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Platforms supporting designers *Nicole Hamouche, April 2019*

Inspired by regional and traditional trends, young talents are redefining and creating new design concepts of their own. Given the increasing interest in design on a global stage and the emergence of Lebanese names on the international scene, be they in fashion, product or jewelry design, industry-supporting platforms can play a pivotal role in not only driving growth in the market but also fostering the diversity and creativity behind it, in addition to expanding its social impact.

Several initiatives intended to support the sector have been undertaken in the past few years, but they remain scattered and disconnected from each other. In addition, many of them have been short-lived because such industries need time to develop, and require constant and long-term support. And many happened to overlap. Some of those initiatives were spearheaded by international organizations, such as the European Union (EU), and cooperation agencies, and cultural NGOs, such as the British Council and Mideast Creatives. Other ventures were promoted by Lebanese collectives or patrons, such as The House of Today, Beirut Design Fair and Beirut Design Week.

Support for the design sector is essentially segmented into three major categories: visibility and promotion; design process and manufacturing; and capacity building. In the first part of this paper, we will highlight the main initiatives in each category, underlining their contributions to the industry, as well as the challenges they face. In the last part, we will suggest some recommendations for future actions.

I – CAPACITY-BUILDING PLATFORMS AND CLUSTERS

Funded by foreign institutions, such as the UN and the EU, clusters or vocational training platforms are intended to improve the quality of the work, build capacities and provide technical trainings. We also highlight a couple of particularly successful local initiatives in the field of crafts and design.

▪ CLUSTERS

✓ UNIDO Creative Clusters

The clusters were launched within the scope of the Creative Mediterranean Project known as "Development of Clusters in Cultural and Creative Industries," which encompassed seven countries in the region, and within the framework of UNIDO's mission to support host communities in Lebanon affected by the high influx of Syrian refugees. The project was implemented in coordination with the Ministry of Industry in Lebanon and co-funded by the Italian Cooperation for the amount of EUR 660,000. To identifying beneficiaries, UNIDO coordinated with UNHCR and WFP, in addition to the Lebanese Ministry of Industry.

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For its part, the Ministry of Industry selected the jewelers in Bourj Hammoud and the wood furniture industry in Tripoli as beneficiaries of the project, which lasted four years from 2014 to 2018.

- **Wood cluster:** The support was essentially in the form of vocational training and innovation design. 50 craftsmen were originally enrolled; only 15 remained in the program. “The reason they cited for them dropping out was financial, as UNIDO provided them with the training but did not pay for the raw material and for the manufacturing of the products,” said Nada Barakat at UNIDO. “They didn’t want to incur the cost themselves.” UNIDO took the participants once to Maison et Objet in Paris.

The program was complemented by a USD 1.5 million grant from the Japanese Embassy intended for a woodwork and concrete work vocational training center in Zgharta, targeting the youth. The center also provided the equipment. For this project, UNIDO partnered with Austria’s Felder Group, which is renowned for its woodwork know-how. Participants, who were university students, worked with an Italian designer on urban design in order to showcase their work at the 2018 edition of Beirut Design Week, which provided them with much-needed exposure.

- **Jewelry cluster:** An Italian designer was brought in to accompany Lebanese and Armenian artisans. Together, they created a collection called Boukra.
- **YAD:** YAD (meaning hand in Arabic) is an initiative focused on the preservation of heritage and handicraft. Funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration, and Foreign Affairs with a USD 375,000 grant, the initiative supported small-scale producers. UNIDO chose to focus on three main areas: soap, cutlery and silver, and gold weaving. YAD produced handmade products including soaps, tableware, home decoration items and metal thread embroidery. It was conceived with artisans and various local producers from remote rural areas and underprivileged backgrounds. The objective was to upgrade the production process and introduce contemporary art to the existing lines.

