

# THE HAMMAMET CONFERENCE SERIES REPORT 2016

Visions of a better future

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#HammametConf

## ABOUT THE HAMMAMET CONFERENCE SERIES

The Hammamet Conference series is a unique UK–North Africa programme of events and discussions run by the British Council, the UK’s international organisation for education and culture.

It enables some of the most influential current and emerging leaders and opinion formers from Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia and the UK to discuss shared challenges, exchange ideas, and learn more about the latest research and innovative thinking on issues of common concern. It provides a platform to develop shared solutions and ideas at a crucial time for the countries of North Africa.

The Hammamet Conference 2016 represents five years of dialogue between leaders of North Africa and the UK. Its purpose is to share ideas, and develop innovative solutions to the challenges faced by these countries. This significant milestone provides an opportunity for Hammamet Fellows to critically review the Arab Spring, chart roadmaps for the future and discuss solutions to the most pressing problems of the next five years.

### Who Attends?

The network comprises of the Hammamet Fellows; emerging and established leaders in policy making, civil society, business, education, entrepreneurs, the arts and the media. All attendees have been invited for their capacity to inform, and their ability to build trust between the UK and North Africa.

### What is “Hammamet”?

The Hammamet Conference is the first part of a wider on-going dialogue that informs a year-round discussion via events and online activity. The Conference Series is a springboard for change; it provides its participants with a platform for dialogue, and solutions - driven conversations between the UK and North Africa.

## ABOUT THE BRITISH COUNCIL

**The British Council is the UK’s international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities.**

We work in the fields of art, sport, education, science, culture, language, innovation and creativity in over 100 countries around the world.

Founded in 1934, a UK charity governed by Royal Charter and a UK public body, we work with over 100 countries across the world teaching English and administering examinations, promoting the arts and developing partnerships to deliver education and society programmes. Each year we reach over 50 million people direct (face-to-face, at events and digital social media), plus more than 500 million people online, via broadcasts and publications.

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# MAMET CONFERENCE SERIES

OF A BETTER FUTURE  
EMBER 2016

# REPORT FOREWORD

2016 was a year in which conventions were overturned. From a UK perspective the greatest surprise was finding ourselves, on 24 June, on track to leave an international club that had been part of our political DNA (for better or worse) for over 40 years.

The referendum on European Union membership revealed widely differing assumptions and aspirations within British society, strongly related to citizens' age, education and region. These differences in viewpoint are also present throughout North Africa.

On a global scale, the astonishing rise of Donald Trump to lead the one remaining superpower – by methods that ignored or ran counter to traditional campaigning wisdom – confounded not just the pollsters, but an entire political class.

The 'End of History' (a phrase coined by political scientist Francis Fukuyama following the collapse of the Soviet Union) seems a very long time ago.

However, in this age of uncertainty, some certainties endure. Conflict in Syria and elsewhere in the region seems likely to remain a focus of international concern – and of more localised agony.

The striving of ordinary people for a decent future is sure to result in a continued flow of migrants from places where such an outcome seems impossible.

And the search for 'dignity' in daily life will continue to be a perennial concern for citizens, no matter what sort of government they live under, or however well or badly their country's economic affairs are arranged.

This is the context in which Hammamet 2016 took place, over a few days in November, in the resort town of the same name an hour's drive south of Tunis.

The Hammamet Conference is the only leadership conference bringing together new and established leaders from the UK and North Africa. It creates a unique dynamic in a region that requires leadership at all levels of society.

Almost 80 Conference delegates – Hammamet 'Fellows' – came from Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, and the United Kingdom to discuss issues of shared concern, to make connections, and to find solutions.

The three sub-themes of Hammamet 2016 were 'Political and Economic Reform through Engagement', 'Meeting Citizens' Needs to Overcome Inequality', and 'Arts and Culture as a Driver of Change'. Each of these contributed to the overarching theme of 'Visions of a Better Future' – a self-explanatory and positive banner under which to consider national and regional contexts and challenges.

Following the Arab Spring the British Council has been working at all levels of society in North Africa – with governments, communities and individuals – helping to support civil society, empower youth, and give people the skills they need to help them make a better life.

The Hammamet Conversation – the Conference and its associated channels and activities – provides an opportunity to shape a new social contract. It brings together established and emerging leaders from North Africa and the UK to address shared economic and social challenges, and to help young people engage positively in the life of their community, nation and region.

In a time of change and uncertainty, a conversation that continues from year to year, welcoming different voices and absorbing new ideas, is a powerful force for positive change.

Robert Ness  
Director, British Council Tunisia



# POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REFORM THROUGH ENGAGEMENT

## Introduction

One of the most significant lessons from North Africa since 2011 is that long-lasting reform – whether political, economic or cultural – is only possible when all sectors of society are fully engaged.

