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ARTISAN ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN JORDAN

POLICY BRIEF - 2018:
Jordanian and Syrian Refugee Artisans and Cultural
Heritage Entrepreneurship In Jordan 2018



TIRAZ widad kawar
home for arab dress



Arts & Humanities
Research Council

About the Project

The project addressed Jordan’s development challenges arising from the burgeoning influx of displaced Syrians by exploring the resilience, vulnerabilities and identities of the displaced Syrian artisans and Jordanian artisans. It addressed questions about the socio-political impact of engaging in cultural heritage crafts, conservation of cultural heritage, and the impact of displacement on the Syrian artisans and their Jordanian host communities. The project entailed research and capacity building for Jordanian and Syrian refugee cultural heritage artisans.

As with most issues concerning Syrian refugees in Jordan, the challenges faced by the Syrian refugee artisans are consistent with those experienced by the Jordanian artisans albeit being a refugee further exacerbates these challenges and intensifies their vulnerabilities. The evidence-based challenges and recommendations presented in this Policy Brief contribute to enhancing the cultural heritage sector in Jordan, protecting cultural heritage crafts and skills, and empowering the well-being of artisans in Jordan. In doing so, the impact of the project is embedded within the social and economic development of Jordan.

Significance

Throughout history and currently, Syrian heritage crafts are highly prized within the Middle East and North Africa region due to their premium standards of quality, precision, beauty and heritage. Prior to Syria’s devastating civil war and escalating refugee crisis at least %12 of Syria’s gross domestic product was generated by cultural heritage crafts. Yet by 2015, approximately %80 of these artisans had left their trade, and fled to neighboring states in search of safety and security resulting in a grave threat to Syria’s cultural heritage. However, whilst there remains a marginal community of artisans in Syria, the displaced Syrian artisans in Jordan are reviving their cultural heritage crafts by operating in Jordan’s informal economy and adopting economic and cultural survival strategies to create their own pathways and networks to provide a livelihood for themselves and their families. Whilst we expect these trades to alleviate the poverty of the displaced artisans and their families, we don’t know how the informal economy conditions are impacting upon the quality and authenticity of the products, their production, marketing, branding, and pricing. We also don’t know about the socio-political impact of engaging in cultural heritage crafts on the displaced Syrian community in Jordan. Finally, we don’t know about the impact of cultural appropriation through ‘made in Jordan’ Syrian cultural heritage products, on the conservation of the Syrian cultural heritage by the displaced artisans.

In our attempt to answer these questions, and through our extensive engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, a number of recommendations emerged focusing on the restructuring and revitalization of Jordan’s cultural heritage sector to enhance its contribution to local and international tourism, and the country’s GDP. These recommendations included attracting Jordanian legislation, including regulations and instructions in the relevant government institutions; facilitating procedures for the establishment of cultural heritage craft workshops for Jordanian and Syrian artisans; reducing the prices of raw materials necessary to produce the crafts; regulating the Jordanian market of imported goods; formally supporting and promoting the marketing and selling of the cultural heritage products; and facilitating the conditions for Syrian artisans to obtain an artisan work permit, an investor card, and other legal protection.

Doing so supports both Jordanians and Syrians artisans, reduces unemployment creating job opportunities in the cultural heritage sector, and contributes to the growth of the Jordanian economy.

Challenges for artisans in Jordan

- Lack of formalised and institutionalised support and social value for the cultural heritage sector. That is, a lack of support and appreciation from the government as well as society for the artisans, their skills, and the cultural heritage crafts they produce.

“The existence of a union is required, but it is necessary to have binding laws and regulations that are compulsory. It should be like a trade union with the strength of the union and for artisans to listen to its decisions, it has to have specified standards, for example not everyone can be called an artisan and take the place of a real one. Note: Laws, regulations and legislation that control this sector are frozen, the collection side is used only, but the service side is frozen.” Jordanian craftsman

PRODUCTION

- Producing high quality cultural heritage crafts is expensive as raw materials must be imported and are not subsidized as they are in other countries in the region such as Turkey. As such, this affects the quality of the cultural heritage crafts produced and the production rate.
- Artisan workshops are expensive to start up and sustain. Their owners suffer from high rental expenses, electricity, material expenses, etc.

“The village of Tayebat is designed and equipped to accommodate 490 workshops to produce cultural heritage crafts as a solution to the problems of artisans, but: it’s been deserted for 15 years.” Jordanian artisan.

SUCCESSION:

- Artisan skills are not being passed on to future generations, further threatening the preservation of cultural heritage in Jordan. Given the difficult situation facing the artisans, youth are not interested in learning and enterprising the cultural heritage craft skills as this does not appear to offer a sustainable financially viable future to support themselves and their families.

