Suggesting mechanisms to increase the production and decrease cost;

- 6- Encouraging the organization of local markets and fairs and the participation of craftspeople to external ones to facilitate the marketing of products with relevant actors.

Furthermore, in line with the objectives of the United Nations World Decade for Cultural Development (1988-1997) and with the emergence of a serious trend in various regions of the world to protect handmade production and preserving it in all of its forms (United Nations, 1987); the ministry was triggered through its development service centers, inherited from the to develop programs to support the craft industry and offer craftspeople informal vocational training courses. Therefore, each center had a unit for handicrafts and was responsible for training craftspeople. In addition, each unit dealt with training women in certain crafting skills such as sewing, making beads, drawing on glass etc... and developing capabilities that contribute to increasing income (Kanaan, 2008).

Furthermore, a design center was supposed to be founded by the ministry in 2005, within the *Maison* on its second floor, to train the craftspeople to improve their designs and teach them new marketing strategies to better sell their crafts. The design center was also supposed to attract senior students of fine arts from all universities, to work voluntarily as trainers. Unfortunately, this center was not created (Kanaan, 2018).

Additionally, the ministry conducted a study on the handicrafts sector in Lebanon and published it in 2000. The study includes two parts: a field survey for craftspeople detailing their situation and a comprehensive database. In fact, this study was the first stepping stone towards a comprehensive strategy for the advancement and

protection of the handicrafts crafts sector. However, the strategy was never drafted nor implemented.

The survey included 7,199 craftspeople and one craft institution selected from each district and governorate. It provided an overview of the reality of the craft sector in Lebanon before 1997 and dealt with its economic, social, cultural and organizational dimensions. Furthermore, the database served as a register for all craftspeople and the types of craft they practiced (Republic of Lebanon, 2000). However, the database was never updated ever since.

Finally, among the support units created to assist the ministry for its work was the unit for development media and population communication in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNPFA) and the Ministry of Information in 1994. One of the unit's missions was to promote the preservation of national heritage and raise awareness on the value of the handicrafts sector (Kanaan, 2008).

4. The Handicrafts Sector's Current Reality

Globally, the phenomenon of globalization and the mechanization of the world's new economic system began to threaten the handmade sector by the end of the civil war and it led to a massive emigration of talents from Lebanon (Gates, 1998).

Locally, there was an apparent shift in policies by the beginning of the civil war in 1975 that peaked in 1990. Despite what was planned and written on policy paper in the 1990s with the Ministry of Social Affairs, this field never enjoyed a full-fledged policy (Nahas, 2020).

The handicrafts sector is an informal sector, craftspeople remain unregistered and are hence more vulnerable to poor policies and face constraints with regards to their growth and access to public services (Hammouche, 2020).

In addition, there are no laws granting privileges or protection to local products amongst exported ones. Lebanon's open market system allows for many imported products with no audit or accountability making the competition for local handicrafts in the market extremely difficult. Adding to that, local exportation decreased due to regional and local political conflicts and craftspeople are more and more obliged to comply with the market by lowering their prices and hence quality to compete with the abundance of invading Chinese products (Makki, 2020).

Moreover, the handicrafts department under the Ministry of Social Affairs has been almost inactive today because of its very limited budget. It solely and irregularly intervenes to deliver training for craftspeople (Makki, 2020).

Furthermore, the sector is mostly unsustainably supported by international and non-governmental organizations including the United Nations agencies and the European Union. Most of activities implemented involve vocational trainings in technique, marketing, design among others (Hammouche, 2020).

The International Labor Organization (ILO), and in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is leading an ongoing study and roundtable discussion with the participation of MoSA to set the National strategic framework for technical, vocational education and training (TVET) in Lebanon policy 2018-2022. Accordingly, a series of recommendations related to craft development were decided by the ministry to support the TVET. These recommendations guide the ministry in revitalizing the sector and are assembled into three main objectives; enrolment and

provision of services; quality and relevance and governance and systems” (ILO, 2018). Moreover, the TVET discussions include the institutionalization of the sector and the preparation of a register for craftspeople according to criteria and indicators that enable the craftspeople to receive a membership card. The card would offer them a set of rights to access trainings, marketing assistance, economic incentives on raw materials and the likes (Makki, 2020). None of the recommendations have been implemented.

In addition, the United Nations Industrial Organization (UNIDO) established in partnership with the Ministry of Industry the ‘YAD handicrafts Collection’ in 2019. This collection featured the collaboration between craftspeople and various producers to modernize methods and introduce present-day pieces to traditional ones. Products varied from soap, tableware among others (Nohra, 2019). The collection is under full ownership of the ministry but however did not persevere due to UNIDO’s lack of funding (Hammouche, 2020).

