

مركز البيان للدراسات والتخطيط  
Al-Bayan Center for Studies and Planning



# Developing and Empowering Cultural Actors in Iraq A Strategic Proposal for Graduate Studies in Cultural Policies and Cultural Management

Haider Jalil Khalaf



## Developing and Empowering Cultural Actors in Iraq: A Strategic Proposal for Graduate Studies in Cultural Policies and Cultural Management

Series of publications of Al-Bayan Center for Studies and Planning  
/Research Department / Social Studies

**Publication** / Policy Paper

**Topic** / Education and Society

**Haider Jalil Khalaf** - Researcher

**Translation:** Milad Alnofaly

---

### About

Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies is an independent, nonprofit think tank based in Baghdad, Iraq. Its primary mission is to offer an authentic perspective on public and foreign policy issues related to Iraq and the region.

Al-Bayan Center pursues its vision by conducting independent analysis, as well as proposing workable solutions for complex issues that concern policy-makers and academics.

حقوق النشر محفوظة © 2024

[www.bayancenter.org](http://www.bayancenter.org)

[info@bayancenter.org](mailto:info@bayancenter.org)

Since 2014

## Executive Summary

The cultural sector in Iraq has faced significant challenges in recent decades due to political instability, conflict, and lack of investment. These issues have left the country's cultural infrastructure in a fragile state, with minimal official support for policy development, management, or institutional leadership within the cultural field. Strategic intervention is critically needed, as the sector holds immense potential for enhancing national identity, social cohesion, and economic growth—especially through the preservation of heritage, arts, and tourism. Despite this potential, the absence of specialized academic programs addressing cultural policies and cultural management in Iraq has created a significant gap in the sector's development.

Introducing a specialized Master's program in Cultural Policies and Cultural Management represents a strategic opportunity to build the much-needed human capacities in the sector. Such a program would provide a solid foundation for developing cultural actors and managers equipped to lead and manage cultural institutions in all their diversity and fields, formulate effective policies, and promote the growth of the creative economy. By focusing on theoretical knowledge and practical skills, this program will address the urgent need for cultural leaders capable of navigating Iraq's unique cultural landscape and contributing to its revival.

Furthermore, the program will serve as a vital tool to enhance Iraq's cultural diplomacy efforts, allowing the country to engage more effectively in cultural dialogue and international cooperation. As Iraq seeks to rebuild and redefine its identity in the post-conflict era, this program will play a crucial role in promoting cultural sustainability and fostering a deeper understanding of the relationship between culture and development. It will also enable Iraq to position itself as a leader in cultural policy and management in the Arab region, where similar challenges exist.

In addition to contributing to Iraq's cultural renewal, the program will have a broader societal impact by empowering a new generation of cultural managers capable of advocating for cultural rights, preserving heritage, and promoting inclusive cultural practices. Through a multidisciplinary and globally informed curriculum, students will acquire the competencies required to drive innovation in the cultural sector while preserving Iraq's rich and diverse cultural heritage. This initiative is essential not only for the future of Iraqi cultural institutions but also for enhancing a more cohesive and resilient national identity in the face of ongoing social and political challenges.



## Introduction

The cultural sector in Iraq stands at a crossroads, facing significant challenges that have hindered its growth and development. Decades of conflict, political instability, and inadequate strategic planning have weakened Iraqi cultural institutions and depleted resources. The absence of an organized approach to cultural management and policymaking has exacerbated the difficulties faced by the sector. Currently, the country lacks a specialized academic framework to train effective cultural leaders and managers. In the absence of such educational opportunities, Iraq has witnessed a shortage of qualified professionals capable of addressing the country's cultural needs—from policy formulation to managing cultural institutions and creative industries.

One of the main problems is the lack of initiative from the Iraqi higher education system to offer specialized programs in cultural policies and cultural management. This gap has hindered the development of effective cultural policies and limited the enhancement of Iraq's rich cultural heritage in contributing to national identity and economic diversification. As the world increasingly recognizes the importance of cultural governance, Iraq finds itself struggling to keep pace with this development.

This paper aims to address this critical issue by proposing the establishment of a specialized Master's program in Cultural Policies and Cultural Management in Iraq. By providing students or qualified candidates with the necessary skills and knowledge, such a program would prepare a new generation of cultural actors to enhance Iraq's cultural infrastructure, support creative industries, and promote cultural dialogue within the country and on the regional stage.

The study explores the urgent need for specialized education in cultural management and its policies, evaluates the local context and challenges faced by cultural professionals in Iraq, and proposes a strategic solution inspired by global and regional models. Specifically, the experience of the Kingdom of Morocco in launching a graduate program in Cultural Policies and Cultural Management serves as a valuable case study from which Iraq can benefit.

Through this lens, the paper investigates the following key questions: What are the fundamental needs of the cultural sector in Iraq? How can a specialized graduate program in Cultural Policies and Cultural Management address these needs? And what implementation strategies would ensure the success of such a program in Iraq's unique cultural and political landscape?



