

# Inclusive Arts Practices in Lebanon Consultation Workshop

November 10, 2020



On November 10, 2020 an online consultation brought together 18 disability-led organizations, as well as arts and cultural institutions in Lebanon to feed into the ongoing review of literature and practice review undertaken by the Disability Under Siege Network. The aim was to open up a dialogue between disability practitioners and art institutions with interests in marginalization, specifically disability.

## Consultation Questions

What are the opportunities and barriers to promoting inclusive education through collaborative partnerships between cultural partners and disability-led organizations?

How could disability studies affect an alternative methodology for cultural practices to further engage with the politics of representing forms of exclusion?

## Key Themes Emerging from Consultation

### Questioning priorities: Education Versus Art?

There was a general concern raised about prioritizing arts over the needs of people with disabilities; it was challenging for some participants (mostly from disability-led organizations) to understand why and how art practices can feed into disability-led initiatives and disability studies and discourses. Several participants voiced their apprehension, saying that the focus should be on empowering the disabled themselves and their families, for instance through prioritizing education and raising awareness. On the other hand, some examples were given on how punctual art workshops can help empower the disabled.

Another central point raised was for the crucial need for a change of mindset, namely through education to bring about a change of discourse on a national level.

### Accessibility of Arts and Culture

There was a discussion about the accessibility of arts and culture, i.e.: elitism versus pluralism/populism (and media). In other words, some participants from disability-led organizations were concerned with the effectiveness of arts and culture vis-a-vis accessibility and reaching out to a wider audience. How effective is arts in engaging with a broader Lebanese audience and how can art and cultural practices be all-inclusive, with a focus on people with disabilities?



### Misrepresentation: Stereotype and Stigma

There was a concern over the misrepresentation of disabilities in the arts and cultural sphere: whether it is internalized stigmatization of the disabled, or non-disabled individuals misrepresenting the disabled. Consequently, there was a general consensus among participants for the normalization of representations and perceptions of people with disabilities.

### Agency Representation and Data Ownership

From the above three points, the discussion curved into a fourth concern of data ownership: who “owns” the narratives and who benefits from them?

*Photograph of Jewish women in traditional dress  
in front of artificial backdrop - Tunisia 1900  
Photographer unknown*



## Key Questions for Inclusive Arts Practices in Lebanon

Throughout the discussion conversations kept returning to the core challenge that Disability Under Siege Project seeks to engage: How can the worlds of art and culture and that of disability effectively be brought together to meaningfully alter and impact existing narratives and discourses? Specifically:

- What are the “new forms” of art practices that would engage with a broader Lebanese audience and that would be all-inclusive, with a focus on people with disabilities?
- How can the world of art and culture meet the expectations of the disabled communities?
- What platforms can be created to support collaboration and communication and bring artists to the table?
- How should the content be curated, delivered and mediated so as to shift the outsider/insider binary to intrinsically/organically be inclusive instead of exclusive?

The Disability Under Siege Project is a co-created programme which brings together a community of researchers, educational practitioners, members of disability groups, charitable and advocacy organisations in the UK and Middle East (Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine) to transform the discourse on disability and enable inclusive learning in global contexts of conflict and crisis. The identification of these pressing challenges, proposed solutions to affect change, and routes to impact crucially involve regional actors and stakeholders.

The Consultation was hosted by the Centre for Lebanese Studies

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