UNIDO and the Ministry of Industry chose 20 producers with the view of possible industrialization in the future. An Italian designer was brought in to accompany the process. For silver work, UNIDO worked with three associations in Baalbeck, engaging 60 women. UNIDO focused on interior products rather than fashion. The Ministry of Social Affairs provided them with a small workshop space where they could provide the women with the equipment. For cutlery, they worked with a cooperative of 11 people in Jezzine, where they benefited from the municipality’s support.

YAD participated in Beirut Design Fair, where it managed to increase its visibility and exposure. However, YAD received a few orders, notably for the cutlery, which producers couldn’t supply on the spot. Together with Rural Delights Cooperative, UNIDO opened a store in Gemmayzeh to exhibit YAD products alongside food products that UNIDO had supported as part of an agri-food cluster. The store was not sustainable and it eventually shut down.

UNIDO initiated several contacts to sell the collection in places such as Orient 499, l’Artisan du Liban, Beit el Mohtaref and Moftah el Chark. So far, these efforts haven’t paid off because of exclusivity or commission issues.

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The YAD collection is the property of the Ministry of Industry. Its future is uncertain for now, as UNIDO said it couldn't provide more funding.

✓ **Minjara**

Initiated in 2016 but officially launched in September 2018, Minjara was conceived as part of the Private Sector Development (PSD) Program, funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented by Expertise France together with a network of local partners such as BIATT in Tripoli. Devised as 3.5-year program, Minjara aims to revive the furniture manufacturing industry, all the while helping small producers of traditional designs elevate their skills and expand their access to the market through the Minjara label. The aim is to attract local and regional architects, interiors designers, product designers and consumers to Tripoli's furniture hub. A facility has been set up at the Rachid Karami International Fair to serve as a hub where designers and manufacturers meet to develop and showcase their creations. The program includes the following:

- Observatory/online info center: about 1,000 enterprises have been mapped.
- Technical and business support to carpenters.
- Loan matching: Minjara matches Kafalat loans with a grant. Amounts can be microfinance loans ranging from USD 1,000 to USD 100,000. The subsidized grant represents 20% to 50% of the loan
- Access to Markitz, a marketing and communication agency that promotes the platform on social media. Markitz highlighted the work of 25 carpenters.
- Development of a Minjara collection, for which a group of 10 designers were selected.
- Material laboratory: 300 to 400 samples are available from about 20 suppliers. Carpenters can come and consult the material on site and can be trained on how to use these materials.
- Creative lab where designers and producers meet.
- Potential gallery in Tripoli and possible pop-ups in Beirut.

✓ **Beirut Creative Hub**

Launched in February 2019 with the support of the Lebanese Ministry of Industry, UNIDO, Expertise France and the Association of Lebanese Industrialists, Beirut Creative Hub aims to spur the creative economy, through the organization of events, talks, short-format workshops and trainings. The budget is said to be relatively small, hence the focus on small events. Duration of the initiative is a year. It is part of a UNIDO-led regional project aimed at fostering creative industries. "Though it is not addressing the systemic issues, we hope it will encourage communication between groups who usually work in isolation, at least in Lebanon," said Marten Bakalli, head of the project.

✓ **Beirut Creative Cluster**

Launched by Berytech in 2011 and financially supported by the European Union, the cluster gathered 25 companies. The cluster's goal was to foster collaborations, partnerships and knowledge sharing between companies.

The cluster targets media companies that produce content and films, post-production companies, and interactive design companies, including mobile and web design, 3D modeling and animation, tech solutions for TV, sound studios and photography. One of the cluster's main objectives was to help companies join fairs organized in developed markets, such as the MENA gaming conference in Dubai,

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San Francisco Mobile Summit and the MIPCube in Cannes. The Investment Development Authority of Lebanon (IDAL) had partly subsidized companies' participation in the latter. Cluster members also participated in B2B match-making sessions organized by ANIMA Investment Network. The British Council funded a series of workshops and trainings that UK experts gave to cluster members both in Beirut and the UK. Since it was funded by Berytech, the cluster did not charge any membership fees. However, now that Berytech has pulled its support and its manager quit in 2015, the cluster's structure and fate are unclear, and it has been mostly dormant. Recently, a new manager was hired to revive the cluster. The new direction is to open it up to suppliers in order to serve the entire design production chain. The cluster is considering applying to a LED (Lebanese Enterprise Development) grant from USAID to get funding.