## Background

The cultural sector in Iraq faces numerous challenges, including inadequate strategic planning, limited capacity for empowerment in cultural management, and insufficient support for various cultural rights. These issues are compounded by the absence of a structured academic and practical approach to training future cultural leaders, managers, and policymakers.<sup>1</sup>

Discussing the current state of education related to cultural policy in Iraq reveals that the Iraqi higher education system currently lacks specialized programs in Cultural Policies and Cultural Management. This deficiency leads to a scarcity of professionally qualified cultural managers to address the country's growing cultural needs. This gap limits the development of effective cultural policies and the growth of creative industries in the cultural field.<sup>2</sup>

When addressing the question of whether specialized education in the cultural field is needed in Iraq, the answer is affirmative. A specialized Master's program in the cultural field would address these gaps by providing students with the necessary skills in cultural management and policymaking. It would foster a new generation of cultural actors capable of enhancing the public cultural sector, supporting creative industries, and promoting regional and international cultural cooperation. This aligns with global best practices and the increasing demand for expertise in cultural governance in the Arab region and Iraq.

To answer this important question in more detail and precision, a specialized graduate program in Cultural Policies and Cultural Management is necessary for Iraq for several reasons:

**Rebuilding Cultural Infrastructure:** Iraq has a rich cultural heritage, but decades of conflict and instability have severely damaged its cultural institutions. A specialized program can help rebuild and manage cultural infrastructure by training professionals and cultural managers in modern cultural management techniques.

**Preserving Culture:** The country faces significant challenges in preserving its historical sites, languages, and traditions. A graduate program can equip experts to handle preservation efforts effectively using best practices from around the world.

---

Al-Ani, K., & Haddad, S. (2020). Cultural Policy and Management in Post-Conflict Iraq: Challenges and Opportunities. *Journal of Cultural Policy*, 25(4), 345-360

Hassan, Layla. (2021). *Cultural Reconstruction in Iraq: Heritage, Policy, and Management*. Oxford University Press

**Enhancing Cultural Identity:** In a diverse country like Iraq, cultural policies can help promote a sense of shared identity while respecting the diversity of its communities. Specialized education in this field would prepare graduates to develop policies that support cultural dialogue and cohesion.

**Developing the Economic and Creative Industry:** A well-trained workforce in cultural management can help boost the creative economy, contributing to sectors like tourism, arts, media, and heritage. This would diversify Iraq's economy beyond oil.

**Capacity Building for Cultural Institutions:** Cultural institutions in Iraq need experts who understand not only the technical and cultural aspects but also how to handle administrative, financial, and policy challenges. A graduate program would train cultural managers capable of leading these organizations effectively and methodically.

Regarding the suitability of such specialized study programs to Iraq's reality and conditions, the program can be designed to address Iraq's unique circumstances by relying on three important considerations:

**Local and Global Perspective:** The curriculum should balance global best practices with Iraq's specific cultural realities. This ensures that graduates are not only familiar with international standards but also equipped to face local challenges.

**Challenges in the Cultural Sector:** Those working in Iraq's cultural sector face challenges such as lack of funding, weak legal frameworks, and limited institutional support. The proposed program can prepare graduates to tackle these issues by providing them with skills in cultural advocacy, fundraising, and policymaking.

**Security and Political Instability:** Cultural work in Iraq is often affected by political and security instability. It will be essential to have a program that teaches how to protect cultural heritage in conflict zones, engage communities, and ensure the safety of cultural workers.

### **Case Study: The Kingdom of Morocco Model**

A vital Arab model in launching a specialized graduate program in Cultural Policies and Cultural Management can help understand the comprehensive framework we advocate by transferring this important educational experience to Iraq. By benefiting from the Moroccan experience in designing Iraq's program, we can adopt successful steps and avoid potential challenges.



The Culture Resource Foundation (Al Mawred Al Thaqafy) launched the Master's program in Cultural Policies and Cultural Management in cooperation with Hassan II University, Hildesheim University in Germany, the UNESCO Chair for Cultural Policies in Arts Development, and with support from the Moroccan Agency for International Cooperation and the Ford Foundation. Hassan II University in Casablanca was chosen from a group of universities nominated in different Arab countries because it already had a specialized department in Cultural Engineering. This program, considered a successful model for the Arab region, aims to address a significant need by fostering a new generation of cultural leaders equipped to lead cultural activities and cultural policy in their countries.<sup>3</sup>

The Master's program was developed after an extensive feasibility study conducted by the Culture Resource Foundation in 2013. The study showed the inadequacy of European and American training models dedicated to cultural managers, researchers, and policymakers in the Arab world. The foundation relied on nearly two decades of experience in this field, including ongoing activities in cultural management since 2005, in addition to continuous surveying and analysis of cultural policies in eight Arab countries.

As a result of these studies, the urgent need to establish an advanced academic program dedicated to the region was identified, leading to the launch of the Master's program. The program integrates academic coursework and applied learning through intensive workshops, international exchange opportunities, and practical training. The first cohort started in late 2018 and continued until 2020, while the second cohort ran from 2020 to 2022.

