CREATIVE CULTURE MAKING:
Policy Directions for Arts Sector Development in Bahrain

By Ali Milad

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Abstract

Despite a storied history of artmaking, Bahrain's arts sector currently exists in a state of arrested development. A recurring explanation for this claims that the country's small population is simply unable to yield a sizable arts market and industry. However, research findings prove otherwise. This study directly engages arts sector stakeholders to contextualize the current state. Arts sector governance, environmental conditions, and artmakers' ways of working are analyzed through a systems lens – revealing a lack of active development processes, along with an amalgam of challenges that span across sociocultural, socioeconomic, and sociopolitical boundaries. In their totality, these challenges impair Bahrain's creative value chain, thereby nullifying Bahraini society's ability to engage in bottom-up creative culture making processes. This report seeks to inform cultural policymaking by uncovering challenges and distinguishing between fundamental and symptomatic issues. Moreover, it identifies openings for change, and proposes a set of alternative policy directions aimed at transitioning Bahrain's arts sector towards a state conducive to its flourishing.

Acknowledgements

To my parents – I am forever indebted to your unending sacrifices, which I myself am a product of. I can never thank you enough.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Overview

Bahrain's arts sector is at current, in a state of arrested development. This characterization is based on the following observations:

- Intermittent artistic production and a repetition/recycling of familiar themes and tropes.
- Exploration and adventurousness being discouraged.
- Low diffusion of local artistic works into local mass/popular culture.
- A nascent market for the arts and a niche, non-growing arts audience.
- Low proliferation and specialization within the division of labor of creative work.
- Arts organizations regularly go out of business, and artists are unable to pursue full time artistic work without relocating, serving foreign markets, or succumbing to problematic market mechanisms.

Upon first glance, it may be easy to attribute this to Bahrain's small population, or the overwhelming of local production systems by creative/cultural imports. Through systems analysis, this report illustrates how such phenomena are not root causes but rather symptoms of a deeper issue: underdevelopment.

Despite differences in medium, means of production, and modes of consumption across the observed fields (filmmaking, music, visual art), Bahrain's artmakers face similar challenges. These challenges exhibit elements of complexity; they are interconnected, display non-linear causation, span across multiple societal domains, and produce emergent consequences. The accumulation of these challenges creates an environment that disincentivizes adventurousness and self-expression, stifles artistic production, and prevents artistic works from diffusing into mass/popular culture.

This report consists of three parts: The first will present analysis findings and examine the causes of arts sector underdevelopment. The second frames the current context and highlights the implications of arts sector underdevelopment on culture, society, economic development, and innovation capacity. The third highlights openings for change and proposes alternative policy directions that address key challenges and provide a pathway for transition.

What this Report is:

- This report unpacks the current context with regard to how Bahrain's arts sector is managed, how it behaves, and how individuals within it operate. The investigation focuses on the lived experience of Bahraini artmakers, and relies on their expertise, opinions, and value judgements.

- The report is a culmination of a twelve month research, analysis, and synthesis process conducted in Bahrain by a Bahraini researcher.

What this Report is Not:

- This report does not focus on nor does it aim to document the history or past successes of Bahrain's artistic movements.

- This report does not analyze Bahraini artistic works from the domain of art criticism.

Purpose of Report:

- Generate an understanding of the current state of Bahrain's arts sector by investigating and making explicit the lived experience of Bahrain's artmakers.

- Provide recommendations for arts sector development and serve as a blueprint for cultural policy making in Bahrain and the surrounding Gulf-Arab states.

- Contribute to a broader body of design research on art and culture, systemic design, policy design, and design for social innovation.

This Report May be of Interest to :

- Policy makers interested in developing arts sector, cultural sector, or creative industry policies.

- Designers interested in arts and the creative industries, systemic design, policy design, design for social innovation, and design for decolonization.

Framing

The role the creative industries play in driving economic development and urban rejuvenation by way of idea generation, job creation, and talent attraction has been the subject of much research over the last 30 years (Scott, 2014). Although this report acknowledges the dynamic economic properties of the creative industries, it adopts a predominately culture-centric approach. Of particular interest to this study is the ability of artmakers to engage in acts that reflect and shape the societies and cultures they operate in. In order to approach this report from a cultural perspective, the relationship between culture, creativity, and artmaking must first be framed.

On Culture

The study adopts the definition of culture as a "composite of all traditions, values, beliefs, behaviors, customs, and rules as well as economic, political, and technological forces that operate on a given group of people at a given time within a given place" (Ludwig, 1992, as cited in Rudowicz, 2013, p. 275). This definition is useful for a number of reasons. First, it helps in acknowledging the plurality of peoples, cultural histories, and experiences within a given place. Second, it classifies tradition as a component of culture, with culture itself being a whole composed of many parts. Last, it acknowledges the element of time, and in doing so, recognizes that culture can change. Under this view, culture is not a static and time-bound phenomenon, but rather, a dynamic and living system.

One of the ways in which culture may change is through processes that entail the absorption, creation, or modification of *memes*. Memes are, in essence, units of culture that are embedded with patterns of information (Castaño Diaz, 2013; Rudowicz, 2003). They may be internal such as ideas, languages, and beliefs – or outward facing in the case of behaviors, practices, rituals, and artistic works (Sperber, 1996).

Memes are commonly regarded as the cultural counterpart to genes (Dawkins, 1976); they replicate, mutate, and respond to selective pressure based on the peoples they come into contact with and the contexts they exist in or arise out of (Dennet, 1995). Memes may be created, revised, rejected, adapted, or absorbed by a culture (Rudowicz, 2003), and are passed on to populations or future generations through processes of exposure, learning, and imitation (Blackmore, 1999; Sperber, 1996). The continuation and creation of memes is considered necessary to the survival of a culture (Rudowicz, 2003).

With regard to the sociocultural landscape of a given place, the creation, transmission, or absorption of memes may take place through the following forms:
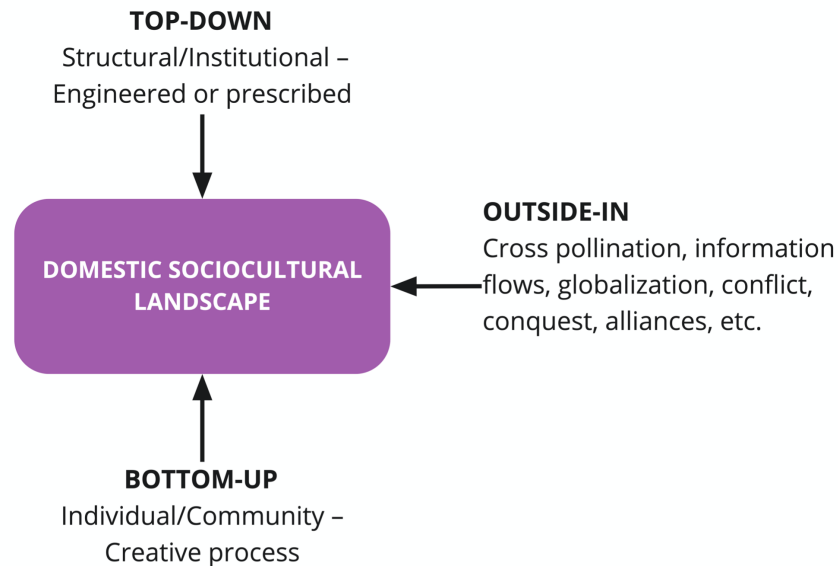
TOP-DOWN
Structural/Institutional –
Engineered or prescribed

DOMESTIC SOCIOCULTURAL LANDSCAPE

OUTSIDE-IN
Cross pollination, information flows, globalization, conflict, conquest, alliances, etc.

BOTTOM-UP
Individual/Community –
Creative process

Figure 1: Diagram depicting directionality of meme creation, transmission, or absorption.
Developed by Ali Milad.

- *Top-Down*: Wherein certain memes are engineered, favored over others, or prescribed by institutions based on ideology or strategic ambition.

- *Outside-In*: Wherein memes produced by one culture are absorbed by another. This may occur through an exchange (cross-pollination) or hierarchically (hegemony), subject to the resources, capabilities, and power one culture may exert over another either directly or indirectly. Outside-in meme absorption may take place with or without revision on the part of the receiving culture.

- *Bottom-Up*: Wherein new memes are created or existing memes are revised through exploratory and/or critical creative acts by individuals or communities within a given place.

On Creativity

Although the value judgments placed on creative acts or works are subjective, creativity itself can be defined as a capacity to interpret information, recognize patterns, and engage in generative and combinatory acts that result in the creation of novel products, artworks, ideas, or solutions (Franken,

2007). Thus, the creation or modification of memes can be regarded as a creative endeavour (Rudowicz, 2003). In this sense, creativity can be viewed as an essential prerequisite to meme generation.

Psychologist Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi proposes a more holistic view that regards creativity as not merely a cognitive process, but rather, a complex sociocultural phenomenon emerging from three forces: "*the culture*, which stores and transmits the selected ideas, values, and beliefs to the next generations, *the social system*; which selects which behaviors, values, and information (a new meme) are worth preserving; *the individual*, who brings some transformation to social domain" (Csikszentmihalyi 1988,1999, as cited in Rudowicz, 2003, p. 274).

The sociocultural environment an individual operates in is said to have a significant effect on creative expression. It influences what is expressed, by whom and how it is expressed, what function an expression serves, and determines an expression's consequences (Ludwig, 1992). Further, culture may influence creative process, conceptualizations of creativity, the forms and domains of creativity, and the degree to which creativity is nurtured (Rudowicz, 2003).

Adopting this frame helps in demonstrating the interdependent relationship between creativity and culture; wherein, creativity is able to shape culture through meme-generation, whilst also being facilitated or hindered by it through the "judgements placed on a creative product or idea" (Rudowicz, 2003). Conceptualizations and realizations of creativity are also influenced by the paradigms, infrastructures, policies, and regulations that exist within a given place.

On Artmaking

Setting its philosophical significance aside, artmaking may be regarded as a creative process that involves research, synthesis, and the creation of works across a variety of mediums. It is fueled by the creative capacities of the individuals and communities engaging in its practice, their experiences and histories, the worlds they interact with, the training they may or may not have received, and their idiosyncrasies. Works of art may communicate individual or collective emotions, ideas, questions, beliefs, wisdom, or experiences and as such, are regarded as "cultural objects" (Pratt, 2005, p.33).

Cultural objects are in essence, *memes*. They are embedded with patterns of information stemming from the contexts they arise out of, are transmitted through various channels, subsequently decoded

through acts of interpretation, and either absorbed or rejected by those who come to interact with them. Thus, the totality of produced and consumed artworks serves to provide an impression of the cultural landscape of a given place at a given time. Central to this study is the creation of cultural objects by way of artistic production, which in other words, can be described as the process of *creative culture-making*. This process may result in the recreation of existing cultural objects, their revision, or the creation of completely novel cultural objects. This relationship between culture, creativity, and artmaking is be depicted through the following diagram:
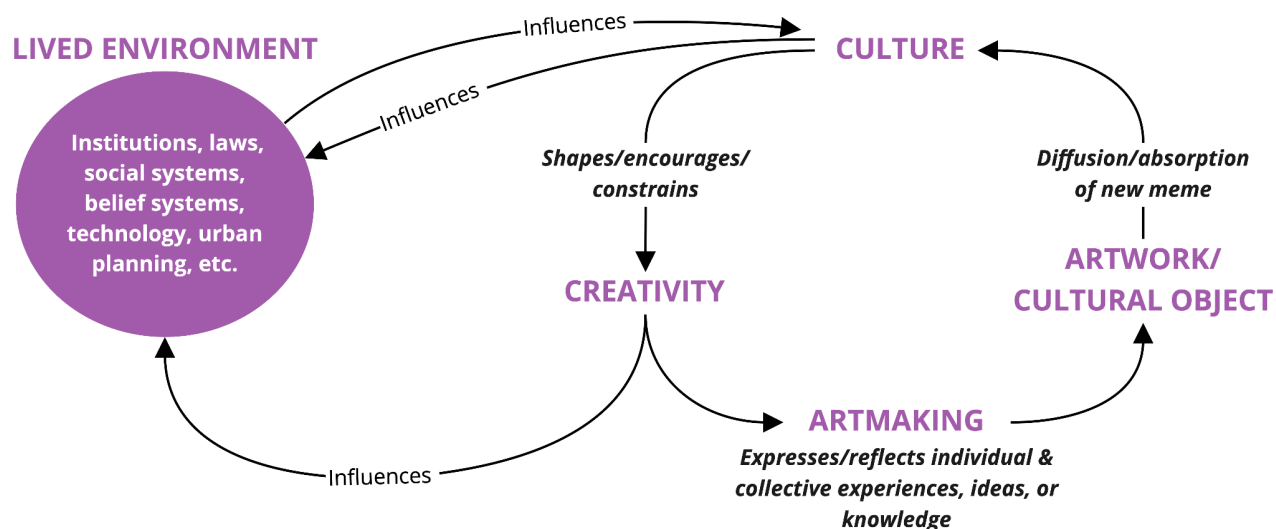
LIVED ENVIRONMENT

Institutions, laws, social systems, belief systems, technology, urban planning, etc.

Influences

Influences

Influences

CULTURE

Shapes/encourages/ constrains

Diffusion/absorption of new meme

CREATIVITY

ARTWORK/ CULTURAL OBJECT

ARTMAKING

Expresses/reflects individual & collective experiences, ideas, or knowledge

Figure 2: Diagram depicting relationship between culture, creativity, and artmaking. Developed by Ali Milad.

The Creative Industries and the Cultural Sector

The United Kingdom's Department of Culture, Media, and Sport's (DCMS) classifies the creative industries as those "which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property" (DCMS, 2001). The creative industries encompass a broad variety of fields including, but not limited to; architecture, design, art, television, and software development. Central to these fields is the involvement of work that engages in or supports acts of *creating*.

The cultural sector overlaps with the creative industries, and is comprised of fields and disciplines "with a cultural object at the center of the industry" (DCMS, 2016). It encompasses built heritage, film, libraries, literature, museums, galleries, the performing arts, public broadcasting, and the visual arts (Metro Dynamics, 2020). Given its culture-centric lens, this study focuses on the cultural creative

industries. Within the context of this report, the terms 'cultural sector' and 'arts sector' may be used interchangeably.

The Creative Value Chain

The creative value chain is a framework that captures the key creative industry processes involved in the creation and diffusion of creative or cultural works. This study makes use of this framework to assess the health of Bahrain's arts sector. The following model is an adaptation of the European Commission and the UNESCO versions of the creative value chain (European Commission, 2017; Pratt & Taylor, 2006; UNESCO, n.d.a).
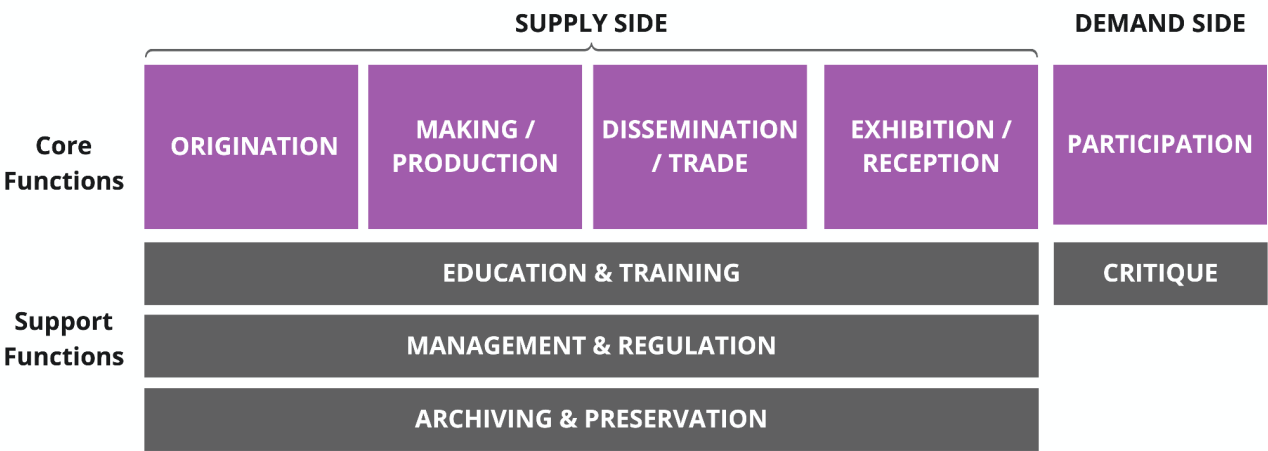

Figure 3: The Creative Value Chain. Adapted from the European Commission and UNESCO models.

Core Functions:

Origination: Concerns the activities related to the origination of artistic ideas, contents, and original cultural products.

Making/Production: Relates to activities, tools, infrastructure, and processes used to realise an original idea into a work that is available for presentation or consumption.

Dissemination/Trade: Corresponds to making created and produced work available to consumers and exhibitors (e.g. through wholesale, retail, distribution, licensing). Also includes acts of communication and marketing.

Exhibition/Reception: Refers to the provision of live experiences to audiences through the granting or selling of access to consume or participate (e.g. festival organisation and production, opera houses, theatres, museums, cinemas).

Participation: Activities of audiences related to consuming or interacting with creative/cultural products. Also includes participation in cultural activities (e.g. book reading, attending events, visiting galleries).

Support Functions:

Preservation: Activities aimed at conserving, protecting, restoring, and maintaining cultural heritage.

Education/Training: Formal and non-formal education in artistic, creative, or cultural fields. Relates to both skill development as well as knowledge building/awareness raising with regard to artistic or cultural domains.

Critique: Relates to the evaluation or study of creative or cultural works by art critics, art historians, academics, or journalists.

Management/Regulation: Relates to administrative activities carried out by institutional, public, or private organisations to regulate, manage, or support creative and cultural environments.

Definitions of creative value chain functions referenced from (European Commission, 2017; UNESCO, n.d.a)

Research Design & Methodology

Research Paradigm

Ontology	Critical Realism: - Concerned with the nature of individual agency, structures, relationships, information flows, value exchanges, and orthodoxies.
Epistemology	Interpretivist: - Focused on capturing and interpreting the meanings of phenomena observed in social contexts.
Space	Design for Social Innovation: - Design that challenges socio-economic paradigms for the development of new processes, products, services, and policies that meet social needs (Carnegie Mellon School of Design, n.d.).

Table 1: Research Paradigm

Type of Research

The research conducted as part of this study is classified as design research. Design research is primarily undertaken to support the design and development of solutions that address challenges and unmet needs. Design research focuses on whomever one is designing for; it explores participants' behaviors, perceptions, challenges, aspirations, and experiences to inform design considerations and uncover design opportunities. Not only does design research seek to provide guidance on what it is that needs to be designed, it also offers insight into how the designed solution or state ought to be and ought to feel.

Research Design

This study aims to contextualize the current state of the Bahraini arts sector and identify key needs, challenges, and openings for change. The study was conducted in order to provide recommendations that address challenges and to outline a pathway for the transition towards a flourishing arts sector. Given the lack of prior research or available data, it was imperative to first generate a bottom-up understanding of the arts sector. Thus, the research process was designed to be exploratory in nature. The study spanned September 2020-2021, during which the researcher was based in Bahrain.

Research Question:

What is the current state of Bahrain's arts sector, and what are its defining characteristics?

Sub-Questions:

- What common themes or tropes characterize the experiences of Bahraini artmakers?
- How do artmakers carry out their work and sustain their livelihoods?
- What are the main challenges faced by artmakers?
- What is the nature of interaction amongst artmakers and how/where does this usually take place?
- How do artmakers characterize the current state of their respective fields?
- What are the embedded incentives, social pressures, or policies that influence the arts sector?
- What roles or functions does artistic work serve, and are some more supported and accepted than others?
- How is Bahraini culture or '*Bahraininess*' portrayed, expressed, and propagated through artmaking?

Methodology

Three types of participants were interviewed, each representing different points of inquiry. The *Art Maker* category constitutes the core of the analysis, as the discovery process primarily focuses on unpacking the lived experience of Bahrain's artmakers. Interviews conducted with *Decision Maker* participants served to provide a complementary understanding with regard to how the arts sector and creative industries are approached and managed institutionally. Last, the inclusion of the *Academic* category helped explore elements of Bahraini culture (*although this data was not analyzed, it aided sensemaking)*. Interview questions can be found under Appendix A.

Category	Description	Points of Inquiry
Art Maker	Individuals with demonstrated expertise as practicing artists.	Living as an artist in Bahrain, ways of working, outlook on artistic field/arts sector, desires, and challenges faced.
Decision Maker	Individuals with demonstrated influence as per their position within governmental institutions.	Outlook on the arts sector and creative industries. Plans, initiatives, and strategies relating to creativity, culture, and the arts.
Academic	Individuals with demonstrated expertise as per their academic qualifications.	Elements of Bahraini culture and their expression over time.

Table 2: Participant Categories

The 'Art Maker' Category:

The study explored the fields of filmmaking, visual art, and music. In addition to being associated with different mediums, means of production, and modes of consumption – these fields represent different Bahraini histories and artistic movements. For instance, filmmaking is a new and emerging field, the visual art movement began in the 1950s, and music traces back to pre-industrial origins through folk traditions and cultural cross-pollination by way of maritime trade.