▪ **INSPIRATIONAL LEBANESE CAPACITY-BUILDING MODELS**

We highlight below two long-standing, inspirational and successful initiatives that combine craftsmanship, design and social entrepreneurship.

✓ **L'Artisan du Liban**

Created in 1979, L'Artisan du Liban is a social enterprise legally registered as a limited liability company. Its main shareholder is the non-governmental organization, Mouvement Social. L'Artisan du Liban works with crafts men and women across the country. L'Artisan du Liban provides women with training, machines and equipment. The initiative works with three informal women-led groups in Akkar and one in Tripoli, in addition to micro-enterprises for wood and brass work, mostly made up of men. While L'Artisan du Liban employs 30 people, its direct beneficiaries range from 300 to 350 people, and its indirect beneficiaries amount to 800 people.

L'Artisan du Liban also sells products by Lebanese designers on consignment basis, including Images d'Orient, Beyt Lb and Ramzi Abou Fadel. Many of these designers have gone on to become famous. L'Artisan du Liban also sells the products of 10 NGOs that work with craftsmen.

L'Artisan du Liban opened a store in a posh Parisian location from 2001 until 2016. The French operations did so well that they even financed the Lebanese activities in the years 2005 and 2006, which were largely affected by the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri and the Israeli war. But when the financial crisis hit Europe, the French operations started faltering.

L'Artisan du Liban took part in Souq Lb, the incubator for social enterprises that was funded by the British Embassy. The program was closed after a year of operations. Souq Lb supported L'Artisan du Liban institutionalize its structure through a couple of grants. The organization upgraded its IT and inventory management systems. Thanks to a Mercy Corps grant, it developed its e-commerce platform. Sales are still low online due to a struggling e-commerce platform and poor online marketing. While 300 articles are available online, 3,000 can be found in store. L'Artisan du Liban is now looking for funding to address these challenges. So far, L'Artisan du Liban has only been operating through grants. Because of its status, it cannot take any loan or bring in equity partners. The decision to open the capital is up to the board members of L'Artisan du Liban, who are mostly members of Mouvement Social, and the Consultative Committee.

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✓ **Creative Space Beirut**

Creative Space Beirut (CSB) was founded in June 2011 by Parsons graduate, Sarah Hermez, and her former Parsons professor, Caroline Simonelli. It is a free non-profit school in fashion design, which provides education to talented individuals who lack the resources to pursue a degree in fashion design. Teachers are volunteer Lebanese designers. The school receives 50 to 70 applicants per year, out of which only five are accepted.

CSB runs as a three-year program. Courses include pattern making, illustration and digital design development. The students produce garments that are showcased and sold in a public exhibition at the end of each year. Proceeds generated by these sales are reinvested in the school. CSB has both its school/atelier and exhibition space that was offered by Solidere in Beirut Souks. The profits of the ready-to-wear brand created by the founders and the students contribute to funding the school.

The school would consider expanding at a certain stage into graphic design and product design as the market is too small to absorb fashion designers only. A USD 650,000 grant provided by Drosos Foundation will allow them to implement their expansion plans. One of their alumni has just won the prestigious FTA award (Fashion Trust Arabia).

II – MAKER SPACES AND FAB LABS

Fab labs and maker spaces have recently started to emerge in Lebanon in an attempt to cater to the needs of a buoyant creative, design and interior design scene.

▪ **IZEM**

IZEM is a creative agency that specializes in industrial design, prototyping and high-end fabrication. It develops designs and produces furniture and interiors using digital technology. Everything is produced in-house except glass and marble items, which are produced in a factory. IZEM consists of 8 team members specializing in architecture, business strategy and design development, and 22 workers.

IZEM founded in April 2016 Innovation Factory as a fab lab for startups and businesses with a focus on tech, design and fabrication.

