

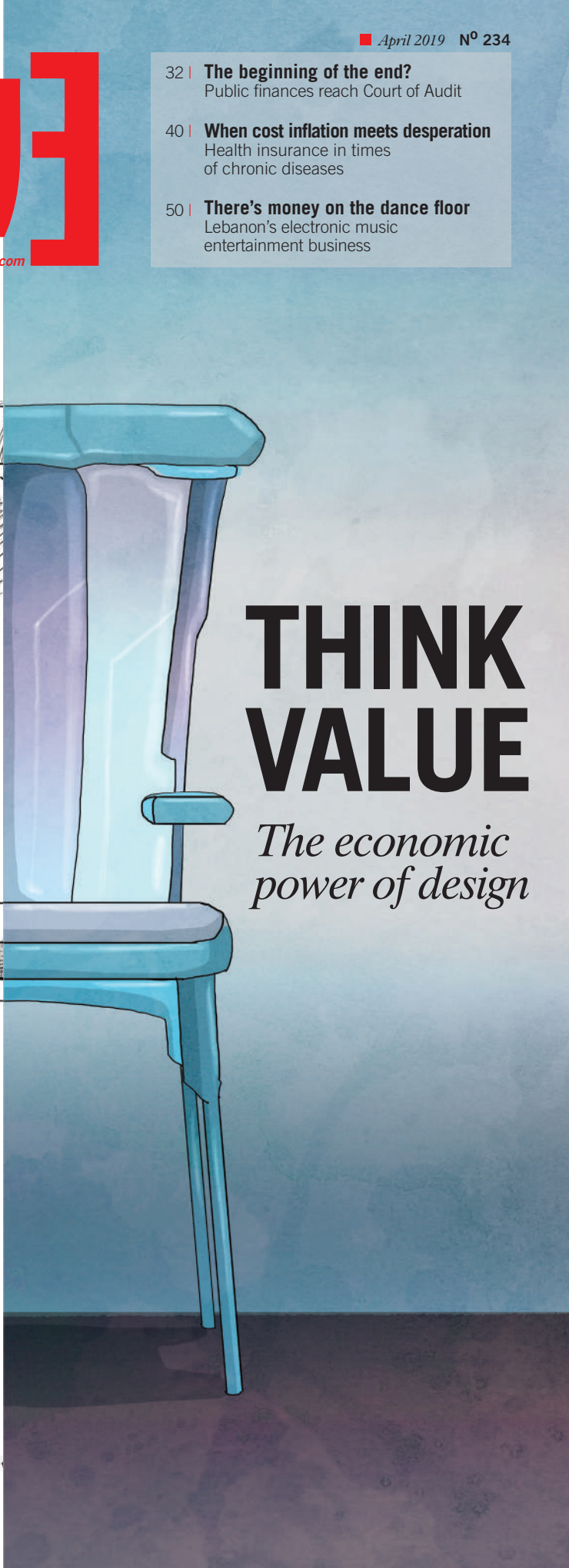
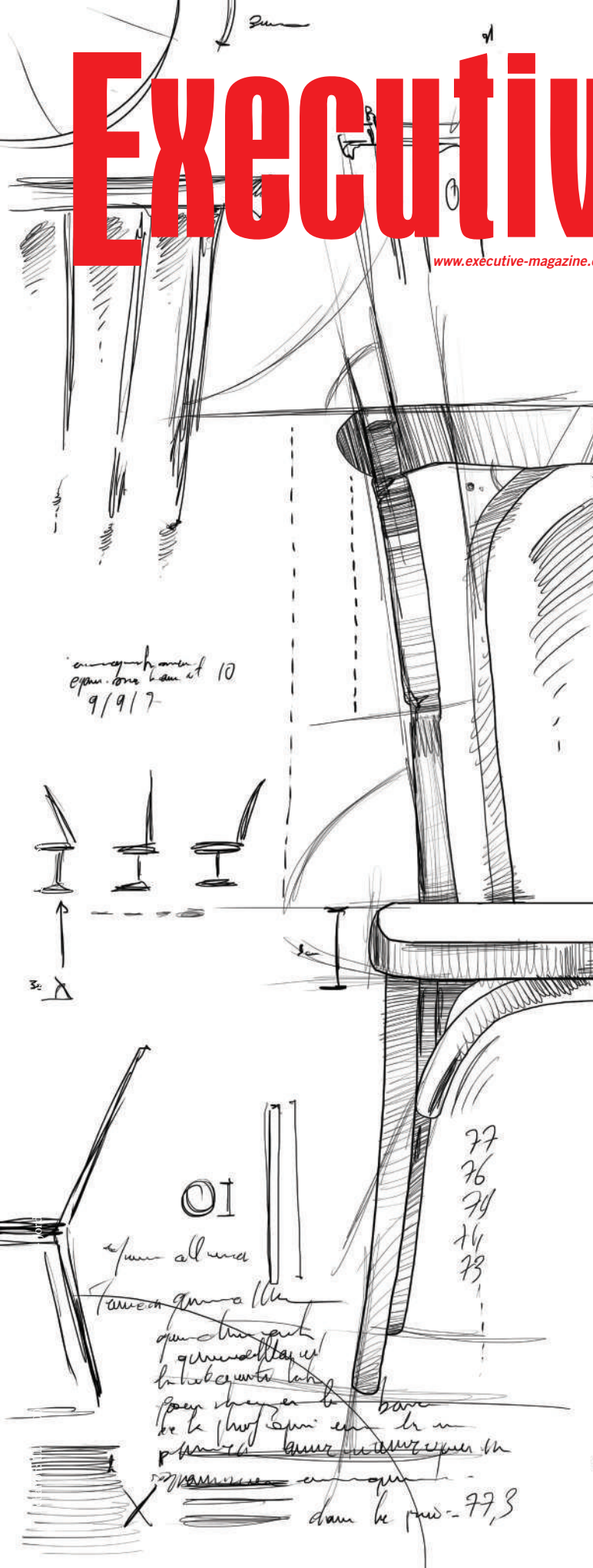
Executive

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Lebanon's electronic music entertainment business

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EDITORIAL

#234

A trap of their own making

It has been a year since Lebanon agreed on a path out of its crises, promising to undertake serious reform efforts in exchange for the \$11 billion pledged by the international community at CEDRE. The nine months after CEDRE were primarily spent on political bargaining and government formation, all built on the hope that these funds were the way out of our current malaise.

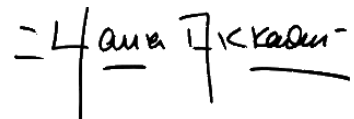
These past two months our new government has become obsessed with securing the CEDRE funding, revealing how addicted our political elite are to handouts. Yet there has been no indication that the government is even capable of enacting the reforms needed to unlock CEDRE funding. Their hunger to divvy up the promised funds has blinded them to the reality of what reform really means. They have fallen into a trap of their own making.

In order to access the \$11 billion, the government will have to dismantle a web of informal, unregulated, and illegal privileges that have been distributed from on high in order to extract the wealth of the Lebanese for the benefit of the few, and, in its place, create a national system that works in the public interest. And all this is expected to take place in a matter of months—good luck!

Alternatively, every industry in this country has a wealth of human resources and energy. If the government was able to engage on a industry level it could unlock a productive potential far greater than the promised \$11 billion. The private sector's energy, coupled with its knowledge and creativity, is a much smarter and adaptive resource for the government.

The Lebanese have a natural talent for design, one that has been honed over the years through the innovation and adaptation that has been necessary to survive. We expect our government to allow the private sector to step up its role and take the lead. It needs to migrate from an extractive model to an inclusive one—one where every stakeholder is engaged in order to improve productivity, efficiency, and value creation in the country.

It is only when our government becomes more inclusive, and puts creative thinkers at the heart of its efforts, that Lebanon will start solving its own problems and unleashing its true potential.



Yasser Akkaoui
Editor-in-chief

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EDITORIAL

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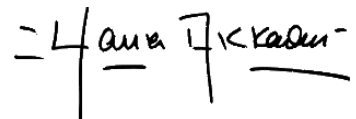
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Yasser Akkaoui
Editor-in-chief

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LAST MONTH

ZOOM IN



Saad Hariri poses with UN Special Envoy to Syria Geir Pedersen, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini during Brussels III on March 14,.

Budget passage delayed, government calls for cuts

On March 5, Finance Minister Ali Hasan Khalil announced that the finance ministry had handed over its report on public sector spending between 1993 and 2017 to the Court of Audit, the body tasked with auditing public finances (see story page 32). This came on the heels of Hezbollah MP Hasan Fadlallah accusing former Finance and Prime Minister Fouad Siniora on March 1 of illegally spending \$11 billion during his tenure. Siniora denied the disappearance of the \$11 billion during his time in office. The Court of Audit investigation will likely slow down the passage of the 2019 budget, which was already stalled due to delays in cabinet formation. Lawmakers are looking to slash spending to reduce the budget deficit so that the state can access \$11 billion pledged by foreign donors and investors.

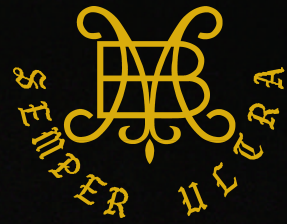
Sabaa implicated in Yacoubian smear

Former Sabaa MP Paula Yacoubian was dropped by the party on March 8, with Sabaa saying it parted ways with Yacoubian for ig-

noring its main legislative agenda, not equally criticizing political parties, and failing to disclose her personal holdings. Shortly after a pro-FPM blog Agoraleaks.com published a video showing Yacoubian's former driver accusing the MP of owning properties in the UK and France. Yacoubian responded to the video saying she only has one property outside Lebanon (in the US), having sold her Paris property after her election. During a March 18 press conference, Yacoubian played a video showing her former driver being filmed by Elie Abdel Nour, a member of Sabaa's Executive Committee, in which Nour gives the driver money. On March 19, Tahalof Watani, an alliance of civil society groups, suspended the Sabaa Party's membership pending an investigation into Yacoubian's allegations. Yacoubian, who is an outspoken critic of alleged corruption, became involved in additional legal disputes later in the month.

Lebanon appeals for funds at Brussels III

At the Brussels conference on "Supporting the future of Syria and the region" on March 12-14, Prime Minister Saad Hariri asked the Syrian regime and its allies to help facilitate the return of more than 1 million Syrian refugees in Leba-



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LAST MONTH

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“How does stockpiling tens of thousands of rockets and missiles in Lebanon territory for use against Israel make this country stronger?”

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, speaking at a press conference in Beirut on March 22.

non. The Lebanese delegation in Brussels was led by Hariri and included Minister of Education Akram Chehayeb, Minister of Social Affairs Richard Kouyoumjian, and the Lebanese Ambassador to Brussels Fadi Hajj Ali. Missing from its ranks was Saleh Gharib, Minister of State for Refugee Affairs. Hariri's Future Movement is opposed to normalizing ties with Syria, while Gharib is close to the Lebanese Democratic Party that has ties to the Syrian government. At the conference, which aimed to garner financial support for states that host Syrian refugees, Hariri requested \$2.9 billion that he said would appropriately fund Lebanon's response plan to the crisis.

Cabinet appoints Military Council, considers new electricity plan

The cabinet filled four vacant spots on the Military Council in March 21 meetings as part of a 54-item agenda. Also during the cabinet meeting, Minister of Energy and Water Nada Boustani introduced plans to solve the country's electricity problems. The cabinet has formed a committee to further evaluate the present electricity plan and will also look into onshore oil and gas exploration laws. The new plan's goals are to reduce Électricité du Liban's financial deficit and improve electricity through measures that include building two new power plants in Selaata and Zahrani. Existing plants would be decommissioned if the plan goes through.


US Secretary of State Pompeo visits Lebanon

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met with top state Lebanese officials during his visit

in Lebanon March 22-24. During his visit, Pompeo also met with Lebanese Army Commander Joseph Aoun and stressed that the US supported the LAF as a partner in fighting terrorism. Pompeo repeatedly spoke out against Iran and Hezbollah, branding the former an “outlaw nation” and the latter “its terrorist affiliate.”

Speaking prior to Pompeo, Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil made the point of stating that Hezbollah has popular support in the country and is not a terrorist organization. Responding to Pompeo's statements about Hezbollah's role, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's secretary general said in a March 26 speech that, Israel, backed by the US, is what puts Lebanon in danger. Talks between Pompeo and Aoun also included mention of the southern border, and Aoun said Lebanon would welcome US assistance in demarcation.

Aoun meets with Putin on refugee file

President Michel Aoun met with Russian President Vladimir Putin on March 26, as part of an official visit to Moscow. Both presidents expressed support for Russia's refugee return initiative in a joint statement that also argued that the return of Syrian refugees required favorable conditions within Syria, including post conflict reconstruction efforts. Russia had offered to help repatriate Syrian refugees from Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey last year but the plan, which drew concerns from the UN and other stakeholders, has been on hold due to funding issues and concerns over it gaining international support. Also discussed was the United States' decision on March 25 to officially recognize Israeli sovereignty in the occupied Golan Heights seized from Syria during the 1967 war, with Aoun reiterating his strong opposition to the move by the Trump administration. 

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LEADERS

DESIGN IS EVERYTHING

Lebanese design deserves attention

Initiatives need to move past the individual to the state level

Design, as the fruit of creativity that enables its user to co-define and express their identity, while optimally matching form and function of a product or process, has been around for as long humans have had the capacity to imagine.

Lebanon is a great example for the presence of design throughout the history of people living on the culturally fertile shores of the Eastern Mediterranean. When compared with the past roles and value-added functions of design—for example 100 years ago when the legendary Bauhaus was established as laboratory of ideas, architecture, and applied arts in 1919's Germany—design capabilities today appear to represent an even greater asset in our times of societies' digital transformation, economic globalization, and wide-ranging individual pursuits of new identities.

While numerous innovative design approaches have been fostered through the private initiative of design professionals, teachers, and thinkers in Lebanon over the last few years (as EXECUTIVE has reported), the design sector in this country still remains sadly underappreciated, incompletely mapped, quite poorly understood, and even more poorly supported by important political and financial institutions. As our investigation of Lebanese design conditions in this issue shows, the ecosystem for design is growing, but marked mainly by individual efforts and scattered individual success stories (see overview page 12).

The value of the ecosystem and support structures for Lebanese design industries have not been comprehensively and systematically assessed for

their contribution to the struggling industry sector or the national economy as whole. There are many hints that creative and cultural industries—first-line beneficiaries of designer inputs—can thrive, but very little information is available on how design investments translate into economic gains in long-standing or newly reimagined crafts workshops (see story page 24).

Finally, design appears to be an underexplored and largely untapped mental resource when taken in the sense of improving not only the beauty and functionality of products, but in the sense of the importance of citizen-centric design for reforming heavily outdated, non-transparent, and wasteful processes in the interactions between citizens and their public servants (see story page 28).

Thus, at this time EXECUTIVE draws attention to the need for greater appreciation of design as part of the revitalizations, the structural and administrative reforms, and the economic and financial investments that are the acknowledged priorities of Lebanon for 2019 and the coming years. Governmental support of design is needed and, under current pressures on the government, there should be an awareness and wide organizational buy-in into the importance of design as part of implementing e-government and digital transition in the public sector.

Many design stakeholders confessed to EXECUTIVE that they would be delighted if the state would commit tangible support to design—in forms of sponsorship of export-enhancing design exhibitions abroad, easing of export procedures for design products, or fiscal and structural support for young ventures in creative and cultural industry with high-value added—but also say that, realistically, they prefer to not expect governmental support that will cost our cash-strapped state.

Design stakeholders believe that private sector support, on the other

hand, could be envisioned to incorporate very impactful financial angles. This could be as fundamental as using design in manufacturing processes from the first moment and showing financial appreciation toward design contributions to products manufactured in the private sector by adequately remunerating their designers. However, it could be even more powerful if industrialists and private investors were to dedicate funds for investing into design clusters and enterprises, or engage with Lebanese designers in efforts of better defining and organizing the design sector as professional syndicate or association. Academic institutions with stakes in design development could broaden their course offerings to teach more of the history of Arab and Lebanese design (instead of prioritizing other aspects of this history), and they also would do well to improve efforts to encourage female design in what has been presented wrongly as a male-dominated realm.

Presently, many Lebanese designers, design workshops, consultancies, and agencies have their days fully filled by the struggle for financial survival. They have precious little time for organizing and advancing the design culture that can add a lot of economic and social value to the nation. If public and private stakeholders with great potential to benefit from design made in Lebanon consolidate their will to think design when taking Lebanon through its impending reforms, economic invigorations, and new expressions of its wealth of talents and identities, new economic and social potentials can be unlocked at low cost when compared to likely benefits. EXECUTIVE thus sees great new value potentials in focusing on design from measuring the economic value of design inputs over further empowerment of the design ecosystem to, in the long run, viable financial inputs in form of private investments and public incentives. 



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NURTURING LEBANON'S DESIGN ECOSYSTEM



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New initiatives to support designers in Lebanon

On March 28, Fashion Trust Arabia awarded Lebanese designers Krikor Jabotian, Roni Helou, Selim Azzam, and the Mukhi Sisters at a fashion event in Qatar—and the Lebanese rejoiced posting congratulations on social media.

The Lebanese take pride in such success stories of local designers, and boast about a rich national history of creative enterprises. They applaud the fashion designers whose gowns glide down international red carpets draped on celebrities, and talk to non-Lebanese friends about long-standing traditions of craftsmanship in jewelry and furniture. Yet, it is important to note that the Lebanese designers and sectors who have “made it” have mostly themselves to thank for their accomplishments. There

has been very little local support for creatives and designers across various disciplines—that there are so many success stories despite so little backing is an indicator that Lebanon has design potential.

In the past, designers that EXECUTIVE spoke with frequently lamented the lack of assistance they have received. A few recent initiatives, most backed by the international community, have zoomed in on the design ecosystem in Lebanon, sparking some hope for the local scene.

IMPACT AND INCOME

Design is one of the fastest growing economic sectors worldwide. According to a study by the United Nations Industrial Development Organi-

zation (UNIDO), the contribution of cultural and creative industries to GDP in Lebanon is estimated to be 4.8 percent, and constitutes 4.5 percent of jobs. The average annual growth between 2003 and 2012 was 8.2 percent—however, this does not include all design disciplines.

If Lebanon helps its designers, those designers can reciprocate on several levels. Given the right strategies and resources, local design industries can become more significant contributors to the economy, employ more people, and elevate the national brand. Through harnessing local talent and providing facilities, programs, and funds, Lebanon can maximize the economic success of its design fields. Design can also have higher level impact; it can be used to optimize processes and systems, make our cities more livable, and solve practical problems related to issues as varied as urban planning and civil service efficiency using design thinking strategies.

Active in the design space since 2009, designer Ghassan Salameh, manager and creative director of last year's Beirut Design Week and head advisor for the FANTASMEEM program (more on that below), says designers themselves need to understand the extent of the impact they can have, and calls on them to help the public understand the value they bring to the table. While many designers may know their own value, others—including decision-makers—still have little awareness about what design can do.

“[The public] doesn't know how to define designers or what the real impact of design is. They don't see that design is important for innovation, or the role of design in the creative economy, they don't know how large design [as a field] is, and so designers are not given the right appreciation,” Salameh explains.

Ultimately, designers, like anyone else, must make a living. “Supporting the design ecosystem is important because it gives designers [financial] stability to be able to spend more time solving bigger problems and looking for real solutions, instead of getting stuck in jobs where they do executional work,” Salameh says. Designer Karen Chekerdjian echoes this point, saying that there is no support for local designers, which in turn means that very few designers can invest in initiatives to help the industry and the state, without necessarily making money.

STRATEGIC SUPPORT

To move design forward efficiently, stakeholders need to understand what gaps exist and what spaces offer the highest potential. In late 2018, Endeavor Lebanon collaborated with Beirut Digital



District to host the IGNITE Fashion and Design event, part of which included a roundtable with leaders in Lebanon's fashion industry—designer Rabih Kayrouz; Christian Daccache, founder of Bureau Des Createurs (BDC); Deliphone Edde, co-founder of Diwanee; and Edward Sabbagh, managing director of Farfetch Middle East. Their discussion was developed into a whitepaper released in February,

and though it was fashion-focused, many of its takeaways apply to other disciplines.