It is not sufficient to reform individual institutions, or to make promises of change without putting in place the structures and investments to bring such change about.

Similarly, the events of the last six years have shown that is not enough for individual sections of society to demand an end to old ways of doing things, if they are unwilling to give their energy to building something better.

Presentations and working groups on the theme of ‘Political and Economic Reform through Engagement’ examined the question of how to form productive coalitions between elite and non-elite, young and old, left and right, and those with different religious and cultural views.

Participants agreed that the widest possible range of people should be encouraged to take part in political activity, if the political landscape in all Hammamet Conference countries is to achieve a much-needed modernisation.

There was a feeling that better regional connections – and an increased sense of regional identity – would help develop opportunities for people across the Maghreb.

Collective solutions will be at the heart of building a better future, both in North Africa and in the UK.

## ‘Leaders’ vs ‘Elites’

Central to debates at the Hammamet Conference, in 2016 as in previous years, was the question of leadership: how to engage the consent of people to their leaders.

More transparency in the political process is needed in order to gain the public’s trust. Organisations like Al-Bawsala (in Tunisia) are the first steps towards an idea of politics as public service.

This begs the question of who the people’s leaders should be. Popular distrust of politicians has led, often, to a spiral of distrust. In some parts of North Africa, institutions like the police and army achieve higher levels of trust than political leaders.

“Distrust is the biggest problem. Distrust between the population and what they regard as the people who have it all. Distrust between the population and politicians. And distrust between the population and the financial institutions.”

Uday Thakkar (UK)

The activism that has characterised North Africa since 2011 (and which to some extent characterises current political life in Europe and other parts of the world) is partly driven by distrust of conventional politics and what are seen as the motives of traditional politicians of all parties and persuasions.

People are frequently so disillusioned with conventional political processes that they see little point in engaging with them. Common to the UK and the Maghreb in 2016 was a sense of politics as something ‘done to’ people, rather than ‘done for’, or ‘done with’ them.



From Algeria, for example, it was reported that while the public was extremely proactive in terms of strikes and protests, this activism did not necessarily result in a constructive engagement with politics. Citizens had lost faith in politics as a means of achieving peaceful change.

There was consensus (both cross-sector and cross-country) about the need to develop a concept of leadership as serving, rather than self-serving. The separation of leaders from a nation's other citizens – both physically and in terms of education, aspiration and wealth – was the major factor in their inability or unwillingness to serve citizens' interests (rather than their own or those of their class, tribe or interest-group).

This in turn demands that leaders have a better understanding of people's needs, concerns, and aspirations.

Many speakers at Hammamet emphasised the need for building connections between people and their political leaders. Without such connections, no real democracy can flourish.

Emerging leaders often prefer to engage in civil society rather than join political parties or engage with existing political structures, as they believe that they are unable to bring about change from within the system.

Yet there are limits to what activism can achieve when disconnected from the traditional structures of nation states. The issue of youthful demographics was raised in several different discussions. In a society where so many are young, it is unrepresentative to have leaders who are (almost exclusively) old and (predominantly) male.

When people feel disconnected from their leadership, they cannot feel engaged in the process of change. It is only when they take ownership of the politics of their country that they take politics seriously.

The question then is how to create synergy between government and public – how to bring about a credible and responsive democracy, in other words.

Finding a route by which youthful energy can be channelled into conventional political forms, in order to reform and humanise them, may turn out to be one of the most significant challenges of the coming decade.

There was in many of the discussions a sense that an era in which elites believed they had a right to speak on behalf of the public was passing away: it was a model that no longer held. Voices from other sectors of society, representing interests that had hitherto gone unheard, would increasingly form part of national discourse.

A view shared by Hammamet participants from North Africa and the UK was that in failing to deliver a more equal society for their people, elites have made the world a more dangerous and divided place.

“Elites have failed. We thought they could get us to the future, but they've made the world more dangerous.”

Amira Yahyaoui  
Hammamet co-Chair





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This is not to say that the abilities of elites were held to be worthless. There was an understanding of the need to harness the skills and experience of elites (and not only political elites), if nations and societies were not to start from a post-revolutionary blank sheet.

This point was made at the opening of the Conference, when the UK Co-Chair drew a comparison between events in the region and what happened in South Africa following the end of Apartheid.

Dr Beall reminded Fellows that in South Africa the engagement of elites on the side of development and national progress had been an essential factor in the bloodless transfer of power.

In order to square this circle – to harness the knowledge and experience of ‘elites’ without giving citizens over to them entirely – there is a need for proper channels of engagement and communication.

The ‘strongman’ model of political leadership (personality-based and not susceptible to change from below) is not a prescription for success in a fast-changing world.

The point was made that a valuable characteristic of leaders is the ability to acknowledge mistakes; but that such a ‘fallible’ model of leadership was not one that characterised North African politics before 2011.