Finally, craftspeople’s rights are not always preserved when working with the private sector. Many social entrepreneurs and businesses do not apply the concept of fair trade. They exploit craftspeople by selling their products at high prices to their customers yet pay very low costs to buy them from craftspeople in the first place.

Finally, the handicrafts sector and all other sectors of the country have been gravely hit and crippled by the end of 2019, That period marked a transitional phase for the country as a whole when Lebanese citizens took to the streets in major cities protesting and calling for their social and economic rights, accountability and an end to corruption. Shortly after, the COVID-19 pandemic began. The country was hence in total stagnancy due to political, economic and health crises. The cherry on top was the devastating Beirut blast on August 4, 2020 recorded as the largest non-nuclear

explosion worldwide, leaving around 300, 000 displaced families, 7,500 injured and 200 deaths (Hamzeh, 2021).

E. International Policies for the Preservation and Protection of Handicrafts

In this section, I comparatively highlight how many governments around the world adopted policies and measures to protect and preserve their handmade crafts. The literature on handicraft policies is especially abundant with regards to Morocco, Mexico and India. These 3 countries will be further explored below:

Morocco

The handicraft sector in Morocco constitutes more than 9% of the nation's GDP with 2.3 million people employed (El Jebbari, 2015). Therefore, the Ministry of Tourism, Air Transport, Craft & Social Economy set in place vision 2015 in 2007 in order to strengthen the small enterprises in the arts and handicrafts sector.

The concrete action plan spread overtime to develop the handicrafts sector and increase employment. It split the industry into 6 clusters: jewelry, furniture, clothing, organic products, architecture and decoration (Eladnani, M & Verdier, E. 2008). Furthermore, the strategy includes the participation of larger business in the production, the distribution of financing to help increase turnover, partnerships between the SMEs and develop measures to advance the living and working conditions of SMEs employees. The vision's objectives were to double sales and exports, generate around 115,000 jobs, establish 300 SMEs and train 60,000 people by 2015. The sector exceeded all these targets by 2013... (oxfordbusinessgroup.com, 2012)

Part of the vision was for the ministry to upgrade vocational training centers and encouraging younger generations to choose more professions in the sector.

Moreover, the vision was able to boost handicrafts exports tremendously to the United States, Canada, Australia, Spain and Switzerland among others in the government's efforts to expand with trade partners and open markets. In fact, a US-Morocco free trade agreement was also set up between both countries. (United States Mission to Morocco, 2020)

The ministry also set up a certification program for a list of mandatory standards, labeling and trademarks which are part of the country's national label 'Morocco handmade', to increase the standing of their handicrafts in face of global competition and imitated products. 'Morocco handmade' products are displayed at the *Maison de L'Artisan* which provides expertise and marketing locally and internationally (oxfordbusinessgroup.com, 2012).

Finally, the government passed a law that will inflict a structure for the sector and provide it a legal framework. The new law enables craftspeople to register on a government website that collects data regarding the sector. Each artisan who registers will receive professional identification. And benefit from the pension system and health insurance. To receive an identification card, craftspeople must also submit a diploma or certificate from a training institute from the public district body which that represents ant the craftspeople' specialty (Mcourt, 2019).

Mexico

In Mexico, there are around 12 million craftspeople, which makes up for 10% of the whole population working in the handicrafts sector (Thelmadatter, 2020). Under the Secretariat of Welfare, in charge of development issues, was created The National Fund for the Development of Arts and Crafts (FONART). FONART is a public trust established in 1974 as a federal institution for the development, advancement and commercialization of artisan production, similarly concerned with the support of research and regulations for the development of the sector, the increase of the quality of life of craftspeople and their families by generating more income and dissemination of Mexico's cultural heritage (Collazo, 2008). Among the main programs of FONART are making sure craftspeople receive a fair rate for their work, opening handicrafts tourist halls for craftspeople, supporting them in the promotion of their products I fairs and exhibitions and encouraging craftsmanship through proper training. (Collazo, 2008) Furthermore, through FONART, regional craftspeople from rural communities are given the opportunity to display their products in Mexico City's retail shops and popular markets. FONART also emphasizes on the use of creativity and quality with a prominence on customs and sustainable resources.

Furthermore, "Day of the Artisan" is marked on March 19 in Mexico. This date was selected because it is the feast day of Saint Joseph which was the human father of Jesus and a carpenter by profession (Thelmadatter, 2020).