▪ **ACID**

ACID is a design and production firm founded in 1997 by renowned designer, Karim Chaya, and architect, Raed Abillama. It is one of the biggest and most advanced design firms with a staff of approximately 163 professionals, including architects, engineers, foremen and craftsmen. ACID provides comprehensive services in the design, manufacturing and implementation of architectural products, as well as industrial and furniture design projects. It intervenes on a wide spectrum of programs and scales for local and international clients, be they private, corporate or public. It takes on large, highly detailed projects and small projects from schematic design to finished product.

▪ **BITS AND ATOMS**

Founded by Guillaume Credo, Bits and Atoms is a research and creation lab for architecture and design registered in the world association of fab labs. It is equipped with a USD 150,000 state-of-the-

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art printer, which is costly to operate because both the powder and the robot work hour rate, according to Credoz. The machine was bought from the German company, EOS. Clients can rent the lab's machines on an hourly and volume basis. The company has developed 70 designs at the prototype level and 20 that are marketable, according to Credoz. It employs eight full timers. In its efforts to support the sector, Credoz said that Bits and Atoms had proposed to AUB, which doesn't have a substantial fab lab, to use their space at a certain rate. But AUB didn't follow up on the proposal.

✓ **Beirut Makers**

Bits and Atoms' Guillaume Credoz founded Beirut Makers as a collective of designers intent on exploring the post-industrial crafts age. The collective consists of 20 designers, including Karim Chaya, Kamal Aoun, Vrouyr Joubanian, Ahmed Khoja and other younger designers. Since 2015, designers have been showcasing their work twice a year, including at Beirut Design Week. Since 2017, they have been supported by Credit Bank, which grants them USD 10,000 yearly. According to the collective, the digital revolution is putting design and fabrication back together. The new generation of makers is developing designs that numerically controlled machines can execute. Beirut Makers has mapped wood processes and forged new ways of creating digitally crafted, wooden objects. It features objects made using parametric design and manufacturing, 7-axis robots, 3D scanning, wood bending, laser cutting and CNC milling.

✓ **Piece Makers**

Founded by Taymour Jreissaty in 2015, Piece Makers is a platform for design and customization, combining local craftsmanship, state-of-the-art machinery and creative and manufacturing expertise. It aims to produce custom-designed furniture and goods at affordable prices. It has garnered interest and respect from architects, designers and entrepreneurs who regularly seek the platform for collaborations.

▪ **BERYTECH FAB LAB**

Funded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Berytech, Berytech Fab Lab gives members access to its knowledge and resources so that they can turn their design ideas into prototypes. A team of experts provides the necessary training to use the available machines, including 3D printers, laser cutters, vinyl cutters, CNC routers, electronics workbench, vacuum-forming machine, engineering software, and an array of tools that can be utilized to build electronic prototypes. Furniture design and production, home automation, electronic gadgets, customized toys, and architectural models can be made in this lab using such varied material as wood, plastic, wax and soft material. Berytech Fab Lab also supports the Agrytech program, which aims to cultivate innovative startups that turn agri-food challenges into business opportunities. Berytech Fab Lab is part of the international Fab Foundation.

The lab provides courses and workshops to improve members' skills and introduce them to new technological advancements. The lab started a five-month education program known as the Fab Academy, and directed by Neil Gershenfield of MIT's Center For Bits and Atoms. At a cost of USD 5,000, it has proven to be inaccessible to creatives: enrollments are low and only four students are registered at the moment.