It was also noted that while experience is a valuable commodity, its value is severely limited when those with experience have lost the ability to think new thoughts. JM Keynes’ dictum, ‘When the facts change, I change my mind’, does not describe a position of weakness, but of strength.

Hammamet Fellows thought that governments needed to relinquish power (held for reasons of self-advancement) and devolve it to citizens. This is of course a major challenge to current received ideas about power – and not only in the Maghreb.

The engagement of new-style activism with older forms of power; the engagement of young people with older generations; the engagement of elites with the new facts of history: all of these are needed to create reshaped societies that work for the benefit of all people.

## Role of the media in post-uprising countries

Discussions on the media focused on the need to nurture and promote objective and responsible journalism despite (or because of) a polarizing political environment; and the media’s role in protecting freedom of speech for all citizens.

A free and objective media was seen as vital to incremental (rather than revolutionary) improvement in the conditions of life in North Africa. Stability and prosperity were seen to depend, in turn, on gradual democratisation in the region.

Given the recent revolutionary nature of change in the region, this may represent a recalibration of expectation, arising from the uneven progress of democracy and citizens’ rights since 2011.

Participants agreed that one of the best ways to address the public loss of trust in politicians, and a subsequent lack of interest in engaging with politics, is the development of a trustworthy media capable of speaking truth to power.

Hammamet Fellows posed the question of how best to transform the media so that it can play a more constructive and developmental role.

There should be a shift from a critical and attacking media – newly free to criticise, and enjoying the power to do so – to one that is able to lead constructive debate and offer good ideas for peaceful change.



## Technology

Digital forms of engagement were a feature of the 2011 uprising, and played a significant part in every subsequent popular movement.

One Hammamet Fellow, a former government minister, stated that Tunisia is attempting to solve 21st Century problems with 20th Century institutions and 19th Century laws.

He suggested that by governments can take advantage of the connective power of modern technology to empower citizens, improve education, and create a more equal society.

But it is important not to confuse an enabling technology with a political cause. Technology is not tied to any particular form of politics. It can be used to enforce compliance, to propagandise (as in numerous repressive regimes), or to hold to account, as Al-Bawsala has successfully held Tunisian parliamentarians and municipalities to account, in the interests of citizens, since 2011.

Forms of government, and the relationship between citizens and the institutions of the state (or, in the case of the President of the United States, the direct relationship between the person of Donald Trump and his millions of Facebook ‘followers’) are being reshaped by digital technology. But the aims and ethics of political discourse remain the same.

New forms of citizen engagement look back to the earliest organised form of democracy – when all the citizens of a Greek city could crowd into the agora to hear argument and persuasion from the mouths of their leaders.

Social media is most effective when used in combination with traditional face to face networks – like those on display at Hammamet – rather than as a set of technologies that sweeps away conventional, well-tried forms of connection.

For anyone looking for new certainties and new perspectives in a time of global change, or hoping to find other people with whom to make common cause, networks are critical.

Hammamet Fellows agreed that citizens’ engagement in policy making and political processes is essential; but in many countries there is often little tradition of such activity on which to draw.

The relationship of new forms of mobilisation and engagement with well-established institutions and ways of working, is a continuing process – and is perhaps nowhere more visible than in the Maghreb.

In the United Kingdom the normal representative form of democracy gave way in 2016 to decision by referendum, resulting in a clear vote to leave the European Union – and an unclear future for the UK’s position in the world.

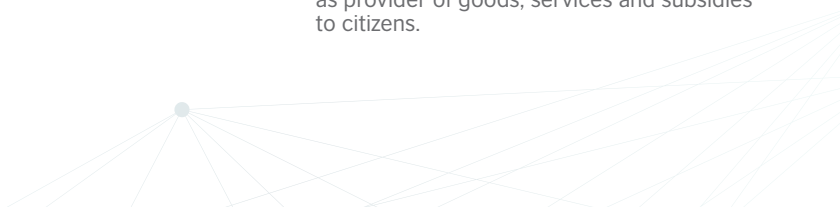
## Shared narrative

Participants discussed the importance of language in the creation of political discourses and cultures, and agreed that the demonising of such words as ‘radical’ or ‘youth’ is unhelpful. It adds to the ‘them and us’ sense that all delegates wanted to move away from as the first step towards political reconciliation and rebuilding.

A Northern Irish Fellow spoke about the importance of agreeing a shared narrative on ‘the things that matter most to people’: jobs, health, housing, and education.

## Unsustainable, unbalanced economies

Libyan Fellows pointed out the unsustainability of their national economy, both in terms of its almost total reliance on oil and gas industries (a situation shared by other North African economies), and because the government has taken on a role as provider of goods, services and subsidies to citizens.



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The model of the state as sole provider of goods is unsustainable: pay-outs from government warp and hold back business and the private sector.