India

In India, the handicrafts industry, especially that of textiles, plays an essential role in the economic life of the country. It is in fact the substantial provider of

employment of opportunities for generations in rural communities and contributes considerably to national export earnings. The Office of Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) is the focal point within the Ministry of Textile in India, devoted to handicrafts development and marketing activities. There are 6 regional offices and sixty-two field bodies throughout the country that provide technical and financial assistance to craftspeople for them to become self-reliant (Government of India, 2014).

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES

A. Purpose

The purpose of this research is to revive Lebanon's handicrafts sector through policy-making. This paper attempts to trace and deconstruct the policies and practices relevant to the handicrafts sector in Lebanon, uncover its weaknesses and challenges and finally provide policy recommendations to further develop and preserve the sector. Furthermore, by dissecting the policy framework, this research touches upon the dualism between what is apparent and what is hidden in every policy made. Finally, this research is qualitative and exploratory in nature.

B. Objectives

The objectives of the research, in sum, are to:

1. Trace the evolution and deconstruct the Lebanese policy framework for the handicrafts sector
2. Expose the areas of weakness of the sector
3. Provide policy recommendations to ensure its economic and social empowerment.

C. Design

This paper relies on both primary and secondary data in order to cover the topic from various angles. In an effort to better understand and provide in depth information

about the evolution and sequences of decision making and governance policies regarding craftspeople in Lebanon, the paper consolidates several publications on handicrafts in the literature review. After covering all secondary data sources, the research is contextualized by conducting its findings through a couple of interviews with prominent local experts on handicrafts and policies in Lebanon. Each interview is recorded with the approval of the interviewee, transcribed after each meeting and analyzed accordingly. For privacy purposes and upon their request, the real names of some interviewees are not divulged in the paper. The data is collected and analyzed to highlight gaps within the field and steer the paper towards providing a practical path forward with recommendations for the development of the sector.

Seeing that the topic of handicrafts is handled from a policy perspective in this research, interviewees were chosen based on their firsthand experience in Lebanese policy making, especially with regards to handicrafts. In addition, a coppersmith was interviewed as well to gain a comprehensive and well-rounded understanding of the matter at hand.

Interviewees are:

- Dr. Charbel Nahas, former Lebanese Telecommunications Minister and Labor Minister, and policy expert.
- Former public servant official at MoSA
- Current public servant official at MoSA
- Former public servant official at MoI
- Coppersmith

D. Experience

The experience of tracing and deconstructing the policy framework by means of interviewing policy makers and civil servants proved to be challenging. Almost all interviewees expressed reservations and fear to discussing the reality of policy making post-war and when defiant information slipped by accident during the conversations, interviewees requested the information to be immediately deleted on paper and recordings kept utterly private.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND CHALLENGES

The literature on handicrafts in Lebanon and the interviews conducted, reveal an evident shift in policies by the beginning of the civil war in 1975 that culminated in 1990 by the end of it. The handicrafts sector now relies on short lived endeavors from different frameworks and institutions and is governed by a fragmented and dispersed policy.

Accordingly, the in-depth interviews assisted in determining a diverse number of challenges that have surfaced in the 1990s and that are still persistent today. These interrelated challenges, which are preventing the handicrafts sector from thriving in Lebanon, vary from political struggles and negligence, the unease of doing trade, lack of recognition and protection measures to foreign competition, and the inability to export, among others. Finally, the qualitative analysis conducted led to the categorization of the main findings into ten main themes as follows:

A. Broad and Ambiguous Definition

Most interviewees agree that the definition provided by the Ministry of Social Affairs on craftspeople and handicrafts is inadequate and incomplete. According to the public servant official at MoSA (2020), a craftsperson is any person that produces by hand, with the use of a few and old tools and techniques, a cultural traditional craft. It is an artistic handmade work that transforms raw material into a final product. In addition, the craft production technique has to be inherited from his ancestors or direct family. This definition excludes an array of stakeholders in charge of high quality or mid-chain production or even designers and only implies final product makers.

The starting point to any policy making process requires a clear definition of the matter at hand. Once strongly defined, policy makers can provide clear indicators for the sector and relevant programs can be implemented accordingly.

B. Absence of Data and Statistics

The absence of relevant, updated and reliable data from the central administration of statistics (CAS) is a fundamental obstacle to the proper planning, design and implementation of any policy, especially that related to the handicrafts sector (former public servant official at MoSA, 2020). CAS is the official body within the Presidency of the Council of Ministers responsible for carrying and publishing statistics in all fields in Lebanon. Data is presently gathered sporadically and randomly by private research institutes, non-governmental organizations or international organizations.