Structured Interviews:

Three sets of interview questions were developed, each relating to the specific points of inquiry for the participant categories (Art Maker, Decision Maker, Academic). As per participant request, interviews were either transcribed in real-time or recorded and transcribed at a later date. The interview process yielded over 70 hours of data.

Sample:

A total of 37 participants were recruited based on the following criteria:

Category	Screening Criteria	# of Participants
Art Maker	Number of years as an art maker, catalog of works produced, educational credentials, participation in or organization of art events, awards, press coverage.*	Filmmaking (5), Visual Art (11), Music (12)
Decision Maker	Employment in governmental or semi-governmental bodies identified as having a direct or indirect influence over the arts sector or creative industries.	8
Academic	Faculty position in a local post-secondary institution, and having authored works or taught courses in sociology or cultural anthropology.	1

Table 3: Sample and screening criteria

Art Maker participants were recruited primarily based on demonstrated expertise as per screening criteria. However, participants did not need to meet all criteria to qualify. Moreover, additional screening was applied to ensure diversity in gender, age, and experience (to account for the views of both emerging and established artists). Interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached.

Analysis:

Qualitative data analysis software (*Atlas.TI*) was used to code interview data and prepare it for analysis. Interviews were coded bottom-up using a combination of taxonomic and open coding. Only the Art Maker and Decision Maker interviews were coded for analysis.

First, data was reviewed to classify responses into a working taxonomy. Due to differences in points of inquiry, separate taxonomies were developed for Decision Maker and Art Maker interviews (see Appendix B for the developed taxonomies). A more robust open coding cycle was then applied, wherein quotes were coded with descriptive statements and simultaneously sorted under the developed taxonomy (e.g. '*Creative_Output-Filmmaking: Low amount of narrative cinematic films are produced*'). Last, a revisionary cycle was applied to refine the codes. The open coding process was repeated four times, yielding four code sets; one for each interview group (Decision Maker, Filmmaking, Visual Art, Music). A total of 1,861 quotations were coded for analysis.

The four code sets were transferred to a digital canvas and clustered into sub-themes related to each interview group (Decision Maker, Film, Visual Art, Music). Sub-themes were analyzed to derive insights, and clustered once more to form major themes. Influence mapping was then used to visualize connections and identify causal relationships amongst observed phenomena. The commonalities amongst Film, Visual Art, and Music influence maps prompted the creation of an additional influence map for the Art Maker category as a whole. The final output was five influence maps: Decision Maker, Filmmaking, Visual Art, Music, and Art Maker (*combine*d). The combined Art Maker influence map serves as the foundation for this report.

Limitations

Sampling Limitations:

- The Decision Makers category does not include individuals concerned with education.
- The Art Maker category is limited to only three artistic fields (however, commonalities amongst fields suggest that findings are generalizable).
- The number of Filmmaking participants is lower than that of Music or Visual Art. This may be attributed to the filmmaking being the most nascent out of the observed fields.
- High school or university aged participants are underrepresented in the sample.
- The study does not cover artmaking within traditional or religious contexts and domains.
- No expatriates working and residing in Bahrain were interviewed.
- The study does not include members of the general public who represent an existing or potential audience (audiences represent an extremely important stakeholder group for future research).

Solution Limitations:

- Although policy recommendations are informed by the interviews conducted with Art Makers, it is advised that these stakeholders are re-engaged and collaboratively involved in the design and implementation of any proposed interventions.

PART ONE:
ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

Analysis Lens and Approach

On Systems Thinking and Systemic Design

This study integrates systems thinking into analysis to guide and inform design considerations. Systems thinking is a theoretical approach to navigating ambiguous, ill-structured problems. Unlike reductionist thinking, which simplifies complex problems by dividing them into smaller components – systems thinking avoids breaking things down. Systems thinking regards complexity as a key characteristic; it retains connections, and examines the ways in which components relate to and interact with each other as a whole system (Chapman, 2004).

A system is a group of interdependent parts that, in their totality, perform a purpose. When system parts interact, they produce emergent – *either desired or undesired* – properties and conditions. Interactions in one part of the system may influence other parts, thereby affecting the whole. In this sense, a system is greater than the sum of its parts. These dynamics can be difficult to comprehend, because what is seen and felt at the surface level is often an event or a symptom stemming from a system's structure (Kim, 1999).

Systems considered to be complex are highly interactive and interdependent. They consist of other sub-systems, and often involve human activity. This includes the likes of healthcare systems, cities, large organizations, and markets. Complex systems are never isolated as they are affected by, for example, dynamics in population, ecology, politics, and technology (Jones, 2014). Problems that exist within, or arise out of complex systems can be difficult to navigate because complex systems display nonlinear causality and feedback. That is to say, system dynamics are circular: A causes B causes C causes A (Kim, 1999).

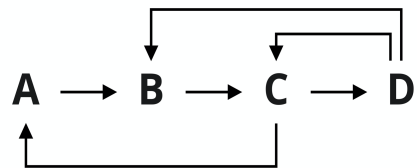$$A \longrightarrow B \longrightarrow C \longrightarrow D$$

Figure 4: Diagram depicting non-linear causation. Adapted from (Kim, 1999).

Designing at the systemic level allows for more impactful change (Kim, 1999). However, intervening in a complex system without understanding its structure and dynamics is likely to yield counterproductive

and unintended outcomes. This analysis addresses this knowledge gap; it approaches the arts sector as a complex system, and in doing so, examines its systemic conditions, relationships, and behaviors.

This analysis was conducted with the objective of identifying and distinguishing between symptomatic and fundamental issues. Much like Figure 4, this required that interview data be visualized via influence mapping. Doing so allowed for causality and nonlinear feedback to be analyzed. It also led to the development of a five-order classification system for the observed challenges. Classifications are detailed below (*lower numbers represent more fundamental challenges*):

1. **Foundational Impediments:** Highly influential challenges and '*rules of the game*' either stemming from sociocultural norms or set forth by institutions, regulations, and policies.

2. **Limiting Factors:** First-order consequences that form the ecosystem conditions and constraints which Bahrain's artmakers operate under.

3. **Emergent Consequences:** Second-order consequences related to social behaviors and phenomena. In essence, human responses to ecosystem conditions.

4. **System Failure:** The macro-level outcome of systemic dynamics. (Success in this case was defined as the establishment of an active, adventurous, and inclusive arts sector that is: well integrated into society, produces cultural novelty, and sustains livelihoods).

5. **Problem Symptoms:** Surface-level observations that point to (*and are often blamed in place of*) a system malfunction. Intervening at this level will not alleviate problems beyond the short-term.

On the Use of Quotations:

This report relies extensively on the use of interview quotations in order to communicate themes and insights. No identifiers are attached to the quotations, which may imply that the quotations belong to a single participant. On the contrary, the quotations belong to multiple participants; the decision to omit identifiers was made to ensure the anonymity of participants. The quotations included in this report do not represent all of the data that was captured. As mentioned, a total of 1,861 quotations spanning 36 interviews were coded for analysis. Including all quotations would have been neither feasible nor practical; instead, quotations were selected based on their relevance to the theme or point being discussed.
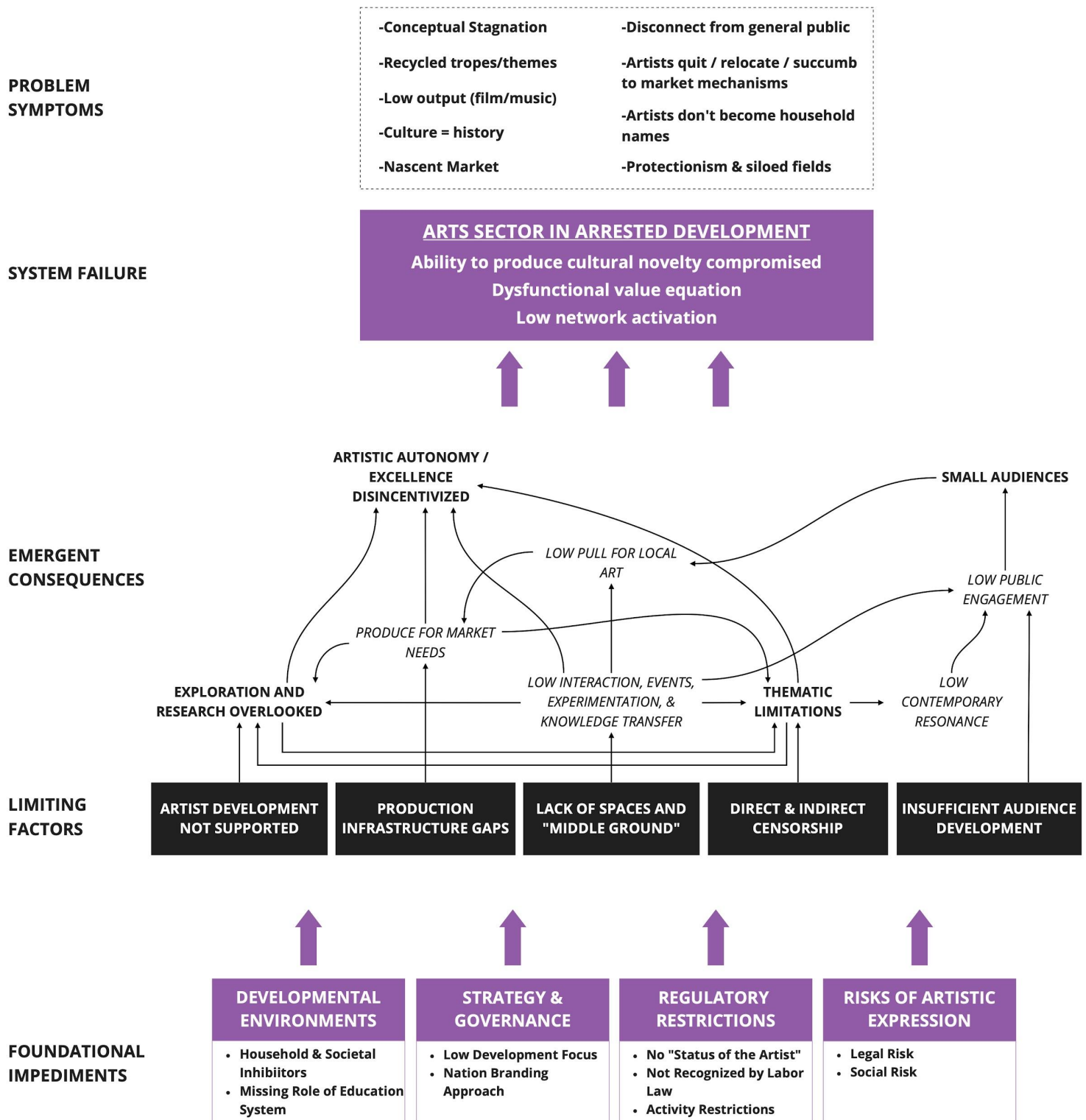
PROBLEM SYMPTOMS

-Conceptual Stagnation

-Recycled tropes/themes

-Low output (film/music)

-Culture = history

-Nascent Market

-Disconnect from general public

-Artists quit / relocate / succumb to market mechanisms

-Artists don't become household names

-Protectionism & siloed fields

SYSTEM FAILURE

ARTS SECTOR IN ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT
Ability to produce cultural novelty compromised
Dysfunctional value equation
Low network activation

EMERGENT CONSEQUENCES

ARTISTIC AUTONOMY / EXCELLENCE DISINCENTIVIZED

SMALL AUDIENCES

LOW PULL FOR LOCAL ART

LOW PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

PRODUCE FOR MARKET NEEDS

EXPLORATION AND RESEARCH OVERLOOKED

LOW INTERACTION, EVENTS, EXPERIMENTATION, & KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

THEMATIC LIMITATIONS

LOW CONTEMPORARY RESONANCE

LIMITING FACTORS

| ARTIST DEVELOPMENT NOT SUPPORTED | PRODUCTION INFRASTRUCTURE GAPS | LACK OF SPACES AND "MIDDLE GROUND" | DIRECT & INDIRECT CENSORSHIP | INSUFFICIENT AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT |

FOUNDATIONAL IMPEDIMENTS

DEVELOPMENTAL ENVIRONMENTS
- Household & Societal Inhibiitors
- Missing Role of Education System

STRATEGY & GOVERNANCE
- Low Development Focus
- Nation Branding Approach

REGULATORY RESTRICTIONS
- No "Status of the Artist"
- Not Recognized by Labor Law
- Activity Restrictions

RISKS OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION
- Legal Risk
- Social Risk

Figure 5: Arts sector influence map. Developed by Ali Milad using interview data.

24

1. FOUNDATIONAL IMPEDIMENTS

A.) Developmental Environments

Household & Societal Inhibitors to Creativity & Self Expression

Participants raised concerns over the ability of Bahraini household and social environments to nurture creativity and self expression. An emphasis was placed on the influence of child-rearing and socialization practices during developmental phases. As one participant noted: "*an artist's lifestyle is* the *opposite of what our parents want for us*". This seems to stem from a combination of economic determinism and societal norms.

Structural & Economic Determinism:

The challenges discussed throughout this report limit pathways for full-time work in the arts. Further, the exclusion of artistic professions from the social pension fund, along with the underrepresentation of the arts within the education system structurally de-legitimizes artistic professions. These factors propagate the notion of the artistic career as a non-viable path and discourage participation in the arts at a household level; wherein, artistic pursuits are at worst a waste of time, and at best hobbies. This likely disproportionately impacts lower income households, who may be pressured into steering their children towards paths that are more likely to secure them work that is readily available within the Bahraini job market.

Film:
- *"I come from a village. If you don't have a government job with a pension it means that you aren't doing anything worth doing."*

- *"Older generations don't regard 'filmmaker' as a real job title. That stigma still exists. You're told to get a secure job and do whatever you want to do on the side. It's hard to prove to people that creativity is valuable."*

Visual Art:
- *"Art in general doesn't make money, so some families might not allow their kids to pursue it."*

- *"Your mom and dad are probably not going to be focused on you learning art, especially when it's not a core subject at school."*

Music:

- *"Your family wants you to have a better life, they don't want that instability in your life. Art and creativity might not be important for lower or middle income households. They might be more pressed to survive financially, and that's when 'stable income' becomes like a holy word."*

Societal Norms as Creativity Deterrents:

A common agreement amongst creativity researchers is that child-rearing practices that restrict individual freedom by insisting on conformity and adherence to the status quo hinder creative development (Rudowicz, 2003). This appears to be the case in Bahrain, which may be described as a collectivistic, honor-based, and relatively conservative society. Participants described the Bahraini household and social environment as repressive of thoughts and expressions that deviate from traditions or societal norms. The degree to which this applies does seem to vary between artistic fields. For instance, music may be perceived as a *haram* (taboo) practice by more conservative portions of the population.

Decision Maker:
- *"There is a social stigma regarding artistic pursuits. It all begins at the family level."*

Film:
- *"It's almost as if people are told not to be themselves, and that they should be embarrassed about feeling certain feelings or showing themselves in a certain way."*

Visual Art:
- *"There are deep inherited societal stigmas and cultural norms that stand in the face of creativity and self expression. We are not free to be who we are."*

Music
- *"I bring up the importance of the household because it's not just me, I know so many people struggling with the same thing. It plays a huge role in constraining creativity. I realize this happens everywhere, but it's even harder here because of the integration of religion and culture and reputation. The biggest and most significant challenge is the stigma. That being a musician is widely associated with drugs, alcohol, and a spontaneous, unsavoury lifestyle."*

Cross-cultural studies examining the effects of collectivistic socialization practices on creativity corroborate interview responses. Collectivistic societies are more likely to emphasize conformity, compromise, social order, self-control, duty, and emotional repression in socialization (Rudowicz, 2003). Due to its proclivity towards nonconformity, creativity poses a danger to entrenched traditions

and social practices (Rudowicz, 2003), and therefore, is likely to be discouraged. Furthermore, individuals within such societies are more conditioned to feel embarrassment and shame, and as a result, may be more cautious and indirect in self-expression (Farver et al., 2000; Rudowicz et al., 1994; Ng, 2001).

The Missing Role of the Education System

The missing role of the education system emerged as a recurring theme throughout interviews. This challenge was implicated as a barrier to the development and participation of artists and audiences alike. Analysis revealed two areas of concern: the first relates to the curriculum and pedagogical approach associated with K-12 education, while the second relates to the limited availability and inaccessibility of arts education.

K-12 Curriculum Unnurturing of Creativity:

Participants' experiences with the Bahraini education system point towards a 'moulding and shaping' approach to learning. Commonly associated with hierarchical societies, such an approach emphasizes *memorization-and-recall* over *trial-and-error* by focusing on "one right way of doing things and many wrong, unacceptable ways (Rudowicz, 2003, pg. 285)". A common criticism of this approach is its tendency of depriving young people and artists of opportunities for individual exploration and self expression (Cheng, 1999; Gardner, 1989), the likely effect of which is "the burial of whatever creativity the child might have originally had" (Ho, 1981, p.89).

Decision Maker:
- *"Amongst the biggest challenges is encouraging creativity in schools, especially public schools. We need to adopt teaching styles that are not rigid and that explore imaginative and exploratory approaches"*

Film:
- *"Our society has a problem imagining. It's related to a lack of education in writing, reading, art, and music. The creative urge is stamped out and not nurtured."*

Visual Art:
- *"The education system is bad. People are used to art class being free time."*

Music:
- *"We are inherently taught not to fuse and express our inner identity"*

- *"I was approached by a teacher at school when I was 10 or so years old. He called me into his office and proceeded to tell me that I needed to stop playing music if I wanted to get into heaven."*

Given that creativity is necessary for the development of problem-solving skills (Martz et al., 2017; Mumford et al., 1994), national examinations that assess problem-solving abilities may be used as a proxy measure for gauging the Bahraini education system's effectiveness at developing creative capacities. According to the Bahrain Education and Training Quality Authority's (BQA) 2019 annual report, only 5% of public school students and 20% of private school students managed to achieve passing scores on annual problem-solving ability examinations. The assessment sample included 10,217 public school and 439 private school students (BQA, 2019).

Low Availability of Post-Secondary Art Education:

There are currently no post-secondary arts institutions that strictly cater to arts education in Bahrain. Only one bachelor's level art specialization is offered within existing post-secondary education institutions (University of Bahrain's Bachelor of Arts in Fine Art & Graphic Design – established in 2015). As for post-graduate education, the only Master of Fine Arts program available in the country is offered by the Royal University for Women which does not enroll male students. No music or filmmaking specializations are available whatsoever. Although private art learning centers do exist, they primarily provide technical training through pay-per-hour classes or workshops as opposed to credit based courses or diplomas.

Limited Accessibility of Art Education:

Access to art education is associated with high financial costs and may therefore exclude lower income households. For instance, participants claim that curriculums of private K-12 schools incorporate the arts and creativity to a higher degree when compared to public schools. Similarly, individuals wishing to pursue post-secondary arts education often resort to studying abroad – a costly option that is inaccessible by many given the lack of arts scholarships or grants. Furthermore, it was revealed that available arts education is primarily offered in English, and as such, may discourage participation from individuals who prefer learning in Arabic.

Film:
- *"I was able to find a lot of financial support for education when I was in banking, but not when I decided to pursue filmmaking"*

Visual Art:
- *"There is a huge gap between public and private schools in terms of art education."*

B.) Governance and Strategy

Low Development Focus

The current mode of governing and managing the arts sector was identified as a barrier to arts sector development. In addition to the absence of a comprehensive cultural policy document or framework in Bahrain, findings point to a lack of long-term planning, a disconnect between institutional knowledge and ecosystem needs, the under/misallocation of public funds, and the absence of a grant system or arts sector/creative industry development agency.

Lack of Long-Term Strategic Planning:

All Decision Maker participants agreed that creativity, art, and culture play an important role in fostering social cohesion and facilitating economic development. However, responses also point towards non-unified piecemeal efforts and a lack of long-term strategy with regard to arts sector development. Decision Makers were in agreement that moving forward, a clear focus needs to be directed towards the arts sector and creative industries.

Decision Makers:
- *"Several entities are involved and they work differently, this is a challenge. There needs to be a unifying strategy and a vision for the sector, which it currently lacks. There are a lot of ad hoc initiatives and incomplete programs. I have never seen a strategy that outlines clear directions from skill development, promotion, and platform building."*

Film:
- *"There is no clear structure or vision pushing the industry forward. It will go nowhere If left on auto-pilot."*

Visual Art:
- *"Institutional programs happen on an ad hoc basis, and without a proper framework, things will always be ad hoc."*

Music:
- *"There needs to be a cultural policy that is well-studied, there isn't a long-term plan for people to execute."*

Institutional Knowledge Gaps + Limited Outreach:

Decision Maker interviews revealed a disconnect between institutional knowledge and arts sector needs. Further, responses suggest that the groundwork necessary to fill knowledge gaps – such as field research or community outreach – is often neglected. Being on the receiving end, Art Makers expressed their frustrations, claiming that their voices are unheard.

