

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) CRISIS

Snapshot: Art & Culture in Israel

May 2020*

A Review of cross-sectorial issues in the wake of the Coronavirus Crisis

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By Galia Feit

Background

The Coronavirus outbreak has led to a widespread social and financial crisis resulting from the social distancing and quarantine measures adopted as a strategy for coping with the pandemic in Israel and throughout the world. Practically all sectors of the economy were impacted including entire industries, institutions, organizations, families and individuals. **The fact that all culture and arts institutions had to close down and cease operations**, resulted in an immediate plummeting of their income based on ticket sales and subscriptions, in addition to potential impact to income from public budgets and supports that rely on actual operational volume.

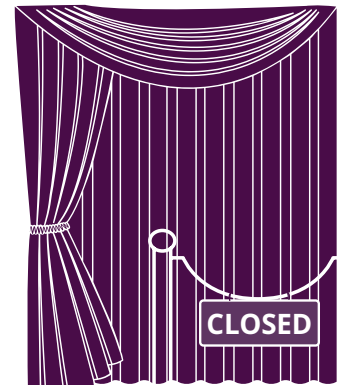
Moreover, the shutting down of routine operations also adversely **impacted creative development and all preparations for future staging** of productions. Thus, in addition to expected limitations to opening public institutions in the foreseeable future, a dignified (and quick) recovery from the crisis seems unlikely.

In parallel, the crisis situation has also brought a **fatal blow to the employment and livelihood of artists**, performers and supporting staff, whether operating independently or employed by culture and arts institutions.

In their attempts to cope with the crisis, some culture and arts institutions began distributing and presenting their art to the general public in digital form, in many cases free of charge, aimed at supporting public morale during quarantine while also maintaining their relationship with prospect audiences. In parallel, artists as well as culture and arts institutions and their umbrella organizations (such as The Culture and Art Institutions Forum in Israel) lobbied the importance of culture and art for the public's spirit, resilience and social life, and to express their protest against the shutting down of the ability to display and express creativity, as well as the severe financial impact they have endured. The organizations also approached to governmental agencies and demanded financial support to mitigate current and future damages as a result of the crisis.

Israeli philanthropists and philanthropic foundations which normally support culture and art (Philanthropy Forum – Culture and Art in Israel) mobilized to support the emergency efforts initiated by the Culture & Art Institutions Forum in Israel.

In addition, members of the forum decided to prepare a preliminary review to **examine and identify issues in which Israeli philanthropy can provide support, collectively – through a campaign or by any other means**, or assist in developing a stronger level of resilience among art and culture institutions or specific genres.¹



1. It is important to note that this document does not directly discuss the damages caused by the Coronavirus crisis and the ways to cope with them and furthermore does not include data pertaining to the Israeli culture and art industry. There is room to consider conducting a further focused study.

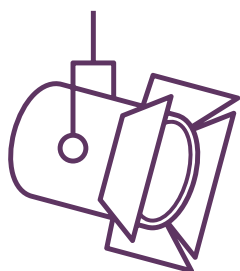
Following recommendations and advice from of the members of the Philanthropy Forum – Culture and Art in Israel, I held conversations with key persons² in a number of diverse art and culture institutions so as to jointly assess whether we can identify sector-wide issues or problems pertaining to a cultural genre or a group of institutions (rather than to a specific individual institution) **which could be addressed through strategic philanthropic support.**

The following overview is based on issues raised during these conversations. However, the text reflects my own insights following the interviews and not necessarily the exact wordings of the interviewees.³

Overview

My conversations with interviewees raised three main issues or problems which may serve as aims towards the development and nurturing of strategic, collective philanthropic support models, to be achieved by a campaign or other means.

1. Support for artists – creativity and cultural creation as a source of livelihood



The Coronavirus crisis brought a fatal blow to artists' sources of income. This fact was raised by most interviewees as a central problem which must be immediately addressed as an emergency measure.

