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## Summary of the debates – مدارات – MADARAT Exchange platform 21st November 2012, French Institute, Beirut, Lebanon

Following the “RCF-Mobility” conference in Fès in 2006, the international seminar « Mobility and artistic development in the Mediterranean » in Paris, May 2011 and the “Exploring Mobility” Symposium in Amman in June 2011, the Roberto Cimetta Fund organised a platform of exchange on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2012 entitled مدارات – MADARAT in Beirut, Lebanon with the support and collaboration of the French Institute in Paris and in Beirut. A meeting of the members of the Istikshaf platform took place on 20<sup>th</sup> November, also at the French Institute in Beirut, and the report on this meeting will be drafted by the Arab Education Forum in Amman.

55 artists, operators, journalists, institutional representatives, experts and Board members of RCF and regional members of the Istikshaf platform from 21 countries (Belgium, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sudan, Tunisia, Turkey) took part in “Madarat”.

The term Madarat means orbit in Arabic and metaphorically underlines RCF’s commitment to art as a process, to the mutual influence of artists on one another and to the enrichment and dialogue this reinforces. RCF’s most important assignment is to facilitate mobility within this process.

During the two day debate it was clear that the artistic mobility we are referring to is not confined to the Euro-Med area but stretches from Casablanca to Abu Dhabi, also encompassing the Balkan region. RCF’s chairman, Ferdinand Richard, underlined in his opening speech, that freedom to be mobile contributes to the dignity of self, builds links and contacts that diversify artistic production and reinforce understanding between different cultures. Artists want to share and expand their interest in contemporary situations and draw strength from differences. Mobility is fundamental to open up spaces and processes of “cross-fertilization” developing the practice of art and recognising that balanced exchanges can be reached.

The acknowledgement of these challenges is not so forthcoming on behalf of the national or territorial governing bodies (in Europe or the Arab world), but some are starting to work with RCF on the benefits that artistic mobility implies at local level and are adapting their strategies in consequence. As Inès da Silva from the French Ministry of Culture underlined there is a disconnection between the work done on the “official” level with the work in independent circles, while the challenge is to find ways to work together.

Mobility is essential to the European project, which is why the General Directorate of Education and Culture of the European Commission would like to improve the data available on this topic. Statistics for example are insufficient and the recent study lead by RCF could start to address some of the issues that are lacking. Angie Cotte, Secretary General of RCF, stated for example that the study provided information on contacts established abroad, frequency of travel, impact of travel in terms of concrete outcomes, reasons for travel and so on. The study shows that a mobility grant has a rapid and positive impact on the artist’s integration into his/her art field and practice and results in further projects, publications, performances and not only tours as one could imagine. The study will be continued in order to provide data and findings on how mobility can impact local development in the host or departing countries.

The European Commission, and in particular Xavier Troussard’s team at DGEAC, have made considerable progress in the framework of the preparations for the new European programme dedicated to Culture for the 2014 – 2020 period. This programme should allow for a full participation from neighbouring countries to the East and South. However, the economic potential of culture is brought to the fore when it is more than necessary to give a major voice to the fact that culture is a factor of peace, and that its recognition is indispensable to any policy or programme for development, particularly in the framework of the “Arab Spring”. Culture as the fourth pillar of development is no longer acknowledged in Europe alone. New models of development are emerging in other parts of the globe. In the Arab world and in Europe, civil society would do well to establish a common road map, and share with institutions a vision for the future in which the central question of “how we live together” is respected as much as economic values.



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The Arab artists and operators present underlined the changing and unstable context in the region. Despite this, opportunities for the new generations of artists exist and it is important to build transnational bridges, not only for physical mobility but also for the exchange of ideas. This can help strengthen and protect artists as well as contribute to their recognition.

Art practice will inevitably refer to the society from which it stems and will highlight religion and politics if these are omnipresent. The political nature of art was discussed as well as its discursive role which can be effective to educate the younger generations. Adding a “mobility” component builds up links between the diverse factions of society in a non coercive manner, reducing ignorance of the “other” whether it be “other religion”, “other politics”, “other culture”, etc. Marietje Schaake, Dutch deputy and member of the European Parliament addressed a video message to the participants in which she underlined that in difficult times it was important to focus on people-to-people contacts and cultural exchanges that help to recognise freedom and dignity. Mobility and reciprocity are keys in the process of democratisation, promotion of inclusion and reconciliation in post-conflict countries.

Rami Takroui, Jordanian consultant in policy reform reminded the audience that we are not in a position unfortunately to change society in the Arab world from one day to the next particularly as many of the systems of governance that rule favour forms of corruption. Nevertheless, advocacy actions remain fundamental and enable us to defend the right to mobility whilst at the same time learning about the system and opening up possibilities for negotiation. This action favours change. The current unilateral relation in which the government broadcasts information to citizens can and should be transformed into a bilateral relation where citizens and non-governmental organisations play an active role.

Artistic and cultural mobility is confronted with boundaries and controls, the funding of this mobility is lacking, the benefits of this mobility are not understood or voluntarily ignored. Advocating for this mobility does not weaken or neglect artistic practice but helps to create the appropriate conditions for its development.

Successful advocacy requires networking between actors, and a common understanding of the challenges, followed by the definition of priorities, recommendations and the adoption of a specific agenda. The Istikshaf platform represents a good tool to organise this advocacy in favour of mobility since it also includes social entrepreneurship, which sustains the general interest. Luca Bergamo, Secretary General of Culture Action Europe, Brussels-based political platform for the arts and culture, underlined that networks must share information and cooperate to generate the capacity to influence others, which some participants agreed was not an easy task. He also mentioned that a certain number of institutions were necessary in society for advocacy platforms or tools to be efficient.

Ferdinand Richard underlined the weight of mentalities and their impact on imagining the future; changing society in an already established system is never easy. Yet, more mobility and easier access to information through the World Wide Web enable transformation of die-hard habits and tenacious stereotypes.

International cooperation remains fragile. However, it is worth noting that the Agenda 21 for Culture is perhaps one of the best tools to develop a cultural policy at local level in each civilisation and that includes, in its article 45, the need to nurture ties north and south. In fact the RCF ethical charter makes reference to this text and spells out the conditions that are needed to strengthen this cooperation: mutual respect, dialogue and freedom of expression. RCF will endeavour to renew opportunities for synergies with local, regional and national governing bodies as well as philanthropic entities to reinforce the support for the mobility of artists and cultural operators.

This debate will be followed by other exchange platforms organised by RCF (in Manama for example in 2013).