■ Though some Lebanese designers have penetrated international markets, many are still struggling.

The participants agreed that though some Lebanese fashion designers have pen-

etrated international markets, many are still struggling due to gaps in the supply chain, and lack of funding and support for the fashion industry in general. One of their suggestions was to focus on financial support, urging investors, banks, and Banque du Liban, Lebanon's central bank, to consider the potential of the design sector. They urged further de-

Design

velopment of creativity by encouraging more talent to enter the sector and introducing more programs, as well as leveraging technology and strengthening the ecosystem by building more factories. Salameh noted to EXECUTIVE that in addition to the suggestions of the roundtable, better infrastructure, more educational inclusivity, and the provision of prototyping spaces need to be provided.

Tax incentives and the formation of syndicates would help the sector too, Chekerdjian says. She employs local artisans to craft her hand-made designs, but is classified as a merchant and thus does not get the benefits and incentives that, in other countries, come with sustaining national crafts and creating jobs for artisans.

At the roundtable, Kayrouz was vocal about the state's role in building industrial know-how, arguing that financing and building factories for manufacturing in Lebanon was one way to encourage fashion industrialists. Salameh is more cautious, arguing that this solution may work, but it needs to be well studied. He suggests instead that Lebanon should focus on creation, rather than industrial production on a mass scale.

Most of the designers EXECUTIVE spoke to agreed that focusing on industries that are already well-oiled in Lebanon, such as jewelry or fashion, is a good strategy to move forward. Salameh explains, "It's smarter to support industries that are functional already. It will have a bigger impact because you already have people invested and doing something. But [there is a] need to support design across disciplines."

TEACHING AND CONNECTING CREATIVES

Strengthening educational channels gives designers a better sense of the work they can do. This is the goal of FANTASMEEM, a design program implemented by the Goethe-Institut in Lebanon as part of a German government initiative to support design in developing countries. Launched in early 2019, the one year program aims to support designers through capacity building and networking, and is comprised of several parts, including an artist residency, where 18 local designers were mentored by international and local experts, job-shadowing industry specialists in Lebanon and Germany, and opportunities to apply for grants.

Another design initiative in Lebanon is the Beirut Creative Hub (BCH). Created by UNIDO and



Lebanese co-working space Antwork, BCH is a platform for creatives in Lebanon to meet and learn. The free program, which is funded by the EU and the Italian Agency for Cooperation Development, is a pilot that will run until June. It offers workshops on technical and business development, and on design subjects for anyone that wants to attend.

The idea is not only to teach emerging designers new skills, but also to give visibility to traditional creative industries that are at risk of being lost, and even more importantly, to connect people who would not normally meet. "In the workshops [we have] designers, artisans, students, industrialists. This [combination] could lead to collaborations beyond the time frame of the hub," says Stephanie Khouri, the program's coordinator. She gives the example of a glassmaking workshop with a long-time Syrian artisan living in Lebanon, who will teach his techniques to a crowd comprised of design students. The networking opportunities can create long-lasting connections and give birth to partnerships. "Job creation is a goal—you have to start somewhere," Khouri adds.

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Design



Traditional institutions that teach design are also keeping up. Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts (ALBA) is the institutional partner of the BCH. Meanwhile, the Lebanese American University (LAU) recently revamped their curriculum to include more relevant topics for today's designers. Yasmine Taan, associate professor at LAU's art and design department, argues that design is a discipline that changes with society's needs, making it imperative for those teaching design to keep up with these changes. To address this challenge, LAU introduced a first-of-its-kind (for the region) course this semester, on graphic design history in the Middle East, which will provide better context for its students. Other new offerings at LAU include User Experience (UX) and user behavior courses that will help designers across the board.

FOSTERING INNOVATION

Endeavor's whitepaper emphasized the importance of mentorship in developing creativity and giving designers the tools they need. Their recommendation was also to have designers focus on their forte—design—while delegating business aspects of their work to professionals in those fields.

Going beyond that, the experts contributing to the Endeavour whitepaper also encourage leveraging technological disruptions. For fashion but also other types of design, e-commerce and social media can raise brand awareness and boost sales, giving designers more visibility and easier access to international markets that can help more talent bloom into economically-viable businesses.

TOP DOWN AND BOTTOM UP MOVEMENTS

Rabih Kayrouz' incubator-style initiative Starch Foundation has supported designers since 2008, and some alumni like Krikor Jabotian, Rami Kadi, and Hussein Bazaza have gone on to reach great success.

Since 2010, Beirut Design Week has been encouraging designers with a movement that empowers design entrepreneurs, gives them a platform to sell their wares, and offers insightful exhibitions and events for more high-level aspects of design. More recently, Beirut Design Fair, which is held at the same time as sister event Beirut Art Fair, has also stepped in to offer designers access to local buyers, as well as international clients and press that fly in at that time.


These new initiatives are backed by a collaboration of foreign investment and local talent—Beirut Creative Hub is backed by UNIDO, FANTASMEEM backed by Germany, even Endeavor

■ “I think it is the responsibility of designers to mobilize and raise awareness about what they do so.”

Lebanon is part of the international Endeavor network. BCH's Khouri explains that there is always a risk with a top-down approach to such programs, but is happy that the response to

the initiative has so far been positive, and attendance high.

Salameh believes that Lebanese designers need to initiate more grassroots movements: “Two years ago this conversation didn't exist in the way it exists today. We are moving in a good direction, but I think it's the responsibility of designers to mobilize and raise awareness about what they do so that people understand how much impact design can have. Designers often don't see the power they have.”

The impact of design on Lebanon can be social, economic, and developmental. With so many success stories already, the country, by all accounts, has a lot of potential in this field. Giving Lebanese designers across disciplines a strategic push could positively impact job creation, the economy, and propel the Lebanese into further success. Growing interest in the sector from international agencies is encouraging, but for the design industry to really thrive, public sector initiative is vital. 

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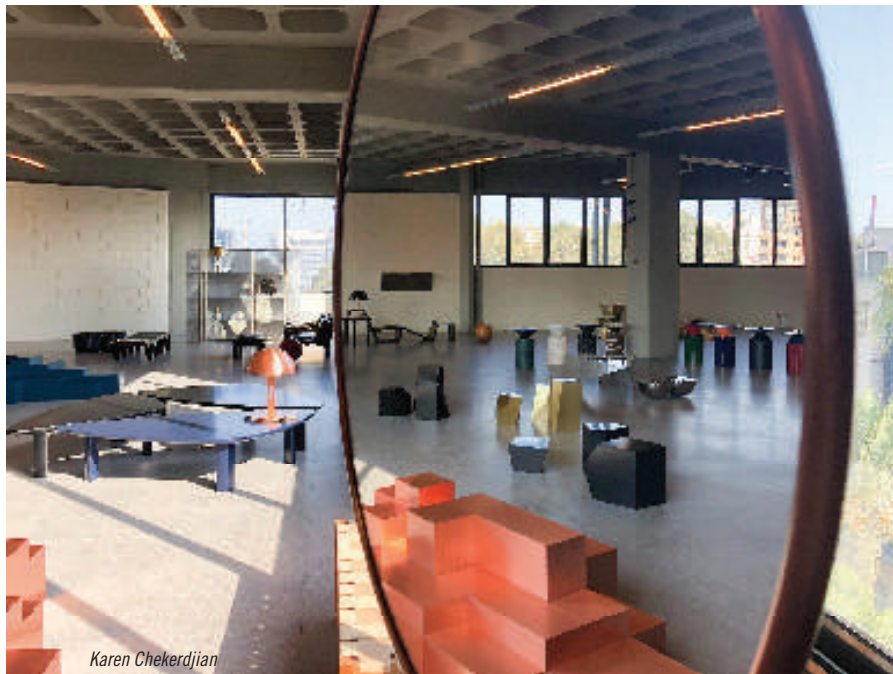
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REDESIGNING GENDER RULES



Karen Chekerdjian

Design and gender identity in Lebanon

Design is an essential part of our lives and how we interact with our environments, and it changes with society, catering to shifting needs. Design can also be the agent for change, shaping the way we think about the concept of identity, in particular gender identity.

Many people still use the terms sex and gender interchangeably but gender studies have made an important distinction between biological sex, which is mostly a dichotomy, and gender, which is a culturally imposed identity construct that teaches us what it means to be male or female, and affects the way we see ourselves and how we think and act.

The conversation on gender and design is increasing worldwide, with more and more designers challenging the status quo and changing the way they design. No longer perpetuating gender binary and society's hetero-normative clichés, progressive

designers are creating more inclusive design, and helping to spark the conversation on genderfluidity. Genderfluid design is still underestimated, but it is becoming more relevant. This is perhaps most evident in fashion, which has traditionally been associated with the expression of identity, though it also applies to other types of design.

GENDERFLUID FASHION

The Far East, especially Japan, has a long tradition of clothing that is worn by men and women alike, such as the kimono. In recent years international brands from Gucci to Zara have experimented with genderfluid clothing. In Lebanon, the trend is catching on too. Several fashion exhibitions and shows have specifically focused on genderfluidity, notably during by Beirut Pride during Beirut Design Week 2017 and later that year by fashion



Boutique Hub

design students at the Lebanese American University. One early comer into genderfluid design in Lebanon is Cynthia Chamat Debbané, who opened her experimental clothing store Boutique Hub and created the brand Urban Sense back in 2013. She describes her one-size-fits-most line as genderfluid, making the point to avoid using the common alternative, gender neutral, which she argues is a negative term that insinuates removing something from existence.

In her store, in addition to her own customizable pieces, she curates a selection of items from over 40 Lebanese designers, many of whom reflect her gender values, including Roni Helou, Jeux de Main, Bochies, Civvies, and Kinamania. “Most of the time I identify as a woman, but I’m also very masculine in certain moments. I felt like my brand needed to reflect that—it’s not feminine or masculine, but genderfluid,” she explains. She says most of her clients are women, in addition to men who identify as homosexual, but a growing number of heterosexual men are beginning to buy her styles too.

Debbané never studied fashion, but picked up the trade from her merchant father and began designing to answer her mother’s needs as her body

type began to change with age. Having herself gone through weight fluctuations, she wanted to create a line that was more inclusive of body shapes, with comfort and functionality at its core. She explains that while some designers create statement pieces with the purpose of putting on a show and getting international attention, others, like herself, focus on function. “Clothes should always serve the body and its movement. They are tools to help us carry on with our activities. Clothes are here to serve us, we don’t serve clothes,” she says.

There is an economic dimension to this idea too. Debbané explains that the more specific your target audience, the more variety of pieces you have to produce in order to create diversity, which is more costly, especially considering not everything is likely to sell. “If you design something

■ “Clothes should always serve the body and its movement. They are tools to help us carry on with our activities.”

that’s functional for any body type, age, gender, you end up selling more and producing less,” she says, emphasising the ecological impact this has—in 2018 she was chosen as one

of six international

designers by the British Council-backed Fashion Revolution movement that aims to transform the fashion industry, including limiting the industry’s impact on the environment.

SEX APPEAL

Genderfluid clothing is not supposed to lack sex appeal, “Sexiness is never in the clothes, it’s attitude and body language that make you sexy,”

Design

■ “They made it a point to say they only had male designers and wanted to include a woman, which I thought was very strange.”



Karen Chekerdjian

Debbané says. She follows this idea with an alternative example: that rape has nothing to do with the clothing a woman wears. The sexiness of clothing is often the topic of debate when it comes to assault. In 2018, an art exhibition in Brussels challenged the “what were you wearing?” narrative by showcasing the various clothes rape-survivors were wearing during their assault, in order to raise awareness about sexual violence.

Such awareness is part of a wider topic of the objectification of women. Media and advertising often perpetuate this, and blindly follow society’s ideas of feminine and masculine. Stereotypes are not completely false because they are part of a social reality, but they emphasize some aspects while de-emphasizing others. Yasmine Taan, associate professor at LAU’s art and design department, teaches a gender studies course that looks at women in media and advertising. Since many of her graphic design students end up working in the field, she says it is important to encourage students to stay clear of stereotypes in their most obvious and subtler forms. While in the past it may have been acceptable for ads for household cleaning products to speak directly to women, today this is an unacceptable practice to a growing number of people. If women are to make any progress in society, it is partially the responsibility of advertisers to steer away from messages that confine women to patriarchal constructs.

Some newer advertising campaigns in the region have begun to highlight genderfluid concepts. A recent Dubai campaign for toy brand Lego features a group of mothers who are shown a video skillful child making an airplane. All the mothers

assume the child is a boy, only to be told it is in fact a girl, with the ad ending with tagline “Imagination has no gender.”

MALE DOMINATION

Ultimately, many of these issues stem from the fact that design is a male dominated industry, like many others. Though more female designers are emerging, the balance of power still favors men.

Designer Karen Chekerdjian points out that there are few celebrated female designers, in Lebanon and abroad. She recounts that she was approached by an international company to sell one of her designs in their space. “They made it a point to say they only had male designers and wanted to include a woman, which I thought was very strange,” she says. She adds that they never followed through and today still do not have a single woman designer in their collective. It is not just men that perpetuate this problem. Chekerdjian recalls being approached for a project by a female editor at a European magazine, and when she researched the other designers involved she found they were all men. “Why does she not realize what she’s doing? Sometimes women are also part of that system,” she says.

She also feels it can be difficult for women to work in male-dominated fields. “When I started it was difficult for me to make my male artisans accept me,” Chekerdjian says. “It’s a man’s world, in all [fields]. Especially in industry and production—women are not welcome in that world.” With time, Chekerdjian says she has become comfortable working as a woman in a male-dominat-

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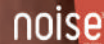


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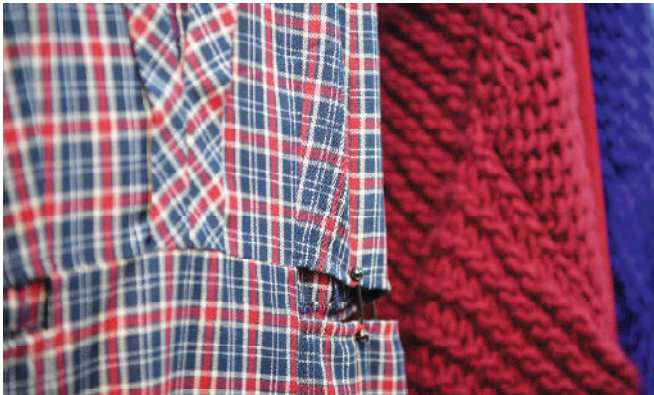


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Design

*Cintha Boutique Hub*

ed field, and has hope that attitudes are changing and more people are accepting that women are an equal part of the design sector.

INCLUSIVITY AND DESIGN


The problem is that women's underrepresentation also affects the outcome of the designs themselves and their user-friendliness for women. For example, biological differences between the sexes are not always taken into consideration. There has been international criticism recently for design of seatbelts, which were originally designed for a larger male physique, and did not take into account pregnant women at all (motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of fetal death related to maternal trauma, according to research by Stanford University). Other objects receiving this type of criticism include lawnmowers designed for relatively long arms, and strollers made for shorter limbs. As gender roles are changing, such issues become problematic.

Some designers are catering to gender inclusiveness. Facebook is continuing to roll out its more inclusive gender identification system in further countries, where users can now choose from one of

71 gender options. In March, the world's first gender neutral voice technology, Q, was introduced in Denmark as an alternative for distinctly male and female virtual assistants like Siri and Alexa. There's also an ongoing conversation on genderless bathrooms. In the US, a collective of architects, designers, lawyers, and experts called Stalled! advocated to change the International Plumbing Code in favour of all-gender bathrooms, with the expectation these changes will be adopted at the local and state level. In Beirut, some restaurants have begun offering all-gender bathroom facilities—like Kalei Coffee Co.'s “anything works” stall situated between the male and female options.

Some designers are focusing on the specific needs of women. Designed by women, MEMI is a smart bracelet that vibrates to alert of calls and texts for women who store their phone in their purse—a need male designers might not have anticipated. More women in the design fields could mean more of such products that address their specific needs—not least of which is pockets.

One way to encourage more female designers to enter the domain is to highlight their predecessors. Taan wants to see more taught on female designers and is leading this effort with her work with Khatt books, a publishing house on design and visual culture of the Middle East. After having written several books on graphic designers from the region, she came to the realization that her subjects were all men and so began to research what women have done in the regional design field. She discovered that Saloua Raouda Choucair, who is mostly known for her art and sculpture, was in fact also a designer. She also found that artist Mouna Bassili Sehnaoui designed the famous Lebanon logo for the Ministry of Culture in the 1960s, as well as several posters encouraging tourism to the country. Taan says it is important to highlight the value that women designers have brought to our country, and is currently working on books about these female pioneers.

More inclusion of women designers is part of a larger trend of more inclusion in general, in design production and use. Design created by more people with varied identities can cater for a larger pool of needs. The conversation has started, but more designers and users need to see the value in embracing a wider variety of identities and their needs to drive this global design revolution forward. 



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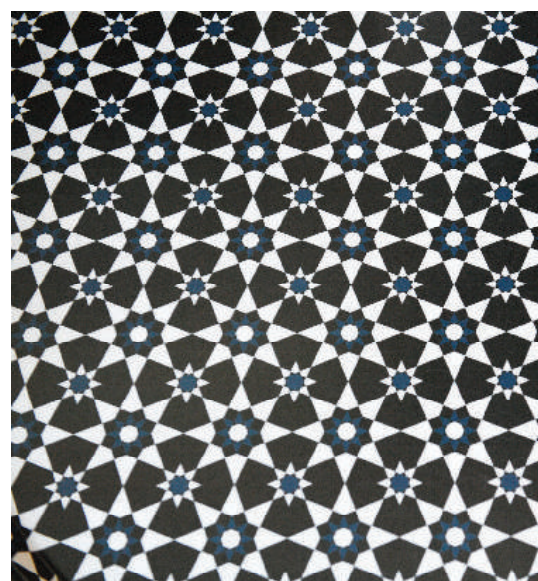
Traditional handicrafts in Lebanon

Carpets, cutlery, glass, soap, furniture—these traditional Lebanese crafts have a valued place in the country's—and the region's—history. Industrial development in the last half of the 20th century has, inevitably, affected Lebanon's traditional artisans. On the one hand, it has driven demand down for artisanal crafts that are usually more expensive than mass-produced imports. On the other, for local artisans who have weathered weary economic waters, access to a new global market has been made easier, a result of improved online marketplaces, social media, and internet-based communication. There are also multiple initiatives underway in Lebanon that seek to ensure Lebanese artisans find their place in increasingly

crowded local and global markets. For traditional artisan crafts in particular, local and international organizations have worked to improve their sustainability by providing technical, industrial, design, and marketing support, and by providing a place for craftsmen to market their goods.

SUSTAINING MARKETS

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and L'artisan du Liban are two organizations that have helped keep Lebanese artisanry alive by providing production support, serving as design catalysts, and offering a place for local craftsmen to market their wares. Established in 1979, L'artisan du Liban was Lebanon's first so-



cial enterprise, and it sought to keep artisans active and safekeep artistry and heritage by providing local craftspeople a marketplace for their goods. UNIDO has been active in Lebanon since 1989, and supports sustainable development across multiple sectors, including its work with craftspeople. Both organizations have played similar, but distinct, roles in sustaining local artisanry.

Despite a strong history of design generation and export in Lebanon, recent economic stagnation has made it difficult for some traditional artisans to compete with cheaper imports from places like China. For example, where 10 years ago there were several glassblowers in Lebanon, today only one family, the Khalifehs in Sarafand, remain. The period between 2011 and 2018 marked a 37 percent increase in imported glass and glassware, according to data by Blominvest Bank, with which Lebanese glassblowers had to compete.