The absence of data serves political purposes. For example, there are no recent reliable numbers on poverty in Lebanon and none on the accurate numbers of refugees in the country whether Syrian or Palestinian Furthermore. The lack of such numbers and figures is a pretext employed by political leader to abstain from planning or approving any policies or strategies at their own whim. This subsequently reinforces acts of cronyism and extortion.

Furthermore, the former public servant official (2020) tells of the extreme difficulties experienced when gathering population data and statistics. Not only did he have no expertise and no official support, but he was fought hard by political parties and religious leaders when conducting such tasks. Most accused him of gathering numbers to create tensions between confessional groups.

The last of relevant official publication on craftsmanship by the ministry was the field survey and guide in 2000. Yet even the process of gathering and analyzing the data had many shortcomings stated in the publication. Today, the ministry's database does not include accurate and updated statistics regarding the number of craftspeople and the type of crafts still available in Lebanon (public servant official at MoSA, 2020).

Furthermore, for the purpose of this research, very little data or studies were found on craftsmanship in Lebanon in general.

C. Misrepresentation of the Sector

The research demonstrates that from the viewpoints of government officials and representatives, handicrafts and craftsmanship were always deliberately talked about as a social issue and included within social policies. Furthermore, craftspeople are perceived by policy makers to be part of vulnerable and susceptible communities (former public servant official at MoSA, 2020).

This hypothesis, based on no data, impedes the full development of the sector inhibiting it from reaching its full potential. It sets limitations to the possibility of crafts being developed and improved towards reaching high quality and high monetary value. Moreover, it, ignores high value craftspeople such as jewelers and the likes. Most countries, especially developing ones as seen in the literature review, have included the sector of handicrafts under the ministries of culture, tourism, economy or industry. Placing the sector under the Ministry of Social Affairs, communicates the message that this sector needs assistance rather than development and professional recognition. This devaluing representation also affects the craftspeople's perception of themselves.

D. Lack of Indicators

The social representation of craftspeople by the Ministry of Social Affairs referring to them as part of vulnerable and marginalized communities and its vague definition are subsequently hindering the process of accurately providing the sector with indicators and setting clear characteristics for policy. Furthermore, a lack of indicators inhibits the distinction between the measures of practice within a same sector. That specifically is controversially confusing when trying to differentiate between industrialists and craftspeople.

Both interviewees from ministries of social affairs and industry (2020) agree that handicrafts and industries are the creative process that includes the transformation of raw material into a final product. What differs is whether the product is handmade or machine based (public servant at MoSA, 2020). However nowadays, craftspeople do integrate a few machines or tools as defined above. For example, both interviewees list pottery and leathers works respectively as handicrafts and industries, however the indicator on electricity consumption decides which is what (former public servant official at MoI, 2020). Furthermore, some pottery workers are registered as industrialists because they use a pottery oven, while other are registered as industrialist simply because they are well connected to political leaders and could swindle over the eligibility requirements (former public servant official at MoI, 2020)

However, the coppersmith (2020) adds that, unlike industrialists, craftspeople cannot produce more than 100 units of any craft a week and sometimes sells them once a month. The process of making handicrafts takes time unlike industries which are based on technological advancement.

It is hence primordial to recognize the sectors' individual status, to identify who are the stakeholders in question and which institution is more adequate to grant craftspeople their rights. It is also important to put into question the characteristics related to traditional practices and creative significance and recognize the added value provided by craftsmanship when it utilizes elements of industrial production. Registered industrialists with the ministry seem to benefit from a range of incentives unavailable to craftspeople because the latter simply do not have indicators for their sector. That lack also signifies an overlooked point of view towards the value added of handicraft products.

E. Inaccessibility to the 'Certificate of Origin' and Export Markets

In Lebanon, the Lebanese standards institution (LIBNOR), a public institution linked to the Ministry of Industry sets the standards and criteria for quality control of goods and export purposes. LIBNOR does not include criteria for handmade crafts despite the Ministry of Social Affairs pleading at several instances its need for clear standards for handicrafts to access the export market but to no avail (public servant official at MoSA). Hence, craftspeople lack clear standards and indicators that are essential to be recognized for the 'Certificate of origin' (Coppersmith, 2020). This certificate grants access to export markets upon eligibility check and is only available to registered industrialists.