However, it was also clearly stated that the impact of the emergency situation has been exacerbated as a result of a compensation system that was weak and unstable even before the crisis.

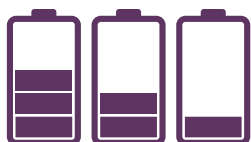
Despite differences in the income model of artists in different cultural and artistic genres, we can generally state that most do not normally enjoy a fixed salary, but a temporary income based on active participation in productions or the sale of art following its presentation in occasional exhibitions. In any event, most artists resort to supplementing their income through diverse channels and sources.

This income model is inherent to circumstances in which culture and art have become consumer products in the capitalist economy.

With an aim to create the foundation for a more stable financial basis for artists, further study and development of operational strategies should be considered on a number of levels:

- Ensure that in funding a project or cultural/artistic initiative through a culture/art institution there is **a budgetary clause explicitly dedicated to the income of the artist/s or performer/s.**⁴
- Act to nurture and encourage 'a room of her own' style funded residency programs as a creativity-enabling space.
- Study models of direct funding to artists via public funds (direct governmental, municipal, Mifal HaPais [national lottery of Israel] budgets), including such aspects as old age pensions and the promotion of policies that adopt such models.
- Establish dedicated private funds to directly support artists and performers, encouraging the participation of Israeli artists in local and international productions, exhibitions, etc., and enhancing demand for Israeli art and culture (the demand for art and culture as a consumer product has become cosmopolitical and digital, distancing itself from original Israeli artistic creation).

2. Supporting institutions – nurturing accessibility to culture



In the wake of the Coronavirus crisis, now more than before, culture and art institutions must innovate in order to once again attract their audiences. In this context we see expected (more or less) developments and changes in modes of consumption of culture and art following the crisis (for instance – older generations preferring to hold concerts and meetings in smaller groups, and a transition to online productions when physical convening is not necessarily an essential part of the cultural experience).

Philanthropy may be able to assist by supporting content, initiatives or cultural, artistic and creative projects:

2. The list of interviewees is included at the end of this document. It is clearly not a complete or exhaustive list of the key persons familiar, knowledgeable and experienced in this area and this fact may have led to certain issues or topics being overlooked.
3. This means that I am responsible for the text and for any misunderstanding or error which may be found in it.
4. In this context it is important to note the initiative's cost and funding structure, specifically that of the different "links in the chain" – artist-agent-institution.

- **Content led by the institution** – optimally, a partnership between a culture/art institution and philanthropy towards promotion of an initiative/project presented by the institution based on a work plan and **according to professional considerations**. In this framework, the institution and philanthropy conduct a mutual listening and discussion process that would lead to the implementation of a project or initiative.
- **Supporting a range of institutions** – directing our attention to providing a long term framework (3-4 years) of support to young fringe institutions, enabling them to become better established and stable, while emphasizing the acquisition and preservation of organizational knowledge and nurturing cultural and artistic excellence also among artists and performers working “part time” in these institutions.
 - **Culture institutions as community** – various aspects of the community roles of culture institutions were mentioned by interviewees. The starting point in some cases was that culture institutions are no longer seen as “alienated ivory towers” but rather as places for meeting, encountering different voices and creating social-community interaction.
 - In this context it is proposed that emphasis be given to opening and exposing initiatives and projects to diverse audiences, **not on the individual project level, but as a core strategy of the institutions**.
 - Of no less importance is the need to act towards **allowing a range of artists the opportunity to be exposed to the public and to present artistic and cultural excellence** through diverse institutions, **as part of the core of every artistic project or initiative**.
 - A range of principles of action support this approach: digitation, use of diverse language, appointment of a “community interface coordinator”, creation of “surprising” partnerships between institutions, a balanced dosage of “spectacular” vs. “simple excellence” initiatives/projects.