Artisans across the handicraft spectrum have had to adjust to shifting market trends and find new ways to make their products attractive to consumers in a modern market. Driven, in part, by shifting market trends and demands, artisans have used sev-

eral tactics to stay ahead of the game, from introducing subtle, more modern-looking design twists, to adopting new materials and packaging methods to make traditional goods more marketable.

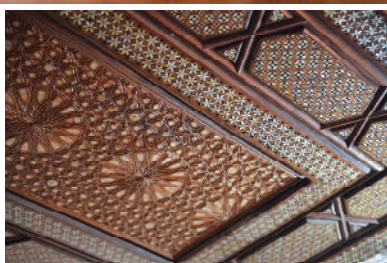
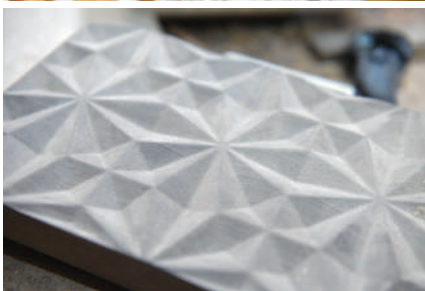
The rapidity of changing trends, a clientele more aware of global trends and buying options, and the combination of rising ease of travel and digital advancements have accounted for the largest market shifts, says Hadi Maktabi, owner and curator of

■ Recent economic stagnation has made it difficult for some traditional artisans to compete.

Hadi Maktabi carpets, who holds a PhD in Islamic Art from Oxford. Difficulty in identifying a unified “Lebanese taste” has also made marketing to a local audience

challenging. And it is in this climate that producers and artisans must decide which model they want to adopt, whether that be identifying a niche within a larger market and catering to it, or following the “supermarket model,” which Maktabi defines as being largely mass-produced, cheaper wares made abroad that appeal to a broad audience (think IKEA).

Artisanal crafts



■ Some traditional artisans have needed help finding a viable market for their niche crafts.

"Fifteen years ago, it was the supermarket model, and you had five to 10 big dealers who catered to everything," Maktabi says, referring to the carpet industry. He argues that where trends in the 1990s shifted every 10 years or so, recently they have begun changing every two to five years.

The advent of the internet and improved digital marketplaces have sped up the introduction of new styles over the last 20 years. Rapidly growing global markets also meant the Lebanese market was flooded with more affordable, modern products that were designed in Europe, but were produced in places with cheap labor supply. "Most people working on this [supermarket model] side are dealing with products mass produced in China and India, and then selling them here," Maktabi says. "But what they're selling now is not craft, it's just a product."

CARVE OUT A NICHE

Now, within the last few years, more have tried to carve out a niche in a crowded market—like Maktabi's focus on antique carpets and textiles—specializing in providing a specific product. Complicating the matter, on the local front, he argues, is the rising European influence and the need for the Lebanese to find their place within that trend. Even local geographical considerations play a role in this. "Drive a few kilometers south of Beirut, and it's like entering a different time period," Maktabi says. Torn between the occidental and oriental, this clash of cultures has made designers and artisans alike, who choose to follow the niche market approach, have to define a narrow target audience.

But those specialists, specifically some traditional artisans, have needed help finding a viable market for their niche crafts. A few kilometers south of Beirut, Houssam Outabashi is found in Ouzai with multiple workshops lining the street. Here, Outabashi, a master in traditional marquetry and inlay techniques, can look at a piece of mother of pearl and name its country of origin by its color. Marquetry is a process by which small pieces of different types of wood are bundled to form a pattern, and then shaved in thin layers, while inlay design is a process in which chunks of wood are carved out and replaced with the shimmery pieces cut from sheets of Mother of Pearl to create intricate designs.

Outabashi specializes in the traditional styles of his craft, however, he has started modernizing some of his designs. L'artisan du Liban has provided him with support to help preserve his craft, which goes back as far as the 1800s through generations of his family. Nour Najm, creative director of L'artisan du Liban, says they work with Outabashi, designing objects that Outabashi creates by hand and then are sold in L'artisan du Liban store.

Further south in Sarafand, L'artisan similarly works with the Khalifeh family who create glassware out of recycled glass—which in a country that has an excess of garbage, is remarkable. The Khal-

ifeh's only turn on the oven five to six times a year, but can turn it on up to 10 times when there is an order to be filled—otherwise it is a resource drain. When it is on, six to eight people work in shifts around the clock for 15-20 days to fill an order. Najm says L'artisan makes sure to place a large order with the Khalifeh's each time they turn on the oven.

In the small, run-down warehouse where the Khalifeh family makes their glass, Najm is thinking about what she can do to give the glassware a modern twist—for her, the answer is color. With colored glass she bought from the US, the glassblowers are experimenting with different techniques to potentially incorporate color into their traditional designs. Najm says they have introduced a lot of small details to modernize traditional designs and help make them competitive in today's markets. "Small twists change everything," she says.

RE-IMAGINING THE CRAFT

UNIDO has also worked with local craftsmen to help them update traditional designs and help artisans peddle their crafts. For example, UNIDO worked with Jezzine cutlery craftspeople—as well as local soap makers and *tark el-fouda* (embroidery) craftspeople—to help them modernize designs and industrialize production. Two years ago, UNIDO launched a program in partnership with the Ministry of Industry and funded by the Austrian government to help preserve traditional artisanry and improve livelihoods of artisans in these sectors, says Nada Barakat, national project coordinator at UNIDO.

Jezzine cutlery, for example, was once thought of as a gift that sat in a wooden box unused; the product had to be re-imagined into something people would by to use and enjoy. Barakat stressed the importance of marketing: they did away with the old wood box and started packaging the sets in cardboard, which cut down costs and made the sets more practical. To better market the soap, they did the opposite and introduced an attractive olive wooden box as packaging. Jezzine cutlery, which was traditionally made out of olive wood and featured bird-like motifs on the handles is now sometimes made out of resin, but maintains the older features with a modern edge. Creating the mold for the resin-based handles made the production process and end-product marginally cheaper, but consumers can still buy the cutlery with the traditional wooden handles as well.

Barakat says that while the collection is primarily available to local markets, negotiations are



underway with Coincasa, an Italian retail outlet, to market the collection there. L'artisan du Liban has a slightly larger global reach with their online store that opened last year. Najm says that less than 10 percent of their sales are global, but they have clients all over Europe and in the US, and they attend yearly trade fairs in Paris.

Both entities—UNIDO and L'artisan du Liban—have worked to keep Lebanese artisanry alive and are beginning to introduce traditional local crafts in international markets. Though

■ Jezzine cutlery was once thought of as a gift that sat in a wooden box unused; the product had to be re-imagined.

industrial development made traditional crafts more expensive, recent globalizing trends and improved digital markets may help some local artisans find a viable market for their goods

abroad. While it is too early to tell what the future holds for Lebanese crafts in the international market, at least here at home some local artisans have found the support needed to keep centuries' old traditions alive.



TO TANGO WITH REFORMS

Design the winning ingredient in tackling Lebanon's public sector restructuring?

At any meeting these days, from academic circles to business and banking conferences, one is likely to hear more than one allusion to Lebanon's reform challenges. Much more. Whether it is the pesky theme of electricity or the issue of fiscal and structural reforms in the public sector, the big questions that matter today are all about how.

Although Lebanon progressed painfully to finding its new government—something that seems to have almost been forgotten in some circles in the relatively short time since the ascension of this new administration—a myriad of problems are now maturing from the worry if reforms will ever happen, to the more pertinent question of how these reforms can be done.

One pressing “how-question” seems to have an underappreciated design answer. This is the question of how to tackle reforming the public sector into a citizen-centric sphere. Is it enough to compel all administrative units in Lebanon to digitize? Will transitioning from paper-based public processes—that sometimes requires days of roaming some of the country's most fascinating corridors and offices with all the appeal of worn-out interiors from the days of the early republic—to electronic databases and files on computers suffice to upgrade public services at ministries to something that deserves the label “e-government”?

If any doubts were to linger in citizens' minds about the feasibility of such a solution, design may be a big part of all more viable answers and provide better approaches, say Lebanese design specialists with expertise on multi-tiered levels of conceptual and specific approaches.

Digitizing the public sector in the sense of implementing electronic networks will not achieve any deep transformation, says Loubna Ibrahim, product and innovation lab lead at Ideatolife, a regional consultancy of developers and designers that is focused

on technology-and-people-centered software solutions. From a human-centric design perspective, technology is not the main issue. “We have to focus on end-users and understand problems from a human perspective. This is the core aspect of design thinking and everything follows from this user-centric approach. It is all about understanding humans, and then designing for humans,” she tells EXECUTIVE.

THE HUMAN APPROACH

As Ibrahim explains, this prime mandate of understanding the humans involved in any digital transformation of public sector units in Lebanon means that such transformations need to start small and proceed incrementally. “Transformation does not come overnight and one needs to take it one step at a time,” she says.

On the reasoning that people are fundamentally afraid of change and often consciously or subconsciously afraid of technology and so hesitant to adopt unfamiliar technology, Ibrahim further advises that not only would the digital transformation of the public sector in Lebanon have to start small, but also that the solution for digitization would have to be different in every public sector organization and heavily involve the persons in every specific organization. “People in the public sector entities will have to co-create the solutions, because they are the ones who know the issues,” she says.

While some digitization progress has been made in Lebanon's public sector units over recent months—especially since the new government's arrival—and challenges related to issues such as basic infrastructure and partially wanting digital literacy in the country are on the mend, the obstacles to a complete digital transformation do not end there, says growth strategist Georges Abi Aad.



■ “If you digitize a flawed process, it will still be flawed.”

“We are not convinced that digitization is at the core of digital transformation of the government, because the first thing is to design the process. Processes tend to be outdated and serve agendas more than citizens. Before digitizing them, we need to look at processes and redesign them from scratch, because if you digitize a flawed process, it [still] will be flawed. However, if a successful process is digitized, it has the chance to succeed on larger scale,” he tells EXECUTIVE.

Abi Aad works with Birdhaus, a Lebanon-based agency in the commercial communications sphere that seeks to twin client’s marketing and sales efforts through “novel marketing practices.” With the statement, Birdhaus hints at its integrated online (coding) and enterprise-engulfing marketing approach that is also described in the business by nine-year old buzzword of ‘growth hacking.’ In the context of digital transformation, a known focus of growth hacking is on rapid digital-world growth of organizations that are tight on economic resources. In its work, Birdhaus furthermore uses human-centric design concepts for online interaction that have in recent years been promoted in the

digital communications media sector as UX and UI (user experience and user interface) design.

When applied to public sector administrations in Lebanon, such design will require a process that takes into account the needs of civil servants as well as be citizen-centric, chimes in Abi Aad’s colleague Marilynn Bou Habib, who is a UX/UI designer at Birdhaus. “To provide high-quality services through digitized systems, the public sector needs to have incentives for providing high-quality services and on the other end, the citizen needs to know the problems,” she says.

According to these two professionals, barriers to achieving true digital transformation in the Lebanese public sector must be expected in form of resistance and pushbacks because of the same basic human fears that Ibrahim had referenced. They also concur that political buy-ins by stakeholders and participants on different levels of a public sector entity and incentivization of all their involvement will be necessary.

Furthermore, according to Abi Aad it is a paradigm of UX design to boost the transparency of the process that is designed or redesigned. Initiation

Design

of such transparency—which Abi Aad describes as “presently completely absent” from public sector processes in the country—will reveal many layers of opacity that today exist in the public realm, adds Birdhaus Director Karen Abi Saab.

“Processes need to become more transparent as citizens are informed what they need to do throughout the entire process [of interacting with a public entity] whereas today citizens are told from one step to the next [what they have to do] and have no visibility of the whole process. It thus is an important step in digitization of public processes to have the public know the entire process,” she says.

THE RIGHT PEOPLE ON BOARD

It is revealed in course of a wide-ranging discussion with the team of Birdhaus and its parent company, Flag M Group, that they had encountered a further barrier of unfavorable mindsets toward its efforts to launch a mobile app with UX design inputs that would have been conducive to public sector digital transformation on the municipal level of in Lebanon. Embarking on the app’s development about two years ago (shortly after municipal elections in Lebanon and in parallel with work which the group did for two public sector entities in the United Arab Emirates), Flag M invested into the project on its own initiative under the notion that the mobile app might appeal to municipalities in the area of Keserwan and Metn.

The group approached several municipalities with the app that included features designed to improve communication between municipal authorities and their residents as well as elements such as an emergency connection button to police, but found that the municipalities were more interested in promoting their achievements than in communicating with residents. “The project got stuck because of a big lack of awareness [in the approached municipalities as to] why [they should want to] enhance the user experiences of the people,” explains Firas Mghames, the CEO of Flag M Group.

As one lesson of the experience, the team of Flag M and Birdhaus concluded that top-down buy-in will be required in Lebanon to achieve acceptance of digital transformation initiatives and that, moreover, the context for such efforts must be very conducive from political and budgetary angles. Municipalities that struggled to deliver basic services to their residents might not have been the best targets for digital transformation, Abi Aad observes.

However, while there are undeniable barriers that will have to be overcome on all levels when digi-

tal transformation of public sector entities is tackled, there are even more compelling upsides. The success of the effort of redesigning, from scratch, the interactions between citizens and their administrations in Lebanon would be likely to unleash significant cost savings in different ministries and administrative units. Examples from private sector experience in the region hint that the size of potential savings, which would range from paper needs to time wastage of citizens and also to more productive use of employee time in the units, will be huge, even as they today cannot even be properly estimated. Moreover, as Ideatolife’s Ibrahim points out, employing human-centric design methodologies —also called “design thinking”—will be a sort of dual speed process that can be initiated fast and rapidly show first results, even if years may be needed to produce the full results of the transformation process by design.

“When we work on digital transformation strategies with enterprises, we plan a five-to-seven year strategy but a country like Lebanon might need more like ten years,” says Ibrahim, but then emphasizes that, “changes will start to happen after the first six months.” As she explains, some six weeks after its start, the process would see the creation of first solutions on basis of user research that would thereafter be user tested and incrementally as well as continuously improved, with tangible outcomes. “If it takes more than three months to implement a solution, something is wrong,” she says.

■ “What is beautiful about this country is its ability to adapt and adapt very rapidly, because of its huge human capital.”

For Maroun Sarrouh, board advisor at Flag M Group, Lebanon today is indeed primed to accomplish fast progress of its reform process and digital transformation. Based on

fortuitous ending of regional conflict and economic bust cycles in conjunction with the external pressures and internal determinations of the current time, he sees the course set for reforms. He says, “Historically, when a decision in Lebanon is taken and covered, it is implemented. What is beautiful about this country is its ability to adapt and adapt very rapidly, because of the presence of its huge human capital. With the amelioration of the political/economic environment, I really think that all the ambitious projects that have been left in drawers for so many reasons, will now just pop into existence. Change can happen and it may be slow at first but then grow exponentially.”



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The beginning of the end?

Public finances reach Court of Audit

On April 6, 2018, at CEDRE, donor countries pledged \$10.2 billion in loans and \$860 million in grants to Lebanon to fund long-awaited infrastructure projects in the country. However, the donor countries and organizations require of Lebanon a long list of fiscal, structural, and sectoral reforms in order to release the funds, of which anti-corruption measures are a part.

Desire to free up CEDRE funding is one of the main reasons behind the recent surge of corruption accusations flying back and forth between political parties. Everyone seems to be pointing fingers at each other to slingshot the blame over the not-so-latent corruption that post-war Lebanon has suffered to date. Ultimately, only one pointed finger will matter in terms of accountability, that of the Court of Audit.

OVERSEEING PUBLIC FUNDS

The Court of Audit is an administrative tribunal with financial jurisdiction that oversees the management of public funds; it is the highest financial tribunal in Lebanon. The court is composed of judges, controllers, and account auditors as well as an independent public prosecutor. The Court of Audit exercises both (i) administrative and (ii) judicial controls on the state administration, certain municipalities and public enterprises, and institutions and associations funded by the state.

The Court of Audit's administrative control is twofold: A prior control to approve the use of public funds in specific projects/transactions and a subsequent control to confirm the proper use of these funds. The Court of Audit prepares annual reports with their findings on public spending.

The Court of Audit's judicial control enables it to prosecute public officials if the court attributes any misuse of public funds to their actions. Such prosecution can only amount to fines if proceedings are brought forward before the court. That said, the Court of Audit can choose to transfer the proceedings to the applicable criminal tribunal if criminal charges are brought against a public official in relation to their misuse of public funds. The concerned official could then face a prison sentence.


MISSION IMPOSSIBLE?

The Court of Audit typically audits public accounts and submits an audit report to Parliament that votes to approve the public spending of a given calendar year. This procedure is paramount to ensure a proper control on public finances and to confirm the proper execution of the annual public budget. It also constitutes a condition precedent for the Parliament to vote on the annual budget. Since 1993 the Court of Audit has been publishing its annual reports based on incomplete information and documents provided to it by the government (it was exempted in 1995 from its constitutional duties for the years of the civil war, and then for the years 1991/2 in 2006, due to the impossibility of compiling the relevant documents). Moreover, until the 2017 budget, Parliament had last voted on the budget in 2005.

Pierre Duquesne, the French diplomat monitoring the reform progress after CEDRE, stated in early March that the 2019 budget had to be adopted by Parliament as soon as possible. Arguably this pressure is what led the Ministry of Finance to finally hand over all

the statements and documents necessary for the Court of Audit to audit the public accounts starting from 1993 until 2017. The mission assigned to the Court of Audit is twofold: First, it must prepare the statement of accounts for 2017 to enable the Parliament to vote on the statement and discharge the government for the public spending of that year and simultaneously approve the budget for the year 2019 (this audit of 2017 is late, it should have taken place in 2018; likewise the audit of 2018's spending is due this year.) Second, the court must examine the use of public funds from 1993 up until 2017—a task that will take two months to complete, according to sources in the court.

In order for the court to function as intended, and not just when it is politically expedient, certain things must change. First and foremost, the court should be sent all the necessary documents every year without fail and in time for it pursue its review process. In the past, this process has been disrupted, with instances of documents that were either lost, altered or destroyed. To minimize these risks, the Court of Audit should be provided with a fully digitized, comprehensive platform where data transfers and documents submissions can take place. This will result in a faster, more comprehensive, and more transparent audit process.

Fighting corruption starts at the very top of the pyramid. Being one of the few institutions capable of sanctioning corruption, the Court of Audit needs to be fully functional in order to efficiently assist in the fight against corruption. It remains to be seen if this effort is a one-off exclusively aimed at receiving the funds promised at the CEDRE conference or if it signals the beginning of the end of corruption in Lebanon. 

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Raindrops are falling

Preserving Lebanon's water resources requires multisectoral collaboration

In winter, Lebanon seems to have an abundance of rainfall.

When the rainy season is over, however, the country's traffic woes are often compounded by large tankers blocking roads as they supply buildings with water.

Lebanon is rich in water resources, but these are replenished seasonally, through rain and snow that generally falls between October and April. With improved management, there is the potential to significantly enhance water storage, preserving the water supply for use during dry summer seasons and occasional droughts. Improving water collection and storage is not a difficult task, and one made easier with multisectoral collaboration.

WATER GAINED, WATER LOST

A 2001-2002 State of the Environment report by the Ministry of the Environment (MoE) presented the worst case scenario for Lebanon's water supply: On average, yearly precipitation in Lebanon results in 8,600 million cubic meters (Mm3) of water, feeding 40 major streams and rivers, including 17 perennial rivers, and more than 2,000 springs. Of that, approximately 50 percent gets lost through evapotranspiration—the process by which soil loses moisture via a combination of evaporation and plant transpiration. Additional losses stem from surface water flows to neighboring countries, estimated by the Litani River Authority to represent almost 8 percent, and ground-water seepage estimated at 12 percent. This leaves Lebanon with 2,600 Mm3 of surface and groundwater, of



which 2,000 Mm3 is deemed exploitable and available for supply. This is not far off 2014 estimates from the United Nations Development Program where Lebanon's water balance in a dry year was estimated at 2,140 Mm3.