Decision Makers:
- *"There is a huge gap between what's happening on the inside and how people on the outside feel. We've never done surveys, so we don't really know what kind of programs people want. We just do what we think and hope they respond."*

Film:
- *"Over here, people within institutions don't have the necessary knowledge, there's too much red tape for filmmaking to take place."*

Visual Art:
- *"There must be communication between institutions working on the arts – a relationship needs to be established. They don't even know who we are, they don't sit with us or hear our ideas."*

- *"We've all given proposals, but the focus always seems to be on the shiny things."*

Music:
- *"Our main problem is that decision makers are disconnected in terms of their level of understanding. The level of knowledge within institutions is low. When you explain a concept or an idea it's either not understood or dismissed because it's new and never been done in Bahrain before."*

No Developmental Agencies or Grant System:

As demonstrated by the merits, critical acclaim, and global diffusion of their creative output, England, Canada, and South Korea are home to sophisticated and thriving arts sectors. Common amongst these countries is the existence of semi-governmental agencies that directly support artistic development and production. The agencies, commonly referred to as *arts councils*, operate at '*arm's length*' from the government. In essence, they are funded primarily through government channels, but are distanced from the influence of political goals or ideology.

A key function of arts development agencies is the provision of funds through an accessible grant system. To illustrate, Arts Council England awarded $894 million in grants to individual artists, arts

organizations, and community-based organizations in 2018 (Arts Council England, n.d.). The Canada Council for the Arts awarded $229 million in 2019 (Canada Council for the Arts, 2020), and Art Council Korea's expenditures on cultural and arts promotion totalled $219 million (Arts Council Korea, 2020, p.50).

Grant systems are expansive in that they cater to a variety of objectives, recipients, and disciplines. For instance, the Canada Council's grant system disburses funding for 30 functions that span arts organization support, capability building, research, production, distribution, public outreach, export support, travel assistance, and more (Canada Council for the Arts, n.d.). Furthermore, funding decisions are made by a peer evaluator committee comprised of artists and art professionals. To uphold a level of transparency, details such as decision criteria, amount breakdowns, recipients, and peer evaluators are disclosed to the public via searchable online databases.

Analysis of interview data along with web-based research reveal that no such agencies or programs exist in Bahrain at present. Participants cited the lack of grant funding as a key barrier to the undertaking of artistic projects, revealing that artistic efforts are primarily self-funded. This limits artistic production as well as artistic development, exacerbates accessibility issues faced by the underprivileged, and pressures artists into succumbing to problematic market mechanisms. Although participants from all observed fields expressed the desire for a grant system, filmmakers may be disproportionately impacted given the capital and labor intensive nature of film production. The absence of a grant system also leaves arts organizations susceptible to market and financial pressures.

Furthermore, interviews revealed that Bahraini artmakers may face difficulties when applying for grants from regional arts organizations. Bahrain's high per capita GDP (*relative to surrounding Middle Eastern/North African nations*) may in fact disadvantage its artists, as regional organizations may prioritize support for artists in lower-income environments.

Film:
- *"Leave profit alone, If you could at least break-even making films, then more people would be inclined to do it. If you're making a film, you're making it yourself – no one is funding you. There's no film fund, and no organization with producers or industry experts on board that you can pitch your ideas to and receive support."*

Visual Art:

- *"I wouldn't even dream of grants here."*
Music:
- *"We don't have a grant system in Bahrain as far as I know...And other organizations in the Middle East generally don't award grants to people from the GCC because we're seen as higher income countries."*

Although some public support channels do exist, they appear suboptimal. For instance, the '*Tafarogh*' program provides artists who have demonstrated artistic success and acclaim with a monthly allowance. However, this model frames support as a reward for success, as opposed to a facilitator of it. As such, it is reserved for a small number of artists, and is usually awarded towards the latter end of their careers. Moreover, selection criteria is neither transparent nor properly defined.

Additionally, older participants expressed feeling excluded from existing opportunities, which seem to primarily cater to the youth at the expense of older populations. To demonstrate, the '*Hope Fund*' was established in late 2020 to support youth-driven entrepreneurial projects (Bahrain News Agency, 2020). Although well intentioned, the initiative risks excluding otherwise worthy arts sector projects from its support on the basis of age.

Visual Art:
- *"There is focus on the young artists, as well as the established pioneering artists. But the people who are older and not yet established get lost in the middle. They shouldn't be ignored."*
Music:
- *"There is an obsession with creating opportunities for the youth of Bahrain. Okay sure, but it's happening at the expense of others in society."*

Underallocation of Public Funds:

Decision Makers interviews indicate that public funding for the arts is sparse. Responses suggest that funding is either diverted away from the arts or prevented by policies and regulations that bias against creative work (*discussed in further detail under "C. Regulatory Restrictions"*).

Decision Makers:
- *"Government grants are untapped, they are disproportionately funnelled into other already developed sectors."*

- *"We don't have an art acquisition fund. We used to but it got cut, now our funding is mainly ad hoc through corporate sponsorship."*

32

- *"Supporting creative workers can be difficult. Policies and regulations currently in place bias against individual or informal efforts. To be able to support an artist, they have to be part of a formal practice, a gallery, or have a commercial registration license."*

Music:
- *"Even though GDP here looks fine, we're more disadvantaged. In reality, the money that goes into the arts and culture is low or misdirected. Art and culture are usually the first things that get defunded."*

It may be easy to attribute the underfunding of the arts to the size of Bahrain's state budget. While it is true that the British, Canadian, and South Korean economies dwarf that of Bahrain's, ascribing causation to this is inexact. This line of reasoning ignores the focus and value these countries place on the arts, whether for social, cultural, or economic reasons. It also ignores their efforts in introducing policy measures and devising funding mechanisms that support arts sector development.

To demonstrate, it was the UK National Lottery Act of 1993 that established the National Lottery as a structure for funding the arts (Creigh-Tyte & Gallimore, 2000). It was the Massey Comission's 1951 report which recognized that Canadian cultural industries were at a 'severe disadvantage" and in need of government intervention (Marsh & Harvey, 2015). It was South Korea's Roh-Tae Woo government that refocused efforts from physical infrastructure projects to cultural creation in 1990, and the Roh Moo-Hyun government that created Arts Council Korea in 2005 (Lee, 2019).

Thus, it is more appropriate to attribute the absence of arts funding in Bahrain to a misplaced focus, an institutional undervaluing of the arts, and a lack of a development mindset. In fact, as per 2019 figures, Bahrain's per capita GDP was either higher than or at parity with Portugal, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Malaysia (World Bank, n.d.a). All of the aforementioned countries are home to dedicated art development agencies or ministerial programs that offer direct financial support to artists and arts organizations.

Malaysia is a particularly interesting case to draw from. First, its 2019 per capita GDP ($11,414) is virtually half of Bahrain's ($23,443) (World Bank, n.d.a). Second, its predominately Muslim population offers – *at least in some part* – a point of sociocultural comparison. Having acknowledged the potential and importance of the arts, the Malaysian government established the Cultural Economy Development Agency (CENDANA) in 2017. The agency aims to energize the country's creative economy by creating demand, improving supply, and reorganizing policy (CENDANA, n.d.). According

to their 2019 Annual Report, CENDANA awarded over $544,000 in grants and sponsorships in support of a wide variety of artistic disciplines and genres, ranging from traditional theatre to punk rock (CENDANA, 2020a, p.14). Most recently, CENDANA announced the allocation of over $3.5 million in arts support for 2021 (CENDANA, 2020b).

The Nation Branding Approach

State-sponsored efforts have produced notable achievements over the past two decades, such as the construction of the National Theater, the induction of cultural sites into the UNESCO World Heritage list, and the annual Spring of Culture festival. However, findings reveal that institutional efforts prioritize image projection and nation branding at the expense of creative ecosystem development. This was observed to take place through foreign commissioned large-scale physical infrastructure projects, events, and festivals that deliver the optics of what is commonly referred to in press releases and local media outlets as the *'international standard'*. Moreover, responses suggest there being a hierarchical power relationship between State institutions and artmakers.

The State as Cultural Engineer:

Among the most cited cultural governance frameworks is the one developed by Chartrand and McCaughey. It details four possible roles for the State: facilitator, patron, architect, and engineer. The engineer state exercises ownership over the means of artistic production, supports the results of creativity rather than its processes, and supports art that meets political standards of excellence (Chartrand & McCaughey, 1989).

Based on the findings of this analysis, Bahrain's mode of cultural governance most closely resembles the *'engineer'* model. Given the absence of adequate public support channels, Bahrain's most prominent private arts organizations (Al Riwaq Art Space, Malja, and Mashq Art Space) have either closed or no longer operate at full capacity. Therefore, State institutions such as the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities (BACA), are at present, the curators and '*arbiters of taste*' of all things art and culture related.

By focusing on the results of creativity (*nation branding*) over process, and by adhering to political standards of excellence – institutional efforts are, *by design*, directed away from the necessary yet unglamourous and time consuming nature of development-oriented work. In line with this notion, only

1 out of 25 participants responded favorably when asked about the availability and usefulness of public support channels.

Art & Culture as Nation Branding Instruments :

Analysis suggests that art and culture bear the added responsibility of maintaining and projecting an idealized national image. Initiatives or works considered to threaten this image *(for instance, by being informal, critical, or controversial)* are often deemed undeserving of institutional recognition and support. The application of culture as a nation branding instrument appears to extend on to artists' personal appearances, lifestyles, or social/political beliefs. Scholars note that image projection in Gulf-Arab states has increased State expectations of citizens, frequently reminding them that they are "cultural ambassadors" that must maintain an image of social respectability and decorum (Alhussein et al., 2021). Thus, artistic freedom is limited and undue influence is exerted on artists' ways of working. Furthermore, artists who do not align with institutional standards may be subjected to unfair treatment.

Film:
- *"Most of the work tries to present a polished image, an image for marketing Bahrain."*

Visual Art:
- *"It's a big problem, this idea of competing over status and perceptions by projecting to the world that Bahrain has prestige."*

- *"Bahrainis are held to stricter standards in terms of how they dress at art events, whereas foreigners won't."*

Music
- *"The initiatives that are done under the name of culture are actually done for the sake of showing off."*

- *"We have a problematic hierarchy where certain disciplines are regarded as high culture and others as low culture."*

- *"You need to look and dress a certain way if you're Bahraini. It's this idea of not wanting Bahrainis to embarrass the country."*

Additionally, responses suggest the existence of a State-prescribed national culture, which some describe as doctored and non-representative.

Film:

- *"Bahrain is a cultural mix, and those cultures need to be celebrated in their individuality. For example, we don't celebrate the diversity of dialects we have here, you keep seeing this neutral Bahraini dialect being used in work."*

Visual Art:
- *"Even though we have many layers, what is shown is usually polished and manufactured to specifications."*

Music
- *"We're shifting more towards a very specific and noninclusive version of Bahraini identity. It feels very surface-level and artificial."*

Overreliance on Cultural Enjoyment and Physical Infrastructure Projects:

Initiatives listed on the BACA website point to a focus on four fronts: cultural preservation, cultural tourism, cultural enjoyment, and physical infrastructure projects. All types of initiatives are made accessible to the public by way of free admission or subsidized tickets. The latter two categories – *cultural enjoyment and physical infrastructure* – emerged as areas of concern in interviews. Cultural enjoyment initiatives consist of event programming, which includes but is not limited to: concerts, lectures, exhibitions, and festivals. Physical infrastructure projects include but are not limited to: high-end performing arts venues, pavilions, museums, and cultural sites.

With regard to nation branding objectives, cultural enjoyment and physical infrastructure projects likely represent important initiatives. However, responses suggest that the focus placed on them eclipses ecosystem and community needs. Participants' critiques centered around the purpose and management of such initiatives, citing a focus on *'hardware'* (i.e. building aesthetics, decor, equipment, etc.) instead of *'software'* (i.e. community building, capability building, grants/funding, production, marketing, distribution, etc.).

Moreover, responses point to a lack of sustainable initiatives, with institutional efforts commonly being referred to as short-term *'one-offs'*. This is likely due to the costs associated with the large scale and high production value of these projects. As such, participants cast doubts over the ability of these initiatives to create a meaningful and lasting impact.

Decision Makers:
- *"Cultural efforts are mostly preservation, performances, and events"*

- *"Efforts are mostly one-and-done, a lot of hefty investments go into producing short term outcomes."*

Film:
- *"...The focus was on the physical layout and the marketing but not on what the initiative delivered. In reality, the equipment and infrastructure were fine, but the vision was not."*

Visual Art:
- *"Money is invested, but unfortunately into decorations and how things are going to look."*

- *"Because the focus is on making things expensive and fancy, we have a big bang once a year vs sustainable programs."*

Music:
- *"We have the shell for everything, but no core. Money is spent on equipment and appearances, but there is no proper strategy of how to put it to use. There's zero production, it's almost as if institutions operate as event management companies."*

Overreliance on Imported Creative Work:

Participants pointed to an institutional overreliance on creative work that is sourced from outside Bahrain. Responses indicate that this approach often takes precedence over local capability and capacity building, and usually takes the form of foreign commissions that deliver on State-sponsored physical infrastructure and cultural enjoyment initiatives.

Visual Art:
- *"Somehow, international designers are commissioned to design pavilions that represent Bahrain – what about the people that have lived and grown up here?"*

- *"We have the skills now, why do we keep hiring people from outside Bahrain?"*

Music:
- *"You keep seeing cultural and arts projects carried out by people hired from abroad."*

- *"Platforms such as the national theater are very hard to access or perform in if you're Bahraini."*

This observation matches the description of the engineer state, which supports the results of creativity rather than its processes (Chartrand & McCaughey, 1989). In this case, creative work is simply procured from the global marketplace to deliver on nation branding objectives, bypassing the need for

investments in local development. Participants were clear in stating that their frustrations lay not with the act of importing creative work, but rather, the institutional overdependence on it.

Film:

- *"If the talent doesn't exist here that's fine. But did you do the due diligence to look for it? If it doesn't exist, why not work on developing it? There are people with potential. It's about investing in people, that sort of thing doesn't happen. Instead the easy way out is taken by bringing someone from outside to carry out a job"*

Visual Art:

- *"You have to have a proven track record to be recognized, but there's no pathway of building that track record at home."*

Music:

- *"The representation of Bahrainis at the Spring of Culture is low, and maybe that's alright. It can be a window to the world once a year. But why not have other things going on for Bahraini creatives during the rest of the year?"*

- *"We need spaces for young artists. As a budding musician, there's no clear path to follow that allows me to perform at the more renowned public venues. It's like a glass ceiling."*

The act of sourcing creative work from abroad also contributes to nation branding by association. In essence, projects delivered via foreign commissions extend on to Bahrain's image the sought-after distinction of having reached the 'international standard'.

Film:

- *There is an obsession with achieving an 'international standard'. Is it the quality, is it the process, is it the way of working? What that means is not defined. It usually defaults to production quality."*

Visual Art:

- *"It's promoting Bahrain using other people's names. They'd rather do it with someone who has a big global name, and we don't have that, so we're out of luck."*

Music:

- *"Whenever the word 'international' is used, it means that an act is automatically good because they managed to play somewhere other than Bahrain"*

In addition to perpetuating notions of local inferiority, the import-dependent image projection approach biases against the skills, experience, and credentials of Bahraini artmakers. Participants expressed feeling underappreciated and underrepresented, and in some cases, being subjected to wage exploitation under the expectation of serving a national duty. Given the structural voids and lack of development-focused initiatives at home – Bahraini artmakers are disadvantaged by virtue of not having access to the credentials, creative ecosystems, and markets found outside of Bahrain. As such, they are vulnerable to being crowded out of what limited opportunities may come their way.

Film:
- *"We have the people, the talents, and the passion – but it's not being watered. What we don't have is people that believe in and push these talents forward"*

Visual Art:
- *"They think Bahrainis will embarrass the country."*

- *"It pisses me off when I see other countries in the region celebrating what we have had for a long time."*

Music:
- *"There is this expectation that everything has to be relatively cheap if you're a local musician – but thousands and thousands are paid for Western or European artists. Oftentimes, local artists are exploited for their passion. They're told to do it for their country."*

- *"Unfortunately, even official entities see foreign creatives as more important than Bahraini. Maybe it's not the intention, but the results show this way"*

- *"No platforms are given for locals and this perpetuates the idea that locals are all amateurs which is not true."*

C.) Regulatory Restrictions

No "Status of the Artist" Laws

Adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in 1980, the "Recommendation Concerning the Status of the Artist" provides a set of recommendations and guidelines that aim to protect, empower, and support artists and their work.

> *"The 1980 Recommendation Concerning the Status of the Artist calls upon Member States to Improve the professional, social and economic status of artists through the implementation of policies and measures related to training, social security, employment, income and tax conditions,*

mobility and freedom of expression. It also recognizes the right of artists to be organized in trade unions or professional organisations that can represent and defend the interests of their members." (UNESCO, n.d.b).

Numerous countries, including the United Kingdom, Canada, and South Korea have since legislated and enacted laws concerning the status of the artist. This study was unable to identify the implementation of similar measures in Bahrain.

Film:
- *"Where do I go for answers? How do I get permissions? Nowhere. There's no place I can go to for support and to protect my rights as a filmmaker. No guideline that lets filmmakers know what their rights are and what the proper channels are for help. "*

Visual Art
- *"There is no law that organizes and protects the rights of artists, there is no official body for this"*

Music:
- *"We don't have a proper system or structure that recognizes the Bahraini full time artist and safeguards our rights"*

Artistic Professions not Recognized by Labor Law:

Independent artists who sustain their livelihoods through the creation, sale, licensing, or performance of their works, and who are not owners of businesses that offer creative services do not fit within the existing criteria of Bahrain's labor code. Consequently, artists are unable to declare '*artist*' as their profession on civilian identification. Responses indicate that this may negatively impact outcomes on credit card, loan, and travel visa applications. Although an 'artist card' is available through the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Tourism, it mostly caters to foreign performing artists (e.g. hotel bands) as a form of an expatriate work permit. Not being recognized under existing labor structurally de-legitmizes and de-professionalizes artistic work. It reinforces notions of artistic pursuits as hobbies or part-time work, and more importantly, prevents unionization.

Film:
- *"We don't have a union that we can go to for support, one that can protect our rights."*

Music:
- *"I'm not unemployed, I work. But I can't set my job as an artist or a musician on my ID card. I have to either choose "student" or "unemployed". And if I set it as*

> *either of those then it can affect things like getting a credit card or a visa to travel."*

- *"We need a union for musicians or for artists in general. We don't have a proper categorization for full time musicians – it doesn't exist in the labor code. There is no way of being recognized by the country as a freelancing performing artist"*

- *"There is an artist card through the tourism ministry, but it's not available to Bahrainis, only people hired from abroad."*

Exclusion from Pension Fund:

A serious consequence of labor law gaps is the exclusion of full-time independent artists from Bahrain's social insurance fund. This directly affects the livelihood of full-time artists as it makes them ineligible to receive pension payments.

Visual Art:
- *"I can't enroll in the social pension fund as an independent artist, I need a CR. If I get a CR, then my application with the Ministry of Labor gets pushed down"*

Music:
- *"There's no proper means of identifying artists to register them in social insurance. I had to get a virtual CR under "performing arts school" and present invoices for me to be eligible to register and only after a period of time. I'm listed as a business owner and I'm not a business owner, I'm a creative artist."*

A workaround some artists resort to is to obtain a commercial registration (CR) license, effectively rendering themselves as business owners. However, due to the nature of their profession, many artists are unable to meet required criteria (eg. proof of office space). Although a more flexible virtual CR service, *'Sijili',* allows individuals to file for a CR without the need of a physical space, it largely excludes artistic creative activities. As such, many artists are unable to opt in simply by design.

It is important to note that expanding CR criteria and registering artists as business owners fails to address the root of the issue. Instead, it subjects artists to inapplicable criteria, discriminates against their ways of working, and may lead to future problems. For instance, a participant expressed being hesitant towards obtaining a CR due to a pending job application; as CR licenses are disclosed to employers, and hiring preference is often given to applicants who are not business owners (*especially with regard to public sector vacancies*).

41

Difficulty Accessing Labor Fund Support:

Artmakers are excluded from public funding streams that are otherwise accessible to CR owners or employed individuals. For instance, participants cited difficulties in accessing the support of Bahrain's labor fund (*Tamkeen*), claiming that the platform primarily caters to employed individuals, businesses, and CR owners.

Film:
- *"Tamkeen provides help for corporates or commercial production houses, but not independent filmmakers. You need to have a CR."*

Visual Art:
- *"With the labor fund, it's hard to get anything as an independent artist, even to study. The link between the arts and the labor fund doesn't exist"*

Music:
- *"In terms of Tamkeen, the support is there but its clear its geared towards business entities"*

Activity-Based Restrictions:

Discriminatory Rental Practices:

Interviews reveal that unmarried males who wish to acquire studio space by renting a residential apartment may be prevented from doing so due to discriminatory practices on the part of landlords. Commercial spaces are not a feasible option, as they are often priced out of financial reach and may require tenants to undergo screening and auditing to prove their commercial viability. This restricts the activities of artmakers, and in particular, artists who lack the financial means to own private property.

Visual Art:
- *"There is a lack of spaces in terms of renting spaces to do your work (flats, studios, etc.). You may face difficulties if you are a single male"*

Music:
- *"If you want to rent a residential space to work in, they don't allow single Bahraini men to do so. You have to go through a lot of hoops. So it leaves you with commercial spaces which are more expensive and you have to show them the income you generate to prove how commercially viable you are as a tenant"*

Hosting Musical Events

Musicians face difficulties organizing independent musical concerts or events, as ministerial permission is required to advertise an event and charge admission fees. It was also revealed that permission is more likely to be granted if the request is submitted under a CR license as opposed to a civilian ID. Moreover, the type of CR license must include event hosting as part of its business activities. This not only limits musical activity, it contributes to a larger problem wherein musical performances are primarily relegated to bars, which are noninclusive spaces.