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III - PR AND VISIBILITY PLATFORMS

These include fairs, events and platforms that aim to promote and showcase Lebanese design locally, regionally and internationally. The main initiatives are the following:

- **BEIRUT DESIGN WEEK**

Established in 2012 by Doreen Toutikian, Beirut Design Week (BDW) defines itself as a festival that aims to encourage inter-cultural exchange, design, education, social impact, and design entrepreneurship. A series of events, such as open studios, talks and workshops, take place every year, during which local and international designers come together to showcase their works across the different neighborhoods of Beirut. Toutikian said she didn't want to confine design within the single disciplinary commercial aspect, but wanted to expand it to the theory of design thinking and design research. BDW attracts more than 25,000 visitors each year, according to their website. According to its founder, it has created awareness about unknown designers as it also attracts foreign and local media. As examples, she cited Sayyar & Gharibe, who had their first exhibit at BDW 2015, and the collective Beirut Makers, which was accepted free of charge. Designers don't share with Toutikian the feeling that they have been mediatized through BDW. Prior to the 2019 edition, participation fees ranged from USD 250 to USD 500, Toutikian said. While some designers participate for free, more established names pay fees. She said that 40% of participants come back every year. BDW not only works with individuals, but also partners with universities. For example, within the framework of its 2018 edition, which focused on themes linking design to the city, BDW partnered with the AUB Neighborhood Initiative.

For the 2019 edition, Doreen Toutikian gave the management of the event to Creative 9, a branding and communication agency so that BDW "experiments with a different expression and for people to give it their own face." The founder still has an advisory mission with BDW. Creative 9 is a young agency, created in 2018. According to its website, it positions itself as the official advertising partner of BDW. Its website doesn't suggest a significant track record. BDW is owned by MENA Design Research Center (DRC), which is also owned by Doreen Toutikian.

BDW budget is about USD 150,000, according to Toutikian. Participation fees currently ensure funding and sponsors are only Lebanese: Absolut Vodka and Meker Gallery. Beirut Municipality also supports the event in kind and in cash with a small contribution. Recurring partners include the Embassy of Denmark, the Embassy of Finland, the Embassy of the Netherlands, the British Council, the Goethe-Institut and the French Cultural Center. According to Toutikian, many of these partners have stopped providing direct funding due to policy changes, but continue to offer indirect support.

- **BEIRUT DESIGN FAIR**

Founded in 2017 by Guillaume Tasle d'Heliard and Hala Moubarak as a spin-off of Beirut Art Fair (which is spearheaded by Laure de Hauteville, d'Heliard's wife), Beirut Design Fair is an annual fair dedicated to showcasing collectible and limited edition contemporary or vintage furniture and design objects. 19,800 visitors attended the fair in 2018. The fair showcases works by local and international designers and galleries. 58 exhibitors from the Arab region and Europe took part in 2018 edition, which featured

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the creations of 111 designers. The fair offers three design awards during its run. With a USD 400/sqm rental fee and a minimum box size of 16 sqm, the fair addresses already established designers. “The first edition was 90% Lebanese, the second edition was 75% Lebanese and is becoming less Lebanese with time,” said the fair’s main patron, Tarek Khalife, who is the CEO of Credit Bank. Credit Bank and the Association of Lebanese Industrialists are the event’s major supporters. The roughly USD 300,000 annual budget is covered mostly by Credit Bank and Tarek Khalife personally, while space rentals cover the rest. In 2019, Khalife withdrew his support of the fair due to “mismanagement issues and lack of transparency,” he said. Founders have separated, with Hala Moubarak leaving the initiative. According to Tarek Khalife, the remaining stakeholders might be working towards putting Beirut Art Fair and Beirut Design Fair up for sale.

BDF selection committee includes top notch designers and architects and interior architects such as Lina Asmar d’Amman, Lina Ghotmeh, Karim Chaya and Marc Baroud.

▪ HOUSE OF TODAY

Founded in 2012 by designer Cherine Magrabi Tayeb, House of Today is a non-profit organization with a mission to identify, mentor, curate, showcase and connect emerging Lebanese designers with design experts and collectors both regionally and globally. Its objective is to put Lebanon on the international design map. Every two years, it curates a biennale that showcases the collaboration between experts and emerging designers, who come together under a central theme to release a collection. The cost of the biennale is covered through sales and sponsorships. About 100 designers participate in the biennale. Some pieces of the exhibitions have been shown at Nilufar Gallery in Milan, Gallery Fumi in London, Maison et Objet in Paris and Carpenters Gallery in London. In most cases, it is House of Today that produces the work of designers in exchange for a percentage of the sales pursuant to agreed upon schemes. Most of the pieces are produced in Lebanon, but House of Today also works with artisans abroad, notably in Italy, as a way of fostering designers’ creativity and skills. “Production in Lebanon is costly and designers have difficulty when it comes to mixing materials, though capacities have been evolving,” said Magrabi Tayeb.