With the Ministry of Electricity and Water (MoEW) expecting the country's total annual demand for water to increase to 1,802 Mm3 by 2035, Lebanon, in theory, has more than enough water available to supply anticipated demands for at least the next

15 years. However, local natural water availability is seasonal, and currently there are not enough water storage tools in place to avoid water shortages

■ Lebanon, in theory, has more than enough water available to supply anticipated demands for at least the next 15 years.

during summer droughts. This needs to change.

One prime example of a multi-sectoral water stewardship initiative

to secure future water supply was set up following recommendations from a study on groundwater management in the Shouf Biosphere Reserve—The 2017 Groundwater Assessment of the Shouf Biosphere Reserve (SBR)-Lebanon. The report, prepared by global environmental consulting group Antea, in collaboration with Nestlé Waters, found that the area's overall groundwater balance was positive, by around 12 Mm3 per year, but noted important seasonal water fluctuations as well as high impacts from climate change and human activities.

A multisectoral partnership involving water authorities, farmers, the private sector, the Shouf Biosphere Reserve, the MoEW, the MoE, municipalities, and others, was established to tackle the issue and is already beginning to help the reserve successfully enhance the recharge of natural groundwater reservoirs in the area during the rainy season. Through the use of retaining walls (micro dams in the valleys) and terraces that increase water infiltration, among other tools, the partnership aims to reduce the impact of summer droughts. Such recharge techniques enhance water infiltration into underground natural water reservoirs and can be good alternatives to dams, especially in karstic/fractured geological contexts, as they help store river and runoff water that otherwise flows

naturally toward the sea and is lost during the rainy season.

A MODEL TO REPLICATE

A full action plan recommended by the study's authors has been underway since October 2018, aiming to improve the quantity and quality of water supply in the area. Its key recommendation—to improve water storage—needs to be rolled out across the country using varying methods dependent on a given area's geological, environmental, and social needs. For example, if an area's surface rocks are fractured and include faults and cracks, underground storage is preferred over surface water storage, whereas if surface rocks are impermeable and can store water easily, surface water dams are worth considering.

Other recommendations from the study include: to continue monitoring water resources in the watershed and improving the existing database; to improve protection around municipal springs and water wells, as well as their hygienic design to guarantee better water quality; to further reduce leakages from municipal networks and piping; to engage with farmers to introduce best irrigation

practices; to promote the building of small reservoirs for irrigation on the catchments of Damour, Bisri/Awali, and Beirut rivers; and to form a steering committee of major stakeholders.

In a nutshell, water storage in winter is vital to mitigate summer droughts even during a wet year such as this one, where the registered rainfall amounts until end March were almost double the usual yearly average.

Actions being implemented at the Shouf Biosphere Reserve in collaboration with other water management stakeholders can serve as a model to be replicated in other water basins around the country in order to improve local water resource manage-

■ In a nutshell, water storage in winter is vital to mitigate summer droughts even during a wet year such as this one.

ment. This is especially pertinent, given the collaboration is in line with the water code that was ratified in June 2018, which supports multisectoral collaboration.

The reality is that collaboration between multiple sectors is needed and can be easily established to ensure that water is stored during rainy periods, either on the surface by building well-planned eco-friendly dams, or underground by enhancing water infiltration to replenish groundwater reservoirs and springs.

More initiatives can and should be launched across Lebanon, each tailored to suit the geological, environmental, and social needs of different areas of the country: All they need is multisectoral collaboration. ■

Assaad Saadeh is the regional water resources and environmental sustainability manager at Nestlé Waters.

ESTIMATED ANNUAL WATER DEMAND IN MM3 BY SECTOR (2020-2035)

Sector	2020	2025	2030	2035
Domestic	427	467	512	562
Industrial	128	140	154	169
Tourism	10	13	16	21
Irrigation	935	983	1,021	1,050
Total	1,500	1,603	1,703	1,802

Source: MOE/UNDP/ECODIT, 2011

Rethinking social entrepreneurship



Women's economic participation is more than a photo-op

January's Mashreq Conference on Women's Economic Empowerment was a welcome initiative at a time where socio-economic conditions for women in Lebanon are dire. In addition to a discriminatory legal, political, and social environment, women continue to make up less than 25 percent of the labor force, according to 2018 World Bank estimates. Donor pledges to support women's economic empowerment are a huge opportunity, but efforts to fund empowering programs often ignore core issues at the heart of Lebanon's economy. A big concern is the encroachment of social entrepreneurship as a one-size-fits-all approach to women's roles in the economy. As an emerging terminology into the entrepreneurship ecosystem, it tells women the sky is the limit, but in reality allows the government to shirk its responsibilities while trapping women in a model that has not proven itself to be sustainable.

WHAT SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IS—AND IS NOT

Broadly defined social entrepreneurship is an approach to solving socio-economic problems through sustainable income-generating tools. The entrepreneurship ecosystem in Lebanon has focused some of its efforts on promoting social enterprises through incubators and other programs targeting women in both urban and rural settings. But such programs often leave the government on the sideline and focus more on the logic that women themselves need to create their own economic opportunities. That is not to say there are no success stories; notably *Soufra* (Full Table), a food truck run by Palestinian women in the Burj al-Barajneh refugee camp, the documentary of which was recently screened in Beirut and followed the

story of its founder, Palestinian refugee Maryam Shaar.

Shaar's story is not an unfamiliar one; countless women in Lebanon have been driven to set up small businesses to survive, including my own grandmother, a Palestinian refugee who set up her own grocery store to feed her seven children and provide jobs for her community at the brink of the civil war. Social enterprise is simply the new watch-word that development donors have decided to use to label the inherent ability of women to be versatile and creative in times of distress. But social entrepreneurship is not—nor should it be—the main strategy for economically empowering women.

THE LESSONS FROM SOUFRA'S SUCCESS

Soufra's model pushes us to think of structures of financing and opportunities to integrate women in the formal economy in three ways. First, Soufra is funded via Alfanar, an Arab

■ Social entrepreneurship is not—nor should it be—the main strategy for economically empowering women.

venture philanthropy. This means that Soufra has actual investors who expect a return on their investment, whereas the overwhelming majority of funding to the Lebanese social entrepreneurship ecosystem is via foreign donors. This is reminiscent of the 1990s/early 2000s, when NGOs in Lebanon mushroomed without improved govern-

ance. Instead, these NGOs filled the gap in service provision, letting the state off the hook. Social enterprises do the same to women: they make for nice photo-ops with donor agencies, create temporary jobs, and allow the state to shirk its responsibilities—eventually the funding will run out.


Second, social entrepreneurship does not effectively provide women with sustainable jobs because it does nothing to address structural market inequalities. Sexual harassment, wage inequality, gender-based violence, and political marginalization are just some of the reason why women in Lebanon do not work—or work but do not reach managerial positions. Social enterprises create parallel alternative economic models that last as long as income keeps coming in, but which collapse the moment the initial success wanes off. There is almost no data and little evidence that social enterprises can last longer than the initial round of seed funding.

Third, the main players setting criteria for and supporting social en-

terprises have no relevant experience and expertise. It is not people like Shaar, nor like my grandma, running these programs. Few of the organizations championing social entrepreneurship for women are actually social enterprises themselves or are headed by women. These approaches tend to leave out the contextual factors that make the Lebanese workforce especially difficult for women. There are cultural, societal, and political intricacies that cannot be solved using a textbook based on outside experiences. They need to be addressed by transforming the workplace to be more equitable to young women, working mothers, disabled women, and elderly women.

RETHINKING THE APPROACH

Not all social enterprises are without merit, but to truly encourage women to enter the workforce we need to talk about the role of the state in social justice. The pressure should be on government to play a more direct role in making businesses more

inclusive. The private sector and civil society should not wait on the government forever, but sidelining the role of legislation and policymaking, while Lebanon continues to receive foreign funding will not yield sustainable results. There have been similar experiences with previous Paris donor conferences, and it may occur yet again with the CEDRE pledges. The onus should not be on women themselves to improve their economic conditions because this will exclude the majority of women whose efforts do not go under the label of social entrepreneurship. It excludes women fighting inside their workers' unions for better access to social security, it excludes women facing harassment at work, it excludes refugee women and migrant workers. The way to empower women is to fix Lebanon's endemic economic problems, not to create temporary solutions. 

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Executive

By Lauren Holtmeier

Reverse migration

Crisis-struck Venezuelans turning to Lebanon

Venezuela teeters on the brink of further deterioration from years of political and economic instability.

With self-proclaimed interim president Juan Guaidó on one side standing in opposition to current president Nicolás Maduro, the country's future is uncertain. As with most modern

conflicts, what happens in Venezuela has global implications, and this Latin American crisis may even touch as far as Lebanon.

Hyperinflation, food and medicine shortages, rising crime rates, and a progressively authoritarian government, have caused many to flee Vene-

zuela over the past few years. Most of those who fled have sought refuge in neighboring countries; according to a report by think tank Council on Foreign Relations, as of last January there were around 3.4 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants—up from just 0.7 million in 2015—with Colombia



Venezuelan opposition leader and self-proclaimed acting president Juan Guaidó (C, bottom) speaks during a protest in the fifth day of a crippling power blackout, in Caracas on March 12, 2019.

hosting the most refugees at 1.1 million and Peru, Chile, Ecuador, Argentina, and the US also receiving sizeable numbers. And because of generation-old links between the countries, an increasing number of Venezuelans, as a result of conflict, are choosing to move to Lebanon, reversing the migration patterns of prior decades where Lebanese fled conflict at home and made their new homes in Latin America.

LONG-ESTABLISHED TIES

The initial Lebanese link in Venezuela dates to 1861, when the first recorded migrant from Lebanon arrived in Venezuela. Years of conflict in Lebanon served as the primary driver of emigration, says Colin P. Clarke, an adjunct political scientist at RAND Corporation, an American nonprofit thinktank. During Lebanon's 15-year civil war, many left Lebanon, settling around the globe. "In Venezuela, a lot of them were connected to the business and merchant community," Clarke says. "They were making money and sending it home to Lebanon." Over the last 100 years, scores of Lebanese have gone to join their extended families in different Latin American countries, including Venezuela. And, in parallel, migration flows have come from Latin America to Lebanon as well.

The Venezuelan Embassy in Lebanon says they have around 11,000 Venezuelans currently registered, but the actual number is likely to be much higher. Factor in those with Venezuelan ancestry who have lived in Latin America but do not have the Venezuelan passport—like Riad Abou Itief, the owner of the popular Hamra restaurant Ferdinand's—and the number climbs even higher.

Itief and Amir Richani—a political analyst at ClipperData, a crude oil movement data and analysis firm,

and a Venezuelan of Lebanese ancestry now living in Lebanon—share similar family histories. Richani's mother's great-great-grandfather was Latin American, but came to Lebanon three generations go, and later generations made the trip back to Venezuela. "I think they chose [Venezuela] because there was a large population of Lebanese there already," he says.

He says his mother's family, who moved to Venezuela during the Lebanese Civil War, were merchants, working in the calle, or street, selling furniture. "A lot of Lebanese there were merchants" he says, echoing Clarke. Highlighting the shared migration between the countries, Richani's grandparents in Valencia, Venezuela, moved to Lebanon in the mid-2000s. As the situation deteriorated in Venezuela, more members of his extended family followed. "It was an extended family decision to come," Richani, who arrived in Lebanon in 2010 with his brother and mother, says. His father stayed in Venezuela to look after the family construction businesses.

Itief's family, who works in the automotive industry, had similar concerns about leaving Venezuela. "Some were afraid to come back because of their shops and the situation there," he says. "They didn't want to leave everything they had worked for."

Itief's family, originally from the Bekaa Valley, moved to Maracaibo, Venezuela in the late 1970s, where family members helped his dad open a spare automotive parts shop. His paternal grandfather's family moved to Venezuela in 1974 and worked as merchants, selling clothes on the street. But he spent only six years in

Latin America as a young child before returning to Beirut, eventually taking over Ferdinand's in 2012, and recently opening Meats and Bread in Gemmayze in 2017.

A GROWING TREND?

The trade of human capital and money between the countries has occurred for generations. Richani explains that remittances, money sent from abroad, were typically sent from Venezuela to Lebanon. Now, that trend has reversed. "Venezuela had strict controls over foreign exchange, meaning you could not buy US dollars, so you had a lot of black market business," Richani says. "People would buy dollars on the black market and

■ Remittances, money sent from abroad, were typically sent from Venezuela to Lebanon. Now, that trend has reversed.

then send them to other countries. Now it's the opposite. A lot of Venezuelans have left the country, and the currency is devaluating rapidly."

While the exact economic impact of migration and remittances sent between countries is nearly impossible to estimate, the shift of Lebanon as a sending country to a receiving country potentially has economic impacts, especially if others, like Itief, open businesses in Lebanon. Media reports cite the number of Lebanese citizens and descendants in Venezuela at 800,000 (the Lebanese Embassy in Caracas did not respond to a request to confirm this number). With Venezuela's future still uncertain, it is likely that more will follow suit and join their extended families in Lebanon. ■

When cost inflation meets desperation

Health insurance in times of chronic diseases

For all the good that numbers can do for explaining economic and social trajectories, statistics provide limited utility. This is exacerbated into rapidly decreasing utility when social and economic issues are of immense complexity and have divergent, contradictory, or confusing data points attached to them. Things get even worse when an issue extends beyond economic or social relevance and enters the realm of the existential. In the juxtaposition of current data trends for chronic diseases and medical risk management efforts with the help of insurance, there is ample room for confusion.

In the tome of medical knowledge, there is much information about chronic diseases, especially cancer. The incident rates for the disease are rising globally in absolute numbers. According to the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), the occurrence of the disease in 2018 was estimated at 18.1 million new cases and 9.6 million deaths. The risk of developing cancer during one's lifetime is one for five in men and one for six in women, the IARC states.

However, there are figures suggesting a still frightening but more nuanced picture. According to new estimates published last month by the European Society for Medical Oncology, 1.4 million EU citizens will succumb to cancer in 2019. However, while this total represents an increase of 4.8 percent when compared with 2014, factoring in population increase and ageing over the same five-year period reveals that age-standardized death rates for cancer have overall



been diminishing—by 6 percent for men and 4 percent for women.

When compared with the development trajectory of the disease from 31 years ago, the EU death toll of cancers between 1989 and 2019 would have been 5.3 million higher than it actually was. Theoretically, under unabated cancer trends from 1989, the burden of cancer deaths in 2019 could have been expected to reach well over 1.75 million people, 359,000 more than are now predicted for the year. So it appears that a combination of better understanding and avoidance of carcinogenic substances from dangerous particles to chemicals, improved advanced screening of populations for cancer risk, lifestyle adjustments, and advances in cancer treatment over the last 30 years have had a strongly positive impact on the progression of combating one of humanity's historic scourges.

Lebanon, as Dr. Marwan Ghosn, professor and chairman of the hematology oncology department at the Saint Joseph University's Faculty of Medicine, tells EXECUTIVE, shows a total count of between 12,000 and 13,000 new incidents of cancer for the latest research year, 2016, by the count of the National Cancer Registry (NCR) at the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), which Ghosn describes as one of the best in the Arab countries. According to him, the NCR data translates into an annual new cancer incident rate that is about half of what is being observed in the developed countries in Oceania and Europe that have the highest such rates.

As Ghosn explains further, the high medical cost inflation rates that are plaguing healthcare systems and public or private health insurance providers worldwide reflect a shift whereby highly-touted cancer treat-

ment breakthroughs that allowed moving from bone marrow transplants to the administration of drugs in targeted therapies, which, on balance, were essentially cost-neutral at the time, have been followed by later achievements in the fields of targeted therapy and immunotherapy.

These scientific achievements have resulted in the ability of treating up to 40 percent of all cancers today with either targeted therapy or immunotherapy (predominantly the latter) but also contributed massively to medical cost inflation as the drugs used for them are several times more expensive and need to be administered for longer periods when compared to older treatment methods.

Moreover, Lebanon has a health system with practically full capacity for treating cancers. “For 98 percent of the patients and 98 percent of the medical situations, I can propose and perform an ideal treatment—in multidisciplinary fashion [meaning] perhaps not in one hospital and together with other physicians, because I will not do it alone. Using this multidisciplinary approach, 98 percent of the patients can be treated within the Lebanese system at a level that is up to international standards and comparable to best places in Europe or in the United States,” Ghosn says.

Concomitant with Ghosn’s observations of Lebanon’s moderate cancer rates and good treatment capacities are numbers compiled on the website of the World Cancer Research Fund, a non-profit that places Lebanon in 48th position out of 50 countries listed, with an overall incidence rate of 242.8 people per 100,000 population. For delving yet another notch deeper into the issue, observations for the years 2005, 2010, and 2015 are available in the MoPH NCR statistics.

The data displayed in the NCR graphs support the perception that cancers—in Lebanon as everywhere else—in their overwhelming majority are afflicting age groups from their 50s and onward, and men more than

women. The numbers further suggest that the overall trend for new cancer cases in Lebanon is pointing upward but a) needs much detailed study and qualification of the data and b) that this data is morally, as well as practically, unsuitable as a vehicle for cheap populism or panic mongering.

But life is not the sum of average trends, average people, and average experiences. Thus the numerical story on the page of cancer incidence rates in Lebanon cannot hide the existential fact that no data point, however scary or apparently benign, can weigh up to the sensation of sitting—far too recently—in a condolence hall of a church in central Beirut and witnessing the traces of shock, grief, struggle, resolve, and coping on the faces of a family that just lost their daughter to cancer at an age when she should have been embarking on her career. The existential questions that relate to chronic diseases and especially cancers to this day can not be encapsulated or even begun to be addressed by discussions of trends or statistics in the fight against the disease.

THE MEDICAL PAGES OF INSURANCE

While medical insurance cannot protect against anyone’s risk of being afflicted by cancer, health insurance plays an important role in determining the country’s ability to cope with two aspects of medical development: first, to manage the increased cost burdens of diseases, and second, to incentivize and promote social shifts that can reduce risks of being afflicted by chronic diseases.

Like in the case of the numbers on cancer, the trends of development of medical insurance in Lebanon are very ambiguous. Although the national performance of the Lebanese healthcare system is amazingly—and

to some surprisingly—strong (see EXECUTIVE health report 2018), and although health insurance in particular last year outperformed other insurance lines in terms of growth momentum on the back of future-minded regulatory impulses (for more on the guaranteed renewability (GR) measures by the Insurance Control Commission (ICC) at the Ministry of Economy and Trade, see EXECUTIVE insurance coverage August 2018), the picture of commercial health insurance in Lebanon in spring 2019 is far from exuberance or glory.

For Elie Nasnas, general manager of AXA Middle East Insurance, the main problem in the medical line is

■ “98 percent of the patients can be treated within the Lebanese system at a level that is up to international standards.”

not, as one might expect, the notorious price competition in the overcrowded Lebanese insurance sector. “We have a major issue, and it is not the competition among our peers. This issue is the competition between the cost of health and the purchasing power of the Lebanese people. This [competition] is completely imbalanced,” Nasnas tells EXECUTIVE.

AXA is one of six insurance companies in Lebanon that together own about 60 percent of the market share pie in a sector that has 40 commercial insurers reporting medical business in their portfolios. According to data published for the fourth quarter of 2018 by the ICC, health insurance gross written premiums for the year-to-date 2018 at end of the fourth quarter reached LL770.3 billion (\$508.8 million) and followed hot on the heels of the premiums for the life insurance sector with LL782.6 billion (\$516.9 million). Life, medical, and, with some distance, motor insurance constitute around 83 percent of the

insurance industry's LL2.53 trillion in gross written premiums for 2018.

As the latest numbers published by the ICC indicate, the bottom 20 of the 40 insurance companies with medical portfolio content together account for not even LL50 billion (\$33.2 million) in cumulative premiums—a combined market share in the 6 percent range of the health total. Some of the currently smaller players, such as Lebanon newcomer Cigna, an US health insurance specialist that in 2017 had taken over the license of Zurich Insurance Middle East, and local player Securite Assurance, which boosted its medical port-

(\$30.8 million) a year later, according to the ICC quarterly publications.