It was pointed out that in Libya 60 per cent of GDP is spent on subsidies (\$1,200 per family, per month). And in any case state subsidies have not achieved their primary purpose, which is the alleviation of poverty.

To address this issue it was suggested that state support for citizens (in Libya and elsewhere in the Maghreb) should be urgently rethought, in order to differentiate between the needs of the elderly, people with disabilities, women, and children; and – perhaps – to remove support altogether.

Taxation is the best way of redistributing wealth – and an equitable taxation system can fund improved public services.

Economies across the Maghreb (and Middle East) are hugely dependent on oil and gas, with the consequence that the economy's health is tied to the market price of those commodities – with all the inherent instability and insecurity that implies.

Broadening of the economic base is therefore an urgent priority; but will only be effective if it takes place in accordance with the will of the people, and their active engagement.

If economic reform is imposed from above, it risks triggering the kind of rejectionist attitude seen in places where international bodies (the IMF or the World Bank) have imposed market reforms against the will of citizens. One Moroccan Fellow stated that development policies in most countries in the developing world actually increase the gap between rich and poor.

From the UK came the suggestion of a lighter fiscal burden in North Africa in order to encourage small enterprises, start-ups, etc – thus avoiding the complex bureaucracy that can prevent them becoming part of the mainstream economy.

The argument was strongly made that government needs to play the role of government – that is, it should be concerned primarily with legislation and the provision of security – and make space to enable the private sector to provide goods and services.

Moroccan delegates suggested a new model of partnership between private and public sectors; and the importance of understanding the essential role of civil society.

Economic zoning was proposed as a key to creating wealth in Libya, with government as a buyer of services, not a provider.

Beyond the extractive industries, one major source of income and employment for the region – tourism – has suffered drastic declines in many countries, as a result of terrorism and political instability. A revived tourism industry (from which Hammamet itself would benefit) will only become a reality when national and international agendas coincide.

Pessimism about improvements in the economic situation results in a high percentage of people in all North African countries seeking employment in the public sector – seen as a source of stability and certain income.

It also leads to large numbers of (particularly) young people who plan to leave the place they were born. It was reported that only 27 per cent of Tunisians see their employment future in their home country.

These pressures are likely to become more acute, given the region's demographics, with youthful populations in all countries leading to a huge surge in numbers joining the workforce over the coming decade.



# MEETING CITIZENS' NEEDS TO OVERCOME INEQUALITY

## Introduction

In discussions under this theme, there was general agreement that North Africa had failed to turn its resources (both human and natural) into 'fortune'.

The North African uprisings were driven by a search for 'dignity', and this word recurred several times in the sessions. The search for dignity is closely related to the desire for more equal societies, where individuals feel they are valued, listened to, and can affect political change.

From the UK came a strong view that the public sector in North Africa is poorly equipped, on its own, to address issues related to inequality. Greater private sector involvement is essential, whether through private investment or the encouragement of a thriving civil society sector.

Equal access to education is one of the key factors leading to greater equality of opportunity.

Reform of the region's education systems is essential in order to address inequalities in the long run.

This is not simply a question of more education, but of appropriate education and skills training. The preparation of young people for the labour market should be a priority for the region's governments.

Given the historic inadequacy of existing education systems, there is a need to develop frameworks that allow the validation of non-academic skills, gained outside formal education. Allied to this was a suggestion that the informal sector could usefully develop closer links with the formal sector, to the benefit of both.

Traditional centralised approaches should be amended to enable participation by young people, women, and excluded groups. Digital approaches have an obvious role to play in this.



There should be an emphasis on entrepreneurship programmes, and better coordination between NGOs and ministries. Fellows agreed that more work was needed to scale up and sustain programmes that at present are disconnected and un-strategic.

In parallel with all of these issues, corruption needs to be tackled, in all sectors and all countries.

Fellows thought that the UK, EU and other out-of-region actors struggled to understand local issues, which had an impact on the effectiveness of their donor activity.

However, it was felt that the British Council played a key role, offering a bridge between policy makers and practitioners.

### Diversity of voices

The Young Arab Voices debates that took place during the opening session of the Conference were demonstrations of differences of opinion finding a place within the formal structure of a debate.

“Having a different point of view doesn't mean you're my enemy you're just different.”

Young Arab Voices participant

One clear lesson from the United Kingdom is that diversity of thought, and of population, is an advantage when a nation is attempting to find its place in a complex world.

It follows that 'engagement' (the previous theme) must mean the engagement of the whole of society – not just certain sections that can be pitted against each other for short-term political gain.



This is a vision of society as a debating room in which differing positions are argued out ahead of arrival at a consensus position; rather than a battlefield on which only one side can end victorious.

But freedom to speak is not necessarily the same thing as being meaningfully engaged, accepted as a valued contributor to society, or able to effect change. As one Algerian Fellow put it, 'Before, we were afraid to speak out; now, no-one is listening'.