In an effort to give Lebanese designers global recognition, House of Today established a partnership with the online store and magazine, Wallpaper. The organization offers six full or partial scholarships each year to students pursuing product or industrial design degrees in Lebanon or abroad. To help promising designers launch their careers in the design field, House of Today also provides internships and permanent placements. Magrabi Tayeb said that she would like to expand the organization’s support to include participation in international fairs, such as Art Basel, and visits by international university lecturers. However, this is not possible at the moment due to budget limitations.

▪ FASHION TRUST ARABIA

Created in September 2018, Fashion Trust Arabia (FTA) is a non-profit initiative affiliated with the British Fashion Council Trust. It is spearheaded by Lebanese Tania Fares who founded in 2011 the Fashion Trust in the UK. FTA focuses on funding and nurturing design talent across the MENA region. Out of the 25 finalists, 11 were Lebanese and two Lebanese won the ready-to-wear award. It targets designers who have been in the business for at least two years in the following categories: eveningwear, ready to wear, accessories and jewelry. Jury includes influential personalities in the

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fashion world, such as MatchesFashion.com's co-founder, Ruth Chapman, and Vogue Italia's deputy editor-in-chief, Sara Sozzani Maino.

The FTA Prize operates under the patronage of honorary chair HRH Sheikha Moza Bint Nasser and co-chair HE Sheikha Al-Mayassa Bint Hamad Al-Thani from Qatar. The prize ranges from USD 100,000 and USD 200,000, as the designers themselves set the budget to take their business to the next level. Winning designs are showcased on Matchesfashion.com. And winners benefit from a 12-month incubation.

▪ **STARCH FOUNDATION**

Founded in 2008 by internationally acclaimed designer, Rabih Keyrouz, and fashion consultant, Tala Hajjar, STARCH Foundation claims to incubate the most promising emerging young fashion designers during the early stages of their career, advising and mentoring them through an annual program. The foundation selects four to six young designers each year. Their collections are presented for a period of one year at STARCH boutique in downtown Beirut, providing the designers with exposure.

There was a time when STARCH was the go-to organization for people in search of Lebanese talents. It was sought out by the likes of Maison de la Creation - Marseilles, Woolmark Prize, and Dubai Fashion Forward. However, the Foundation seems less proactive lately. The website hasn't been updated for many years and the latest press release dates back to 2011. The store showcasing STARCH alumni in Beirut Souks, which was graciously offered by Solidere, was closed a few months ago. The designers we spoke to said that the foundation had no mentoring program, and provided no follow-up after designers left STARCH. In addition, its international exposure was waning.

▪ **OTHER PROMOTION AND MARKETING PLATFORMS**

- ✓ Several events take place in the country and abroad promoting Lebanese designers and crafts. The most famous ones include the Liza Design Week in Paris, which promotes trendy Lebanese designers in the highly sought out Liza restaurant, and Washington-based Caravan Beirut, which featured the likes of Mariana Wehbe and Nour Khoury Jallad, the founder of Bucolik, an online platform that sells Lebanese designers' products. These two events target high-end and well-established designers.
- ✓ Locally, several pop-up fairs taking place during summer in Faqra and Faraya's trendy mountain resorts showcase the work of many Lebanese talents. Other punctual exhibitions highlighting local designers are also emerging, such as Saifi Village, Station, Christmas markets, Caritas at S District, and Ecosouk in Hamra.
- ✓ Museum boutiques at such venues as Sursock Museum and the National Museum feature a curated selection of designers and artists. Sursock, which has a selection of about 60 designers, has become a hub for emerging designers, thanks to its prime location in Achrafieh, which attracts locals and foreigners alike. The National Museum showcases mostly established designers.
- ✓ Artisan platforms include L'Artisan du Liban, Beyt el Mohtaref, an initiative by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Orient 499, L'Artisan du Liban et d'Orient, Liwan (also present in Paris) and Moftah

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el Charq. Among the issues designers face with these platforms are high commissions, exclusivity requirements, and hosting capacities, as they don't have room to exhibit many designers.