However, the picture at the top of the market where companies such as MedGulf, Bankers, Allianz-SNA, Fidelity, GroupMed Insurance, and AXA Middle East are writing health business in the range of \$50 million and up (per company), is not unambiguous either. In this segment one finds several groups that have, by Lebanese standards, very large accounts from leading corporate conglomerates and professional orders or syndicates (such as the orders of engineers, lawyers, or physicians). Compe-

ditions are reviewed annually, and sometimes one has to increase rates, change products, or take other steps to keep up with developments and follow up with new procedures and technologies applied in the coverage. When you as an insurer are today granting guaranteed renewability, this has an impact that must always be calculated. GR is putting a lot of pressure on insurers, and we don't think that the distribution of the GR burden is totally fair. The new GR requirement should not only target insurance companies, but also hospitals as they are charging commercial prices to insurers," she tells EXECUTIVE.

Her colleague Joyce Salameh, marketing and quality director at Libano-Suisse Insurance, explains that a new value-added service program introduced one year ago under the title Health Plus was mainly purposed to defend the insurer's market position. "Because people lately have become very price sensitive, by introducing Health Plus we have created a marketing instrument to differentiate ourselves in the market. I cannot say that sales skyrocketed because of the [new value-added service]. This was okay as the purpose of Health Plus was to widen our service offerings. The feedback on the new services, and the way we handled cases, was very good. People were happy and impressed with what we did," she says.

According to AXA's Nasnas, the overall premiums growth seen by health insurance companies in 2018 could not make up for explosions in medical cost. "Many people [in the insurance industry] are afraid [to write] health insurance, and last year the results were awful. 2018 was an exceptional loss-making year, as the costs of new medicines exploded and we had twice the cases of cancer than in the year prior," he says. Emphasizing his perception that the doubling of cancer incidents related to both case number and costs, he declares that he and fellow insurance leaders were asking them-



folio from LL750 million to just over LL2.2 billion year-on-year in Q4 2018 alone, however, are strongly performing in terms of growth and ambitions.

Around another 15 companies comprise the middle field in the market with numbers that testify to anything from their mainly insuring affiliated financial groups with sizeable headcounts for health, to standalone operators in more or less profitable market niches, such as Libano-Suisse Insurance whose numbers for 2017/18 show slight improvement from LL44.4 billion (\$29.4 million) by end Q4 2017 to LL46.4 billion

tation for such large accounts has long been quite intense in Lebanon and having \$50 million and above in their medical portfolios for an insurer does not necessarily translate to being at the top in profitability. (All numbers cited above are for gross premiums).

Paula Abdelmassih, medical director at Libano-Suisse Insurance, attributes the uneven evolution of insurance markets in part to burdens that the newly introduced guaranteed renewability regulation imposed on commercial insurers but not on other stakeholders in the healthcare system. "Our coverage terms and con-

Individuals and responsible business organizations seeking to buy adequate medical coverage still face a multitude of different options that can be difficult to compare. However, the imperfections of the Lebanese insurance environment are today being balanced by various factors, including: an increasing level of regulatory oversight over underwriting standards and practices for medical insurance providers, growing client rights to extend insurance protection through guaranteed renewability and associated contract options, and the widening availability of policy options that are tailored to needs of all sorts of enterprises, while being adapted to 21st century healthcare needs and priorities of employees. Thus, business organizations that have an understanding of their social responsibilities toward their employees—and a proper economic grasp of the advantages of operating in a socially responsible manner—can adhere to simple rules that will help them assure that they have the optimal health insurance coverage, i.e., coverage that appeals to its benefactors in terms of service quality and coverage blanket, rather than competitive pricing being the sole appeal. Once an individual or business organization has made the decision to purchase medical insurance, diligence in the acquisition process is a no-brainer, just as when entering any other purchasing contract. Surprisingly, however, such informed diligence seems not to be habitual for those looking at medical insurance contracts. “People have to invest time to understand what coverage they will have, what the limitations are, and what exclusions might apply,” says Paula Abdelmassih, medical director of Libano-Suisse Insurance and head of the medical committee at the Association des Compagnies d’Assurances au Liban (ACAL). She laments, “The problem is that today, no one reads. People just pay the premium but don’t read their policies, and thus do not know what they have.” Based on the insurance industry representatives interviewed for this story, the line of advice is straightforward. People should:

■ **Take reasonable precautions to ascertain that their insurance provider can fulfill its obligations:**

This includes making sure that the insurer is regulated by the Insurance Control Commission (ICC) of Lebanon, and thus by implication meets requirements on capital and technical reserves.

■ **Ensure that underwriting is done so that the insurance contract meets client needs, is legally sound, and is fully understood:** This includes checking that the contract contains no unwanted limitations or coverage ceilings that are predictably insufficient to pay for an eventual procedure, and ensuring that the policy is in line with requirements for guaranteed renewability.

■ **Make sure that the insurer is reputable, is known for its good quality of services, and has the right partners or sufficient own capacities in the administration of medical services:** This includes an insurer’s dedication to settling hospital bills on time and for treating its insured clients with fairness and reasonable generosity/flexibility.

■ **Verify practical details before the start of the contract and recurrently throughout the period of coverage, this includes:** (1) Understanding coverage reach in terms of geography, and paying special attention to coverage terms for elective procedures outside of the core coverage area (e.g. conditions and eventual limits for payment of a procedure done in a country with high cost of medical procedures when compared with Lebanon); (2) Being aware of the medical network to which they have unlimited access under their policy, and being aware of which providers (such as university hospitals in Lebanon) they have limited access to under their insurance plan; (3) Making sure that they are aware of financial requirements in case of contracts with a co-payment stipulation as well as financial processes such as provision of direct billing and applicable reimbursement procedures; (4) Keeping themselves updated as far as being aware of additional coverage options that may or may not be provided under their medical insurance plan, such as maternity, dental, vision, wellness or other.

Insurers who EXECUTIVE talked with emphasized that insurance buyers should make sure that they buy an individual policy or group plan that is not only competitive in terms of rates, but also of benefits, and that the insurance they partner with is a strong, large, and reputable provider. They should further examine to the best degree possible that the intermediaries they use for obtaining insurance advice, such as brokers, are independent, knowledgeable, and committed to the best interests of insurance buyers—and that any third-party administrator involved in the insurance arrangement is professional, accessible, and fair. Actors with questionable status, such as mutual associations that are in Lebanon not regulated by the ICC, and any market participants proven to have unethical practices should be avoided, the insurers concur. From the side of medical professional, the experience of Dr. Marwan Ghosn, professor and chairman of the hematology oncology department at the Saint Joseph University’s Faculty of Medicine, suggests that people may want to enter into a group health policy as part of an organization instead of buying an individual contract because being part of the group plan tends to avert or alleviate some of the conflicts between insured and insurer that can emerge over the lifetime of a policy. Beyond this, Ghosn also emphasizes that insurance buyers carefully need to examine the terms, conditions, limits, and exclusions of their policies.

According to Ghosn, it is further important for insured persons to ascertain contractually that they have the right to renew their insurance contract on the spot and do not have to wait until next year’s regular renewal date, in the scenario that their coverage ceiling is reached within a given year. As do insurers, the cancer expert emphasizes that it all begins with fundamental diligence. “People really need to look into all the conditions of the proposed insurance contract,” he tells EXECUTIVE.

selves in shock what was happening last year.

In Salameh's words, the danger faced by insurance companies is to price themselves out of the small and price-inelastic Lebanese market. "We have to re-study pricing every year and have to pay claims, but if we re-study, we face the danger of pricing ourselves out of the market because of medical cost inflation, and because some people are treated at the expense of the paying insured," she laments.

ENTER THE DISRUPTORS

Impulses to bring new vibrancy to the Lebanese health insurance market in these days come from players such as internationally renowned Cigna, which aims to increase its Lebanon portfolio by about 30 percent in the near term on the strength of its well-tailored product range, and local provider Securite, which banks on a combination of strong ethics, innovativeness—including tech—and service orientation.

As Raed Labaki, recently appointed as general manager of Cigna in Lebanon tells *EXECUTIVE*, the company wants to initially attract corporate clients but also companies in the family enterprise and small to medium business communities. "Today we as Cigna Insurance Middle East are distributing our medical insurance products, which are tailor-made not only to international organizations and NGOs [with presence in Lebanon], but also to local groups and local companies. These can be corporate clients who qualify for our first product—and what we call corporate [are organizations with] 100 lives and above, 'lives' meaning employees and their dependents. This is our first product. Our second product is for [small and medium enterprises] and what we regard as SMEs



in Lebanon are organizations where we insure between 25 and 100 lives," he says.

For Anthony Khawam, deputy CEO of Securite Assurance, the formula for winning in medical begins with the pillars of innovation and service. Citing a host of catchy innovations that range from providing clients half a dollar of their monthly premium for every exercise mile that they run and capture on their Nike-plus app, to having created a term insurance policy—as a rider on medical or standalone—for paying a cash claim in case of terminal illness. As part of its medical cover, the insurer

of the new guaranteed renewability regime in the Lebanese insurance field. "We decided to extensively limit our business in this mutual fund and shift business from this fund to the insurance, because we think that with the new GR regulation, it is not ethical to keep the client in a mutual fund where he cannot benefit from the new GR. We thus ethically and strategically decided to move them to our insurance," Khawam explains.

The decision means that clients of the group's existing mutual fund are asked to transition to a formally regulated health insurance cover when their existing one-year contracts expire, which implies that a portion of the growth achieved by the Securite's health portfolio in last year's fourth quarter was, in accounting terms, an extraordinary item.

Regardless of this and also regardless of the fact that the insurance market in Lebanon is both saturated with providers and difficult because of fragmentations and special interests, Khawam declares his confidence in Securite's ability to continue growing strongly. "I am optimistic and not scared of competition at all, because I see everyone [in the market] as having their own play and way of doing things. We have differentiated ourselves in a way that is focused on service and innovation. I expect good growth in Se-

■ The danger faced by insurance companies is to price themselves out of the small and price-inelastic Lebanese market.

even promises two-year long waiving of premiums for a client family in case of the breadwinner's death.

Besides building its service and innovation culture into a modern insurance enterprise, Securite also decided to transit out of services—commonly known as mutual insurance funds in Lebanon—that are not future-proof under the perspectives

"Innovate or Perish"

Darwazah Center's motto for the 7th Year Running

Hearing "Darwazah" would you think that it is an "entrepreneurship center" named after a Palestinian-Jordanian AUB alumnus behind the giant Hikma pharmaceuticals?



"We are building elements of the Lebanese entrepreneurship environment which functions as a landscape of standalone activities. DC's work is helping to transform this into a thriving ecosystem with better coordination, and awareness among ecosystem players focusing on growing innovation-driven enterprises."

Bijan Azad, Director of the Darwazah Center at OSB, American University of Beirut.



Moodfit founders.
Ghassan Abi Fadel, Tarek Jaroudi & Mohamad Sabounieh
(from left to right).

In 2011, the Darwazah family established the Darwazah Center for Innovation Management and Entrepreneurship at Olayan School of Business, American University of Beirut, in honor of Samih Darwazah, an entrepreneur, who saw the potential in production of medical drugs as a business, Hikma, a 2 billion dollar revenue giant. Hikma is the first MENA-based pharmaceutical company that manufactures in Europe and the USA while being listed on the London stock exchange since 2005. Now it is also part of prestigious FTSE 100.

Our mission at the Darwazah Center (DC) is building on Samih's legacy, by supporting entrepreneurs and innovators in establishing their startups or growing their scale ups using the evidence-based method. We have done this since 2012 through six pillars that aim to transform entrepreneurship and innovation thinking in the MENA. We are attempting a mindset change among students to take the entrepreneurial path seriously through the yearly startup competition, the Darwazah Startup Accelerate #DSAaccelerate awarding \$20,000 in prizes.

We also offer the Startup Acceleration Practicum, an accelerator-like rigorous semester course, in which the #DSAaccelerate competition winners and other qualified students learn how to accelerate their startup and take it to the next level. We plan on offering this as an open enrollment course, giving access to rigorous acceleration for the ecosystem.

Darwazah alumni include Moodfit our brightest star, Hum' N Go and Nutshell. Moodfit, the online interior design platform in Beirut and Dubai, has raised \$420,000. Hum' N Go, hummus on the go healthy snack, is distributed across Lebanon. Nutshell, is for healthy peanut butter connoisseurs by a Lebanese foodie/technologist. Twenty-one startup ideas have been accelerated and three have launched and the 3 are now active and gaining traction, that is a 100% hit rate!

Disseminating and sharing knowledge is core to our mission, so we go beyond AUB to collaborate with A-players like Flat6labs, Speed@BDD, Berytech etc. Taqa and GoBaladi, are food startups mentored by the DC. Women-founded startups are a strategic focus of DC work, we partner with women-focused organizations like League of Lebanese Women in Business and initiatives like Women in Data Science.

Scaling up high impact SMEs because of their positive influence on the economy is critical part of DC mission where we give them the right management tools to grow their company, which is why we developed Growth Readiness Program (GRP). GRP, was successfully launched in Jordan with USAID funds in 2015. Companies that went through the first cycle managed to scale up their business and half of them raised \$16.5 million USD in equity investment.

DC has partnered with MIT REAP Lebanon, an initiative run out of the Office of Prime Minister, to craft interventions for accelerating technology-driven transformation of agriculture-tech and fintech in Lebanon.

Being a university-based entrepreneurship center, we conduct research and case studies, in order to produce and disseminate knowledge of entrepreneurship and innovation by MENA and for MENA.

curite's medical business," he says.

Cigna's Labaki likewise professes his optimism. "Cigna looks at Lebanon as a strategic market for the Middle East because there is a large potential for growth in the Lebanese market. Even if this growth has been lower in recent years when compared with the years before, I note that health insurance in Lebanon has been growing ahead of other lines and is still higher than market-average growth," he says.

As to the incentives that Cigna offers specifically to attract Lebanese enterprise clients, the company is offering SMEs perks that are usually reserved to much bigger organizations. "One of our strong selling points is that for SME in particular, we do write business on medical history-disregarded basis. [This means that] we are not asking them medical questions or [require] medical exams when we enroll them. This is a market practice that insurers usually offer only to large groups, but at Cigna we are also offering this to SMEs. This is something that is regarded as very positive by the market and by our distribution partners in Lebanon," Labaki says.

QUESTIONING ECONOMIC MOTIVES

Although the scene of medical products offered by Lebanese insurers to their corporate and individual clients (Cigna wants to expand from group to individual offers in the country by end of this year) appear to be improving on wide fronts, overt and hidden questions loom in the multi-angular relations between insured, insurers, health services managers, and medical providers. Beyond the challenges to insurers' profitability or disparate views of what might be reasonable profit margins for stakeholders in the medical insurance and healthcare system, such questions concern the perceived mentality of Lebanese clients.

Some of the insured seem to approach their health system with senti-

ments that can range from thinking that the better care is always on the other side of the fence—meaning that they believe care will be superior abroad, in developed regions such as Western Europe or the United States—to assumptions that the most important issue is impressing visiting relatives and friends with the calibre of their hospital rooms. Such predilections can influence decisions that wrongly limit medical plan selections, from not buying a local plan to focusing on the wrong priorities in checking a plan's medical benefits.

On the side of providers, universal tendencies to emphasize market justice and contractual agreements exist in the insurance industry as in any other economic entity that embraces its profit orientation. When these priorities clash with social expectations—which can happen easily in socially relevant areas such as healthcare—conflict potentials increase. "In terms of medical treatments, everything is available in Lebanon. However, sometimes it is a doctor who brings a medicine into the country, not the MoPH. In such cases, we as insurance have a problem because we do not deal with doctors.

[Any medicine] must be approved and received by MoPH. I want to add that we often support medications if physicians start using them on basis of FDA approval even before such a medication receives the approval by the MoPH. But if a medication is not FDA approved, it is considered as experimental, and we as insurer are not covering it. Libano-Suisse cannot cover experimental. Under other circumstances, however, meaning when dealing with [FDA and MoPH] approved procedures and drugs, we are obliged to cover our clients' treatments. We need proof that a drug is working," clarifies Libano-Suisse's Abdelmassih.

From the medical side of the patient bed, this issue can look a bit different. As oncology specialist

Ghosn tells EXECUTIVE, "What does experimental mean in the treatment of cancer? As a physician, you have data on every drug that has already been produced and used on humans, even if this drug is not yet FDA approved. This is not an experimental treatment. This is a treatment that has already been discovered, and we [as medical professionals] know that it works because we have data. The [approval] process, which sometimes is merely an administrative process, has [perhaps] not been completed but such drugs are not seen as experimental. One can claim [in such cases] that the drug is experimental, but, in truth, experimental is when you [as doctor] think that you have discovered a drug and are using it on somebody, or if you want to treat a patient with a drug that has never been used on a patient and where no supportive data exist. I agree,

■ "Sometimes insurers in Lebanon will argue with you and say that a drug is experimental when it is off-label."

however, that sometimes insurers in Lebanon will argue with you and say that a drug is experimental when it is off-label, which is something completely different."

Inversely to the potentially conflicted perception issues of what procedure is proven, insurance providers tend to perceive the presence of economic motives with lacking or even fully absent ethics—instead of pure medical considerations—as drivers for costly decisions by medical stakeholders they deal with. For Ghosn, this is not an admissible argument, certainly not applicable in the Lebanese healthcare system where shortages in availability of hospital beds are far more common than oversupply of empty beds. "We need to think—and

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H.E. MR. SAAD HARIRI



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WORKING TOGETHER FOR PROSPERITY

I don't want to think in another way—that physicians are ethical and that in hospitals, there is no need to admit a patient if the patient does not need to be admitted,” he emphasizes.

PRIORITY ONE: PRACTICABLE SOLUTIONS

In an age where life is enormously intertwined with the capitalist dogma that growth is the measure of all things and productivity the ultimate gauge of economic success, the occurrence of conflict potentials and need for their continual resolution in the administration of health services appears ubiquitous. The existence of economic motives among stakeholders in health certainly can neither be denied nor is likely to disappear in human social systems (short of a fundamental revolution against any and all social norms validated in history). If anyone seeks evidence today on how strong the economic motive has become in the healthcare industry, one just needs to throw a glance at the valuation of relevant companies in financial markets and take notice how, for a very recent example, the share price of a biotech stock in the US dropped by 29 percent in a single trading session last month when the company, Biogen, announced that clinical testing of a new Alzheimer's

drug was stopped because of the medicine's apparent ineffectiveness.

Lebanese stakeholders in future medical systems are exposed to global pressures and uncertainties in such healthcare systems only remotely and indirectly but there is much reason to emphasize that societies are today in desperate need for new economic, regulatory, social, and ethical answers for addressing tomorrow's healthcare needs in all their increasing complexities.

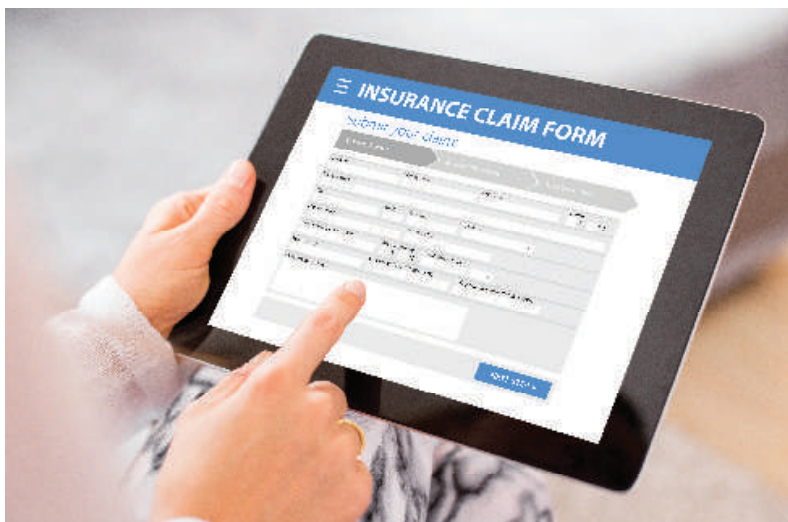
Instead of theorizing, this means coming up with practical approaches and testing them. As Elie Nasnas of AXA puts it, the danger of fundamentally unequal healthcare provision for rich and poor must be addressed in Lebanon today. “I think it is high time for all players in the health sector, i.e. hospitals, providers of paramedical, doctors, and insurance companies to either work as partners or see the private healthcare collapse. People cannot sustain such costs,” he says, continuing with passion, “I would really call for all players in the sector around health to be conscious that if there is no partnership, there won't be any future, we are running into

a deep crisis. We all should be very much aware of this.”