Furthermore, craftspeople are not made aware of existing international fairs and exhibitions and cannot participate due to the high fees and cost of transportation (Coppersmith, 2020).

F. Weak Regulatory Institution and Lack of Coordination

In practice, by the end of the civil war, policies shifted towards a total absence of institutional framework and vision (Former public servant official at MoSA, 2020). The Ministry of Social Affairs was said to be established to support those most affected by the war. In reality, the role of the ministry remained, however, very reduced in light of what is stated by its founding decree. In fact, it was conceived as a way to channel through foreign aid money to personal agendas of war leaders who took power (Nahas, 2020). According to Nahas (2020), the term Social Affairs gradually changed and was abused to serve these leaders' personal agendas. Its real mission from that date and up to this day consisted of allocating a considerable sum of public funds to Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), some of which provide effective services but the largest part have direct links with political and community leaders. Furthermore, the ministry did not support the regional social development centers inherited by the OSD. A very minimal portion of the ministry's funds were allocated for them.

Following the 1958 crisis, an opportunity surfaced in 1959 with the establishment of the OSD, when social issues and matters such as rural migration and social and spatial inequalities became deserving of public action. However that opportunity vanished in 1975 with the beginning of the war and development was instrumentalized for cronyism and patronage purposes to serve the warlords. These acts culminated with the creation of the Ministry of Social Affairs in 1993 (Nahas, 2020). The former public servant official (2020) adds that the ministry was created alongside dreadful and destructive entities that emanated from the war and had damaging consequences on the country's social and economic infrastructure.

In addition, there is an apparent lack of efficient cooperation between the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Industry which hampers the development of the sector. Moreover, there is overlap in the work provided to craftspeople and competition between all relevant public institutions. There is no functional and efficient public institutions network working together for the empowerment of the handicrafts industry (former public servant official at MoSA, 2020).

Although the legal guardian over craftspeople and handicrafts, the Ministry of Social Affairs nor any other public institution appear to be the main actor in the preservation of the craftspeople's rights. The lack of communication and coordination between all concerned public entities is strikingly defective.

Furthermore, the syndicate of craftspeople is mostly inactive. Its capability of effectively working for the development of handicrafts and protecting craftspeople's rights is also limited. Most craftspeople ignore the presence of the syndicate, are not registered in it and criticize its inefficiency (Coppersmith, 2020). Ultimately, the handicrafts sector is in dire need of lobbying force to advocate for change and voice the needs of craftspeople to key public institutions.

Lebanese public fairs and market do not advertise or provide advantage to products that are 'made in Lebanon'. There is no municipal will to encourage local crafts and production and the Ministry of Social Affairs has no control over the lack of standards and conditions (Coppersmith, 2020).

G. Poor Protective Laws and Logistics

Lebanon's market is based on free competition and a strong laissez-faire in trade. At a national level, laws granting protection of local handmade crafts in the

market are either not implemented or extremely feeble (former public servant official at MoI, 2020). Hence, craftspeople face aggressive competition from imported products within the local market.

Furthermore, the trade agreements have a damaging impact on local products because they allow for open markets and favor important goods over Lebanese ones. Despite the many cries of industrialists and craftspeople to the ministries to control customs, protect access to raw materials and even impose a quota on imported goods nothing was successful (Coppersmith, 2020).

As per the former public servant official at the ministry of industry (2020), there is an anti-dumping law that protects national production from illegal competition. The law imposes a tariff on imported products that are priced below the fair market value of similar goods. There are also anti-dumping committees to which relevant business can file a complaint and after being studied, a tax is decided to be implemented on the imported good in question. However, some taxes are decided upon through the Council of Ministers without referring to the committees. Therefore, political pressure seems to be also be exercised on the implementation of protective laws on both the local and the external levels.

The Ministry of Economy is an essential stakeholder with regards to providing incentives for the handicrafts sector in matters such as value added tax (VAT) exemption and the intellectual property law. Handicrafts are not exempt from the VAT despite pleas from craftspeople to the ministry. Furthermore, the law on intellectual protection is inefficient. If the imitated product is minimally different from the original one, the law does not protect the original product. These two components would enable

craftspeople to lower their costs and increase their product's competitiveness in the market (Coppersmith, 2020).

Furthermore, when dealing with social enterprises or businesses, distributors or designers, these charge exorbitant amounts and make large profits yet pay craftspeople a very small amount. There is a large gap between profit and selling price and execution. This makes craftspeople feel devalued, exploited, and mostly unprotected themselves,

In addition, craftspeople face an important challenge when importing raw material for their products. In order to do so, they have to obtain clearance from the Ministry of Finance as per the taxes they have paid. However, most are finding difficulty paying these taxes already in addition to the material being extremely expensive now more than ever due to the depreciation of the Lebanese lira.