Music:

- *"Legally, the event has to be filed for by a company, it's always a red flag when an individual applies for a permit to host an event. If filed under a personal ID, there is more scrutiny in terms of investigation, and the event can be shut down or cancelled subject to whether the person in charge likes or dislikes the event. It's important because you need permission to advertise the event and charge for tickets, and you need to cover the cost of renting a space for the concert. That's why we moved to performing at bars, it made things easier because their business license includes hosting events. The downside to that is that it made concerts inaccessible to women or teenagers."*

Obtaining Permissions to Film at Locations:

Filmmakers face difficulties obtaining permissions to film at locations; citing ambiguous procedures, a lack of communication, and scrutiny over content.

Film:

- *"No clear procedure to shoot at a location, there is a lot of ambiguity."*

- *"Tried to access a location to shoot but I wasn't able to get permission. You're told you can be creative but then you face these simple barriers."*

- *"Permissions can be hard, they want to vet the script first."*

D.) Risks of Artistic Expression

Legal Risk

Legal risk arises when communicating expressions considered to be against the law. The following articles from Bahrain's penal code reference expressions and acts that are punishable by fining or imprisonment (Bahrain Legislation & Legal Opinion Commission, 2019; VERTIC, n.d.).

- *Articles 214-216*, related to expressions that offend authority figures, the national flag and emblem, government agencies, the National Assembly, law courts, the army, a foreign country, or an international organization based in Bahrain.

- *Articles 309-310,* related to expressions that offend religious sects, holy books, and sacred symbols or persons.

- *Article 355,* related the production and possession of publications, drawings, pictures, films, symbols or and items considered to violate public morals.

- *Article 134,* related to "statements or rumors about domestic conditions in the State, so as to undermine financial confidence in the State or adversely affect its prestige or position, or exercises in any manner whatsoever activities that are harmful to the national interests" (VERTIC, n.d., p. 27).

Social Risk

Social risk may arise when communicating ideas or expressions that deviate from cultural or societal norms. This may result in the loss of reputation, status, or occupation. Moreover, the presence of social risks may be amplified given Bahrain's small size and population.

Film:
- *"As an Arab creative, you're told not to talk about certain things and you're scrutinized for bringing them up."*

- *"It's in our culture to respect family and society, this limits my creative freedom."*

Visual Art:
- *"Society also exerts authority. You may be labeled as a heretic that is inciting dissent and promoting vice."*

- *"I'm hoping people start putting more of an edge in their work and not play it too safe, but it's hard in such a small country. You have to be careful."*

Music:

- *"It's tough, one of the first things you think about is how not to do anything considered wrong or offensive to people. At the end of the day you are a part of the social fabric, you can't shut yourself off and not have it affect you."*

- *"It doesn't have to be political. You might be afraid of what your parents think, or society. You might even lose your job."*

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2. LIMITING FACTORS

A.) Production Infrastructure Gaps

Stems From:
- Institutional approach focuses on engineering/procuring the results of creativity rather than developing processes of creativity.
- Lack of grant funding for individual artists.
- Regulations that restrict access to spaces.

Implications:
- Reduces output of artistic production.
- Artists pressured to cater to available commercial work, as opposed to autonomous artmaking and the pursuit of artistic excellence.

Link to Creative Value Chain: Content Origination, Making/Production

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Gaps in production infrastructure hinder the arts sector's ability to engage in sustained artistic production. Due to the more component-based nature of motion picture and audio recording production chains, this was found to disproportionately impact the film and music fields. Production infrastructure gaps were identified in three areas: production resources, division of labor, and project financing.

Production Resources:

Analysis revealed a shortage of *spaces* and *facilities* related to the production of artistic work. This includes the likes of film sets, filming locations, art studios, recording studios, and rehearsal rooms. In addition to availability issues, existing production spaces and facilities are often inaccessible. This is attributed to the high costs associated with their procurement, construction, or rental, as well as restrictive regulations. Although access to production *equipment* was raised as a challenge, most participants regarded it as a barrier that is easier to overcome when compared to the lack of spaces and facilities.

Film:
- *"It's easier to access locations for shoots in other countries, where you usually pay a fee to get a license. There isn't any of that here, you never know if you'll get permission. You just end up waiting."*

Visual Art:

- *"There aren't spaces to rent for an affordable price that you can use as a studio."*

- *"My pieces are quite big, and it's hard to afford a space big enough to work in."*

Music:
- *"Practice spaces are very expensive and limited. You have to pay more to stay longer and it doesn't give you the space to compose, only rehearse. A lot of groups vanish just because they don't have or can't afford a practice space."*

- *"We have a few recording studios, but they're not well equipped. Most musicians end up building home studios at their own expense – and not everyone has the space or the ability to afford that."*

Division of Labor:

Interviews revealed a shortage in skills and professions that relate to specialist roles and functions. This is both a symptom and a cause of underdevelopment. On one hand, it alludes to the creative ecosystem having not matured to the point of division of labor proliferating to create new, *stand-alone* work for individuals to pursue and specialize in. On the other, labor gaps represent missing inputs that stall production, compromise quality of output, and prevent ecosystem evolution.

Film:
- *"We lack specialists. People have to take on multiple roles such as directing, shooting, and producing all at once. There are key roles that are missing here."*

Music:
- *We don't have specialists in Bahrain, we use the same sound engineer and studio for everything from recording Quran to rock and roll. We also don't have producers so musicians produce themselves. It's not normal. In other places, you find studios and producers that specialize in specific types of music. Here you have people doing A,B,C,D,E and F all at once.*

To illustrate, filmmakers operate in the absence of a film industry and therefore face difficulties in finding the skill sets needed to bring their concepts to life, especially with regard to feature film production. A lack of acting schools, as well as a scarcity of work opportunities provide little to no incentive for individuals to pursue acting careers. As such, filmmakers struggle in finding actors who not only possess a *film* acting skill set, but who can also accommodate the long durations of feature film shoots (i.e. full-time film actors). Moreover, filmmakers emphasized there being a lack of producers with the necessary industry knowledge to effectively manage production, marketing and distribution processes. Thus, the majority of Bahraini film production is relegated to short films.

Film:
- *There are actors that work in theater or TV series, but not in cinema. And even then the TV actors are expensive to hire by someone like me. That leaves me with younger aspiring actors, but they usually work full-time in other jobs. I have to track them down on Instagram because there is no database for actors. I might be able to get them for a week for a short film, but it's hard to expect them to take 2 months off to shoot a feature film. I also can't find extras, there are no companies that deal with this. I have to gather my friends – it takes time. We're working with what we have in the absence of an industry.*

- *I'm a director and I have a script ready, but there aren't many producers. Oftentimes it's in the form of funding from wealthy angel investors – but not in the form of an actual producer that is knowledgeable about filmmaking and the industry and that can help market and distribute the movie.*

Musicians voiced similar concerns, highlighting labor gaps related to both technical and relationship based roles. Although sound and recording engineers do exist (*albeit to a limited extent)*, the shortage of relationship based roles appears to be more severe. This includes the likes of artist managers, music producers, booking agents, music lawyers, journalists, and publicists. In regard to the production process, the shortage of music producers (*a role often wrongly conflated with that of recording engineers*) represents a particularly limiting challenge, as it deprives artists of developmental, stylistic, and production guidance.

Music:
- *"We have a few recording studios that can help you record, but it's more like technical support. When it comes to production we're not at a good level, we lack producers."*

- *"There is a lack of labels, booking agents, or managers that can take in and develop or help promote artists."*

- *"When people start a studio here, recording is the main business. But we don't have that producer approach, where artists are brought into the studio to make music under the mentoring and guidance of an experienced producer."*

Although unstated in interviews, the same could be said of the visual arts field, which suffers from a shortage of journalists, publicists, artist managers, critics, brokers, and curators.

<u>Project Financing:</u>

Given the absence of public procurement programs, labor fund support, and a grant-disbursing arts development agency – Bahrain's artmakers operate without channels for project financing. In consequence, production infrastructure gaps and accessibility issues remain unresolved, thereby limiting the rate at which artistic work is produced. Participants revealed that artistic projects are primarily self-funded, with some artists spending months, if not years (*in the case of filmmaking*) raising funds to cover hiring and production costs.

<u>Film:</u>
- *"Film is unsupported so you're on your own. You can't make what you want to make because you don't have the resources. It shouldn't hold you back, but certain things you can do yourself, and certain things you can't."*

- *"You have to do a lot of running around to get funding. It took me close to 4 years to fund the production of my first feature film."*

<u>Visual Art:</u>
- *"Tools, materials, and equipment can be expensive. Especially when it comes to sculpture, installations, or video art. Artists end up investing a lot of money from their own pocket for their work not to sell, or to be showcased in empty spaces. You lose a lot."*

<u>Music:</u>
- *"Everything has to be done 'DIY' and financed from within. It's not about the money per se, but rather the resources money can provide. For example, using it for a studio or for publishing."*

B.) Lack of Spaces and the 'Middle Ground'

Stems From:
- Lack of grant funding for private arts organizations.
- Regulations that restrict access to spaces.

Implication:
- Low network activation and interaction amongst artists and audiences.
- Limited spaces for the presentation of artistic works.
- Artists pressured to cater to available commercial work, as opposed to autonomous artmaking and the pursuit of artistic excellence.

Link to Creative Value Chain: Origination, Exhibition, Participation

In "*The Anatomy of the Creative City*", Cohendet et al. (2010) propose an alternative, tri-layered approach to creative city analysis. They argue that conventional approaches and policy measures

neglect the crucial role of the '*middle-ground*', focusing either on the formal cultural institutions and creative firms of the '*upper-ground*' (e.g. Michael Porter's '*innovation clusters'*), or the artists and knowledge workers of the '*underground*' (e.g. Richard Florida's '*creative class'*).

While the authors do acknowledge the importance of developing the upper-ground and underground, they also stress that "each entity forming the anatomy of the creative city has a specific role in the creative process, and fulfills the task other components cannot achieve" (Cohendet et al., 2010, p. 94). Cohendet et al. frame the middle-ground as the activator of the creative city and "the cornerstone to understanding how the creative, artistic and cultural industries on one side and the individuals who work in related occupations on the other side interact in creative processes" (Cohendet et al., 2010, p. 92).

The middle-ground consists of interaction-enabling spaces such as communities, neighborhoods, arts organizations, cafes, cultural salons, public areas, and educational institutions. The places of the middle-ground provide the conditions for people to "meet, wander, confront ideas, and build daring assumptions and validate new creative forms" (Cohendet et al., 2010, p. 108). In essence, they serve as "*playgrounds for creativity*" (Cohendet & Simon, 2007) that allow for the sharing of internalized knowledge as well as the generation of unexpected ideas, projects, and connections.

Furthermore, Cohendet et al. emphasize the middle-ground's intermediary role within the creative city's anatomy. Middle-ground entities provide the grounds for the exhibition, validation, critique, and elaboration of ideas emerging from the underground. In doing so, the middle-ground performs a crucial function; it translates and facilitates the movement of new ideas up to the more formalized upperground. This is attributed to the middle-ground's placement between the underground's informal realm of *idea exploration* and the upperground's formal realm of *idea exploitation* (Cohendet et al., 2010).

In light of this, Cohendet et al. suggest that the middle-ground calls for specific attention from policy makers. The orientation of Canadian public arts funding demonstrates this in practice; for instance, Canada Council data reveals that in 2015, public sector support accounted for 73% of the operating budgets of 75 artist-run centers (Canada Council for the Arts, 2015). Private sector donations and earned revenues accounted for the remaining 14% and 13% respectively.

<u>The Death of the Middle-Ground in Bahrain:</u>

Private Art Organizations:

Analysis identified organizations and communities such as Al Riwaq Art Space, Malja, Mashq Art Space, Museland, BohoBaha, and Sonder Cafe as key middle-ground actors. Given the lack of public support channels, the majority of these organizations are either inactive or no longer operating at full capacity. The loss of these organizations appears to have dealt a debilitating blow to the local creative ecosystem. Participants expressed great frustrations, claiming that the closures contributed to a consolidation of art and culture by state institutions, which has in effect limited the range of artistic activity.

<u>Visual Art:</u>
- *"The gap left by Al Riwaq, Malja, and Mashq has not been filled."*

- *"When you limit spaces to gather and have conversations, you prevent the existence of different art scenes and the possibility of new ones emerging."*

<u>Music:</u>
- *"It's sad that very active and crucial art spaces shut down. These places never seem to last. That's the way the market is here unfortunately."*

- *"There is one monopolizing cultural institution now that the art spaces were wiped out. They have control over producing and providing cultural things"*

Public Community Centers/Social Clubs:

An important point of consideration is the reorienting of public community centers and social clubs away from art and culture (*and towards a primarily athletic purpose*). Interviews and web-based research reveal that, up until the early 1990s, community centers hosted festivals, performances, discussions, and served as accessible rehearsal spaces. Supporting this is a 1997 television interview with Ali Bahar, one of Bahrain's most iconic musical artists. In the interview, Bahar traces the origins of his band's formation to interactions at social clubs (Ali Bahar Band, 2020).

Furthermore, participants expressed their frustrations towards the current state of existing public organizations (*referred to in Bahrain as 'clubs', 'associations', or 'societies'*), claiming that they have failed to serve a purpose or produce meaningful change.

<u>Visual Art:</u>

- *"The current 'societies' are not serving a purpose. There is nothing going on that is productive, futuristic, developmental, looking into current issues, trying to fix problems, or even a general discussion. All you get is messages for membership fees and exhibition openings. You go to the opening, and then you go home. Nothing happens after that.*

Film:

- *"The 'Cinema Club' is dead. No one really knows what the purpose of the place is. No workshops, no production, no strategy – they just screen a film every week. That's it."*

Recollections of Bahrain's Middle Ground:

Participants' recollections and experiences highlight the role of middle-ground entities as social hubs for both the emission and reception of creativity, corroborating Cohendet et al.'s analysis. The following four points represent key dynamic properties that seem non-reproducible in the absence of middle-ground actors.

1.) Spurring Creative Activity:

Participant's described art organizations as places where people engaged in creative acts and creative thought. They were home to performances, street festivals, exhibitions, workshops, courses, film screenings, and everyday discussions.

Film:
- *"We used to have Malja and Al Riwaq, they served as platforms for people to put their art out."*

Visual Art:
- *"I would go to Riwaq everyday, myself and other artists. We were either working, talking, attending a lecture, an exhibition, a film screening or a workshop. There was always something going on."*

- *"Malja provided the space for everything. From music performances to photography to art installations. It was a place where art existed. You could request to use the space for a performance or an exhibition. You could experiment as much as you wanted there."*

Music:
- *"It's so apparent when these organizations are inactive. Not only in terms of just creative output but also activity. It's like nothing original or unorthodox takes place without them."*

2.) Fostering Public Participation:

Through accessible and diverse programming, the organizations were able to bridge gaps and build connections between the arts sector and the general public.

Visual Art:
- *"The work done outside of official institutions – those projects were much more engaging to society vs the more 'polite' and formal institutional approach."*

- *"You would see people from all over Bahrain at Malja, every inch of it was filled with people. And it was a mix of people from private schools, public schools, expats, and tourists."*

Music:
- *"Mashq was able to draw crowds of everyday Bahrainis from different walks of life."*

- *"The events at Sonder targeted many crowds: book clubs, poetry, music, discussions. I was surprised at the diversity. They were also able to draw the younger crowd which we couldn't do as older musicians playing in bars. "*

3.) Facilitating Interaction & Collaboration Amongst Artists:

Art organizations appear to have played a significant role in providing the conditions for gathering and interaction – and in turn – facilitating idea exchange, network activation, and collaboration amongst Bahraini artmakers.

Film:
- *"It was easier to get introduced to other creatives when Malja and Al Riwaq existed."*

Visual Art:
- *"We were at Al Riwaq every week. You would meet a lot of new people, exchange ideas with them, and start collaborating together. I met all the artists I know there. It was our 'gluing' factor."*

Music:
- *"It all depends on these organizations such as Museland and BohoBaha that encourage musicians to work together. They create the space and the push for people to collaborate and produce content."*

4.) Platforms for Learning and Launchpads for New Artists, Ideas, and Movements:

Arts organizations provided the conditions for the origination and dissemination of novel artistic ideas, mediums, and expressions. They also helped develop artists' skills and served as platforms that launched the journeys of new artists.

Visual Art:
- *"Al Riwaq created a space for people to exhibit besides the annual exhibition, and created a movement for new things like installation and video art"*

- *"Malja created a new art scene that was more messy. The standard was low, but people were starting to speak up about contemporary issues. There are many examples of artists who got their start and grew out of there. You saw people showcase their work for the first time, and you saw them get better because it was a safe environment with a supportive audience and knowledgeable staff that coached them through it."*

Music:
- *"Our concert at Al Riwaq's The Nest really helped propel us to the next level in terms of being seen by and connecting with an audience."*

- *"Organizations like Museland and BohoBaha are breaking preconceived notions of how music should be, they're showcasing original music and not 'Hotel California'. Because they created the platform for it, you started seeing new bands pop up. You started to see more bands forming, performing, and writing their own music. They would never have had the platform otherwise."*

C.) Artist Development Not Supported

Stems From:
- Developmental environments that do not nurture art, creativity, and self expression.
- Limited availability of and access to arts education.
- Lack of scholarships and grants for individual artists.
- Lack of grant funding for private arts organizations.
- Legal and social risks associated with certain expressions.

Implications:
- Artistic exploration, research, and concept development compromised

Link to Creative Value Chain: Content Origination, Education, Critique

Shortage of Learning Environments:

In addition to the education system gaps discussed under '*Foundational Impediments*', findings also point to a lack of non-technical arts programs and learning environments. Participants regarded this

shortage as being detrimental to artist development in areas such as research, concept creation, storytelling, critique, and artistic identity. When prompted, participants expressed a desire for well-structured and purposeful programs such as residencies, incubators, networking events, apprenticeships, and cultural exchanges.

Film:
- *"Our weakness is in pre-production. Without a story and a vision, a film will always fall flat. We have a gap in this area and I think this is educational and developmental. We don't have people that teach this at home, and you won't get a scholarship to study it outside. I know there is a big individual element to art, but learning is important too".*

Visual Art:
- *"We don't have an art school. So structured educational and apprenticeship programs, or residencies – with proper instruction on creative and conceptual thinking. That would really push things."*

Music:
- *"I think the type of education musicians receive, or lack there-of, really influences their approach to music. You've got some music training institutes here but they just teach you to be a student and play your instrument. You're not trained to become an artist. It's a gap in lateral thinking."*

Given their unavailability at home, artists often resort to seeking such opportunities abroad. However, this may not be a viable option for many due to the lack of scholarships, grants, or travel-assistance.

Lack of Arts Critics:

Several participants regarded the lack of arts critics as detrimental to artistic development in their field. For instance, artists described the current buying environment as being primarily influenced by connections or social media popularity, and therefore, not a useful gauge of an artist's work. Furthermore, while the majority of participants expressed the desire for institutional recognition, some cautioned that due to knowledge gaps and biases, institutional tastes may not serve as a reliable measure of artistic quality.

Visual Art:
- *"Selling is reliant on connections. My friends might buy my work, but the validation is not useful. It's useful to have an outside critique."*

- *"Who will judge and evaluate the art? We don't have art critics or historians here."*

- *"The next step that we need is art critics. That will help add value and credibility to an artist's track record."*

Music:
- *"One of the biggest disasters we have in Bahrain is that art critics don't exist. You might have opinion pieces, but not analyses by people that can critique in an academic way. Having critics evaluate the work would give a truer indication of the quality of the scene vs social media likes or what institutions push."*

D.) Direct & Indirect Censorship

Stems From:
- Developmental environments that do not nurture art, creativity, and self expression.
- Legal and social risks associated with certain expressions.

Implications:
- Limits artistic exploration and restricts artistic work to accepted expression and themes.
- Self-censorship results in art work that may not resonate with the general public.

Link to Creative Value Chain: Content Origination, Participation

Participant's regarded the ever-presence of institutional limits and societal pressures as a key creativity inhibitor. Due to the risk of legal or social repercussions, Bahrain's artmakers must carefully navigate their creative choices and expressions – often self-censoring or avoiding certain topics altogether.

Film:
- *"What happens is artists self-censor, you always end up compromising and being cautious about what you're doing."*

Visual Art:
- *"We're still kind of restricted and not allowed to express ourselves. How can you make art that compares to the rest of the world when you can't show certain things?"*

Music:
- *"In terms of expression, I think people really hold themselves back. We censor ourselves in a really weird way. There is a fear of going all out."*

E.) Insufficient Audience Development Mechanisms

> **Stems From:**
> - Developmental environments that do not nurture art, creativity, and self expression.
> - Lack of grant funding for individual artists.
> - Lack of grant funding to support private arts organizations.
> - Institutional approach focuses on results of creativity rather than processes of creativity.
>
> **Implications:**
> - General public disconnected from the local arts sector.
> - Niche art audiences generate low pull for local art work.
> - Low presence/spillover outside of Bahrain.
>
> **Link to Creative Value Chain:** Education, Dissemination, Exhibition/Reception, Participation

Audience development refers to activities aimed at developing relationships with new and existing audiences (Arts Council England, 2018). Primarily undertaken by institutions, art organizations, or artists themselves – audience development activities include "aspects of marketing, commissioning, programming, involvement in decision making, education, customer care, and distribution" (Arts Council England, 2018). Despite being a longstanding component of art management and cultural policy (Kawashima, 2006), Bahrain's mechanisms for audience development are either insufficient or ineffective.