From the medical side, Ghosn says, “I think that the prices of new drugs such as cancer drugs brought to market from recent research will drop in future, and these prices have already been dropping. I can cite here the experience of the world's international cancer centers, such as exist in France or the United States. I also want to point out that in these centers, there are funds or foundations that have been created only to support patients that need those expensive medications. Thus, when patients come who

■ The danger of fundamentally unequal healthcare provision for rich and poor must be addressed.

need this or that expensive drug and who are in this or that situation—depending on their situations—it is not anymore the government that pays in France or the insurance that pays in the US, but the funds that have been created in each cancer center who support these very expensive drugs.” Citing examples for dedicated cancer funds from the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York and Institut Gustave Roussy Cancer Center in Villejuif, France where he trained, Ghosn suggests, “Perhaps [following this model] might be the way in Lebanon where insurance companies might all together raise a fund to support their patients. I propose that it would be a good idea to create very nice, transparent funds between NGOs, the government, and insurance companies, with scientific boards who can select patients on scientific basis and set the conditions under which patients can take advantage of these funds. This might help both the companies and the patients, because they will achieve cuts of bills.” ■



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By Sarah Shaar

There's money on the dancefloor

Lebanon's electronic music entertainment business

Electronic music is a worldwide trend—and for those who keep up with it, it must seem as though Beirut is hosting a headliner or an emerging artist who is topping the charts in Europe or the US every other week. Even those who do not follow the scene will have found it hard not to notice the increase in clubs in Lebanon with dedicated electronic music nights.

A BRIEF HISTORY

The electronic music scene has existed in Lebanon since at least 1998, when B018 moved to its now famous Karantina venue. It was followed by its competitor Basement in 2005—though the latter shut down in 2011, an homage to it exists in the form of The Basement

Reunion room in The Grand Factory. Both B018 and Basement were born in the bottle service era, with venues looking more like restaurants that moonlit as clubs. In 2012, Ali Saleh and his partners decided to take the scene to the next level, just six months after opening their winter concept, Uberhaus, they went from the 300 person venue in the basement of the WH Hotel in Hamra to what is now their summer venue The Gärten by Uberhaus, at Seaside in Downtown, with capacity of 4000.

The new summer venue, Gärten, was one of the first in the country to make its focus the DJ and dance floor. Where previously clubs had tables, Gärten made room for people to dance and move around freely (at least until

a headliner or Class A DJ is playing, then you are mostly confined to rocking back and forth in a packed crowd before forcing your way to the back to get some air).

The success of Gärten, and subsequent electronic music clubs in Lebanon, are an indication that Beirut has carved a place similar to that of the underground scenes found in Berlin or Paris. Most club owners EXECUTIVE spoke to admitted that they had not expected to be received so well so quickly. Though the appetite for electronic music among the Lebanese should not have come as a shock, other than clubs like B018, there were groups such as Kaotik, Silver Factory, Acousmatik, Minimal Effort, and We Run Beirut



The Ballroom Blitz—The Ballroom

throwing events all over the country. These bands and early adopter clubs laid the groundwork that exposed more people to alternative electronic sounds, not those usually heard on the radio during the morning commute.

With the creation of Gärten, a space that resembled a festival venue, Beirut embarked on a journey that led to an increase in both international and local DJs on the scene. In 2013, The Grand Factory, one of Beirut's biggest club venues came into being. Owned by Jad Soueid (Jade), Grand Factory later branched out to Soul Kitchen—a smaller room resembling a pub that plays vinyls, and serves pizza and cocktails that is exclusive and by email invite only—and The Basement Reunion room—which also operates by email-invite only, and is a tribute to Jade's previous club, Basement, that was known for having one of the best sound systems in Beirut. The Reunion room hosts Grand Factory's annual Beirut Berlin Express (BBX) competition for local DJs and producers, the prize of which is a month-long residency in Berlin—this

year's finale will take place on April 15. The residency has changed yearly, and in 2019 will take place at DJ Sasse's Blackhead Studios, where the winner will produce and master an album, as well as network and learn, improving both their skills and their exposure.

RISE OF THE LOCAL DJs

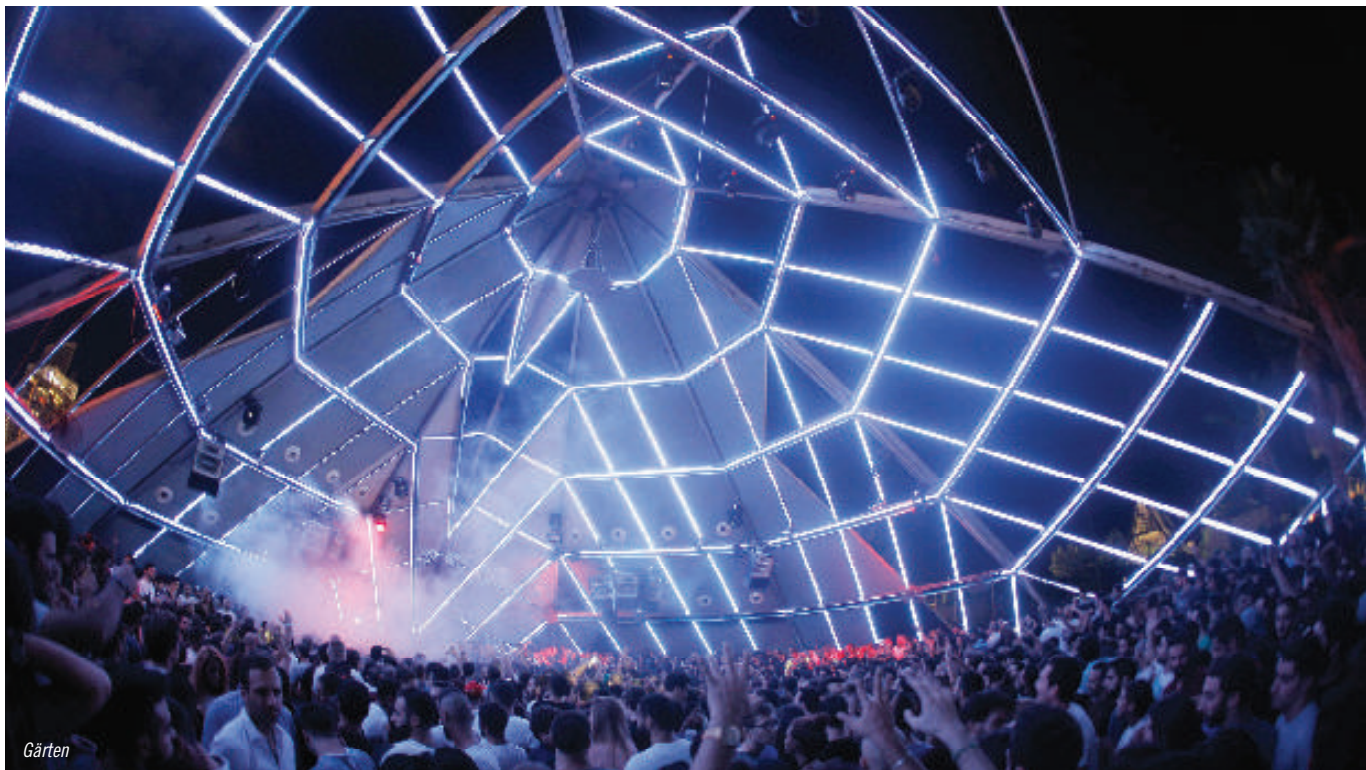
All the DJs and clubs that EXECUTIVE spoke with say that technological advances in mixing and producing software is what made DJing more accessible to music lovers, sparking the worldwide interest in electronic music. Lebanon caught on to this trend with the opening of Uberhaus/Gärten. Saleh notes that when they first came onto the scene, the DJs at B018 were limited to then-Mix FM's Underground Sessions music show hosts DJs Gunther and Stamina, and, starting 2004, DJ Ziad Ghosn, allowing little room for other local DJs to play.

He says that when they opened Gärten they showcased at least 10 local DJs, the likes of Ronin & Nesta (who also previously hosted a Mix FM radio show "Beirut In the Mix"), Romax, and Tia (both of whom are now resident DJs with Uberhaus/Gärten). This opened up opportunities for local DJs who had previously been playing house parties, one off events or gatherings to create wider fanbases among the Lebanese and also internationally.

Saleh also argues that what helped local DJs gain popularity was the bottle-

■ Technological advances in mixing and producing software is what made DJing more accessible to music lovers.

service style of clubbing giving way to what was available, i.e. the electronic music scene. Gärten cut its \$30 entrance ticket after operating for a few



Nightlife

years and realizing that they did not need to keep the entrance so high in order to turn a profit—the lower priced entrance meant a greater volume of guests. Now the going rate is \$15 for entrance on regular nights and up to \$25 dollars on nights with headliners.

Clubs like Uberhaus/Gärten, The Grand Factory, and The Ballroom Blitz (which opened October last year) also help expose local artists to international talent, through various initiatives aimed at helping grow the local talent pool. Uberhaus used to run an exchange program with clubs in Europe and the US that gave local artists the opportunity to be seen by international booking agents, though this is currently on hold. Meanwhile, Grand Factory's BBX program can lead to opportunities like that of local DJ Jad Taleb (see profiles article page 54), who turned the networking experience into a Euro-tour and being a feature act in Tunis courtesy of a club manager he met in Berlin.

The Ballroom Blitz, which consists of three rooms each playing different sets, uses The Gold Room as a way for local talent to showcase their skills to their followers, as well as be heard by those coming to hear the international act playing in the room next door. For Joe Mourani, the owner of Ballroom, The Gold Room is “the heart of the project.”

The Ballroom Blitz also hosts a “take-over” night one Saturday each month, where local groups that already have strong followings, such as TeknoAnd and Lebanese indie label Ruptured (co-founded by music promoter and radio producer Ziad Nawfal and sound engineer and producer Fadi Tab-bal) can showcase their or their artists' signature sounds to new crowds. Ruptured has been producing and promoting Beirut's experimental electronic sounds on Radio Liban since 2008.

■ For Joe Mourani, the owner of Ballroom, The Gold Room is “the heart of the project.”



Venues like Yukunkun in Gemmayze (which last year closed its doors) hosted similar events, with groups such as the Beirut Groove Collective using the space in their earlier years. Yukunkun was also where local artists like Taleb and Ziad Moukarzel (see page 54) launched their DJing personas.

The Ballroom Blitz also has plans to host workshops featuring international and local talent, with the aim of educating those interested in sound production in the hopes that fans of electronic music scene will come and appreciate both the skill and creativity it takes to produce the sounds they love.

The music venue's winter season is coming to an end, however, and a sister venue with the same concept will replace it on the rooftop of the same

tells EXECUTIVE, “We’ve hosted Ableton on software & hardware, Berlin producers CYRK who gave an intensive three day production workshop, and Gigmit to help our local artists look to get promoted in Europe, and have access to newer audiences.”

Beirut Electro Parade, meanwhile, is an electronic music label and international rendez-vous organized two days a year by artists from the underground scene in Lebanon, with an aim to promote the modern electronic music of Beirut and the region. The Paris-based label, founded by Hadi Zeidan, also aims to promote Lebanese talent to international audiences. Taleb performed in the past four editions, and this year more rising local electronic talent—like Kid Fourteen, a noise-pop duo made up of Khodor Ellaik and Karim Shamseddine, DJ Tala, who is also a resident DJ, partner, and creative director at The Grand Factory, and Jad Atoui, electronic musician who worked with American composer John Zorn in New York, and is also stage manager at The Ballroom Blitz—will showcase their work.

RECOGNIZING TALENT

Line-ups for these kinds of clubs are typically handled a year in advance

Harley Davidson building in Karantina for the summer.

The Reunion room of the Grand Factory is also dedicated to widening the skills of local talent, as Lara Kays, project manager at The Grand Factory



by their music directors, who scout out emerging talent at festivals, such as the DGTL festival that started off in Amsterdam and now has various locations, the Time Warp festival in Mannheim, Germany, and the Awakenings festival held throughout the Netherlands. “These key festivals are an index, a world wide index,” Saleh says.

Scouting also goes on in places like Ibiza, Spain, and Berlin, Germany, where the latest trends in the electronic scene and sound exploration take place. Saleh travels at least three times a year to help organize the line-up for both Gärten and Uberhaus first hand, other club owners do the same. And most club owners tell EXECUTIVE that they hear some club-goers travel from Dubai and Cyprus to watch acts perform in Lebanon. Clubs like Uberhaus and The Ballroom Blitz also help promote the tourism market by dedicating a team to take their artists on a tour around Lebanon, usually sightseeing with a nice lunch in a small town by the sea.

The government, however, does not recognize local DJs as artists or even members of the hospitality sector. Lebanon has no syndicate for DJs as in other countries, like Germany and the US. “We tried to start a syndicate in the 90’s, but the government didn’t give us

the approval,” says Dany Samaha, one of the first local DJs to break onto the scene (see age 54).

Since there is no state support for their work, most local DJs tell EXECUTIVE that the important thing to get your name out there is to network. Some argue that the time is ripe to try and formalize the industry, having the government recognise DJs as legitimate artists, creating a syndicate, and ensuring that DJs are fairly compensated for their work—the reality, however, is that there is little unity among local DJs to push for these changes, and little hope that such pressure would be effective on the political level.

Regardless of the lack of formal structures, more and more Lebanese are choosing to DJ on the side or full-time. Going rates for DJing vary depending on venue and experience, but in general the club owners EXECUTIVE spoke with say that local DJs can pull in between \$250-\$800 per set, while international acts pull in no less than \$5,000 with expenses, up to \$10,000 depending on whether the DJ is a Class A, B, or C act.

TEETHING PAINS

The inevitable topic of harassment and drugs at electronic music venues is a challenge the electronic music industry faces. With all clubs fully aware of the correlation between this kind of music and recreational drugs, they ensure that their staff is appropriately trained to handle customers who are using at their venues. Club owners tell EXECUTIVE that they do not condone drug use and try their best to identify when a deal is being made and act accordingly.

Marginalized communities can also often find a safe space at these venues. Beirut’s club scene has become one of the few spaces in the region that offer acceptance to members of the LGBTQ community. But harassment, in all its forms, be it sexual, physical, or verbal, is still an issue. The clubs EXECUTIVE spoke with say that any incident should be reported to the bouncers or security guards at the venue. It is then up to

■ Local DJs can pull in between \$250-\$800 per set, while international acts pull in no less than \$5,000 with expenses, up to \$10,000.

the staff on that night to determine the response, with perpetrators being blacklisted from the club the most extreme measure owners take.

Teething pains aside, Lebanon’s electronic music scene is growing in strength, with more clubs opening and more support being offered to local talent from within the community itself. Beirut it seems, will continue bouncing its way up the list of top places to party, ensuring that of the few industries still thriving in this country, the business of nightlife and entertainment will continue to evolve. ■

By Sarah Shaar

A pool of local talent

Lebanese DJs on the music scene in Lebanon

Beirut's local DJs have been creating a buzz among the country's music-loving community. Some are co-owners or resident DJs at some of the biggest clubs in the country, others, such as those profiled below, circulate the scene playing different sets at Beirut's electronic music clubs. From playing sets and producing music, to sound engineering and sound design, DJing as a profession is much more than just a set list. The DJs *EXECUTIVE* profiled all play an important part in Beirut's diverse music scene, they explain why they chose to focus on music as a career.



■ “Never let the aim or goal be that you get to somewhere and think you’ve made it.”

LILIANE CHLELA

Starting out her career 16 years ago at Citrus in downtown, Liliane Chlela was one of the first female DJs in Lebanon to join the scene. With only three other women in the game, she felt that she was being used as a marketing tool in the industry. Shortly after realizing that on top of the misdirected attention she had to be playing top hits to get booked, she decided to put DJing to the side and focus on production.

Her journey in production started 10 years ago using manually rewired gear to obtain certain sounds; she only switched to digital in the last six years. Chlela still limits her use of software to editing and recording and uses what she has around her as instruments to produce sound.

She has been experimenting with her sound since, forming her sonic identity by always pushing her boundaries and working with artists who follow a different style. For the past two years, Chlela has been collaborating with Hamed Sinno, the lead singer of the Arab-Indie band Mashrou' Leila, on the *Butcher's Bride*, which combines Chlela's signature sound of live electronics and production with Sinno's distinct vocal stylings and lyricism: “We got to work together thanks to Beirut and Beyond, they wanted to throw a fundraiser, and they asked us if we had the time. We just clicked.”

Chlela also caught the attention of Boiler Room, a global online music broadcasting platform that has hosted shows in over 100 cities worldwide. Her session was chosen as part of their underground coverage of the scene in Beirut.

She admits that in previous years, it was easier to make a living out of DJing, remembering a time where she was charging \$500 a set at places like Citrus, sometimes earning \$2000 a weekend. The fact that at the time DJ's were rare to come by definitely contributed to the difference in the going rate. With the advancements in technology that led to the increase of DJ's, the rate has been cut nearly in half for the local talent.

To be able to stand out in this newly saturated market, according to Chlela, it is important to match the sound direction the club follows. She explains that the best attitude to have is to always think that there is more out there: “Try everything you can, even if it sounds bad. Never let the aim or the goal be that you get to somewhere and think that you've made it. Keep trying. It's very important.”



TASH HOCHAR

Tash Hocht owes her skills and passion for music to her father, Walid Hocht, who also DJs. As her world was always musical, she tries to attend most events and support local talent. Adding to her influence is DJ Gunther Sabbagh, known for his radio show Underground Sessions with Gunther and Stamina on Mix FM, as well as his long-time residency at BO18. For Hocht, “There is only one Gunther.”

Working as a copywriter, ghost writer, and digital strategist for eight years, she decided to leave the corporate world and dedicate her time to her career in music. Still accepting freelance writing jobs during the day from clients that she values, she is also the co-founder and music director of Thirteen Management, an event management company currently throwing techno events. She plays four to eight sets a week.

Hocht argues that what helps the industry grow is being present. She is always on the lookout for new local talent, as she sees that the nightlife industry is booming, with a rising interest in electronic music. She says that the networking that goes on at these events, venues with DJs and attendees plays a big part in the growing scene.

She studied music production at Per-vurt in Beirut, and later traveled to South East Asia to expand her knowledge and also work as a DJ. Hocht produces tracks in her home studio, however she has not yet released any, as she is still building her skills and does not want to rush the process.

For her, interacting with people through music is a magical experience. She enjoys seeing the effect music has on the crowd, and often bounces around with the crowd from behind the decks: “I may be a DJ, but my heart’s always on the dance floor with the people.”

Hocht was also featured in Damascus and The Ivory Coast: “I get booked by people who have watched me perform in Beirut. When I’m outside of Lebanon, I always love to explore the music scene of other countries, and I make friends easily.”

To her, the scene is only getting bigger, with large potential for Beirut to break the barriers.

■ “I may be a DJ, but my heart’s always on the dance floor with the people.”



■ Making a living out of DJing is difficult if it is done out of passion; to continuously bring something new is challenging.