Finally, wholesalers are importing raw materials and imposing their conditions on craftspeople, in addition to having to commute from rural communities to Beirut to find these materials which also adds cost of transport and impedes access and supply

H. Supply Unmatched to Demand

The 'Made in Lebanon' brand is not well perceived among the Lebanese customers in terms of quality and valuable identity. There is also lack of awareness and no recognition or appreciation to the value of handmade crafts in Lebanon. There is also controversy regarding who to cater to whether niche with narrow target groups or a wider mass audience.

I. Limited Funding

Most financing at present is provided from international organization and non-governmental organizations. These entities design the projects they fund alone and place their own conditions for funding disregarding the true needs of the sector. Furthermore, developing a whole sector takes time and most of these projects are limited in time and funding. Instead of working on the sector's sustainability, these projects work like Band-Aid's and create dependency.

J. Lack of Motivation and Resistance to Change

Some craftspeople show little will in transmitting their skills and know-how to the youth or newcomers. They also resist producing new innovative designs and insist on using their traditional techniques when involved in new collaborations which can be limiting when producing quantities or following consumer trends.

K. A Delusion of Culture and Heritage

A recurring theme that was highlighted in most of the interviews is that the typical common discourse about Lebanon's diverse culture and heritage is merely a façade to support ideological political statements in Lebanon. The façade also conceals an actual behavior of fear, the fear of accepting that Lebanon has no heritage left. Heritage is usually what is left from a dual or diverse society that has not been integrated nor dissolved into a capitalist economy. That is not the case of Lebanon. Consequently, the official and institutional discourse about the country's cultural diversity is none but an invention and ideological construct. In that regard, handmade products currently represent a fabrication of culture, invented and strengthened by the

country's bourgeoisie which includes many wives of the ruling elite. Hence, while the Lebanese government emphasizes on the cultural dimension, craftspeople themselves consider handmade production an art of living, a lifestyle that enables them to utilize local resources in their environment and produce practical objects and tools for their everyday life.

The craft did begin within rural communities for utilitarian purposes and expanded with their mobility, however the sector now has been utterly transformed. Most handmade products are now selling at exorbitant prices and used and worn to flaunt an image of money, power and a false sense of belonging. The whole process and discourse by which handicrafts are produced, sold and utilized today is staged and invented as elements of a smoke screen. Hence, the process and justification of making handicrafts is no longer natural like in the past which makes dealing with the sector at policy level extremely controversial.

Finally, despite the controversy, and believing in the sector's true and authentic potential, the next chapter of this paper provides policy recommendations for the empowerment and sustainability of Lebanese handicrafts.

CHAPTER V

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter sets out clear policy recommendations to institutionalize the sector based on a comprehensive and integrated approach for its development, protection and mostly sustainability.

Tapping into its promising potential, the various policy recommendations are classified under the following interrelated headlines: the framework, cross-cutting responsibilities of government stakeholders, *Maison de l'Artisan* as regulatory organizing body, capacity building, protection of rights and incentives, technological improvement, global access, promotion and marketing, partnerships, and cooperatives and associations.

A. The Framework

1. Definition

For laws, strategies and programs to be implemented effectively, a clear and all inclusive definition should be provided for the sector recognizing what are handicrafts and their identity and who are craftspeople. Furthermore, to ensure sustainability, a broad revisited definition of the sector should be imagined where the entire handicraft production chain starting from making and ending with selling, is taken into consideration. The definition cannot focus on the final product solely and neglect an array of actors of the value chain.

2. Indicators

Furthermore, clear indicators recognizing both the traditional and contemporary values of the sector should be established. The essence of handicrafts definition lies in the interweaving of tradition, creativity and innovation. There is a need to further explore the added value of handicraft work to produce indicators on the product itself, the material used, the techniques mastered, and the conceptualization as well as the innovation level.

3. Data

An updated and official mapping of existing craftspeople in the country should be conducted. The mapping would include the regional distribution of craftspeople and the handicrafts types.

Furthermore, sectoral and regional studies should be conducted for each type of handicraft including needs assessment. This will in turn, enable the establishment of a statistical and comprehensive database for the collection of information regarding the sector that is updated with periodic and regular fieldwork and evaluation.

Finally, the data will serve for the development of a register for craftspeople.