North African co-Chair Amira Yahyaoui made the point that elites which pursue a strategy of division end by damaging the natural unity, and natural alliances, between people.

In some countries this has resulted in a situation in which (for example) male/female and young/old are seen as opposites, rather than as complementary elements, which together form 'society'.

In order to build a different society, young and old (to take one example of a binary that need not be an opposite) must connect in a relationship that is very different from the traditional, paternalistic one.

Uncertainty about the future is growing not only across the Maghreb, but also in the United Kingdom. In fact, several delegates reported that the 'United' epithet seemed increasingly in doubt following the referendum on European Union membership. The 'Leave' decision revealed fractures in what had seemed to most people (perhaps because it was unexamined) to be a reasonably homogenous and coherent society.

In the light of this newly perceived fragility in their own state, UK delegates were keen to stress the need to engage all sectors of British society in the national political conversation, to avoid further fragmentation (perhaps in the form of a second attempt to bring about Scottish independence, following the significant Scottish vote in favour of remaining in the EU).

## Women

The part played by women – as participants in the economy and agents for social change – informed many conversations at Hammamet 2017.

UK delegate Baroness Fiona Hodgson told the Conference, 'In no country in the world are women equal.' In the United Kingdom, despite the efforts of all political parties, there is still a long way to go before women achieve equal numbers in terms of political representation. (Although it was reported that the new Mayor of London has pledged to introduce equal pay for women in his team.)

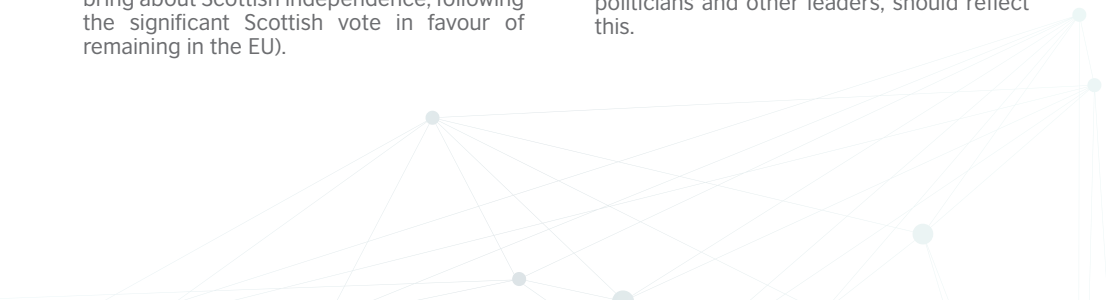
Fellows agreed that any attempt to reform politics and economics in North Africa – or anywhere else – must have women at its centre. Yet the cultural and economic challenges facing women are huge.

Fellows were told about research into women's voting patterns in Egypt, and attitudes generally towards women in the country.

Election officials in one village told the researcher that they didn't count the votes of women; while another wondered why anyone should be interested in who women voted for. The consequence is that it is very hard to find statistics on the participation of women in the democratic process in Egypt.

There was an assumption that when discussions were about 'citizens' or 'women', all citizens or all women were the same: with the same needs and aspirations. Such an assumption does not apply when the people under consideration are men.

The truth is of course that each individual citizen, woman, man or child has his or her own personality, aspirations and needs. Public discourse, and the thinking of politicians and other leaders, should reflect this.







Inequality is the result of the marginalisation and exclusion of different groups and different parts of countries. Gender inequality is one very significant form, but there are many others.

Marginalisation and exclusion lead to a feeling that ‘society isn’t for us’ – and hence the appeal of extremist groups that offer simple (and sometimes violent) solutions, and the chance to be part of a community.

Governments’ tendency to look at populations as homogenous is unhelpful. Populations are not homogenous, and individuals often have multiple identities – ethnically, culturally, and in other ways.

In Libya the marginalisation of women and ethnic minorities extends to the country’s Constitution, the Conference was told. This is one element of the social divisiveness feeding into the current political instability in the country.

Women’s exclusion from participation in national life is a continuation of social and cultural norms that reach back into history – and do not predict a harmonious future for Libya, either between different social sectors or different regions of the country.

The absence of political stability and strategic direction in Libya is preventing the state from performing its duties towards its citizens, and responding to their needs in a balanced and equitable fashion.

There are particular problems for women in terms of cultural expectations. For example in Libya women are seen as a financial burden to the private sector: when they travel for training they must go with a chaperone – which often means taking the whole family.

It was argued that Skype training, flexible working, and increased paternity leave can all contribute to a greater and more equitable inclusion of women in the work force. In other words, what is needed is a combination of cultural and technological measures.

There was a belief and a common understanding among Hammamet Fellows that it is everyone’s job to fight patriarchy: men are also trapped by its expectations.