WILLIAM MAHFOUD

William Mahfoud started his career in sound in London, where he got a degree in sound engineering. First playing his way through the underground circles, he eventually found himself featured on The Ministry of Sound. Mahfoud later moved to Dubai where he mixed and produced adverts for various agencies there and abroad. During his time there, he also managed to nurture his DJing skills as a resident DJ for the longest running club night in Dubai, Night Vibes, which is run by Rima Rached, and played alongside big international acts including Terry Francis, Dance Spirit, Dinky, Joyce Muniz, and Pillowtalk.

When asked about what helped him form his sonic identity Mahfoud mentions the Kao-tik System and Silver Factory crews, who introduced more alternative electronic sound into the country, as well as DJs Dansz, Cesar K, and Fady Aswad, who played a variety of genres ranging from minimal house to breakcore. “They all shaped my sound today, and I owe them everything,” he says.

Mahfoud, who also goes by the stage name Rise 1969, has also been producing his own music for eight years with two albums and two EPs under his belt. While also working as a sound engineer at Red Booth Studios in Jounieh, he finds time to make his own music—while guzzling coffee at an alarming rate—and DJs at bars such as Abbey Road in Mar Mikhael, and clubs like Reunion, where at the time of interview he had played his semi-final set for the BBX competition, The Ballroom Blitz, and Projekt.

He explains that making a living out of DJing is difficult if it is done out of passion; to continuously bring something new is challenging, more so than mixing top hits that are known to be crowd pleasers. He sees no problem getting booked in Lebanon as opposed to how it is internationally, since the country is small, which makes it easier to gain popularity through word of mouth and social media.

However, Mahfoud believes that the electronic music bubble will burst soon, as he feels that the techno scene has become another passing trend. On the upside, he argues that it has generated some die hard fans and sub-communities that will carry it to the future through small event promoters who have “a musical identity” and a regular following, as opposed to those just following the current trend.

ZIAD MOUKARZEL

Ziad Moukarzel started getting serious about DJing in 2007. During that time he was working at popular alternative-music store, La CD-Tech, alongside Jad Soueid (Jade) from The Grand Factory and Ziad Nawfal, who co-owns the music label Ruptured—which Moukarzel is a member of—and who has been a radio show host on Radio Liban since the early 1990s. First accepting gigs at various bars around Beirut, Moukarzel broke into the club scene in 2013, when he played his debut set in Yukunkun, Gemmayze.

His influences came from movements spreading rave culture, such as Kaotik System, and Acousmatik, as well as long standing friendships with DJ Dansz, and Nawfal. He developed a taste for various genres, which he sometimes sees as a disadvantage as he finds that it can be challenging to be promoted as something that is not strictly house, tech-house, or techno. With a background in cinema, Moukarzel was found moving toward sound, “It was something interesting to give the value of sound because sound is always present.”

In 2016, Moukarzel moved back from Qatar, where he was working as a segment producer at Al-Rayyan TV station, to focus on his career in music and sound. He opened Woodwork Studios with his partner, located in Hadath, Beirut. However, he does admit that: “It’s a lot of work, and it’s expensive. You’re paying the studio rent, and the equipment, which is not cheap. My desk alone is \$35,000, plus there are the acoustics of the room.” He charges his sound design services at a range of \$300-\$500 per day, and is mostly selective with what he takes on. When he’s not working on design or DJing, he works on his own productions that he plays live on a modular synthesizer with Akram Hajj in their indie electronica duo “Escalier 301 b” at venues like The Ballroom Blitz, Reunion, and B018.

Moukarzel won second runner-up in last year’s BBX competition, however, he was unable to join the three-week residency at Riverside Studios in Berlin due to complications with his visa process. He holds music production workshops and DJing lessons at vinyl record store and bar Orient Express, Tota, and Riwaq.

He prefers playing clubs to working in the studio: “Being on stage is different. It is a different feeling, it’s an ‘in the moment’ kind of feeling where you have to be literally in the moment all the time, and it takes a lot of focus to deliver whatever you want to deliver in a specific amount of time.”

■ “Being on stage is different. It is a different feeling, it’s an ‘in the moment’ kind of feeling.”



DANNY SAMAHA

Danny Samaha, who goes by the stage name DJ Dansz, has been DJing for almost 30 years. He began his career back in the 1990's, and was one of the first to play spaces like BO18 and since shuttered Basement. Over the years he has taken sabbaticals from DJing, but he has never completely left the scene. Just last year, in August, he got the chance to play the closing set for his greatest influence in electronic music, German techno DJ Dominik Eulberg. Samaha took this opportunity to present Eulberg with a book on the different species of birds native to Lebanon, as Eulberg used to be a forest ranger and is wildly passionate about birds and known to use sounds from nature in his work. Samaha played his first set in the Ballroom of The Ballroom Blitz on March 23.

Samaha has also been featured internationally in Cyprus, Oman, Dubai, and more recently Paris. Most bookings are done through word of mouth and friends. He is a full-time DJ, playing at bars like L'Osteria in Mar Mikhael, and Cayenne, Gemmayze three times a week, and now making a comeback into the club scene. Over the years Samaha has established his reputation among audiences and his fellow DJs, he is known in the scene as producing exceptional sounds during every set, and doing his best to ensure everyone goes home satisfied.

Him and his wife Zeina have collaborated to form Escape, a semi-private party that is not advertised to the masses and instead relies on word of mouth through smaller groups on social media. So far, they have thrown four of these events, in Aramoun, Khalde, Achkout, and Batroun. Samaha sees them as the perfect getaway for those looking for a relaxing atmosphere with some great melodic beats. The fourth Escape had around 40 guests, and Samaha predicts the numbers gradually growing as more and more people gain interest in this concept of partying. He will be throwing the next one on April 25. He says, "This is exactly why I DJ, it is the ultimate way for me to do it. I am playing my music and doing everything not to impress anyone, but rather to create the best space that will make you feel good."

His advice to anyone who is starting out is to "remember that you play for the people. Don't ever forget that. This is your job, without the people you have nothing to do. You play to make the people happy."

■ "Remember that you play for the people. Don't ever forget that. This is your job, without the people you have nothing to do."





■ “Producing music reflects my introvert personality, and I love it. I like to spend a lot of quality time in my studio.”

JAD TALEB

Jad Taleb was the first winner of The Grand Factory’s BBX competition. He started his career in DJing at Yukunkun, Gemmayze, in 2015 when he was celebrating the launch of his debut album for his former electro-rock band The Flum Project. His local influences were Arab trip-hop band Soap Kills, Lebanese hip-hop band Aks el-Ser, and jazz composer Toufic Farroukh.

He has released several tracks with labels like Exploited Records located in Berlin, Red Bull Music Academy, and Smiley Fingers in London. “Producing music reflects my introvert personality, and I love it. I like to spend a lot of quality time in my studio,” Taleb says. “I [also] like to DJ because it’s the best way to interact with your audience.” Though, he does mention that a challenge he faces in the scene is the inevitable “*Eh eh, yalla yalla*,” coming from the over eager members of the crowd when the beat drops.

Through the BBX program in 2016, he was introduced to promoters in the scene who were interested in his sound. He eventually found himself touring in Berlin, Paris, Stuttgart, Marseille, Bielefeld, Saalburg-Ebersdorf, and Tunis the following year. “It was nice, it was the peak of my Europe experience in 2017,” he says.

When playing at clubs, he looks for the places with an identity—clubs that like to tell a story and serve a greater purpose, as opposed to clubs running only to turn profit. And to him, clubs like The Grand Factory and The Ballroom Blitz offer just that. It is at The Ballroom Blitz that he and art director Maria Kassab will showcase his audio visual platform “Assault on Structure,” which features interactive exhibitions and live performances from local artists yet to make their break, or those who rarely play live. He explains, “Most of the people who worked with us in Assault started projects, launching an album, or wanted to perform a new live set, so we worked on this to promote[them] locally and internationally.”

Taleb believes that Beirut’s electronic-music culture has yet to form its own sound, like Chicago with house music. He theorizes that perhaps this is because Lebanon has seen many a civilization come and go, constantly changing the country’s identity. ■

By Nabila Rahhal

Let's party

The nightclub business in Lebanon



When The Axis of Evil comedy tour performed in early 2008, Lebanon—for the first time in its history—did not have a president, and was in the midst of a politically unstable and tense period that culminated with the Doha Accord later that year. Despite the situation, Maz Jobrani, one of the group's stand-up comedians, humorously observed that the Lebanese were still going out clubbing as if everything was fine.

Jobrani was not the first—nor the last—to comment on the Lebanese's panache for partying like there is no tomorrow regardless of the country's state. While the idea of Beirut as the

party capital of the Middle East can lend itself to cliché, the reality is that the breadth of different kinds of nightclubs found in Lebanon—relative to its size—is impressive. Beirut and its immediate suburbs seem to have it all, whether it is live performances by local oriental musicians or international DJs flown in for the weekend; venues can vary from glamorous rooftop clubs where DJs play a set of commercial hits, to clubs in renovated warehouses playing electronic music into the small hours.

Starting in 2012, however, the Lebanese clubbing scene fell prey to the same pressures as others in the

hospitality sector, feeling the effects of a deteriorating economic situation. The number of tourists and expats visiting the country were decreasing year-on-year, leaving cash-strapped locals unable to make up the difference. Partying, while still part of the Lebanese DNA, was becoming more of a luxury—one that many locals could no longer afford at the levels they had before.

While numbers have begun to pick up over the past two years, most club owners **EXECUTIVE** spoke with are still operating under the premise that tourism is low, and so they must adapt to cater to the realities of the



local market. This past year, however, did see some new venues open, lending hope to the idea of a reinvigorated clubbing scene.

WHERE'S THE PARTY AT?

Before 2012, major nightclubs in Lebanon—such as SKYBAR or White Beirut—would be open and full almost every night of the week. Nowadays, it is still not feasible for clubs to open all week. In order to maximize profits, clubs stay shuttered on nights they know their venues will not be busy enough to justify opening costs. All nightclubs EXECUTIVE spoke to say they open only a

few nights a week, ranging between one and two nights during winter (on weekends) and up to four nights during the summer when locals are more in the mood to party and when at least some expats and tourists visit, increasing the clientele at clubs.

For Michel Fadel, a musician and co-partner of O by Michel Fadel, a live music nightclub in Antelias, opening only on Fridays and Saturdays not only makes economic sense, but also creates a good energy for live music. “It’s like being

in a concert on these nights. Also, [it] makes more economic sense than to be open all week and only get half the number of people or less,” he says. “If I have 2,000 customers per week on average that’s 8,000 customers a month and that is enough for me.”

The impact of the uptick tourism is clearly yet to be felt by Lebanon’s clubs though Naji Gebran, founder of B018, an nightclub in a renovated bunker in Karantina, notes that the situation is getting better. “People used to spend more on clubbing before, especially when we had the tourists from the Gulf who would spend without asking,” he says. “But now things are looking up since the ban on Saudi nationals has been lifted and they can visit Lebanon again. Arabs like to spend and have a good time, and so their return [to Lebanon] will be good.”

For Joe Mourani, owner of The Ballroom Blitz, an electronic music venue on Dora’s seaside road, being a Friday-only venue was more a matter of testing the market for electronic music than any economic consideration (The Ballroom Blitz also opens on holiday nights and for special events). As the venue exclusively plays electronic music (see article page 50), Mourani was unsure at first whether Lebanese could handle “two full electronic music nights in a row.” Since opening in December 2018, he says he has been pleasantly surprised by the interest—he says

■ “People used to spend more on clubbing before, especially when we had tourists from the Gulf who would spend without asking.”

his 1,400 capacity venue is full most Fridays—and he now opens one Saturday a month for “take-over” nights (see article page 50).

Nightclubs



■ “The winter market is different than the summer one in that there are less tourists, less expats, less spending.”

In contrast to The Ballroom Blitz’s singular focus, other venues in Lebanon offer theme nights, switching from oriental hits one evening to disco classics another in order to maximize appeal and thus, profit. Claude Saba, chief operating officer of Addmind Group, a hospitality management company that operates Caprice, Nude, Iris, and Zuruni, as well as other restaurants, bars, and clubs in Lebanon and the UAE, says they focus on the local market in Lebanon—as opposed to Dubai, which has a lot of tourists. Having different themes on the four nights of the week when Caprice—their summer-only venue on Dora’s sea-side roads, open Wednesday to Saturday—is open helps them attract a different crowd each night.

HIBERNATION MODE

In winter, attracting regular club-goers is even harder in Lebanon, as the number of tourists and expats decreases and the locals enter hibernation mode. In response, some nightclubs choose to further restrict the number of nights they operate.

Ali Saleh, co-founder of Uberhaus and The Gärten, says their lat-



est venue for their winter club Uberhaus (which was opened six months prior to Gärten), will be Karantina at end of 2019, but it will have a smaller capacity than Gärten’s 4,000. “The new Uberhaus will have a capacity of 2,500 because the winter market is different than the summer one in that there are less tourists, less expats, less spending—people don’t want to go out as much as they do in the summer,” he says. Saleh and his partners already have a monthly pop-up event in Kfardebian, Mount Lebanon, called Electric Sundown,

and so do not want to cannibalize that by having a large winter venue in Beirut.

MONEY MONEY MONEY

Despite the relative decrease in business, night clubs—if operated properly—are the most lucrative hospitality venues, according to Saba, who is making the comparison with his group’s experiences across restaurants, clubs, and bars. “Clubs make their money through volume and 90 percent of your turnover would be from alcohol, for [bars] it’s 60 percent alco-



O by Michel Fadel



The Ballroom Blitz—The Ballroom

hol, and the rest is from food, while for restaurants it's almost the opposite and 70 percent of your turnover is from food," he says. "If all is working well, restaurants are long-term investments although the profit margin is not that high. The nightclubs industry has the highest percentage of profit because it is based on alcohol, but its lifetime is short, and you have to reinvest annually to keep the look fresh."

Nightclubs in Lebanon earn their profits either through ticketing (taking an entrance fee) or through a set minimum spend on tables; the latter

of which is the model that commercial (or mainstream music) and live music venues follow. Commercial clubs usually rely on local DJs, meaning they have fewer costs than electronic music clubs that tend to fly in international DJs, and so can profit from table seating alone, Saba explains. Such clubs have an obligatory minimum spend to ensure that customers do not hog tables all night without spending enough to cover their costs. For Caprice, the minimum charge ranges from \$65 for high tables to \$100 for the lounge areas, which accommodate larger groups.

For electronic music clubs, ticketing is very important. "Even if we don't sell anything else but the ticketing that night, the money from the ticketing would be suffice to pay the artist at least," says Gebran. "Anything extra is good to pay back our costs and make profit." Entrance fees to B018 range from \$20 to a maximum of \$50 depending on the DJ.

Saleh says he and his partners introduced the concept of ticketing to Lebanon through the original Uberhaus in Hamra back in 2012, and continue to use it with Gärten today. It makes sense for them to do, he explains, as they have large venues and

■ Commercial clubs usually rely on local DJs, meaning they have fewer costs than electronic music clubs that tend to fly in international DJs.

so work on volume, not spending per capita—entrance fees for Gärten range from \$15 to \$25.

Clubs have their own costs to contend with before they rake in the profits. For Gebran, the biggest expense is rent, followed closely by the music set. Saba says that their biggest costs come from production—lighting, sound, and LED screens. Aside from the cost of production, Saba says proper ventilation through air conditioners is another big expense for winter nightclubs. As for Uberhaus' Saleh, the cost of artists has become the biggest expense, as competition to secure international artists increases. (For more on artists, see profile article page 54).

It seems the Lebanese are maintaining their party reputation for now. However, the uptick in tourists and expat visitors needs time to have an effect on the ground before Beirut's clubs can get back to their heydays, when they could operate without worry every night of the week. ■

BUSINESS ESSENTIALS

Company Bulletin

■ **Groupe Bel**—the multinational cheese marketer—has teamed up with **Berytech**—the ecosystem for entrepreneurs—to launch the **Kiri Mompreneur Challenge** to help mothers develop their innovative idea or project into a viable business.

■ **T. Gargour & Fils** celebrated yet another milestone as they received the Best Growth in Customer Satisfaction Index award in the region for their exceptional achievements throughout 2018. The **Mercedes-Benz regional awards** event acknowledges general distributors who surpass expectations.

■ **Anghami** has introduced **Podcasts**, their collection of the rising audio format that presents talks about various topics of interest. In collaboration with the podcast community, over 250 shows have been introduced from over 40 regional podcast creators, in addition to global podcasters and DJ Shows.

■ In line with its strategy to alleviate the environmental impact of its operations, **Byblos Bank** launched a carpooling service for its staff in collaboration with Carpolo, a community-based carpooling mobile application.

■ The **European Bank for Reconstruction and Development** has led the way in providing finance to roll out innovative bifacial panels for new solar plants. The bank worked with the Norwegian developer **Scatec Solar ASA** on using bifacial technology for its investment in the Benban solar plant in Upper Egypt, where it financed 16 plants in what became the largest solar installation on the African continent.

■ **BMW M GmbH** is expanding its high-performance model line-up to include models in the mid-size Sports Activity Vehicle and Sports Activity Coupe segments for the first time.

■ Next year the new **MINI John Cooper Works GP** will be taking roads all over the world by storm—along with the hearts and minds of a particularly performance-oriented target group.

■ Jean-Dominique Senard, chairman of **Renault**, Hiroto Saikawa, CEO of **Nissan**, Thierry Bollore, CEO of Renault, and Osamu Masuko, CEO of **Mitsubishi Motors**, announce the intention to create a new Alliance operating board. Jean-Dominique Senard will act as chairman of this new operating board of the Alliance, with the CEOs of Nissan, Renault, and Mitsubishi Motors also joining the board.

■ **Philip Morris International Inc.** became the first international company to be certified globally for equal pay by the independent third-party **EQUAL-SALARY Foundation**.

■ **BLOM BANK** held The A List Competition, as part of BLOM shabeb program's activities that aim to offer support and guidance to the youth. As the competition concluded, five students in their first year of university were awarded scholarships worth a combined \$150,000.

■ **Nissan** unveiled the all-new IMQ concept vehicle, an advanced technology and design showcase that signals the direction of the next generation of crossovers.

■ At 46.9 in February, up from 46.5 in January, the headline **BLOM Lebanon PMI** indicated another marked deterioration in business conditions across the private sector economy. However, the latest decline was the slowest recorded for one year.

■ In yet another endeavor to support financial literacy and inclusion among the youth, **Bank Audi** organized an interschool competition called the Spring Interschool Competition.

■ **ABC** announced on February 11, the appointment of Tania Ezzedine as deputy CEO by the company's board of directors. Ezzedine is an ESSEC Business School graduate with over 20 years of experience, and a successful track record in strategic marketing, retail, real estate, and project management.

■ **Agenor Aviation Services**, member of **Johnny R. Saadé Holdings**, announced on February 6, that it has signed a General Sales Agent agreement with **Singapore Airlines** for the exclusive representation of the airline in Lebanon.

■ Under the patronage and in the presence of the Lebanese Minister of Tourism Avedis Guidanian, **Hospitality Services** held a press conference on March 1 at Eau de Vie, Phoenicia Hotel Beirut, to launch the 26th edition of HORECA Lebanon, the region's premier hospitality and foodservice event, which takes place at Seaside Arena from April 2-5.

■ **Maserati** showcased the Levante Trofeo Launch Edition, a limited edition of 100 units, at the first and most important automotive exhibition of the year in Europe. Another premiere of the Geneva Show were the new interiors in PELLETESUTA™, a new material made by **Ermenegildo Zegna** exclusively for Maserati.

■ **touch**, managed by **Zain Group**, partnered with **Geek Express** to host the AppJamming Summit semi-final competition on February 24 held at Antwork, Hamra.

■ **TAG Heuer**, the avant-garde Swiss watch brand presented the exclusive TAG Heuer Monaco 50 years Anniversary Exhibition at the 89th **Geneva International Motor Show**.

■ High profile media representatives from around Lebanon enjoyed an exceptionally vibrant ceremony celebrat-

ing the highly anticipated launching of one of the newest landmarks of Beirut—the **Hilton Beirut Downtown**.