With regard to institutional efforts, the most common audience development mechanism was found to be the subsidization of cultural center/event admission tickets. Although this represents an important measure with regard to making the arts accessible, it remains unclear whether this has attracted *new* as opposed to *existing* audiences. There is also little evidence that suggests there being robust initiatives that encompass education, public outreach, and audience development research.

It must also be acknowledged that the absence of a grant system represents a key barrier to audience development. For reference, both Art Council England and the Canada Council for the Arts fund artist-led audience development activities. Not only do Bahrain's artmakers operate without this support channel, but so do its arts organizations. Despite being key audience development enablers, Bahrain's arts organizations often succumb to market pressures and are, at present, virtually nonexistent.

As a consequence, arts audienceship appears to be low in Bahrain. For instance, participants cited a disconnect between the arts sector and the general public; they also raised concerns over the ability

of their fields to reach and develop relationships with new audiences. Identifying the reasons for this disconnect is a matter that warrants a separate investigation. Nevertheless, the following observations provide a starting point.

Audience Development at Home:

Absorptive Capacity:

Findings implicate Bahrain's socio-cultural environment in biasing audiences against novel, unfamiliar, or non-conventional artistic work. Participants also emphasized the role education plays in developing audiences' capacites to engage with art in a manner that extends beyond outward-facing aesthetics. In essence, this line of reasoning implies that the disregard for the arts in developmental environments translates to a societal disregard at the macro-level.

Visual Art:
- *"There's no culture of understanding and reading an artistic work in our society, we quickly jump into judgements of ugly vs pretty. It's not part of our curriculum, unless they were fortunate with a teacher who went out of their way to deliver that. It's hard when your work is not understood."*

- *"There is a gap in terms of understanding art. Even with the upper classes, many don't want to digest art in different forms. They don't understand or value it."*

Music:
- *"Music or arts education isn't just about creating musicians, it's about creating an appreciation and an understanding for the work of artists. It creates an audience. Otherwise, you present your work but no one understands or appreciates it."*

- *"I think what separates our audiences from audiences in places where original music is well received is a cultural and educational thing. The worst thing you can do at a gig here is announce that you're playing an original song. That's when you see people disengaging."*

- *"It's shocking how audiences don't have the capacity to sit and listen to something new. We don't have that culture where people go out of their way to experience something new."*

Participants' statements echo the notion of '*absorptive capacity*' from organizational behavioral science (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990), which posits that the "breadth of categories into which prior knowledge is organized, the differentiation of those categories, and the linkages across them permit

individuals to make sense of, and in turn, acquire new knowledge" (Bower and Hilgard, 1981, as cited in Cohen & Levinthal, 1990, p. 129). In other words, audiences' value perceptions, as well as their ability to absorb and interact with artistic works can be cumulatively developed through education and exposure. The experiences of musician and filmmaker participants support this sentiment.

Musicians attributed audiences' bias for familiarity to the reinforcing of existing tastes and behaviors by the current formats and settings in which music is presented (*i.e. top hits and classics from either Western or Arabic charts played in a bar-room or festival setting*). Having said that, they emphasized that audience tastes can change, and referenced the role arts organizations (*i.e. the middle-ground*) play in facilitating audience development by exposing audiences to novel artistic forms and settings.

Music:

- *"I really believe that people can develop an appreciation for an artform. And it's usually the art organizations that end up doing that for people."*

- *"I don't think audiences are stupid, I think audiences can learn and are intelligent. If you present more experimental or interesting music they'll start to get it. But what ends up being presented in official programming are the exhausted 'safe' things, so that never happens."*

Furthermore, filmmaking participants report that audiences are now more receptive to non-Hollywood films than ever before. They attributed this change to the influence of online streaming platforms, whose rising popularity has introduced audiences to a diverse selection of cinematic works.

Film:

- *"I think people started to get bored of cliche Hollywood movies when Netflix came. It introduced the general public to films from countries that weren't screened at local cinemas. They were getting exposed to different stories, and they were sharing and discussing the films they liked on social media. It opened the door for Bahraini filmmakers to tell stories of their own."*

- *"I was pleasantly surprised when I screened my film here. You'd be surprised how many people understand stuff now. They have a certain standard now due to Netflix. Even if the production is 'Hollywood-esque', you can't insult their taste with bad scriptwriting."*

Low Publicity & Public Awareness:

Participants described current media coverage and public awareness initiatives as being sparse and having minimal impact and reach. They also claimed that the arts sector is hidden from the public eye, and expressed a desire for engaging, wider reaching media coverage and public awareness campaigns.

Visual Art:
- *"The people in the country don't know the artists, and they don't get a chance to know them on a personal level. We lack legitimate writers or journalists that showcase or focus on local art or artistic events in magazines or tv."*

- *"Coverage is hard to get, you have to have connections. The news should keep up, we shouldn't be chasing them."*

- *"There is some communication, but it's not getting across to the whole country. How do we reach more people? What about the underprivileged youth in the villages for example?"*

Music:
- *"Creative people exist here, but most people are not aware of them. The average Bahraini might not know that there are artists writing music in Bahrain."*

- *"There needs to be more education and outreach, with people talking about music and local musicians connecting to local people."*

Limited Spaces for Interaction & Presentation:

As discussed, arts organizations served as grounds for artistic activities and gatherings. Their closures (*which pre-date the COVID-19 pandemic*) represent a key barrier to the development of audience-artist relationships.

Film:
- *"There isn't a specific hub for having interactions between artists and audiences. If social media didn't exist, then forget about meeting anyone."*

Visual Art:
- *"People usually meet at events. We used to have these events when art spaces existed, but now you have to make an effort. There is a lack of spaces for people to meet and for conversations to happen."*

Music:
- *"We don't have cultural spaces or salons to bring people together. No healthy grounds for projects, ideas, and collaborations to be launched from.*

On a broader level, responses also indicate a shortage of art events and platforms that enable the physical or live presentation of artistic works to audiences.

Film:
- *"There used to be film festivals and screenings but they stopped. They were small, but It helped in having our work interact with an audience."*

Visual Art:
- *"It's quiet here, there's not a large variety of events and little galleries to show your work."*

Music:
- *"When it comes to concerts, we don't have a lot of outlets for performances. The government spaces are selective, and then there are bars which are not inclusive or accessible for many people."*

Although this was observed to affect all fields, musicians face unique difficulties given that music also acts as a performing art. The limited availability of performance spaces, as well as restrictions on event hosting relegates most musical performances to bars. As spaces for alcohol consumption, bars present inclusivity and accessibility barriers for audiences and artists alike. First, they restrict access to individuals who are above the legal drinking age. Second, and more importantly, bars are considered to be culturally taboo spaces by Bahrain's predominately Muslim population. This disproportionately affects women, as they are subjected to higher social risks, and therefore experience an added layer of discouragement and exclusion. In some cases, venues may not allow some women to enter on the basis of dress codes that do not permit Islamic attire such as the *hijab* (head scarf).

Music:
- *"It's an issue that 90% of the venues are bars because there are people that can't or don't want to frequent bars. It's not just the younger crowd, It intersects with cultural and religious values so many don't get the opportunity to perform at or attend music events."*

- *"I wear a hijab, and so I was never able to go to the bars and lounges that musicians played in. It's not just me, but also a huge portion of society, even though we're living in the same country. Everybody loses, because even musicians are unable to access audiences."*

International Audience Development:

No Export Support & Travel/Touring Assistance:

Although the internet has proved useful for reaching audiences abroad, Bahraini artists still face difficulties accessing international markets and networks. For instance, there are no cultural exchange programs or domestic showcases targeting regional/global audiences or art collectors. Moreover, artists are unable to acquire travel assistance for international showcasing given the absence of a grant system. Although international-focused initiatives do exist, they appear more oriented towards supporting nation branding objectives as opposed to market/audience development or export/distribution support.

Visual Art:
- *"The focus is on having big impressive showings at important biennales once every few years, and sure that's great, but it's not sustainable. It's more effective to build up to that through wider and consistent showings at art fairs, exhibitions or events – even if they're smaller. It will establish a more sustainable presence."*

- *"There are no initiatives such as conferences, alliances, or fairs that are designed to attract and invite collectors from across the region to Bahrain in order to develop a regional market."*

Music:
- *"There's no support to help with travel and lodging if you want to play or tour internationally. It's not even there with the Bahraini embassies. There are no cultural exchange programs either. The mentality of putting a Bahraini band out there doesn't exist."*

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3. EMERGENT CONSEQUENCES

Prior to delving into this section, it is important to note that the consequences to be discussed are highly interactive and interconnected. They also demonstrate nonlinear feedback. That is to say, not only are they resultant from the challenges covered under Foundational Impediments and Limiting Factors, they also arise from and are reinforced by interactions amongst each other. Therefore, it is recommended that readers refer back to the diagram below while reading this section:
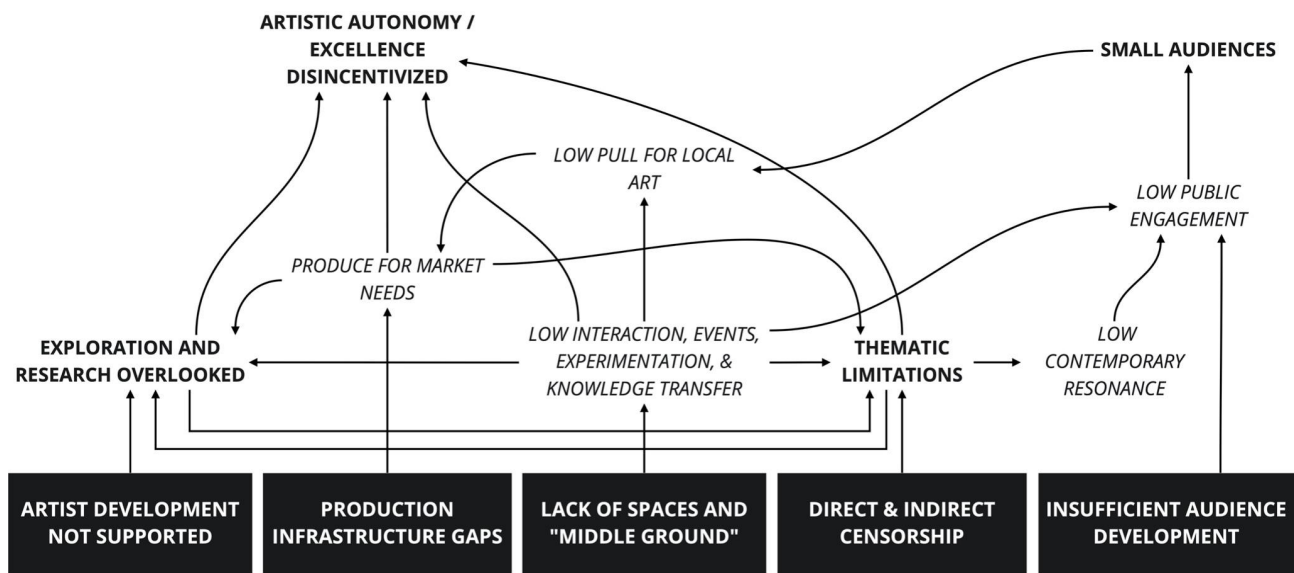

Figure 6: Arts sector influence map - Emergent Consequences. Developed by Ali Milad using interview data.

Thematic Limitations:

The influence exerted by political red-lines, institutional power relations, and sociocultural norms restricts artistic freedom. Consequently, artists may favor working with safe, acceptable, or marketable themes. This is further compounded by the influence of market incentives, along with the lack of spaces and opportunities for learning, research, and experimentation.

Film:
- *"People usually stick to what 'passes'. There's a discomfort with showing the human condition, there is always a public face to show."*

- *"You have to show that Bahrain is perfect...skyline, clean, modern. You can't show poverty or tension."*

Visual Art:

- *"We live in a vast universe, and all that's brought up is comedy and romance. Artists are not raising issues or asking questions – questions that can help us move forward."*

- *"I think a lot of the work produced is not honest enough and too censored. No honest conversations are taking place, everything is on the surface level."*

Music:
- *"It doesn't have to be political. Songs don't reflect people's experiences, with the exception of heartbreak. The majority isn't producing work that can be regarded as honest in terms of expression."*

- *"When artists are scared, you get rubbish. It's meaningless to be an artist and not be honest."*

In consequence, participants claimed that thematic limitations undermine the ability of artists to produce compelling work that can resonate or connect with audiences.

Film:
- *"Not being able to show things is stopping people from connecting to the works."*

- *"Conflict has to be in drama in order for it to be compelling. If we can't show that, then what?"*

Visual Art:
- *"There is a hunger for stories that everyone goes through but no one talks about. Instead, the focus is on broad universal themes like hope or love."*

- *"There are things in our environment that are impossible not to interact with, and yet they're not talked about."*

Music:
- *"When I look around, I don't find genuine heartfelt original music with a Bahraini identity being produced. There are no Bahraini stories being told."*

- *"A lot of the new music being produced is in English and that might not resonate with a lot of the people here. It's not like how it is in Egypt, Lebanon, or Jordan where contemporary music is written in Arabic."*

Small Audiences:

Thematic limitations, the lack of audience development initiatives, and the absence of a middle-ground result in an arts audience characterized by participants as *tiny* and *non-growing*. This was observed to be more prevalent within Visual Art and Music.

<u>Visual Art:</u>
- *"It's a tiny, unique audience. We do tend to get the same people at events. Where are the rest of the 95% of people living here?"*

- *"The arts audience has been the same circle and it hasn't changed for years."*

<u>Music:</u>
- *"There is a lack of awareness and appreciation from the public. I'm not talking about the people already involved in music because it's always the same people. I'm not talking about the people that frequent nightlife either. I'm talking about the remaining hundreds of thousands of people that live here."*

- *"The portion of the population that appreciates local art is tiny, to the point that it doesn't carry a voice."*

Exploration and Research Overlooked:

Findings suggest that the current environment does not facilitate nor reward artistic exploration and research. In response, some participants took on a critical stance in relation to their fields, claiming that artists often overlook the rigor, exploration, and research necessary for them to develop their own artistic identities and visions.

<u>Film:</u>
- *"As filmmakers, we work with a lot of different elements such as production design, videography, cinematography, depth of field...All of these elements are there to translate an idea or a vision. We don't have this idea or vision, so we translate air."*

<u>Visual Art:</u>
- *"There are a lot more people making art nowadays, but a lot of the work lacks research and rigor. It's all shortcuts and hasty work. A lot of the artists nowadays are not seeking knowledge, they're not experimenting and going through trial and error processes to develop their own style. Conceptually, they're not raising issues or asking questions."*

<u>Music:</u>
- *"One of the biggest things about musicians in Bahrain, especially the younger generation, is that they don't have their own voice or their own sound. Maybe that's the thing about Bahrain, you have a lot of good musicians working as performers but not artists. I appreciate the skill of playing an instrument, but it's different from being artistically creative and expressive. Musicians need to have these conversations with themselves."*

Artistic Autonomy/Excellence Disincentivized:

It can be said that Bahrain's artmakers operate in an environment that not only conditions, but at times, may even encourage them to succumb to restrictive orthodoxies and problematic market mechanisms. Whether it be knowingly or unknowingly – *and often out of the necessity of sustaining their livelihoods* – artmakers optimize their ways of working to serve existing consumption preferences, institutional tastes, or client needs.

Often commercial in nature, this type of work makes use of artists' skills and experience but does not contribute to or promote artistic development. In essence, the status quo can be described as one wherein artmaking is relegated to serving secondary or complementary functions as opposed to pursuits of artistic excellence.

Filmmaking as Advertising:

In the absence of industry infrastructure, filmmakers' skills are directed towards advertising. Filmmakers expressed frustrations with the non-cinematic orientation of available work, describing it as running counter to their ambitions and development.

Film:

- *"The film industry does not exist in Bahrain at all, it's mainly commercial work for clients who want to advertise their business. The work that pays isn't the type of work that will help me apply for film school. I can't build my portfolio or get the experience I need through what I do for a living, I have to do it on the side."*

- *"The challenge in Bahrain is that making a film means you're not making money, so it focuses the field towards advertising or social media content. There's not a lot of narrative or arthaus films being produced."*

- *"One of the biggest misconceptions here is the mixing between filmmaking and advertising. We need to separate them. I don't want to be known as an advertising director, I want to be known as a cinematic director."*

Visual Art as Decorative/Fast Consumption:

Visual artists described the current buying environment as one which incentivizes artists to produce easily consumable '*sellable*' or '*likeable*' work optimized for decorative purposes or for garnering social media popularity.

<u>Visual Art:</u>
- *"If work doesn't sell, then why waste time? There's more incentive to produce work for Instagram likes."*

- *"A lot of the work is 'face art', its made to be sold and displayed in your aunty's living room."*

- *"Some artists might feel like it's a waste of time to explore and experiment. They may relegate their pieces to styles and sizes that are sellable, but that's not what I want to see at an exhibition."*

In an online lecture by Barjeel Art Foundation, Abdulrahim Sharif, arguably Bahrain's most accomplished and respected visual artist, describes the field as moving towards a commodified direction:

> *"Frankly, I think the Bahraini art scene was much better some 20 years back. But then, those who came into art were not looking at it creatively. Maybe everywhere is like that. People came into art for commercial reasons. And they are looking for the ingredients and the formula for how to make a painting in order to sell, and that is very sad."* (Barjeel Art Foundation, 2020)

Music as Extension of Food & Beverage, Leisure, and Entertainment Industries:

In its current state, music can be described as being a subcomponent of the food and beverage, entertainment, and leisure industries; whereby musicians are hired as bar, restaurant, corporate event, or wedding performers. It is worth noting that musicians are hired not to perform their own compositions, but rather, radio hits and classics produced by other artists (*i.e. cover songs*). As such, Bahrain's musicians often neglect writing their own music.

<u>Music:</u>
- *"The segment that plays in Arabic became wedding bands, while the segment that plays in English turned into bar cover bands."*

- *"People say I should focus on composing and performing my own music. But if I do that, then no venue will hire me. It's happened to me before. Those places want to make their customers happy by playing them songs they already know and love.*

- *More bars were opening up, and we were making more money than we thought we'd make. It was great as a survival thing, but It was killing our creativity. There's no place for original music – it's all about playing covers of songs to pull a crowd. You see musicians capable of composing not composing because they get into this whole bar cover band circuit."*

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4. SYSTEM FAILURE & SYMPTOMS

System Failure – Arts Sector in a State of Arrested Development:

The challenges uncovered by this study represent entrenched barriers that limit opportunities, discourage adventurousness, and deny artmakers of their autonomy. In their totality, they produce an environment that prevents dynamic bottom-up processes from taking shape. Moreover, the current institutional approach to managing the sector neglects necessary development work and is disconnected from ecosystem needs. As such, challenges remain unresolved, ecosystem evolution is forestalled, and the arts sector is left to stagnate in a state of arrested development. The following observations characterize this failure:

Ability to Produce Novelty Compromised:

Responses pertaining to the type of work currently being produced indicate that the ability of the arts sector to engage in acts that produce novel cultural objects is compromised.

Recycled Tropes – Conceptual Stagnation:

With regard to the status of conceptual development, participants pointed to a repetition/recycling of familiar themes or tropes. Although participants did state that their fields have undergone changes, they also raised concerns over the directionality and rate of this change.

Film:
- *"It's typically slapstick humor, nostalgic things, or family dramas. There is a pattern of replicating things that pass or sell instead of trying new things. Sometimes things are refreshed with a new spin, but there's not a lot of genuinely new elements being introduced or created."*

- *"I'm sure there are people who want to make new types of work, but there is a high financial risk involved in producing it. No one will give you the opportunity to do something on your own, to experiment, and to take your complete freedom without caring about what people might say in return."*

Visual Art:
- *"There is more work being produced nowadays, but it is 'fast-work'. It doesn't please me to see things being replicated year over year. If we don't overcome this, we're going to be stuck in the same place forever. It makes me worried."*

- *"There is a lot of 'copy and paste' being done here. It's starting to change, but we're always 2-3 steps behind the rest of the world."*

- *"I can't think of people that shock me with something different. That's what I want to see, I don't want to see another copy of something that already exists here."*

- *"You could argue that there are a lot of active musicians, but nothing is breaking new grounds. Music is done purely for entertainment purposes. I have not seen it change much over the years."*

Recycled Tropes – Bahraini Identity Bound to Heritage:

With regard to artistic depictions of cultural or place identity, participants emphasized there being an over-reliance on static historicized evocations as well as an avoidance of contemporary themes or issues. In this sense, cultural identity appears to be relegated to heritage, and is primarily depicted through nostalgic and symbolic aesthetics.