Special attention should be directed to Arab culture and arts institutions in Israel, which essentially function “against all odds” and suffer from public budget neglect and lack of facilities (such as suitable halls and venues, art studios, etc.), thereby limiting the ability to nurture cultural and artistic excellence.

Most institutions completely depend on municipal funding (derived from the commissioning of initiatives or projects) and most are not supported by philanthropy at all. In this context a strategic move is required towards the development of capabilities – managerial professionalization, enhanced access to philanthropy and expertise in fundraising through digital means (Crowdfunding) and others, and the establishment of digital infrastructures. All this is required in order to enable the support and encouragement of creativity among Arab artists, to nurture Arab-Israeli art and broaden its exposure among Arab, Jewish and international audiences.

3. Policy advocacy

Many interviewees noted, whether explicitly or in passing, the potential ability of philanthropy to assist institutions and artists in promoting public policy that enables, encourages and supports art, its nurturing and presentation. This concept was raised in various contexts:



- **Public funding** – promoting the expansion of a budgetary foundation (at a minimal threshold of 1% of the State budget), adjusting budget criteria under certain circumstances, including an “artists salary” as one of the budget clauses, and promoting budgetary welfare models (as is done in a number of European countries).
- **Municipal funding** – directing budgets and professional human resources in local authorities to developing facilities, projects and initiatives in the fields of arts and culture and of a sense of community around culture and art initiatives while emphasizing training, education and the identification and encouragement of excellence.
- **Taxation aspects** – regulating various taxation aspects such as VAT exemptions and other tax benefits for contribution of art works.
- **Prevention of politicization, silencing and censorship** – expressing a clear position for protecting the freedom of creation and artistic expression.

Initial thoughts on “what do we do now”?

I imagine that most ideas presented above are not new and for the most part may serve to illuminate well known matters. And yet, there appear to be opportunities for meaningful philanthropic work, such that can actually bring reform, via the following two channels:

- 1. On the individual donor/foundation level** a personal reflection may be needed. Questions such as whether we are working sufficiently towards supporting and promoting the issues presented above? Are we doing it efficiently and effectively enough? And if not, will we be willing to adopt techniques, develop best practices and implement them into the core of our philanthropic operations in this field?

The Philanthropy Forum – Culture and Art in Israel may be the most suitable framework for conducting a joint learning process which is still required in order to promote, by independent but mutually agreed means, the various aspects described, and for the sharing of best practices.

- 2. On the collective level** – among these means there might be an opportunity to jump start a campaign, which might attract further donors and foundations to contribute to the field.

Addendums

List of interviewees:

Sayid Abu Shaqra, Umm al-Fahm Art Gallery

Dina Aldor, CEO, Batsheva Dance Company

Adi Englman, Marcel Art Projects Non-Profit Organization

Doris Arkin, Art Supporter

Atcha Bar, Executive Director, Yellow Submarine

Tali Gottlieb, Executive Director, the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra Foundation

Hadas Goldman Ziv, Tarbut Movement

Adi Gura, Braverman Gallery

Ella Gera, Art Supporter

Zach Granit, General Director, the Israeli Opera

Sefy Hendler, Head of the Department of Art History and Manager of the Genia Schreiber and 'Fondation Michel Kikoïne' Art Gallery at Tel Aviv University

Tanya Cohen-Uzzieli, Tel Aviv Museum of Art

Samer Muallem, Manager of the Forum of Arab Culture Associations

Avi Sabag, Musrara

Sara Sela, Art Supporter

Idit Amihai, the Institute for Israeli Art

Suggestions for further reading:

Focused support for the Sports and Culture sector, a global review, the Ministry of Finance, Chief Economist Department, May 2020 (enclosed).

Culture in Jerusalem beyond borders, Artists Relief Fund (enclosed).

ArtTactic_Covid-19_Expert Guide – chapters addressing responses to the crisis, pp. 52-64 (enclosed, courtesy of Edna Fest).

CANVAS press release 18 May 2020 (enclosed).

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