4. Representation and Classification

From a policy perspective, craftspeople should be considered actors of development. This viewpoint shakes the outdated yet current representation of the sector by policy makers especially the Ministry of Social Affairs. By representing it as vulnerable and marginalized and aiming at only securing its basic survival, the ministry underrates its full potential as a capable productive sector.

Moreover, many countries have labeled the sector under Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) or creative industries, giving it the significance it deserves and highlighting its economic and social values. Hence, once recognized as a formal and organized trade in its own right, the sector could benefit from diverse markets and ideal commercialization as well as sustainable monitoring and evaluation towards its constant enhancement.

B. Cross-Cutting Responsibilities of Government Stakeholders

Regardless under which public entity the sector lies, the sector is spread across several ministries with various programs and initiatives being implemented informally and formally. Hence, the various streams should pull together and coordinate to clarify respective roles, competencies and responsibilities. The harmonization of the work avoids duplication, miscommunication, conflict of interest, and stagnancy.

Consequently, a coordination mechanism needs to be created and implemented. The common ground between different public institutions is the need for a cross-cutting ministerial responsibility and the acknowledgment of the eclectic nature of the sector that cannot be dealt with by a single perspective and entity.

A comprehensive approach implies a regular dialogue and engagement with all parties for the development of the sector. Entities involved are the ministries of social affairs, culture, industry, economy and trade, interior and municipalities, tourism and labor and foreign affairs, the *Maison de l'Artisan*, the Industrialists Association and Chambers of Commerce among others.

C. *Maison de L'Artisan* as regulatory organizing body

Maison de l'Artisan should be transformed into a public institution, more specifically a regulatory and organizing body, acting as the sector's focal point under the supervision of a board of directors in which all the relevant stakeholders are represented. It would also be dedicated to upgrade the quality, techniques and marketing of handicrafts and encourage the sustainability of the sector in close coordination with all relevant stakeholders without being affected by political influences and considerations that hinder the work.

D. Funding

Although challenging especially nowadays amid Lebanon's financial crisis, yet independent funding across the entire value chain is essential to develop the industry sustainability and longevity. Budgets should be allocated to the Handicrafts department at the Ministry of Social Affairs, *Maison de l'Artisan*, and other relevant bodies at other ministries. Funds for handicrafts should also be allocated within municipalities especially of prominent cities.

E. Capacity Building through Vocational trainings

Trainings sessions should be organized in coordination with LIBNOR to ensure that trainings are developed following specific guidelines allowing export.

The National Strategic Framework for technical and vocational education and training (TVET) 2018-2022 provides an appropriate framework for educational support in the handicrafts sector. It includes introducing handicraft curricula at universities and schools to raise awareness. Curricula would include theoretical and practical information

about each handicraft and its stages of production. Furthermore, it includes bridging the gap between maker and designer in terms of education to teach both how to make and create. Finally, the TVET stipulates training sessions in prison for minors and coordinating with the Ministry of Justice.

Most importantly, the regional social development centers established by the OSD should be efficiently reactivated to provide vocational trainings in all areas in partnership with the relevant municipalities. Also the relationship between the centers and the *Maison de l'Artisan* should be strengthened in the fields of training and marketing for handicrafts. The objective is to empower rural communities by means of decentralized capacity building and to create learning networks everywhere.

F. Protection of Rights and Incentives

First, handicrafts should be exempted from the value tax added. Second, with regards to customs, the direct import of raw material by craftspeople should be eased and relevant customs fees lifted. Third, craftspeople should be included in the National Social Security Fund to protect their rights and encourage industrial companies to work in handicrafts. Fourth, craftspeople should be provided with free spaces to work or display their products in. Finally, it is necessary to set strict restrictions at the legislative level to control monopoly from imports and protect local craft products.

G. Technological improvement

Handicraft features do not contradict with technology. Hence, the incorporation of minor technology in the production of handicrafts, all the while preserving

authenticity, is essential in growing volume capacities, facilitating work and opening export opportunities.

H. Global Access

1. “Made in Lebanon” Label

The label’s identity should be reinvented for the digital age and repositioned with global market characteristics. Unfortunately the general customer undervalues the quality, value, time and effort invested in handmade Lebanese crafts. The label should combine a notion of duality between modern and tradition, hand and machine, technology and human presence. It should adapt handicrafts to market demand. Furthermore, Lebanese standards and eligibility criteria should be set in place in accordance with LIBNOR.

2. Export Culture and ‘Certificate of Origin’

The policy should work towards reinforcing a culture of export for the sector. Consequently, Lebanese handicrafts should not be restricted to the Lebanese market; the sector should go beyond those limits to explore the regional and international levels.