Film:
- *"Depictions of Bahrain usually adopt the old-school nostalgic approach, but not a lot of works talk about the 70s, 80s, 90s, to current."*

- *"When it comes to storytelling, we're really scared to tackle things. People want to tackle social issues, but they're scared of doing that here."*

Visual Art:
- *"Its surface level symbolism that is nostalgic of the past. It's as if Bahraini culture only means Bahraini history. If you draw someone wearing a traditional dress is that truly Bahraini identity? Or is that something that people used to wear at a certain time?"*

- *"It's not an honest representation of Bahraini culture, there's a lot of stereotyping. It's like you can't show Bahraini identity without showing traditional clothing or the souq. I want to know more about Bahraini people's stories."*

Music:
- *"I don't completely agree that referencing traditional folk music suddenly makes music Bahraini. I find it problematic because it adopts a very superficial aesthetic. There are different communities in Bahrain that practice different styles of music and all of that is valid. Instead, we've nationalized one thing and made it a symbol of our music."*

Low Output in Filmmaking and Music:

Film and music production processes involve more components and variables relative to visual art, and as such, appear to be more impacted by environmental conditions and production infrastructure gaps. These fields demonstrate low output in terms of finished works produced and distributed.

Film:
- *"In terms of filmmaking in Bahrain, we probably produce around 1-2 short films a year. So over the last 10 years, the film festival worthy shorts probably amount to 10-15. It's a very low quantity, and I'm talking about shorts, not feature films. It's not enough to create an industry or a cinematic movement."*

Music:
- *"I see people performing cover songs at events or on weekends, but I don't see a lot of original compositions. There are musicians that have been active for decades, but with very little under their belt in terms of original releases. If you took all of the Bahraini albums in the last 5 years, they would barely fill a shelf."*

Dysfunctional Value Equation:

Artistic pursuits and careers are universally regarded as risky and challenging. However, Bahrain's artmakers face an amalgam of societal, institutional, structural, and regulatory challenges that make their journeys exceptionally burdensome. Responses indicate that the costs associated with artmaking in Bahrain may outweigh potential benefits – as potentiality itself is obstructed. Resultantly, arts sector challenges were observed to elicit three main responses from artmakers:

Cease Participating/Public Showcasing:

Participants claim that rising levels of demotivation have pushed artists to retreat from the public eye and reserve themselves to practicing their craft behind closed doors.

Film:
- *"A lot of people stop because they start. There isn't a clear path for where your work can go, and the support or recognition isn't there either."*

Visual Art:
- *"There's nothing to encourage you to pursue a career in art. It's a one-sided investment. You put your time, effort, and money into it but it's not being rewarded even through emotional support. The challenges won't stop people from entering the field, but it will prevent them from staying. The sense of demotivation is growing fast, and more artists are finding it easier to stop participating or exhibiting."*

Music

- *"The current state is like a staircase with missing steps. There is no pathway and no support to correct it. It makes you feel like what you're doing is irrational. It makes you question why you're exhausting yourself and investing in it. So some people get discouraged. They stop performing or releasing, and they just keep their music to themselves."*

Relocate or Produce for Foreign Markets:

Ecosystem challenges prevent audiences, markets, and industries from developing or evolving. Moreover, artistic careers are socially stigmatized and structurally de-legitimized. As such, those wishing to pursue a full-time artistic career find greater incentive in relocating or producing work for foreign markets.

<u>Film:</u>
- *"Because of the lack of infrastructure at home, the only avenue for filmmakers is to produce for film festivals or audiences abroad. That's what I've been focusing on, I'm creating work for other markets."*

<u>Visual Art:</u>
- *"You can't rely on things being fixed here, but that doesn't mean that the rest of the world is closed off. The world is small nowadays. You can access open calls and global exhibitions online and apply to them. There are many Bahraini creatives who have moved abroad and found success there."*

- *"Those that won't wait for their worth to be realized can be found outside Bahrain. We have artists that have achieved a level of success in other countries, but no one at home put a dime on them."*

<u>Music:</u>
- *"A lot of the work that I do caters to platforms or audiences outside of Bahrain. I didn't plan for it to be this way, it's because I actually enjoy the projects I get. The pay is more fair, the conditions are more fair, and the work is more creatively and intellectually stimulating."*

- *"There is no focus placed on fixing things here, so why wait for things to change? The world is small now, It's easier than ever to produce for work outside. That's where my focus is, why should I waste my time working in Bahrain?"*

Serve Available Commercial Work:

The lack of work opportunities and monetization pathways may drive some artmakers into succumbing to problematic market mechanisms at the expense of their own artistic ambitions or

development. This observation was discussed under '*Emergent Consequences - Autonomy / Artistic Excellence Disincentivized'*.

Low Integration/Network Activation:

Bahrain's small size is often cited as the arts sector's biggest challenge. This line of reasoning posits that Bahrain's small population is incapable of yielding an audience sizable enough for markets or industries to develop. While Bahrain's population is indeed small, attributing arts sector underdevelopment to population size is inaccurate, as it overlooks the many barriers and gaps covered throughout this report.

On the contrary, the findings of this study indicate that the nascency of Bahrain's arts market and industry is more a symptom than a cause. Highly localized networks and spatial proximity are considered to be key enablers of artistic based knowledge exchange (Martin & Moodyson, 2011). That arts audiences are unable to develop despite Bahrain being the 6th most densely populated country in the world (World Bank, n.d.b) is indicative of an integration and network activation malfunction. This observation also holds true with regard to artmakers, whose responses point to a lack of collective efforts within and between artistic fields. In this sense, Bahrain is a small country that does not behave as one.

Disconnect Between Artists and Society:

As alluded to in '*Limiting Factors - Insufficient Audience Development'*, and '*Emergent Consequences - Small Audiences'*, responses point to a disconnect between the arts sector and broader society.

Visual Art:
- *"There is no relationship between the general public and artists. For there to be a relationship, people would be showing up to art events, but that isn't happening. You don't even see artist's own families show up to their exhibitions."*

- *"There is a disconnect between artists and society, are they simply not interested in art, or do they feel uninvited? I don't know if it's us not attracting them or them not being interested in engaging with us."*

Music:
- *"Creative people exist here, but most people are not aware of them. The average Bahraini might not know that there are artists writing music in Bahrain."*

- *"There is a lack of awareness and appreciation from the public. I'm not talking about the people already involved in music because it's always the same*

72

people. I'm not talking about the people that frequent nightlife either. I'm talking about the remaining hundreds of thousands of people that live here."

Bahraini Artists Rarely Become Household Names:

Participants claim that Bahraini artists rarely become household names that spillover into popular/mass culture.

<u>Visual Art:</u>
- *"We failed to produce local stars. This is important for society because these stars provide the stepping stone for others to follow in their path."*

- *"Creatives and artists don't get recognized in Bahrain, they don't become stars within our society. We have had many Bahraini artists over the years, but we don't even learn about them in school."*

<u>Music:</u>
- *"In Bahrain, creatives and artists struggle to break into popular culture"*

- *"Society doesn't value local artists. We don't celebrate our greats here, it's not like the West where people know and celebrate their hometown heroes."*

Protectionism Within and Silos Between Artistic Fields:

It appears that as a whole, the arts sector lacks cohesion. The notion of artistic initiatives primarily consisting of individual as opposed to collective efforts emerged as a recurring theme throughout interviews. Furthermore, responses suggest that despite being in contact, artistic fields are siloed from one another. In addition to the lack of spaces for interaction, this behavior was attributed to the shortage of opportunities, which incentivizes protectionism over collaboration. The implications of these observations are particularly limiting, as collaboration is necessary for the emergence of new ideas and initiatives.

<u>Film:</u>
- *"The filmmaking scene in Bahrain is based on individual efforts. When it comes to collaborations; everyone is too busy fighting their own battle, and resources are so scarce, so people tend to protect what they have."*

- *"Collaboration is not the norm. It's weird because we're such a small country and everyone knows everyone. People aren't willing to work as a community."*

<u>Visual Arts:</u>

- *"We have unhealthy competition. People don't open up their doors to share their knowledge or experiences, everyone wants to be a star by themselves. This culture of coming together and collaborating or working towards a collective cause doesn't exist here."*

- *"There is a silo effect between artistic fields. For example, literature folks will only go to literature events, and musicians to music events. Contact exists, but there is a difficulty in establishing a link."*

Music:
- *"We don't have this sense of working collectively. I feel there is this sort of unhealthy competition with musicians. It makes them not want to collaborate so they can have the spotlight. I don't think that it's because people are bad, but as a survival thing, because the current situation is pressuring people to act this way."*

- *"You wouldn't find many musicians frequenting art exhibitions or film screenings here."*
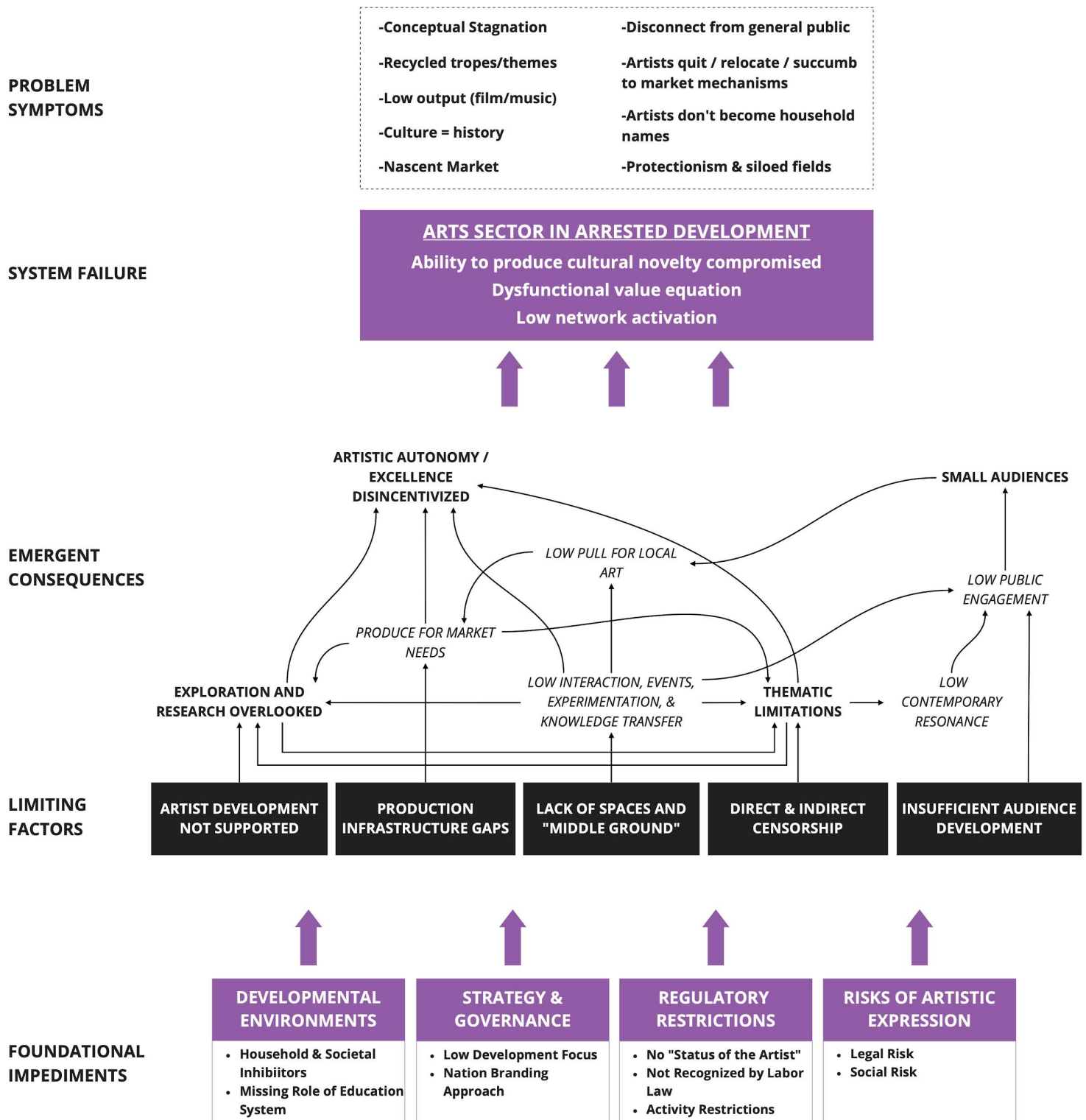

PROBLEM SYMPTOMS

-Conceptual Stagnation

-Recycled tropes/themes

-Low output (film/music)

-Culture = history

-Nascent Market

-Disconnect from general public

-Artists quit / relocate / succumb to market mechanisms

-Artists don't become household names

-Protectionism & siloed fields

SYSTEM FAILURE

ARTS SECTOR IN ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT
Ability to produce cultural novelty compromised
Dysfunctional value equation
Low network activation

EMERGENT CONSEQUENCES

ARTISTIC AUTONOMY / EXCELLENCE DISINCENTIVIZED

SMALL AUDIENCES

LOW PULL FOR LOCAL ART

LOW PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

PRODUCE FOR MARKET NEEDS

EXPLORATION AND RESEARCH OVERLOOKED

LOW INTERACTION, EVENTS, EXPERIMENTATION, & KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

THEMATIC LIMITATIONS

LOW CONTEMPORARY RESONANCE

LIMITING FACTORS

ARTIST DEVELOPMENT NOT SUPPORTED

PRODUCTION INFRASTRUCTURE GAPS

LACK OF SPACES AND "MIDDLE GROUND"

DIRECT & INDIRECT CENSORSHIP

INSUFFICIENT AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

FOUNDATIONAL IMPEDIMENTS

DEVELOPMENTAL ENVIRONMENTS
- Household & Societal Inhibiitors
- Missing Role of Education System

STRATEGY & GOVERNANCE
- Low Development Focus
- Nation Branding Approach

REGULATORY RESTRICTIONS
- No "Status of the Artist"
- Not Recognized by Labor Law
- Activity Restrictions

RISKS OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION
- Legal Risk
- Social Risk

Figure 5: Arts sector influence map. Developed by Ali Milad using interview data.

PART TWO:
SENSEMAKING

The Current State:

The creative value chain provides a holistic framework for assessing the health and guiding the development of the creative industries. With regard to Bahrain, analysis reveals a critically compromised creative value chain. As illustrated by the diagram below, only Archiving & Preservation (shown in green) was found to be in good standing.
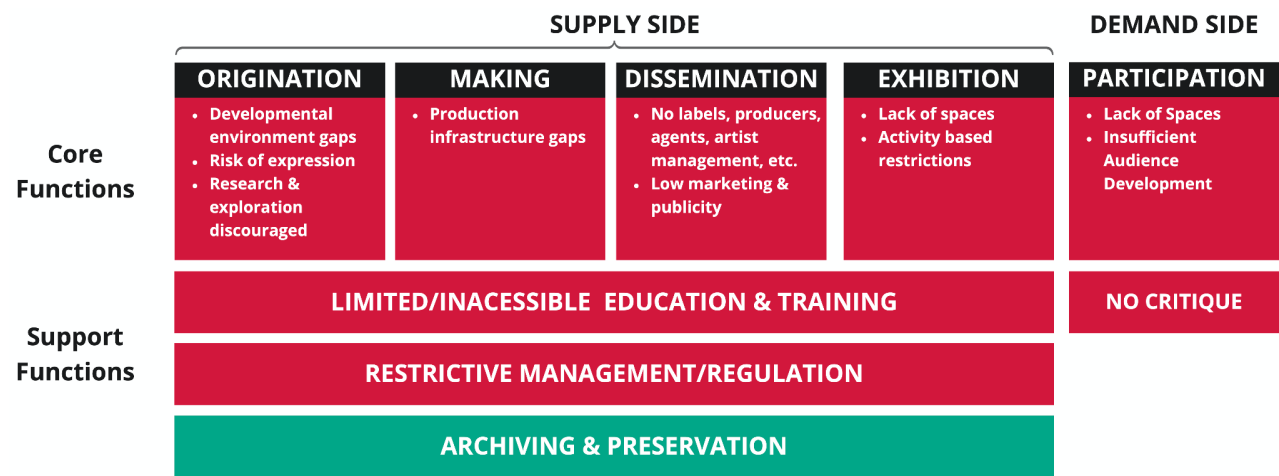

	SUPPLY SIDE				DEMAND SIDE
	ORIGINATION	**MAKING**	**DISSEMINATION**	**EXHIBITION**	**PARTICIPATION**
Core Functions	• Developmental environment gaps • Risk of expression • Research & exploration discouraged	• Production infrastructure gaps	• No labels, producers, agents, artist management, etc. • Low marketing & publicity	• Lack of spaces • Activity based restrictions	• Lack of Spaces • Insufficient Audience Development
Support Functions	**LIMITED/INACESSIBLE EDUCATION & TRAINING**				**NO CRITIQUE**
	RESTRICTIVE MANAGEMENT/REGULATION				
	ARCHIVING & PRESERVATION				

Figure 7: Creative Value Chain - Bahrain View. Adapted from the European Commission and UNESCO models. Overlaid with interview data.

That virtually all components of Bahrain's creative value chain are underdeveloped warrants great concern. Working towards fixing these gaps is paramount to addressing arts sector challenges.

The Need for Policy Intervention

A complex system consists of a group of highly interdependent parts that perform a purpose or achieve an outcome. Complex systems are difficult to interpret; their parts interact in a nonlinear manner, producing emergent *(often unexpected and unintended)* patterns, conditions, behaviors, incentives, and consequences. Adopting a systems lens served to distinguish and identify causal relationships within system structures. As illustrated by the analysis influence map (Figure 5), the arts sector's arrested development does not stem from a singular cause. Rather, it is the result of an accumulation of interactions amongst multiple factors. In this sense, it is a systemic issue.

As depicted by the diagram below, Bahrain's artmakers face nested challenges and conditions that exist at the household, societal, economic, and institutional levels. Only the global/regional level

appears to provide favorable conditions. For all intents and purposes, Bahrain's current environment fails in providing the conditions necessary for the arts to flourish.
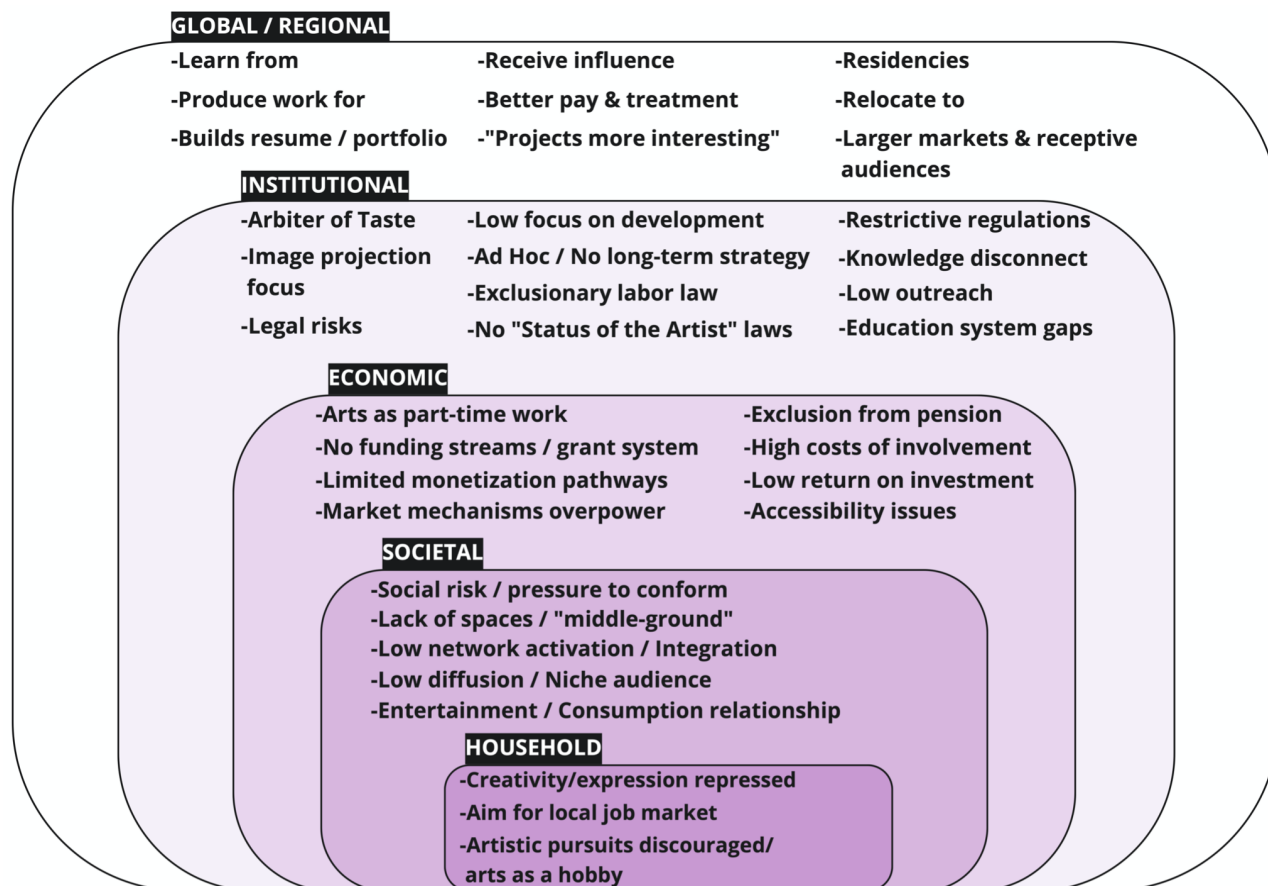

Figure 8: Diagram depicting nested influences on artmakers. Developed by Ali Milad using interview data.