■ **Alfanar**, the Arab region's first venture philanthropy organization, hosted a star-studded private reception and screening of the documentary **Soufra** at Beirut Digital District on March 4, to celebrate the impact the film has had within the Burj el-Barajneh refugee camp and the work of the social enterprises Alfanar backs in Lebanon.

■ The number of women in management at **Nestlé Middle East** has risen to 30 percent from 16 percent back in 2011, as the company continues to move forward with its commitment to enhance gender balance at all its offices around the region, through annual increases in the percentage of women managers and senior leaders.

■ **touch**, managed by **Zain Group**, announced its partnership renewal with **Pierre Sadek Foundation** for La Plume de Pierre Award ceremony for the third consecutive year.

■ **Huawei** announced that it has filed a complaint in a US federal court that challenges the constitutionality of Section 889 of the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act. Through this action, Huawei seeks a declaratory judgment that the restrictions targeting Huawei are unconstitutional, and a permanent injunction against these restrictions.

■ **LG Electronics'** 2019 premium TV lineup featuring advanced OLED and NanoCell TVs were rolled out early this March. This year, OLED models will make up 20 percent of the company's high-end TV portfolio and with demand for OLED TVs expected to grow to 3.6 million units this year, 7 million units in 2020, and 10 million in 2021, LG expects to extend its leadership in the premium TV segment.

■ **The Insurance Control Commission** organized an introductory lunch for the Minister of Economy and Trade Mansour Bteich with the in-

surance sector. At this occasion, the minister spoke about the role of the insurance sector as a major pillar in the financial services industry.

■ **Samsung Electronics Middle East and North Africa** showcased the next generation of smart and intuitive innovations with technological advances aimed at reducing friction in consumers' everyday lives.

■ In collaboration with the Union of **Municipalities of Jabal Sheikh**, the **United States Agency for International Development** celebrated International Women's Day by supporting a seminar titled Engaging Women in Environmental Activities for Balanced Development. This event is part of the \$5 million USAID-funded Livelihoods in Forestry project that conserves and expands forests while enhancing economic benefits from forestry through the establishment of models for agroforestry and forest-related rural tourism.

■ **OLX Lebanon** has recently issued a categorized report on the most searched for items in 2018: cars, mobile phones, and video games.

■ **Hyundai's** Santa Fe has received one of the world's most highly respected awards for long-term owner satisfaction, being named as the most dependable midsize SUV in the **J.D. Power 2019 Vehicle Dependability Study**.

■ The 5th **Lebanon International Oil and Gas Summit** will be held from April 2 - 4 at the Hilton Beirut Habtoor Grand Hotel under the patronage of the Lebanese Minister of Energy and Water Nada Boustani Khoury.

■ **GROHE** gave an impressive account of its journey in reflecting the five mega trends in its offering to consumers and customers during its keynote event at the start of the **ISH trade fair** in Frankfurt, Germany. With a record number of 500 single new products GROHE surprised its customers and consumers with solutions that actively shape the future of water.

■ **Ericsson** announced that Rafiah Ibrahim will leave her position as senior vice president and head of market area Middle East & Africa and will take on a role as advisor to CEO Börje Ekholm. Ibrahim, who has held her current position since April 1, 2017, will assume her new role effective August 31. She will leave the Ericsson executive team effective the same date.

■ The annual fundraising gala dinner held by **Skoun** Lebanese Addictions Center, once again lived up to expectations by providing more than 500 guests with an unforgettable night at the Old Chevrolet Showroom Building, while raising funds for this worthy cause.

■ **BLOM Bank** and **Mastercard** have announced the lucky winners of the 2019 UEFA Champions League' campaign aimed at promoting credit card transactions.

■ **International College** has received the official certification from the US Green Building Council for its new pre-school and middle school buildings. Awarded **LEED Gold** for leadership in energy and environmental design, the buildings in IC's Ras Beirut campus now provide students with a top tier facility, complete with positive sustainability features.

■ **UNILEC sal**, the exclusive distributors of Toshiba consumer products, showcased latest range of **Toshiba** Lifestyle Appliances to their partners, on March 11 at Phoenicia Hotel, Beirut.

■ **BIPOD**, organized by **Maqamat**, celebrates this year its 15th edition with a special focus on the most prominent Lebanese dancers and choreographers.

■ **Lurpak** launched a rice campaign with public figure and talented cook, Pierre Rabbat, reviving Lebanese kitchen traditions where aromas are enhanced with the right ingredients.

■ **HMD Global**, the home of **Nokia** phones, has announced that the

BUSINESS ESSENTIALS

Company Bulletin

Nokia 3.1 has received the Android 9 Pie upgrade. The Android 9 Pie upgrade will be the second letter OS update for the Nokia 3.1—the phone upgraded from Android Nougat to Android Oreo just six months ago, in September 2018.

In collaboration with **WAW Surprise**, and to celebrate Mother's Day, **Grand Hills**, a luxury collection hotel & spa chose to celebrate successful working mothers in various fields like politics and business, during an elegant lunch at Chez Alain on March 14, in the presence of media mothers as well.

Hyundai has announced plans to introduce new digital key technology on future models, allowing drivers to unlock and start their car via a smartphone. Selected new cars will start offering the technology during 2019. Users will download the digital key as an app, with each car allowing up to four authorized devices.

areeba launched Swipe2B in partnership with **Swipezoom**, a leading global financial technology provider. This innovative business-to-business payment tool, creates a digital connection between company and supplier, allowing them to settle their invoices via a paperless platform that is fast, secure, and fully automated.

On a memorable night held at the Holcom Bldg., **Midis Group** inaugurated its second iSTYLE **Apple** Premium Reseller boutique, in the presence of VIPs, businessmen, clients, media representatives, and brand's aficionados.

HUAWEI Mate X received the world's first 5G CE certificate awarded by **TÜV Rheinland**, a global leader in independent inspection services, which indicates the smartphone has smoothly passed the rigorous test and evaluation and

become the world's first 5G smartphone approved by the Notify Body of the **European Union**.

In the new **Ericsson** Consumer-Lab report, Ready, steady, game!, 67 percent of gamers say they will increase their augmented reality usage in the next five years. The increasing popularity of video games is driven by the growth of mobile gaming, and now makes up 26 percent of all media consumption hours.

When it comes to creativity in the kitchen and curating unique dining experiences, **Steak Bar Sushi** has continuously proved to be in the lead. Partnering with **Bombay Sapphire** global brand ambassador, Renaud De Bosredon, Steak Bar Sushi hosted a night of bespoke Bombay cocktails creations.

TAG Heuer introduced a revamped version of the iconic Autavia. Inspired by its rich heritage and origins in the automobile and aircraft industries, this twenty-first-century model is ready for a life of adventure.

FANTASMEEM—a design program implemented by **Goethe-Institut** in Lebanon aims to support designers in capacity building and networking. Since the beginning of this year, designers have spent two weeks at an artist residency, job-shadowed industry experts, and will now have the opportunity to apply for design project grants.

IMPEX, the exclusive dealer of **Chevrolet** and **Cadillac** in Lebanon, has been recognized at the prestigious annual **Grandmasters Awards**. During a ceremony held in Dubai on March 5, both Chevrolet and Cadillac received awards for the best GM dealers.

Minister of Telecommunications Mohamed Choucair visited **Alfa**

headquarters in Parallel Towers, Dekwaneh, where he was received by Alfa CEO and Chairman Marwan Hayek, the board of directors, and several members of the staff.

Production of the new **BMW 7** Series Sedan got underway at BMW Group Plant Dingolfing mid March. Roughly three-and-a-half years after the sixth generation was launched, the BMW brand's top model has been thoroughly revised and given greater presence.

Porsche is adding an even sportier vehicle to the third generation of the its highly successful SUV range—the Cayenne Coupé.

Spinneys has partnered with **Casino Group**, major player food and non-food retailer in the French market, to enter into an exclusive import agreement for the Lebanese market. Spinneys will import more than 5,000 Casino products for its shoppers in Lebanon, including a full range of chilled, frozen, and grocery products. Casino chilled and frozen range will be on Spinneys shelves starting in March, and the full grocery range by the beginning of April.

AM Bank is always keen to show support for local talents and youth activities. As the main sponsor of the Homenetmen **Women's Basketball Team**, the bank has been investing a lot of effort to empower the team and show Lebanon what "together we can do."

The new **Panerai** Submersible Bronzo is derived from legendary creations, enhanced by a new inspiration, resulting in a watch of unique personality that is in a collection for the first time. It is available only in Panerai boutiques throughout the world, at panerai.com, in the Panerai WeChat boutique and on MR PORTER.





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2-4 Apr	LEBANON INTERNATIONAL OIL AND GAS SUMMIT Global Event Partners	+44 7850 025295; adagher@gep-events.com	www.gep-events.com
3-5 Apr	2ND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ENERGY, POWER, PETROLEUM AND PETROCHEMICAL ENGINEERING Lebanese University	+961 5 463489; laceb.2018@gmail.com	www.fdmcongress.ul.edu.lb
4 Apr	HEALTH INSIGHT 2019 MCE Group	+961 9 900110; events@mcegroup.net	www.mcegroup.net
9-11 Apr	SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT EXPO LEBANON Lebanon Expo	+961 76 785 855; info@lebanonexpo.com	www.lebanonexpo.com
6 Apr	MUREX D'OR 2019 Murex	-; info@murexdor.com	www.murexdor.com
15 Apr	LEBANON AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE Al Iktissad Wal Aamal Group	+961 1 780 200; forums@iktissad.com	www.iktissadevents.com
23-25 Apr	THE ANNUAL ARAB BANKING CONFERENCE Union of Arab Banks	+961 1 377800; uab@uabonline.org	www.uabonline.org
2 May	ARAB ECONOMIC FORUM Al Iktissad Wal Aamal Group	+961 1 780 200; forums@iktissad.com	www.iktissadevents.com
7-9 Jun	LEBANESE DIASPORA ENERGY Ministry of Foreign Affairs	+961 1 333100; info@foreign.gov.lb	www.lde-leb.com
12-13 Jun	ARABNET BEIRUT Arabnet	+961 1 658444; info@arabnet.me	www.arabnet.me
13-14 Jun	CITIZENSHIP BY INVESTMENT PROPERTY FAIR AND CONFERENCE Promoteam	+961 1 577 203; sm@promoteam.me	www.promoteam.me
18-21 Jun	ENERGY LEBANON IFP	+961 5 959111; info@ifpexpo.com	www.ifpexpo.com
19-20 Jun	EAST MED MARITIME CONFERENCE Oceanic Spark	+961 5 815835; register@emmc.me	www.emmc.me
DUBAI			
31 Mar - 2 Apr	MARITIME SECURITY AND OFFSHORE PATROL WEEK IQPC	+030 20913 -274; info@iqpc.de	www.iqpc.ae
9-10 Apr	RETROFITTECH MENA SUMMIT AND AWARDS ACM	+971 4 361 4001; opportunities@acm-events.com	www.acm-events.com
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17 Apr	GCC PATIENT EXPERIENCE SUMMIT Fleming	+421 257 272 100; info@fleming.events	www.fleming.events
17-18 Apr	FAHR CONFERENCE INDEX	+971 4 520888; index@emirates.net.ae	www.index.ae
17-19 Apr	GULF EDUCATION AND TRAINING EXHIBITION Getex	+971 4 335 5001; info@icedxb.com	www.icedxb.com
21-22 Apr	DATAMIX CORPORATE COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA CONFERENCE Datamatix Group	+9714 332 6688; info@datamatixgroup.com	www.datamatixgroup.com
21-22 Apr	GCC TWITTER AND SOCIAL MEDIA WRITERS SUMMIT Datamatix Group	+9714 332 6688; info@datamatixgroup.com	www.datamatixgroup.com
21-22 Apr	GLOBAL PENSIONS AND PUBLIC SOCIAL AFFAIRS AUTHORITIES Datamatix Group	+9714 332 6688; info@datamatixgroup.com	www.datamatixgroup.com
21-22 Apr	GOVERNMENT SOCIAL AND DIGITAL MEDIA EXECUTIVES PROGRAM Datamatix Group	+9714 332 6688; info@datamatixgroup.com	www.datamatixgroup.com

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21-25 Apr	GCC SMART GOVERNMENT AND SMART CITIES CONFERENCE Datamatix Group	+971 4 332 6688; info@datamatixgroup.com	www.datamatixgroup.com
23-24 Apr	HEALTHCARE INSURANCE FORUM Informa Middle East	+971 4 407 2528; info-mea@informa.com	www.informa-mea.com
23-24 Apr	MIDDLE EAST INVESTMENT SUMMIT Terrapinn Middle East	+971 1 444 02500; enquiry.me@terrapinn.com	www.terrapinn.com
24 Apr	GLOBAL ONLINE SHOPPING PORTALS EFFECTS ON GCC RETAIL INDUSTRY CONFERENCE Datamatix Group	+971 4 332 6688; info@datamatixgroup.com	www.datamatixgroup.com
24 Apr	THE PRIVATE SECTOR'S UPGRADING STRATEGY CONFERENCE Datamatix Group	+971 4 332 6688; info@datamatixgroup.com	www.datamatixgroup.com
28 Apr-2 May	STRATEGY EXECUTION AND INNOVATION FORUM Informa Middle East	+971 4 407 2528; info-mea@informa.com	www.informa-mea.com
29 Apr-1 May	FUTURE PROCUREMENT LEADERS IQPC	+030 20913 274; info@iqpc.de	www.iqpc.ae
17-18 Jun	COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS FORUM Informa Middle East	+971 4 407 2528; info-mea@informa.com	www.informa-mea.com
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1-2 Apr	GLOBAL FORUM FOR INNOVATIONS IN AGRICULTURE One Communications and Marketing group	+971 2 234 8400; info@InnovationsInAgriculture.com	www.innovationsinagriculture.com
16-18 Apr	CITYSCAPE ABU DHABI CONFERENCE Informa Middle East	+971 4 407 2528; info-mea@informa.com	www.informaexhibitions.com
29-30 Apr	THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE BANKING SECTOR Union of Arab Banks	+961 1 377800; uab@uabonline.org	www.uabonline.org
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16-18 Apr	CIPS SAUDI ARABIA PROCUREMENT CONGRESS Informa Middle East	+971 4 407 2528; info-mea@informa.com	www.informa-mea.com
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EGYPT			
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17-18 Apr	WATER DESALINATION CONFERENCE Exicon intl Group	+966 11 460 2332; info@exicon-specialist.com	www.exicon-specialist.com
23-24 Apr	ARWADEX 2019 Exicon intl Group	+966 11 460 2332; info@exicon-specialist.com	www.exicon-specialist.com
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QATAR			
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Events

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10-13 Apr	SMARTEX INNOVATION'S PLATFORM MICE Lebanon	+961 1 384 791; charlie@miclebanon.com	www.smartexlebanon.com
11-15 Apr	E-MOTOR SHOW e Ecosolutions	+961 9 856565; info@e-motorshow.com	www.e-motorshow.com
30 Apr - 4 May	BEIRUT BOAT IFP	+961 5 959 111; info@ifpexpo.com	www.ifpexpo.com
5-8 Jun	GARDEN SHOW AND SPRING FESTIVAL Hospitality Services	+961 1 480 081; info@hospitalityservices.com.lb	www.hospitalityservices.com.lb
5-8 Jun	TRAVEL LEBANON Hospitality Services	+961 1 480 081; info@hospitalityservices.com.lb	www.hospitalityservices.com.lb
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23-25 Apr	GULF PROPERTY SHOW Hilal Conferences & Exhibitions	+973 17 299123; info@hilalce.com	www.hilalce.com
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EGYPT

31 Mar - 2 Apr	AFRICA FOOD MANUFACTURING Informa Middle East	+971 4 407 2528; info-mea@informa.com	www.informaexhibitions.com
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14-16 Apr	INTERSEC Al Harithy Exhibitions	+966 2 654 6384; ace@aceexpos.com	www.aceexpos.com
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22-24 Apr	OMAN ENERGY AND WATER Oman Expo	+968 24660124; info@omanexpo.com	www.omanexpo.com
25-27 Apr	OMAN REAL ESTATE EXPO Oman Expo	+968 24660124; info@omanexpo.com	www.omanexpo.com

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LAST WORD

By Karim Nammour

End the legal vacuum

Fighting harassment at work in Lebanon

The need to adopt a legal framework to tackle harassment in the workplace in Lebanon has been garnering more space in the public debate during the last couple of months, especially after the success of the almost global #MeToo campaign. In fact, many in the labor sector—especially women and transgender persons, who are verbally or sexually harassed by a colleague or manager, once they gather enough courage to speak-out—often find themselves unable to file a lawsuit against the perpetrator. Instead, they are trapped in a disheartening legal vacuum given the absence of a proper legal framework to fight harassment on one hand and given existing rigid legal imperatives on the other that notably require the victim proves harassment actually occurred. Yes, allegations must be proven, and the alleged perpetrator remains “innocent until proven guilty,” social peace requires it. However, harassment is not assault, and its existence is often contingent on the victim’s perception of the facts. Therefore, an objective search for the truth is not necessarily compatible with fighting harassment, especially when power-dynamics and patriarchal culture are factored-in. It is precisely for this reason that there is a pressing need to adopt a comprehensive legal framework in the country.

Today, there are at least three different draft laws on sexual harassment that are being proposed in Lebanon. The first one was submitted to Parliament in 2017 by former MP Ghassan Moukheiber and was adopted for less than five minutes before being immediately retracted given the opposition of some MPs, who voiced fears

the law would lead to blackmail and vengeful acts against employers. The second law was submitted during the mandate of Jean Oghassabian as Minister of State for Women’s Affairs and adopted by the Council of Ministers on March 8, 2017. In a previous critical review of both draft laws, I had pinpointed many of their problematic issues which may, in fact, counteract the goals they had set, mainly:


The Oghassabian draft law adopts a definition of harassment that recognizes vertical ascendant harassment (meaning that employers can allege being harassed by their employees and sue them on that basis). This recognition is not compatible with the type of hierarchical work-relationships that exist in Lebanon and was only noted in a few rare examples in comparative law within societies where work-relationships are of a more cooperative nature. This can, in fact, lead employers to counter-sue employees who claim they are being harassed at work.

On the other hand, both draft laws use an affirmative phrasing in their definition of harassment, meaning that the victim must not only prove the facts but also the damage—such as psychological stress—incurred, which greatly limits the possibility of ever filing a lawsuit in that regard given the complexities of harassment cases in terms of proving damage.

Both draft laws also rely on criminal justice to resolve sexual harassment claims. This may have a deterrent effect on victims given the very public and repressive nature of criminal justice. The aim of legislators should not be limited to compensating victims, but should also ensure the sustainability of their

jobs. In that regard a criminal lawsuit against the employer is problematic.

In 2012, I participated—along with various lawyers, researchers, feminist activists, judges, and union members—in writing a comprehensive draft law on sexual and moral harassment at the workplace and outside of it within the “Adventures of Salwa” project undertaken by Nasawiya, a feminist collective NGO. This draft law was written after months of research. Its definition of harassment reduces the burden of the proof on the victims, opens the option to resort to civil courts, safeguards jobs, and establishes an obligation on employers to protect their employees from harassment and find an internal mechanism of complaint and investigation to deal with harassment allegations. The draft law was submitted to the National Commission for Lebanese Women in 2018.


Meanwhile, given the legal vacuum that exists, there are certain loopholes victims of harassment can use in the Labor Code to file a complaint. Indeed article 75 of the Code states that an employee is entitled to quit their job and get paid “dismissal compensation” if the employer or their representative commits an act of violence against them. Since the early 1950s, Lebanese courts have interpreted such acts to include verbal acts of violence (harassment may be considered one of them). It is within that framework and given the current legal situation that we at the Legal Agenda have decided to draft a model defense specifically dedicated to victims of harassment at work. The model defense shall be published within the next couple of months and disseminated for free on our online platform legal-agenda.com. 

Karim Nammour is lawyer, researcher, and board member of the Legal Agenda.

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