Most importantly, the criteria required to obtain the ‘Certificate of origin’ from the Ministry of Industry should be amended and adapted to handicraft to allow craftspeople to export.

In addition, permanent and travelling international exhibitions should be organized abroad with the assistance of the Ministries of Tourism, Foreign Affairs and Emigrants and the Economy to introduce and promote traditional Lebanese crafts and encourage expatriates and foreigners to purchase Lebanese handicrafts. Organizing

local study tours to other countries known for their crafts to learn about the latest developments and marketing strategies and best practices in the handicrafts sector is also essential. Finally, formalities of attending international fairs and exhibitions should be eased and facilitated for craftspeople whether on the way out or in to Lebanon with their products.

I. Promotion and Marketing

1. Local Market Access

Municipalities should organize periodic fairs, exhibitions and festivals all over the country with municipalities for the display of handicrafts to attract customers and promote local artisanship. A permanent handicraft center or fair specialized in displaying local handicrafts can be established in each district or major cities.. Furthermore, handicraft workshops should be installed in duty free zones at ports and airport.

2. Positioning and Business enhancement

Marketing is a crucial component in the success of the sector. The introduction of digital markets and e-commerce to the sector is key in addition to the customization and tailoring of craft products to meet global needs without losing traditional features and techniques. There is also a need to disseminate and strengthen positive public attitudes and practices among various population groups towards the sector.

Furthermore, instead of competing with mass produced cheaper products, the sector should be positioned for medium to high end markets locally and abroad.

J. Partnerships

1. Public-Private Partnership

In general, the sector's value does not only lie in its economic and social significance but also in its ability to reinforce social cohesion and inclusion among Lebanese and between Lebanese and the communities of displaced persons and refugees living in the country. Hence, handicrafts are a common denominator between several public and private institutions in Lebanon.

Therefore, one cannot but highlight that the ideal framework and model that can help fully revive the sector and ensure its sustainability is the private-public model. An example of successful public-private partnership is that of the '*Minjara*' initiative. The initiative is a platform, set to become an association, for the revival of wood furniture in Tripoli. In collaboration with Expertise France, a private international investor, and the Chamber of commerce in Tripoli and the Association of industrialists, mapped around 800 actors involved in the wood production value chain whether woodwork, upholstery, glass etc...It aims is to increase production quality competitively prices produced by people from Tripoli.

2. Design and Production Chain Value

Trends are changing fast and customer tastes are becoming more and more diversified due to travel and digital advancement. Consequently, adapting to change is essential for the sector's sustainability and design is a crucial getaway especially when dealing with exports. Therefore, ties should be reinforced between designers and craftspeople to modernize and diversify products.

Furthermore, making linkages between craftspeople and designers is essential and brings benefit to both parties. The collaboration enables designers to learn the know-how and techniques of handmade crafts on one side and craftspeople learn about new designs on the other to maximize their selling potential.

This duo opens doors for new market opportunities and can extend towards a value chain of multiple actors. The craftsperson would no longer be the sole thinker and maker of the product. Hence, addressing the entire value chain in policy instead of the final actor is primordial to adopt an inclusive approach and build a healthy and strong environment of production.

K. Cooperatives and Associations

The handicrafts sector should establish specialized craft cooperatives, which are exempt from taxes, in each type of handicraft separately with the aim of organizing craftspeople and defending their rights and demands. Moreover, the syndicate of craftspeople should be revived and reformed to become dynamic and include a large number of craftspeople.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

On a final note, the evolution of policies with regard to the handicrafts sector represent a small sample on how the general policy framework in Lebanon was drastically altered for all sectors post-war, once war leaders took over government until now. The country experienced a gradual decent into chaos and anarchy and a total eradication of the past.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 global pandemic over the couple of years has exposed the effects of ages of unrestrained capitalism on massive inequality and disparities everywhere in the world. It also reinforced the importance of eco-friendly consumerism and tourism for the realization of fairer, more sustainable societies and environments.

Finally, the pandemic's impact on Lebanon together with the current calamitous and frail socio-economic context, should serve as a wake-up call for policy makers to consecrate all efforts to further develop and revive Lebanon's productive sectors, most importantly the handicrafts sector which has tremendous potential. Globally, the creative and handmade sector is the second largest employer in developing countries behind agriculture, employing 300 million people, yet the least funded. Furthermore, the sector is valued at over 500 billion dollars and is expected to grow by 20% annually (Mastercard Foundation, 2021)

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