In order to prove effective, efforts aimed at developing the arts sector must take into account the sociocultural, sociopolitical, and socioeconomic nature of the challenges at hand. The current institutional focus on event programming and large-scale physical infrastructure projects (i.e. '*hardware*' over '*software*') does not acknowledge nor address the complexity of these challenges. As such, it is recommended that policy level interventions are introduced. This is made more necessary given the lack of a comprehensive cultural policy document or framework in Bahrain.

Cultural Implications:

17/24 participants responded '*Yes*' to the question "*Does Bahrain receive more culture by way of creative/cultural imports compared to what is produced at home?*". The remaining 7 claimed that although artistic and cultural work is being produced, it remains hidden from the public eye. It is at this point worth referencing the diagram from the beginning of this report, which highlights the ways in which cultural objects or *'memes'* may be created or absorbed:
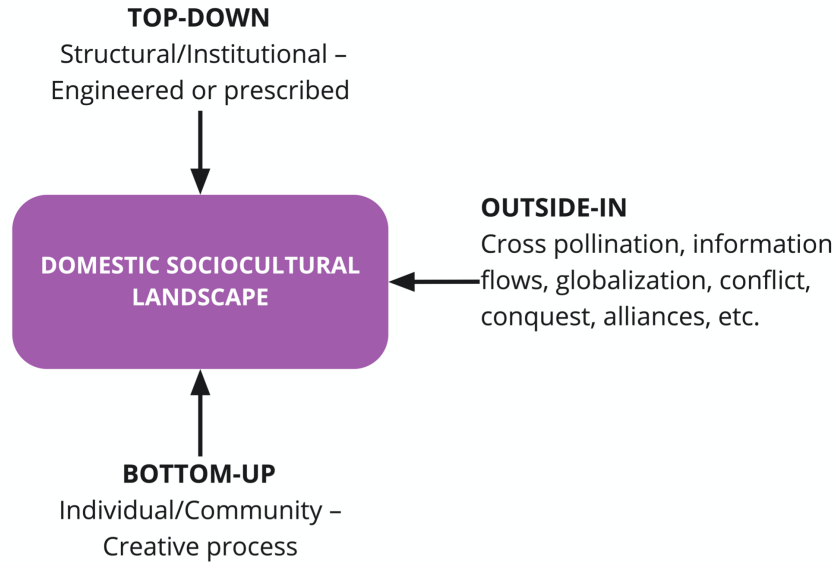
TOP-DOWN
Structural/Institutional –
Engineered or prescribed

DOMESTIC SOCIOCULTURAL LANDSCAPE

OUTSIDE-IN
Cross pollination, information flows, globalization, conflict, conquest, alliances, etc.

BOTTOM-UP
Individual/Community –
Creative process

Figure 1: Diagram depicting directionality of meme creation, transmission, or absorption.
Developed by Ali Milad.

Under this view, Bahrain's ability to produce and diffuse cultural objects societally or *'bottom-up'* appears to be compromised. The following statements corroborate this observation:

Film:
- *"Culture is created through consistency and repetition. For us, we don't have the repetition, because production isn't even there to be reproduced."*

- *"We just consume, we don't create."*

Visual Art:
- *"We are a society that consumes more than it produces. We haven't produced enough work for new ideas to translate into new culture."*

Music:
- *"Our culture has become confined to our history."*

- *"The type of consumption that is happening is mindless, we don't learn and adapt things, we just replicate."*

This provides the groundwork for a working hypothesis: Bahrain's current cultural landscape appears to be fragmented and highly dualistic; wherein, on one end exists local culture as tradition and heritage, and on the other exists an imported Western modernity. However, the presence of a collective and inclusive '*local contemporary'* seems imperceptible – at least with regard to what is widely available in the public realm. This is another cause for concern, especially when considering

the anecdotal loss of generational knowledge, the loss of architectural place identity (Fabbri, 2020), and a documented decline in the use of the Arabic language. To demonstrate this point, the 2017 edition of the annual Arab Youth Survey reports that 68% (*up from 56% in 2015*) of Gulf-Arab youth identified with using English more than Arabic on a daily basis (ASDA'A BCW, 2017, p. 57).

As such, the challenges impacting Bahrain's arts sector and creative value chain pose a risk to the continuity of Bahraini culture over the long term. Given that the survival of a culture is predicated upon not only the continuation of existing memes, but the creation of new memes (Rudowicz, 2003) – one may even go as far as to posit that Bahrain is exhibiting signs of culture death.

Although current institutional efforts do focus on cultural preservation, they entail a predominately archival approach that is not complemented with sustained cultural production. In fact, the current environment *stifles* rather than *facilitates* idea generation and production. Counterproductive regulations, along with the risks associated with expression restrict artistic activity and freedom. Furthermore, the absence of a grant system, coupled with a lack of spaces limits experimentation, knowledge transfer, and artistic production. Thus, the creation and diffusion of novel ideas and cultural objects is hindered.

The current context resembles an archetypal '*fixes that fail*' problem, wherein an action meant to remedy a problem creates an unintended consequence that worsens it (Senge, 1990). By relegating culture to tightly defined spaces and confining it within the realms of heritage and nostalgia, Bahrain's mode of cultural governance appears to be contributing to the stagnation and '*museumification*' of Bahraini culture. In contrast, countries that engage in unrestricted and continuous cultural production are – by virtue of exploration and iteration – more likely to innovate within their own culture, thereby enabling it to take on new forms and functions. This creates a condition wherein imported cultural objects are perpetually novel in comparison to their domestic (*Bahraini*) counterparts. Consequently, imported cultural objects may be perceived as more relevant, useful, or desirable, and therefore, are able to replace elements of local culture through processes of imitation.
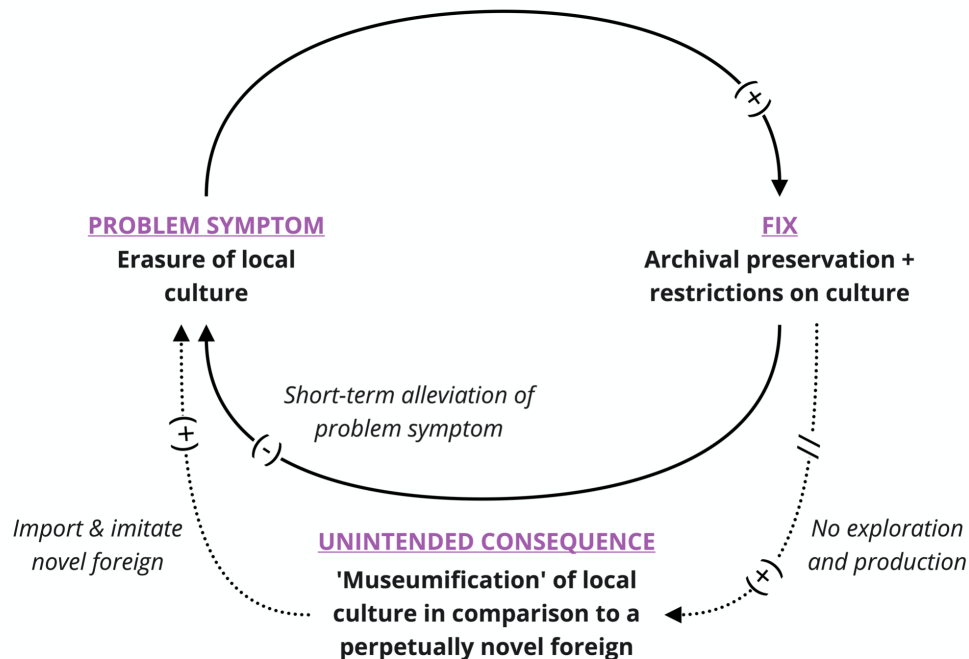
The following diagram depicts this phenomenon:

Figure 9: Fixes that fail: The museumification of local culture. Diagram adapted from (Senge, 1990, p. 388). The '(+)' symbol denotes movements in the same direction (i.e. reinforcing feedback), '(-)' denotes changes in the opposite direction (i.e. negative feedback), and '\\' denotes a time gap.

It is important to note that this was not always the case. Findings suggest that Bahraini cultural production began to decline following the 1990s; some participants even claim that the country was at one point a "production hub". Although a closer look is required to determine what went wrong, probable causes include the cessation of ministerial support for cultural production and the insolvency of local production companies.

Film:
- *"This wasn't always the case, especially in the 70s and 80s. Bahrain used to be one of the best productions in the Gulf, then I don't know what happened."*

- *"Production used to be there until the 90s, then it stopped."*

Music:
- *"Production is what sticks. Bahrain used to be a production hub, people would come from all over the Gulf to produce here. Not only would ministries support production, there also used to be many local production companies as well. But then, Rotana Records put the local companies out of business, and ministries stopped supporting production."*

Societal Implications:

In addition to the shortage of pathways for the monetization of artistic work, accessibility issues related to arts education, spaces, and facilities represent barriers to participation for artists and audiences alike. These challenges remain unresolved given the absence of adequate public support channels. As such, participation in Bahrain's arts sector is at risk of being accessible only to portions of the population that are able to afford its social and economic costs of involvement. This runs counter to social development goals, as an active and inclusive arts sector is said to contribute to the establishment of an integrated and thriving society.

To demonstrate, Francois Matarasso's seminal "*Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts"* highlights the role of the arts in combating social exclusion and providing social support, developing self confidence and creative capacities, increasing quality of life and enjoyment, and reducing crime (Matarasso,1997). Building on Matarasso's findings, the presence of cultural organizations within Philadelphia neighborhoods was found to increase community participation, stimulate neighborhood revitalization, and foster social cohesion within heterogeneous communities (Stern & Seifert, 2008). Similarly, Canadians who rate arts, culture, and leisure in their city/town as "excellent" were 2.8 times more likely to report a 'very strong' sense of belonging to their city/town compared to those who rated arts as "poor" (Community Foundations of Canada, 2017).

Economic Implications:

Launched in 2008, *Bahrain Economic Vision 2030* outlines Bahrain's economic development and diversification strategy. The following passage highlights its aspirations:

> *"We aspire to shift from an economy built on oil wealth to a productive, globally competitive economy, shaped by the government and driven by a pioneering private sector – an economy that raises a broad middle class of Bahrainis who enjoy good living standards through increased productivity and high-wage jobs."* (Bahrain eGovernment Portal, n.d., p.3)

The economic prowess of the '*creative city*' has been the subject of research and policymaking interest since the 1990s (Scott, 2014). Although the creative industries do contribute $2,250 billion to global GDP, and can even make up to 10% of GDP in some countries (UNESCO, 2018) – their broader impact extends beyond the transactional exchange of creative goods and services to encompass the development of innovations and new markets, industries, and jobs. Under this view, the creative industries have "dynamic and not just static economic value – they contribute to the

process of economic growth and development over and above their contribution to culture and society" (Cunningham & Potts, 2008, p. 17).

Amongst the most influential concepts with regard to creative industry policy intervention is Richard Florida's "*Creative-Capital Theory*" (Florida, 2003). A derivative of human-capital theory, creative capital-theory positions the '*creative class*' – in essence, individuals whose work entails creative problem-solving and the creation of "meaningful new forms" (Florida, 2003, p. 8) – as the primary drivers of regional economic growth. The significance Florida places on creative-class people stems from their capacity to produce novel, useful, and desirable solutions, designs, products, services, or art.

The creative class, Florida argues, is moving away from traditional corporate communities to settle in creative centers; in essence, places with high concentrations of creative-class people and creative economic outcomes (e.g. New York City, Paris, Berlin, and London). Florida describes creative centers as "the economic winners of our age" (Florida, 2003, p. 8). He attributes the strength of their economies not to traditional economic reasons such as access to natural resources, tax breaks, or financial incentives that attract business, but rather, because creative people *want* to live there. Florida claims that contrary to the popular belief of people following companies, it is companies that follow creative talent pools (or are established by individuals from within them).

Moreover, Florida's research focuses on the reasons behind creative-class people's migration to creative centers. His findings posit that the creative class does not move to creative centers for traditional amenities:

> "*The physical attractions that most cities focus on—sports stadiums, freeways, urban malls, and tourism-and-entertainment districts that resemble theme parks—are irrelevant, insufficient, or actually unattractive to many creative-class people.*" (Florida, 2003, p. 9)

Instead, creative-class people seek high-quality experiences, diversity and freedom, and the opportunity to "validate their identities as creative people" (Florida, 2003, p. 9). In essence, Creative centers "provide the integrated ecosystem or habitat where all forms of creativity—artistic and cultural, technological and economic—can take root and flourish" (Florida, 2003, p. 9).

The findings of this study suggest that the lack of confidence in Bahrain's creative ecosystem is prompting its artmakers to contemplate relocating. Participants based their stance on the greater availability of opportunities abroad, the alignment of outside work with their interests and goals, better

pay and working conditions, as well as anecdotes of Bahraini artists succeeding abroad. Thus, it can be inferred that Bahrain possesses a weak ability to develop, retain, and attract creative-class people.

For Bahrain, the risk of creative brain drain is exacerbated given recent regional developments. Launched in 2021, the Dubai Creative Economy Strategy aims at doubling the number of creative firms, creative workers, and the GDP contribution of the creative industries by 2025 (UAE Government, 2021). Similarly, Saudi Arabia is quickly positioning itself as a regional creative hub through numerous initiatives such as *Nomow, a* cultural development fund which disbursed $47.9 million to projects in 2021 (Proctor, 2021). The arts sector and creative industries represent a missed economic opportunity for Bahrain. Bahrain's policy makers should follow in the footsteps of regional players such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia to ensure that Bahrain is not swept under by, but rather, rides the momentum of this regional creative wave.

Implications on Innovation Capacity:

As evidenced by the growing popularity of the field of design driven innovation (Cunningham & Potts, 2008), the increasing complexity of global challenges – along with the prospect of future challenges – has placed an emphasis on the need for creativity in problem solving. In this regard, the arts provide grounds for the development of creativity. To demonstrate, one may point to the calls for the transition to STEAM education (Bakshi & Windsor, 2015; Bakshi et al., 2013), which incorporates the arts into STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics). STEAM advocates argue that the arts provide a base for the type of critical and creative thinking that is essential to the idea generation and problem-solving needs of the 21st century (Lathan, 2021).

With reference to the high failure rate (95% in public schools, 80% in private) of Bahraini students on national problem-solving assessments (BQA, 2019) – *and given that problem-solving gives rise to innovation* – Bahrain's innovation capacity appears to be in a perilous state. Furthermore, arguably the most comprehensive annual report on country-specific innovation capacities – the World Intellectual Property Organization's (WIPO) Global Innovation Index – places Bahrain 3rd to last (*46th out of 49*) in the "high-income group" category (WIPO, 2020). It is worth noting that, among other measurements, the index factors creative output into its scoring criteria. In this sense, the nurturing of the arts provides a pathway towards addressing this deficiency.

PART THREE:
TRANSITION

Orienting For Transition:

As per the findings presented in the preceding sections, Bahrain's arts sector currently exists in a state of arrested development. Although this state is a consequence of the challenges discussed throughout this report, the challenges themselves stem from entrenched system rules, paradigms, goals, and incentives that dictate how the arts sector behaves and operates. To better understand this, one may invoke the famous systems thinking heuristic of "*the purpose of a system is what it does*" (Beer, 2002, p. 217). That is to say, how a system behaves and the unintended consequences it brings about are what the system's dynamics and inner workings coalesce to produce. In essence, the current system is configured for stagnation rather than development and evolution.

Urban development theorist Jane Jacobs frames underdevelopment as a default state; in essence, the absence of active developmental processes. In other words, in order for development to occur, it must first be set in motion.

> *"Heat is a result of active processes; it has causes. But cold is not the result of any processes; it is only the absence of heat. Just so, the great cold of poverty and economic stagnation is merely the absence of economic development. It can be overcome only if the relevant economic processes are in motion." (Jacobs,1969, pg. 188)*

Within the Bahraini context, analysis uncovered that developmental processes are not only overlooked in strategic planning, but also prohibited through counterproductive policies and regulations. As one participant noted: *"The state we're in is not a result of something recent, it is a result of things that have not been there for many years".*

Engaging in development work requires a fundamental shift with regard to how culture and the arts are governed. The value of creativity and the arts, the current stagnant state of Bahrain's arts sector, as well as its cultural, societal, and economic implications must first be acknowledged across institutional bodies and then met with concerted efforts. Further, policymaking must strike a balance between direct support and minimized interference such that artists are protected, resources are reallocated productively, and control is redistributed to allow autonomous and dynamic bottom-up processes to take shape. This entails a transition to a new system that is guided by new goals and paradigms; one that produces new rules, conditions, incentives, behaviors, and therefore – outcomes.

The Role of the State:

Champion the Processes of Creativity:

Arts sector development requires an approach and mindset that acknowledges the many processes of the creative value chain (origination, production, dissemination, exhibition/reception, participation, education, critique, regulation, and preservation). Bahrain's current mode of cultural governance pays no attention to the creative value chain – nor does the scope of any existing governmental or semi-governmental bodies for that matter. Managing these processes is a grand task, as evidenced by the existence of dedicated arts/creative sector development agencies in other parts of the world.

Therefore, it is recommended that the role and function of the State shifts from engineering the *results* of creativity to championing the *processes* of creativity. This will require the establishment of a dedicated agency that is tasked with overseeing and developing creative processes as per the creative value chain. It will also require collaboration and unified support across governmental bodies.

Evolve Beyond the Nation Branding Approach:

By being oriented towards garnering prestige and international acclaim in the shortest amount of time, Bahraini cultural governance is diametrically opposed to development work, which is characterized as a *"messy, time-and energy-consuming business of trial, error and failure."* (Jacobs, 1969, p. 141). Policy makers should acknowledge that "artificial symptoms of prosperity or a 'good image' do not revitalize a city, but only explicit economic growth processes for which there are no substitutes." (Jacobs, 1969, p. 307).

The pursuit of development will require moving beyond nation branding as a primary objective. In fact, the transition away from nation branding is regarded as a key turning point in South Korean cultural policy, and is credited as having facilitated the success of its creative and cultural industries:

> *"The Roh Tae-Woo government's conversion of the Ministry of Culture and Public Information to the 'Ministry of Culture' in 1990 signalled the historic dissociation of cultural policy from public propaganda, a core component of the policy thus far. Under the strong leadership of the 'culturalist' minister, Lee Eo-Ryeong (1990–1991), the new ministry reoriented the policy towards cultural creation and public accessibility."* (Lee, 2019, p. 54).

As is the case with South Korea, a development-oriented approach to art and culture may very-well yield international acclaim; however, this should be viewed as a by-product and not an end goal.

From Cultural Preservation to Cultural Continuity:

Institutional efforts were observed to prioritize cultural enjoyment, cultural tourism, high-end physical infrastructure, and cultural preservation (archiving, archeology, etc.) at the expense of creative value chain processes. Moreover, State-institutions act as arbiters of taste, dictating what is and is not an acceptable form of culture. Findings indicate that this approach hinders Bahraini society's ability to engage in bottom up culture making processes. Paradoxically, this may contribute to cultural erosion by restricting cultural development, and in turn, relegating local culture to heritage in comparison to a perpetually novel 'global'. Thus, it is recommended that Bahrain recalibrate its focus from *cultural preservation* towards *cultural continuity* by complementing preservation efforts with artistic exploration and sustained production.

Guiding Paradigms

As previously stated, it is recommended that policy measures maintain a balance between direct support and minimized interference.

Direct Support:

Designate Creativity & Art as Merit Goods:

Bahraini policymakers and influential stakeholders could adopt the stance taken by, among others, England, Canada, and South Korea; whereby the arts are treated as *merit goods.* Merit goods are considered to be welfare enhancing commodities that possess an inherent worth but require direct public support to offset low demand and financial viability (Pratt, 2005). The merit good mindset entails the creation of structures, policies, and schemes that support the arts. It also encourages cultural philanthropy by classifying support for the arts as a charitable act. Moreover, designating the arts as merit goods serves in insulating them from existing market-mechanisms that may steer or exploit their use solely for commercial purposes.

Engage in State-Sponsored Missions:

Recent proposals for the privatisation of public amenities such as healthcare (Smith, 2021) and parks (Zawya, 2020) point to a neoliberal turn in Bahraini policymaking. Such a view positions the private sector as the primary driver of development relative to a lethargic and unproductive public sector. Economist and innovation expert Mariana Mazzucato debunks such claims through her analysis of the American public sector's critical (*yet unacknowledged*) role in driving path-altering, history-making research and innovations.

Mazzucatto argues that government possesses the unique capacity to weather the uncertainty associated with innovation processes, which are often dismissed by the private sector as risky or unprofitable. Although the role of the private sector is important in the appropriation and diffusion of innovations, its placement often comes once innovation has been de-risked through public sector support. This is evidenced by countless examples, from smart phone technology to space exploration.