The problem of inequality between the sexes began (and could begin to be tackled) with education and the expectations of society. Education therefore has a part to play in changing society’s expectations relating to girls and women – and giving them the intellectual and cultural tools to enable them to create change in their own lives. Related to this is the need for more female role models, whether in politics, business or other areas of life.

One specific suggestion was that women should be formally and officially at the table in all United Nations sponsored peace negotiations.

## Religion

One of the sessions under the inequality theme explored the value of religion as a means of insisting on individuals’ dignity (a word that recurred throughout the Conference), and offering a moral pattern on which to build a society that is good for everyone.

Reverend Peter Price (UK) argued that religion offered the poor, in particular, a way to transform broken relationships, reconstruct the ‘moral order’, and enable forgiveness – leading to reconciliation and true justice.



Reparation is not the same as revenge; and a 'justice' that is based on revenge and retaliation is not likely to last, or to create a harmonious society for the good of all.

'Bad religion' that distorts its founders' intentions to offer support to violence and terrorism should not be answered by 'no religion', but by 'better religion'.

A distinction was drawn between 'equity' and 'equality', with speakers arguing that it was unnecessary to have 'equal' societies; what was wanted was societies that allowed everyone the freedom to improve their lives and progress.

## Radicalisation

Fellows agreed that one main cause of radicalisation is the disconnect of young people from the political arena, and lack of access to civic participation. This is exacerbated when younger people are prevented by the 'dinosaur generation' from moving into positions of mainstream influence.

Even after the uprisings of 2011/12, this remains the case in many countries, with replacement regimes behaving in much the same way as their predecessors.

Reform of the education system, and of security and policing (ensuring that the latter

operated as genuine community services, rather than simply arms of state repression) was seen as vital.

Education also has to be relevant to citizens, and appropriate to the prevailing employment market and national needs.

An emphasis on higher education has led, in some countries, to highly-educated young people with little hope of finding employment in areas related to their studies. This in turn leads to frustration, resulting in a desire to emigrate or turn their skills to less constructive (and sometimes profoundly destructive) purposes.

There was also a general lack of channels through which citizens could engage with the state (or vice versa), as highlighted under the previous theme.

In the ideas session, Fellows suggested that changing the UK Foreign Office's travel advice for North Africa (particularly Tunisia and Algeria) would be a significant boost to national economies, as well as a psychological benefit to the region as a whole.

One of the UK Fellows, Baroness Alison Suttie, subsequently argued the case for changing the travel advice with regard to Tunisia in the House of Lords. (The travel advice against all but essential travel remains in place as at February 2017.)



# ARTS AND CULTURE AS A DRIVER OF CHANGE

## Introduction

Culture was broadly defined by the Conference as an 'independent strand of knowledge', living longer than its creators and so capable of being passed on from generation to generation, informing and shaping societies and nations.

However, discussions under this theme revealed different conceptions of 'culture' among Hammamet participants: generally a very broad understanding from the UK, and more specialised visions from North African delegations.

The idea of art as a means of individual expression was seen by some as a European concept – somewhat different from the traditional sense of art in the Arab world, where it was more likely to be used to reinforce conventional values.

Nevertheless, it was clear that the arts had played a significant role in the Arab uprisings, and in the political and social changes since 2011.

These twin conceptions of art, as personal expression and as national narrative, are likely to continue to develop in light of the social and political change.

## Culture and identity

Freedom of expression was seen by Hammamet Fellows as vital to a healthy cultural sector, but the counter-argument was also made that the best art might be created under a culturally oppressive regime – one which forced artists to work more inventively. Egypt in the 1950s was mentioned in this context.

Art's ability to convey political ideas in attractive forms was often seen as threatening to politicians and national leaders. Culture in many different forms was highly visible in all the countries of the Arab uprisings – dancing, performance, graffiti, literature, film.

Fellows agreed that children's and young people's relationship with their country's culture is particularly important: something that should be, according to one speaker, 'deep inside their souls'.

On the question of who should 'control' the arts, the artists in the room argued that their sector should be managed by cultural practitioners rather than ministers of culture (or that at least ministers of culture and the arts should have personal experience of the field).

## Heritage and cultural theft

The issue of cultural theft – or the retaining of ancient artefacts from the Maghreb in museums in other parts of the world – was raised, with many feeling that renewed pride in national culture demanded such items be returned.

Libyan participants raised the issue of disappearing cultural sites. They argued there should be awareness-raising work done by museums. The hope was expressed that the Hammamet Conference might in future address the issue of cultural heritage.

There was concern about theft of archaeological material destroying heritage; and that this was made possible by ongoing conflict in parts of the region, and relax controls. Education in the value of national history and heritage were one way to counter this approach to national cultural assets in the long term.

From some parts of the region it was reported that young people had lost a feeling of identification with their national cultures; and there was a corresponding loosening of ties of nationhood and belonging. Citizenship teaching, currently absent in most of the region, might be one way to address this.