“To preserve the permanence of cultural heritage, training of young people on Syrian and Jordanian heritage crafts (Levant) by Syrian and Jordanian artisans is needed. These centres can be supported by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to be included in the options available to young people in the future

after school and include cultural heritage within the curricula.” Stakeholder.

- Cheap low quality alternatives: the overwhelming low priced, low quality imported craft items invading the saturated Jordanian market create unfair competition for locally produced high quality cultural heritage crafts.

- Multiplicity of references that regulate the cultural heritage sector in Jordan

“I get licensed by the Jordanian Society, the Ministry of Tourism, the Greater Amman Municipality and the Chamber of Industry and Commerce ... A license from approximately six to seven references” Jordanian artisan.

- Access to markets: artisans generally focus on production rather than marketing and sales strategies. They lack marketing skills and have limited access to sales channels where they can sell their products. As such, artisans are exploited by some businesses that acquire the items cheaply rather than fairly from the artisans by buying the crafts for very cheap prices and selling them at a much higher price. This leads to shrinking numbers of customers and buyers as well as dwindling production of the cultural heritage crafts.

“The existence of a national cultural heritage center and exhibitions supported by the Ministry of Tourism; similar to the Damascus International Fair to become a destination for domestic and foreign tourism” Jordanian and Syrian artisans.

“A cultural village has been established in Al Hussein Public Park in Amman consisting of 12 workshops, but it suffers from several problems including the lack of tourists and the inability of artisans to sell directly ... about 60 days ago (approximately 25 August 2018) I was evicted from it. They came suddenly with red wax and evacuated all 12 shops without warning, and the reason is that we do not have a professional license! But we have been there on the property of the Municipality of Amman for 12 years! Our workshops and shops are closed now. Why do this? Fix it without closing 12 homes for 12 artisans living off of the shops.” Jordanian artisan.

Challenges specific to Syrian refugee artisans in Jordan

In addition to the challenges highlighted earlier, Syrian refugee artisans experience the following challenges:

- Struggles in obtaining a professional artisan license. Syrian artisans are unable to obtain a professional artisan license to establish and operate their own workshops and enterprises. The vast majority operate illegally within the informal economy due to licensing complexities, exposing them to legal penalties and exploitation. In addition, the absence of artisans or craft related work permits and the complexities in permissible occupations have led to some Syrian artisans obtaining work permits as carpenters, construction workers or cleaners as these occupations are legally allowed for Syrian refugees.

“In the Chamber of Industry and Commerce there are many closed occupations and we are included with carpenters which is closed to Jordanian citizens. We are not carpenters as you know, maybe you’ve seen pictures of our work it’s different.” Syrian artisan.

Only a minority of Syrian artisans are able to sell their crafts publicly as the majority operate within the informal sector as it’s illegal for them to register their businesses without having a Jordanian partner. This also limits their ability to sell their products at cultural events such as exhibitions and seasonal bazaars and markets.

Absence of legal protection exposes Syrian artisans to multiple forms of exploitation from Jordanian partners, customers and/or business owners and others.

Recommendations for enhancing the cultural heritage sector in Jordan through the contributions of Jordanian artisans and Syrian refugee artisans

- Reducing taxes on imported raw materials specifically for the production of cultural heritage crafts.

- Limiting the importing of foreign cheap quality craft items and encouraging local Jordanian and Syrian production instead.

- Creating a collaborative and shared cultural heritage craft making space – ‘craft incubator’ with subsidized rental rates and utilities to keep costs affordable for artisans to sustain their workshops.

- The establishment of an artisans union that contributes and strengthens the artisan organization base.

- Connecting artisans to online marketing platforms and reducing governmental export charges to enhance international sales.
- With the support of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the Ministry of Culture, creating a national crafts centre and permanent exhibition displaying Jordanian and Syrian cultural heritage crafts to attract local and foreign tourism.

- Reviving the cultural heritage sector through vocational training and centres that teach Jordanian and Syrian cultural heritage crafts and skills, offering apprenticeships, and incentivising participation of youth for sustainability. Within these centres, Syrian master artisans should be employed as trainers to pass on their skills to Syrians and Jordanians to preserve this heritage, develop it and expand it.
- With the support of the Ministry of Education, preserve Jordanian and Syrian cultural heritages by introducing, practicing and incorporating these into school curricula as part of the arts programs.
- Simplifying procedures for Syrian refugee artisans to obtain a professional artisan license.

Project Team

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The Social Enterprise Training for Artisans Toolkit and policy brief are available to download in Arabic and English on the project website: <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/research/syrian-artisan-entrepreneurship-project> <http://irckhf.org/en/project/conserving-cultural-heritage-resilience-forcibly-displaced-syrian-artisans-jordan>

Please engage with the project's community through our twitter account: ResearchRefugeeCraft @SyrianArtisans

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