Broader scope platforms include the store Zawal in Mar Mikhael, which showcases Lebanese and Syrian artisanal products. Zawal also produces items under its own private label. Plan Bey in Gemmayzeh also showcases Lebanese and selected Syrian designers who specialize in illustration, photography and graphic design. Both platforms are initiatives by entrepreneur Tony Sfeir.

Founded by architect Ramzi Salman in the Chouf mountains, the Bkerzay project showcases Lebanese potters and ceramists, Lebanese fashion and product designers and local organic produce. A potters' day celebrates the craft every year in an open-door event in Bkerzay.

- ✓ Online fashion platforms that sell locally and internationally include Lebelik, Bucolik, Net a Porter and Mysouk in the City. Several blogs, such as *L'armoire de Lana* and *Une libanaise a Paris*, contribute to promoting Lebanese designers locally and abroad.
- ✓ **MAD** is an online and offline platform dedicated to music, art and design. It operates as an agent and producer. MAD builds collaborations between artists and brands that are looking for their next brand ambassadors and influencers. The platform also provides artists and designers with a crowdfunding space to finance their projects, and an online store to sell their creations. Crowdfunding campaigns haven't been very successful on the platform so far, which doesn't seem to have many followers based on its social media. MAD is also active in France, where it is trying to introduce Lebanese designers to the market.

IV - FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the interviews we conducted, we would like to share a list of major challenges that were common to the various platforms profiled, and key recommendations that can help in addressing them.

▪ CHALLENGES

- ✓ **Timeframe:** Programs need to be much longer to bear fruits. Foreign agency-supported initiatives are usually short term (one to three years). Programs have so far been devised to be more time sensitive than market sensitive. Cases in point, Minjara, UNIDO Creative Clusters and Beirut Creative Hub.

The UNIDO Creative Clusters program lasted four years. It was limited to the design of a few collections that couldn't be promoted due to lack of funding and no-extension restrictions. Minjara is supposed to run for three years and a half. It was initiated in 2016, but by the time the project was officially launched in 2018, it had already used up much of its funding to develop the

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website and renovate the physical site. This meant that there was less money to support the carpenters' activities themselves.

- ✓ **Budget:** Budget and duration of foreign institutions' projects should be determined by strategic positioning, not the other way around.
- ✓ **Strategic positioning:** According to designers and architects we spoke to, Minjara's strategy should change to support industrial production (big markets, such as IKEA - India and Portugal serves it) instead of focusing on revamping the shops of small artisans and promoting an outdated romanticized image. Others said that the project would benefit more from having new equipment, rather than revamping the site itself. Julien Schmitt, Minjara's director, said that the capacities of Lebanese producers are limited and the market cannot handle such a volume. "We would need an investment of USD 10 million to USD 20 million to increase the technical and financial production capacities," he explained. "Lebanon is not equipped to meet the challenge of mass production." He admitted to having had exchanges in the past with IKEA to start a Lebanese collaboration since the company has regional products. But there was "a divergence in views on a strategic level and the questions of budget and duration were critical," he said.
- ✓ **Impact:** Supporting small sporadic initiatives doesn't lead to real change. Projects need to be sizeable and their impact has to be measurable in terms of job and revenue creation. In Minjara, for instance, about 1,000 carpenters are referenced, but only 50 have interacted with the platform, according to Minjara's director, Julien Schmitt. Of these, no more than 25 were promoted on Minjara's social networks, for a total project budget of USD 5 million.
- ✓ **Format:** Talks and short workshops, such as Beirut Creative Hub, are not what is going to make a big impact and elevate design in Lebanon. Very few people are attending them. Funding can be spent on more impactful, long-term trainings, for instance.
- ✓ **Gap in design for manufacturing:** This issue was raised by Guillaume Credoz from Bits and Atoms and Beirut Makers, as well as other architects and digital manufacturers. "Most of the youth are not interested in manual work and only draw using digital tools," he said. "Hence, they lack the insight on what is feasible and what is not, and how to draw products that can be executed."
- ✓ **Proper training in digital manufacturing:** The aim is to enable stakeholders to use digital manufacturing at the next level, and not only do prototypes at fab labs for individual small initiatives. "CNC operators, and numerically-controlled machines need to be operated by technicians," said Bits and Atoms founder, Guillaume Credoz.
- ✓ **Sophisticated industrial printers:** According to Guillaume Credoz, founder of Bits and Atoms and Beirut Makers, very few advanced printers, such as the one at Bits and Atoms, exist on the market. Such machines are banned in Lebanon by American authorities. Many spaces have 3D printers used for small or specific objects, such as jewelry, dental prosthesis and implants, but they are not industrial printers.