One concrete proposal was the creation of a youth festival which would share culture between North Africa and Europe, enabling new cultural ideas to spread widely. A programme similar to the MAZE youth exchange project between Wales and North Africa was also proposed. There was comment that funding was necessary to ensure that such programmes were not only open to the children of the well-off.

A discussion of the lively film industry in Tunisia came up against the difficulty of balancing freedom of expression and asking for state support.

The question of who art (in this case, film) is for, was raised. Should films be made for elites, or for other sectors of society? Cinema, film in particular, demands expensive infrastructure if it is to be shown in public (rather than online). This implies large-scale investment, which is unlikely to happen if the art-form itself is banned or heavily circumscribed.

There was agreement that artists are a powerful force for progressive change, for imagining alternatives, and for speaking truth to power.

A nation or a region in search of a new story to tell about itself – both to itself and to the wider world – needs artists to do part of that work.

## Arts and economy

As an example of how the arts intersect with other parts of economy, there was discussion of one Fellow's long-term project in the medina of Tunis to support artisans and cultural heritage. The stone, wood and metal workers all belong to the informal economy, which the government finds it difficult to recognise. Yet within the medina there are 525 artisan workshops producing more than 20 different types of crafts. This is part of a 'heritage revival process' that is particularly attractive to young people.

Making the contrary argument, other speakers said that the arts were often seen as a luxury activity for elites: 'We have done a very poor job at convincing people that art is essential'.

Tunisians reported that in the country there was not an 'arts industry': most artists would expect to have a 'day job' in order to survive. More than one speaker referenced the (UK) Arts and Humanities Research Council report which has offered evidence of ways in which the arts support society.



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VISIONS OF A BETTER FUTURE  
24 - 25 NOVEMBER 2016



## Definitions

The UK approach was to see ‘art’ and ‘culture’ as very broad categories which – in addition to obvious disciplines such as literature and the visual arts – include activities such as sport and cuisine. This reshapes debates about ‘the arts’, enabling people from different sectors of society to feel that ‘the arts are for them’.

There was discussion of the difference between art and entertainment – and the art in entertainment. Some Fellows argued that ‘art’ is an elite, non-profit-making activity; while ‘entertainment’ is an industry (for example, Hollywood, or the TV industry).

It was argued that large regeneration projects are less successful at regenerating communities than those operating on a more limited scale (such as the Tunis medina project).

From the UK there was a report that small towns might gain much-needed investment and local self-respect from modest arts interventions, which could kick-start other forms of investment and change. There was a strong feeling that cultural programmes should not be limited to big cities.

Arts and cultural practitioners and people active in the field need to have conversations with media and politicians to counter the message (heard in every country to some extent) that the arts have no practical value, and are an elitist luxury. One theme of this ‘conversation’, Fellows argued, might be to stress the entrepreneurial aspect of arts activity (and perhaps to make a clear distinction between ‘fine art’ and ‘craft’ activities).

Artists are in many cases small businesses, and this fact might usefully be stressed as a means of winning over hostile opinion-formers. Linked to this is the question of the role governments that should play to enable and incentivise the cultural sector.

As well as the undoubted practical and economic benefits of a thriving cultural scene, the arts can help to give people a voice, a sense of self, and increased self-confidence.

Culture and the arts allow individuals and societies to tell their own story, to themselves and to others. That is vital at any time, and all the more so at a period when national stories – as told in newspapers and on TV – tend towards negative outcomes.

The subversive power of the arts was praised by many: art asks some really big questions, which is why many establishment and political leaders feel the need to keep artistic activity and the creators of art, under control.

Voices from Morocco raised the importance of indigenous North African culture, arguing that nations don’t always need to bring in external cultures all the time, but should look to their own. Several Fellows voiced a fear that local, traditional culture was losing out to more ‘attractive’ forms from elsewhere.

Participants wondered if there could be mobilisation around ‘the great culture of the Maghreb’.

“Algeria needs the international community, but especially the support of African countries. And we need the support of the Maghreb countries in particular.”

Khaled Drareni (Algeria)

The Conference was told that there has been disinvestment in the humanities in the Algerian education system; and from Egypt, while artists are free to come into schools to teach and inspire children, there is no infrastructure or funding to enable this to happen regularly.



There has always been a tendency in the region to control the arts – the ‘Haram police’ being just the latest example of this tendency. On the other hand, art has always existed in Islam, within certain rules and conventions.

Science was discussed as one dimension of ‘culture’. The point was made that while we speak of ‘scientific literacy’ in English, in Arabic and French this is called ‘scientific culture’. ‘Scientific literacy’ suggests merely the basics of understanding; while a real scientific culture is deeper than this: a whole way of looking at the world.