> *"The discovery of the Internet or the emergence of the nanotechnology industry did not occur because the private sector wanted something but could not find the resources to invest in. Both happened due to the vision that the government had in an area that had not yet been fathomed by the private sector. Even after these new technologies were introduced by government, the private sector was still too scared to invest. For instance, government even had to support the commercialization of the Internet. And it took years for private venture capitalists to start financing biotech or nanotech companies."* (Mazzucato, 2013, pg. 29)

Further, Mazzucatto challenges the sanctity of markets, claiming that they often head in suboptimal directions that neglect societal or environmental concerns. With regard to Bahrain's arts sector, this is corroborated by the observation that artistic fields are pressured by market mechanisms to serve secondary purposes such as advertising, decor, food & beverage, and leisure.

Instead, Mazzucato calls for an intelligent, mission-oriented State; one that uses both supply and demand side policy interventions to tackle societal challenges and nurture bottom-up experimentation. A mission-oriented state works beyond *market-fixing* and towards *market-shaping*. Under this view, the State is the primary risk-taker and *lender of first resort*; it funds the development of new and unexplored markets, whilst simultaneously forging demand through incentive schemes and public procurement.

As evidenced by the sophisticated funding mechanisms, grant systems, arts development agencies, and cultural policies found in, among others, England, Canada, and South Korea; the role state institutions play in enabling the successes of some of the world's most renowned creative hubs must not be ignored. Bahrain has already displayed a capacity to engage in state-sponsored missions, as demonstrated by the efforts to establish the Startup Bahrain ecosystem, and the success of the National Task Force for Combating the Coronavirus. A similar approach should be adopted with regard to developing Bahrain's art sector and creative ecosystem.

Leverage the "Law of Averages" by Supporting Networked & Collective Practice

Due to the uncertainty involved, Jacobs describes development work as "inherently so chancy that by the law of averages, chances of success are greatly improved if there is much duplication of effort (Jacobs, 1969, p. 142)." In other words, having a large number of people engage in an activity increases the likelihood of breakthroughs.

Bahrain's current *'Tafarogh'* allowance model of arts funding is a coveted designation reserved for a small number of artists who have 'proven themselves' through demonstrated success. It runs counter to this principle precisely because it frames support as a reward rather than a facilitator of success. As such, it is seldom awarded, and usually towards the latter end of artists' careers. Moreover, selection criteria are neither transparent nor properly defined. Cultural policy should instead focus on allowing and encouraging many people to engage in a multiplicity of activities, whether individually or collectively. The type of support ought to take into account differences across disciplines, as well as the varying needs of emerging, mid-career, and established artists.

Furthermore, policymaking should steer clear of the myopic notion of the '*lone genius*' artist. In his seminal work '*Art Worlds*', sociologist Howard Becker highlights the networked nature of artmaking:

> *"[Works of art] are, rather, joint products of all the people who cooperate via an art world's characteristic conventions to bring works like that into existence. Artists are a small subgroup of the world's participants who, by common agreement, possess a special gift, therefore make a unique and indispensable contribution to the work, and thereby make it art."* (Becker, 1982; as referenced in Stern & Seifert, 2008, p. 7)

The art world involves the roles of curators, publicists, educators, material and equipment suppliers, producers, collectors, audiences, and much more. It is crucial that this social and networked nature is accounted for in policymaking.

Minimizing Interference

Culture as Dynamic, and its Governance Decentralized:

Bahrain's current form of cultural governance adopts a static and historicized approach to culture. Moreover, culture is centralized, with the State acting as cultural engineer and arbiter of taste. What culture constitutes, as well as its functions, are assigned and prescribed top-down in alignment with standards of political excellence. Thus, culture is often instrumentalized as a tool for demonstrating prestige or evoking a sense of patriotism.

Such an approach is noninclusive and restrictive, as forms of expression that do not meet arbitrary State-approved criteria are either disregarded or suppressed. Findings also suggest that the hierarchical power relationship between institutions and artists subjects artforms, artworks, and artists to unfair conditions and undue influence. These factors limit the range of themes artists are allowed to work with, thereby hindering both artistic and audience development.

Should Bahraini policy makers wish to retain Bahrain's creative talents and ensure the continuity of Bahraini culture, then they must first allow bottom-up culture making processes to take shape. This entails the adoption of a decentralized approach to cultural governance – wherein the pursuit of political excellence is abandoned, artists are free to work without fear of reprisal, and a wide range of expressions are considered culturally valid. Much like the transition away from nation branding, the decentralization of culture is another turning point that is credited with uplifting South Korea's creative and cultural industries:

> *"The arrival of democracy meant a substantial shrinking of the nation state as the central reference of cultural discourse in Korea: the prescriptive idea of 'national culture' was delegitimised and statist cultural campaigns were discontinued."* (Lee, 2019, p. 52)

Embrace the Arm's Length Principle:

The arm's length principle entails the administration of public duties by semi-governmental agencies that act independently despite being government funded. With regard to cultural governance, the arm's length principle appeared in the late 1940s with the creation of the Arts Council of Great Britain. The model's success led to its adoption by most of the European Union, along with Canada and Australia. Singapore, Malaysia, and South Korea are also home to similar arts councils.

Arm's length arts councils support the processes of creativity (Chartrand & McCaughey, 1989), balancing the pursuit of artistic excellence with community needs. They are primarily tasked with

developing the arts ecosystem and allocating government funds. Government funds are disbursed through a grant system, and grant decisions are made by peer evaluators; in essence, a rotating panel of local artists and arts professionals.

With an arm's length council, the State relinquishes its role as arbiter of taste. Although the government architects the framework, enacts policies, and provides the budget – its influence on decision making is curtailed. As such, the government cannot claim success, nor bear responsibility for failure. Moreover, it cannot be accused of favoritism, as the council and its peer evaluators are entrusted with making decisions and granting support (*assuming that the council is truly shielded from political influence*).

Embrace Collective Decision Making:

Institutional knowledge gaps emerged as a recurring theme during analysis. Out of the participants that responded, only 1 out of 25 regarded available public support as helpful – indicating a clear disconnect between institutional decision making and ecosystem needs. Moreover, responses point towards a breakdown of trust and confidence with regard to institutional efforts. To avoid further deterioration of public confidence, Bahrain's policy makers should champion collective decision making processes, acknowledge artmakers as experts of their own experience, and welcome their input.

Strategic Intervention

Intervene at Lower Layers:

Given the interdependencies and causality observed in analysis, it is recommended that policy interventions are introduced at the level of *Foundational Impediments* and *Limiting Factors*. Intervening at this level will unblock constraints and challenges that exist at higher causal layers, ensuring that fundamental as opposed to symptomatic solutions are implemented.
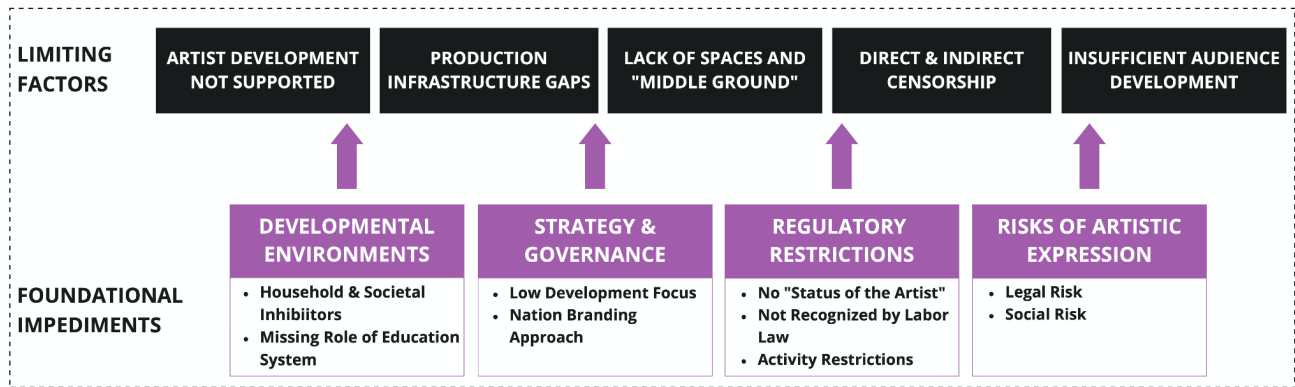
Figure 10: Foundational Impediments and Limiting Factors. Developed by Ali Milad using interview data.

Leverage Points:

The identification of a system's leverage points is an important component of systems analysis. Leverage points are "places within a complex system (a corporation, an economy, a living body, a city, an ecosystem) where a small shift in one thing can produce changes in everything" (Meadows, 1999, p. 1). The following leverage points were identified as key development blockers:

Leverage Point	Related To	Implicated In
Education / Learning	- Low availability and inaccessibility of arts education. - Creativity overlooked in education. - No artistic development programs (residencies, incubators, etc.)	- Limits participation in the arts, artistic/conceptual development, and audience development.
Funding Mechanisms	- Allocation of funds towards short term objectives. - Lack of mechanisms to generate new funding streams. - Absence of a grant system.	- Limits execution and production of artistic ideas and activities. - Limits participation in the arts by prolonging accessibility issues. - Limits adventurousness and leaves artists vulnerable to market mechanisms. - Eradication of arts organizations and the 'middle ground'.
Regulation / Restrictions	- Exclusion of artists from labor	- Restricts artist's activities, range of expression,

	law and labor fund. - Lack of Status of the Artist laws. - Restrictions on expression. - Activity based restrictions.	and access to support. - Deprives artists of protections and rights, and structurally de-legitimizes artistic professions - May discourage participation in the arts.
Spaces / Art Organizations	- Limited access to spaces and facilities for artistic work. - Limited access to spaces for showcasing and interaction / knowledge transfer.	- Limits execution and production of artistic ideas and activities. - Restricts diffusion of art to audiences. - Limits learning, experimentation, exploration, collaboration, and serendipity/emergence - The 'middle ground' is a critical part of the creative ecosystem.

Table 4: Leverage Points

Taking the First Steps

(Note: The following recommendations are informed by insights derived from analysis, however, it is critical that artmakers are re-engaged to account for further input and considerations.)

Establish a Dedicated Arts Development Fund:

Although governmental funding bodies do exist in Bahrain, the absence of a dedicated arts fund remains a key barrier to arts sector development. As discussed, Tamkeen's procedures bias against non-commercial initiatives. Moreover, the Hope Fund is set to focus on youth projects and initiatives and is likely to exclude non-youth individuals from its scope.

Therefore, it is recommended that policy makers establish a dedicated fund for supporting artistic and creative initiatives. The fund should primarily be sourced from government revenues, however, policymakers should endeavour to devise additional schemes that incentivize private sector firms and private donors to contribute. Although a more detailed financial analysis is in order, Bahrain may benchmark against Malaysia's Cultural Economy Development Agency (CENDANA) first year grant budget of $544,000.

Establish an Art Development Agency with a Grant System

In parallel with the creation of a fund for artistic and creative initiatives, a dedicated arm's length semi-governmental development agency should be established and tasked with supporting creative

value chain processes and arts sector needs. Although this report can serve as a starting point for strategy development, it is recommended that strategic plans be revised every 3 to 5 years to account for evolving needs and challenges.

Amongst this agency's most important tasks must be the disbursal of funds by way of a transparent and robust grant system. It is crucial that grants be organized into streams catering to the various creative value chain processes. Individual artists, art organizations, and community centers should all be eligible to apply. The allocation of funds between individual artists and arts organizations requires dedicated analysis. However, given their dynamic network activating properties, it should skew towards art organizations. For reference, the Canada Council maintains an approximate 75/25 split between art organization and artist grants (Canada Council for the Arts, 2020).

Further, grant decisions should be made by a peer evaluator panel of local artmakers and arts professionals who serve on a rotational basis following a nomination or an application process. Grant decisions should avoid preferencing certain artforms, disciplines, or genres over notions of '*high*' vs '*low*' culture. Instead, decisions may be based on criteria such as artistic merit, artistic potential, and community/ecosystem needs. To ensure this, the agency should be comprised of diverse and knowledgeable individuals. Moreover, details surrounding grant decisions (recipients, grant amounts, project type, and peer evaluator committee members) should be made publicly accessible. Building on the findings of this study, it is also imperative that such an agency engages in community outreach and serves as a point of contact for artmakers.

As a starting point, policy makers may reference the Canada Council for the Arts for best practices.

Integrate Arts and Creativity in Education

Analysis identified Bahrain's current education ecosystem as neither encouraging of creative expression nor conducive to the development of creative capacities. As discussed, this limits participation, artistic development, and audience development. On a macro-level, it must also be acknowledged that deprioritizing creative and artistic education hinders domestic innovation capacities.

Bahrain's Economic Development Board has expressed aspirations to increase the presence of STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) as part of its education reform agenda (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2020). Although embracing STEM does respond (*in*

part) to future needs, discourse surrounding education and future readiness is now moving from STEM and towards STEAM education.

To illustrate, the UK's National Endowment for Science, Technology, and the Arts (NESTA) have been calling for UK policy makers to integrate the arts into STEM, stating that "it is precisely this multi–disciplinary mix of science and arts that creative businesses are crying out for" (Bakshi & Windsor, 2015, p. 4). In their "Manifesto for the Creative Economy", NESTA claims that current curriculums struggle in response to the "scale of interdisciplinarity demanded in the digital age" (Bakshi et al, 2013, p. 15). They also expressed concerns at the slow adoption of art and design in curriculum which they claim "weakens both the capacities and incentives of UK businesses to innovate and so threatens the future contribution of the UK's creative economy" (Bakshi et al, 2013, p. 15).

Bahrain's policy makers should take note of developments in education discourse and endeavour to tackle the low availability and inaccessibility of creative learning and arts education. It is crucial that the existing pedagogical approach along with K-12 curriculums be revised with an emphasis on creativity and self expression in mind. Special care must be taken to ensure this takes place within public schools.

Course and degree offerings within existing post-secondary education institutions should be more inclusive of artistic and design disciplines. Ultimately, a national plan for the development of a standalone arts college should be set in place. In the interim, Bahrain should leverage existing relationships and explore partnerships with countries to offer art scholarships and exchange programs.

On a separate note, it would be to the benefit of audience development to integrate learning modules on Bahraini arts and culture, for which existing literature is available, (as published by the Bahrain Authority of Culture and Antiquities and others) but is yet to be integrated into curriculum.

Legislate and Enact "Status of the Artist" Laws

Bahrain's legislative and regulatory environment runs counter to artists' ways of working and restricts their activities. Policy makers should reference UNESCO's 1980 Recommendation Concerning the Status of the artist and legislate laws accordingly. Urgent attention should be placed on deregulating rigid processes and exclusionary procedures that bias against artmakers.

A logical first step would be to reform Bahrain's labor law such that it classifies independent artists as working professionals and extends on to them the protections, rights, and benefits made available to other professions – including the right to unionize. It is important that this be done without subjecting artists to operate and identify as business owners under a CR license. For examples of more appropriate classifications, policy makers can refer to the Canadian Status of the Artist Act's designation of artists as independent contractors (Government of Canada, 1992), or the South Korean Artist Welfare Act's designation of the artist as "a person who earns a living by engaging in artistic activities", and "is able to prove his/her activities in creation, performance, technical assistance, etc. in the field of culture and arts" (Korean Law Translation Center, 2011).

It is also recommended that Bahrain's penal code be amended to allow artists to express themselves more freely without recourse. In addition, legislation that offers artists protections from the potential legal or societal repercussions of their expression should be introduced. Last, legislation regarding the unauthorized use of intellectual property should be introduced, along with proper channels and procedures to file and follow up on claims.

Conclusion

This study contextualizes the current state of the Bahraini arts sector, focusing on how the sector is managed, how it behaves, and how individuals within it operate. Following a rigorous research, analysis, and synthesis process, this study characterizes Bahrain's arts sector as existing in a state of arrested development.

By approaching the sector from a systems perspective, the study uncovered a multitude of entangled and systemic challenges that span across sociocultural, socioeconomic, and sociopolitical boundaries. The accumulation of these challenges render Bahrain's creative value chain inoperative; thereby forestalling ecosystem evolution and preventing bottom-up culture making processes from taking shape.

The challenges highlighted by this report are likely to persist given the disconnect between decision makers and ecosystem needs. Bahrain's arts sector is a complex system, interventions that fail to acknowledge its inherent structure, interdependencies, and dynamics will lead to ineffective or counterproductive outcomes. This study provides guidance in this regard; it distinguishes between symptomatic and fundamental issues, identifies leverage points, and provides evidence-based, system-level policy recommendations aimed at transitioning the sector to an alternate state.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Scripts

Experts A (Decision Makers):

1. Based on your expert knowledge, how do you see the arts sector/creative industries contributing to Bahrain's development in line with Vision 2030?

2. Based on your experience, what are the defining characteristics of the Bahraini arts sector?
    a. What is it doing well?
    b. What could be better?
    c. What opportunities exist?
    d. What challenges exist in the way of these opportunities?

3. Are there policies or regulations present in your line of work that may be considered as part of a national cultural policy?
    a. What do they entail?
    b. Are you currently in the process of drafting such policies or regulations?
    c. Are there other policies/regulations not related to your organisation that you could point me towards?

4. Does your organization or department have future plans aimed at developing Bahrain's arts sector/creative industries? If so, what do they entail?
    a. What has worked according to expectations in the past?
        i. Given what you now know, how could it have been better?

5. Does your organization or department have plans or initiatives that focus on developing and nurturing creative skills or talents?
    a. What creative fields do they primarily focus on?
    b. What skills do they focus on?
    c. In terms of what has been implemented:
        i. Were you able to achieve desired goals (E.g. participation, knowledge transfer, skill development)?
        ii. Given what you now know, how could it have been better?

6. What larger goals do you hope to achieve through these plans or initiatives (In essence, what does success look like?)

7. What might be a beneficial resource or asset made available by your organization that is currently underutilized by creative practitioners?

8. Based on your observations, what might be an untapped asset within Bahraini society that if leveraged, would elevate the Bahraini creative sector?
    a. What obstacles, if overcome, would elevate the Bahraini arts sector/creative industries?

Experts B (Art Makers):

1. Please describe the nature of your involvement in creative work as it is today.
   a. Are you involved in it full time or part time?

2. How would you describe the current state of your work/field?
   a. How would you describe the level of creative output generated (What is being created/how much of it is being created)?
   b. How has it changed over the years?
   c. Where do you see it heading?

3. Where and how do practitioners in your field meet?
   a. How often have you collaborated with a creative practitioner from your field on a project or initiative?
   b. How would you describe the nature of collaboration between practitioners in your field?

4. Where and how do you usually meet other Bahraini artists/creatives?
   a. How often have you collaborated with a creative practitioner from another field on a project or initiative?
   b. How would you describe the nature of cross-field collaboration in Bahrain's arts sector?

5. What are the main challenges you face as a Bahraini artist/creative?
   a. How do these challenges impact how you work?
   b. Are these challenges specific to your experience, or do you think they apply to others in your field?
      i. Based on your experience, who is most affected by these challenges, and who is least affected by them?
   c. How do you think these challenges impact your creative field as a whole?
      i. How might they impact newcomers?

6. What public programs, platforms, or resources are available for individuals in your field?
   a. Have you used these resources? If so, did they meet your needs?

7. In what way is Bahraini culture evident, portrayed, or represented in the works produced by your field?
   a. How has this changed over the years?
   b. How would you respond to the statement: "Bahraini society "receives" culture through foreign creative works more than it generates it"

8. How would you describe the relationship between contemporary Bahraini society and local creative products/works?
   a. In your opinion, how has this changed over the years?

9. How would you describe the relationship between contemporary Bahraini society and foreign creative products/works?
   a. In your opinion, how has this changed over the years?

10. How is your field perceiving and responding to the high in-flow and availability of foreign creative products/works in Bahrain?
    a. How do you view this response?

11. If one thing were to exist in order to make your work easier, what would it be?
    a. If one thing were to cease to exist in order to make your work easier, what would it be?

Appendix B: Coding Taxonomies

Experts A (Decision Makers):

VIEW: Statements related to participant's professional views and opinions with regard to the arts sector/creative industries.

REFLECTION: Statements that reflect on a past professional experience or initiative.

STRATEGY: Statements related to the way the participant's organization operates. Includes mandates, regulations, policies, etc.

INITIATIVE: Statements related to current initiatives targeting the creative industries.

CHALLENGE: Statements relating to challenges facing the participant's organization or department, with regard to the arts sector/creative industries.

GOAL: Statements relating to goals or aspirations of what the participant hopes to achieve or see.

Experts B (Art Makers):

CURRENT_STATE: Statements that describe or surmise the current state of a particular creative field.

CREATIVE_OUTPUT: Statements that describe or characterize works produced within a field (eg. volume and type).

WofW: Statements related to how artists work, choose to work, or have adjusted their work given environmental conditions.

CONNECT: Statements related to how artists meet, as well as the nature of their interactions.

CULTURE_DEPICTIONS: Statements related to how Bahraini culture is expressed or depicted through artistic works.

CULTURE_OPINIONS: Statements related to participant's opinions or experiences with Bahraini culture

SOCIETY: Statements related to the relationship between artists and Bahraini society as well as their beliefs on audience perceptions.

DESIRES: Statements relating to unmet needs or desires. May refer to what a participant has experienced or seen abroad.

PAIN: Statements relating to pain points/barriers/impediments/challenges.

SUPPORT: Separate identifier for questions related to available support or resources.

OPINION: Statements by participants relating to personal opinion, explanation or judgement regarding an observation or experience.

EXPERIENCE: Participant recalling a story or a personal experience. Lived experience vignettes.