▪ **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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- ✓ Develop a strategic and integrated approach to promote a sustainable development model, which combines digital production, design and craftsmanship, since digital manufacturing allows access to bigger markets and enables mass production.
 - Explore new digital manufacturing techniques and recycled material.
 - Use local material, such as cement, which can be used with 3D printers. Wood, for example, is imported in Lebanon. There is no local supply.
- ✓ Create and/or empower technical institutes to do manual and digital work in order to rehabilitate the manual and manufacturing culture. Several designers and industry players we spoke to recommended this step. Examples include Dekwaneh Industrial Technical Institute and Sibline institute.
- ✓ Impactful large-scale initiatives and clusters should encompass public, private, industry and academic partnerships. For example, the Association of Lebanese Industrialists, the Tourism Ministry, IDAL, Beirut Municipality and other municipalities have shown interest in design and manufacturing. Projects should also aim to capitalize on university platforms, such as ALBA, LAU, AUB and the Lebanese University.
- ✓ Identify sectors that still need support. Fashion, for instance, is already highly represented whereas pottery and/or can be revived. Pottery and ceramics are very trendy. Bkerzay is essentially exhibiting the work of upper class women ceramists. Ceramics has become a luxury because the material is expensive. However, it is possible to explore using the local soil. The example of Al Fayyoun pottery school in Egypt is one to look at. So is Wissa Wassef for wool and cotton tapestries. In Lebanon, weaving is a craft that has been transmitted from generation to the next in some regions in particular, such as Akkar and Ersal in the Bekaa, which were conflict areas. In the latter, the AUB Department of Agriculture and a couple of NGOs are contributing to an existing activity, thus empowering women in the region. This provides an interesting example that might be scalable.
- ✓ Define Goethe-Institut's priorities and goals, in light of Germany's added value in the sector and GIZ's objectives: Is the aim to revive the craft and preserve the heritage or create jobs? Is the focus on digital design, including animation, 3D modeling and interactive design? Is the aim to support small-scale or large-scale projects?
- ✓ Consider smart-design strategies at the crossroads of social entrepreneurship and design in order to address current local societal issues. Di Lab Design Impact Laboratory at AUB, for example, addresses the development of marginalized and neglected territories in Lebanon and of Nasma, a sustainable energy efficient refugee school prototype conceived at AUB.
- ✓ Favor long-term programs that will have time to develop and bear fruits. Aim for at least a seven-year timeframe because design needs time to grow.
- ✓ Refer to local experts when possible since they know the Lebanese reality, instead of bringing in foreign experts.
- ✓ Develop partnerships with creative incubators in European countries, such as Germany and France. Start-ups of Paris&Co., Station F and Paris Pionnières. Another example to look at is the French design incubator by VIA.