There are no studies in the Arab world on levels of scientific literacy (or culture), meaning that the scale of scientific understanding is unknown. An Egyptian journalist mentioned FameLab and the work of the British Council as an example of how science can be made interesting to young people. National shortages of science teachers were reported from several countries, with the observation that it was particularly hard to interest women and girls in science and scientific careers.

The connection between culture and other strands of national life was discussed. In this context UK participants mentioned the work the National Health Service is doing to look at the impact of art and literature on mental health and well-being.

Fellows discussed the value of cultural role models, referencing the astronauts of the Apollo programme of the 1960s and ‘70s, and Carl Sagan’s ‘Cosmos’ TV series – both of which put local and regional identities in a secondary relation to ‘global humanity’. The work of Palestinian artist Larissa Sansour was also discussed (her short film ‘A Space Exodus’ imagines a Palestinian going to the moon) in the context of artists’ contribution to new national narratives.



# THE HAMMAMET CONVERSATION

The Hammamet Conference Series comprises two key elements: an annual conference, and ongoing dialogue.

The Conference is a mixture of formal plenary sessions, informal workshops, discussion groups and networking opportunities.

This inspires and informs the continuing Hammamet Conversation – a year-round dialogue, facilitated through events, online activity and personal connection, which brings together leaders from Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia and the UK.

Discussions at Hammamet 2016 revealed large areas of common concern – over the position of women in society, for example, and the need for education systems tailored to national requirements – as well as pointing out areas of difference. One strand that ran through all discussions, and is familiar from each previous Conference, is the question of how to manage change.

Change is of course a continuous process, not a single event. A century, or even fifty years ago, the pace of change was such that people understood what was happening and were able to adapt. As technology increases the rate of global change, ideas and movements sweep around the world almost instantly.

The Hammamet Conversation uses all the channels available to allow thinkers, leaders and activists to engage with change, with the Conference doing the person-to-person 'heavy lifting' once a year.

The conversations, workshops and debates offer an opportunity to shape a new 'social contract', bringing together established and emerging leaders from North Africa and the United Kingdom to address shared economic and social challenges; and to help young people engage positively in the life of their community, nation and region. Hammamet also connects experts and practitioners from different sectors – civil society, the arts, politics, business, education – in a way that is unique in the region.

Hammamet 2017 will continue that work, with a new set of themes but the same commitment to helping people take action for positive change.

In a time of upheaval and uncertainty, an international conversation that continues from year to year, welcoming different voices and absorbing new ideas, is a hugely powerful force.







THE  
HAMMAMET  
CONFERENCE SERIES



#HammametConf



# BRITISH COUNCIL ACTIVITY IN EACH HAMMAMET COUNTRY

## ALGERIA

Algeria is rich in oil and gas, which constitute 60% of revenues and 97% of export earnings. The EU is Algeria's largest trading partner, and there are large global and UK business interests in the country.

English is a national priority in Algeria, to improve employability, increase access to scientific research, and to attract foreign investment. However, many young people lack skills and decent jobs, and female and graduate unemployment is particularly high.

British Council highlights in Algeria 2015-16

- Our Teaching Centre in Algiers opened in April 2015 and taught more than 2,400 students in its first year.
- With the Ministry of National Education and partners, the British Council has trained more than 3,000 teachers, 200 inspectors and 600 teacher-trainers.
- 100 Algerian government PhD scholars have begun studies in English in the UK

## EGYPT

Egypt is the largest Arab country, with an estimated 91 million people (half of them under 24 years) and the third largest economy in the Arab world after Saudi Arabia and UAE.

British Council highlights in Egypt 2015-16

- The British Council in Egypt focuses on three strategic themes: developing skills, empowering women and girls, and enabling international dialogue and exchange.
- 23,000 students improved their English language skills through studying in our teaching centres in Cairo and Alexandria.

- 65,000 young Egyptians secured an internationally recognised qualification by taking 120,000 UK exams.

- 110,000 people attended our activities and exhibitions, and festivals performances supported by us.

- 32 million people viewed or listened to the British Council's broadcast content.

## LIBYA

The new Libyan government will be under pressure to create and develop the foundations of a functioning state; security, stability, good governance, demobilisation and reintegration of militia members and other armed citizens, and to steer the country towards economic prosperity. Key to this will be jobs to meet the aspirations of their young people.

British Council highlights in Libya 2015-16

- The British Council in Libya Delivered English training via radio to 4,500 school teachers across southern and eastern Libya.

- We worked with Tripoli University to establish a National Centre for Modern Languages to develop best practice for the teaching of modern languages across Libya.

- We used Skype to train some 350 teachers in English in seven Libyan universities – in the East, West and South of Libya.

- 120,000 Libyan learners of English access our Learn English websites, Facebook pages and Twitter feed seeking out the opportunity to engage with the British Council, the UK and with each other.





Be a part of the conversation  
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