The curriculum was designed to balance theoretical and practical approaches, offering core courses in cultural policy, management, and strategic planning, complemented by specialized elective courses and international collaboration. It includes unique experiential components, such as an intensive workshop in February and a summer academy in Germany, where visiting students engage in face-to-face learning and network with international cultural actors.

The two-year program, which included four semesters covering 18 subjects divided into two main knowledge areas (Cultural Policies and Cultural Management) plus the thesis project, offered courses such as Academic Research and Research Writing Methodologies, Cultural Policy Models, Writing Cultural Policies, Cultural Trends in the Arab Region, Cultural Law Legislation, Cultural Mediation, Audience Engagement, Human Resources Management in Cultural

---

<sup>3</sup>:For more information about the program, see the following link <https://2u.pw/rUINJBpp>



Institutions, Strategic Planning, Cultural Projects Economy and Marketing, and Designing and Implementing Cultural Projects. The total units for all these subjects amounted to 120 academic units, and upon completing their studies and defending their thesis, students received a Master's degree from the aforementioned universities, recognized internationally.

Since its inception, the Master's program has attracted more than 1,200 applicants, including 1,100 Moroccan applicants and about 100 candidates from various Arab countries, indicating the high demand for specialized training in cultural management. The program's graduates—24 so far—have played significant roles in the cultural sector, whether in various governmental or independent institutions, reflecting the program's success in bridging the gap between academic study and practical application.

Morocco's experience illustrates the crucial role of strategic partnerships and tailor-made academic models in developing cultural leadership. This study highlights the importance of localizing cultural education to meet regional needs while promoting freedom of expression, cultural rights, and regional cooperation. It confirms the effectiveness of an integrated model that combines academic research with applied learning.

The Master's program in Cultural Policies and Cultural Management is unique in the Arab countries, as it is the first specialized program in this field in the region at Hassan II University. For the first time, there is an integrated academic model for a Master's in Cultural Policies, characterized by diverse subjects that combine academic research teaching and applied field learning.<sup>4</sup> One of the most notable aspects of this program is its positive results, as graduates of the first and second cohorts work in the cultural field or represent prominent cultural institutions in their countries and at the Arab world level.

For Iraq, adopting a similar framework would provide a strategic pathway to enhance its cultural sector's capacity, building a new generation of skilled professionals capable of shaping the future of cultural policies and management in the country and the broader Arab region. It emphasizes the critical role of regional cooperation and local expertise in cultural management education, which can be adapted to Iraq's unique cultural landscape and its different environment and conditions.

---

See Hoda Siouri, the program manager, in an interview with Al-Quds Al-Arabi newspaper <sup>4</sup> published at the following link

[.https://2u.pw/siw9PiK9](https://2u.pw/siw9PiK9)



## Objectives of the Proposed Program

The proposed Master's program in Cultural Policies and Cultural Management aims to meet the need for specialized professionals and cultural managers in Iraq's cultural sector. By focusing on the envisaged objectives, the program will create a dynamic educational environment that not only meets the immediate needs of the cultural sector in Iraq but also aligns with broader regional and global cultural policy trends. The most important of these objectives are:

**Developing Expertise in Cultural Management and Policymaking:** Cultivating a new generation of cultural managers, policymakers, and researchers competent in strategic cultural planning, cultural governance, and cultural management to create empowered cultural leadership that will shape Iraq's cultural future.

**Enhancing the Ability to Develop the Cultural Sector:** Providing students with the necessary skills to effectively contribute to the growth of Iraq's governmental cultural sector, creative industries, and independent cultural activities.

**Promoting Cultural Rights and Regional Cooperation:** Fostering a deeper understanding of cultural rights, freedom of expression, and the importance of regional cultural cooperation, enabling students to advocate for inclusive and sustainable cultural policies.

**Enhancing Practical and Theoretical Knowledge:** Combining rigorous academic courses with practical educational experiences, such as workshops, internships, and international collaboration, to ensure that students are prepared for real-world challenges.

**Building a Network of Cultural Leaders:** Contributing to the creation of a strong network of professionals and cultural managers in Iraq, while ensuring their engagement within the broader network formed by these groups in the Arab region. This encourages cross-border dialogue and cooperation to address common cultural challenges and builds new opportunities for sustainable cultural partnerships.

## Program Structure and Curriculum

The proposed Master's program is intended to provide comprehensive education combining academic theory and practical experience, specifically designed for Iraq's unique cultural and political environment. The program should be offered over two academic years, encompassing four semesters, and includes the following components:



**Core Courses:** Focused on fundamental topics such as Cultural Policy Analysis, Cultural Management Strategies, Cultural Rights, and Dynamics of the Creative Economy. These courses will provide students with critical theoretical knowledge and analytical skills.

**Elective Courses:** Offering specialized subjects such as Digital Transformation in Cultural Management, Cultural Heritage Preservation, and Cultural Diplomacy. This flexibility allows students to tailor their education to their interests and career aspirations.

**Practical Training and Workshops:** Emphasizing experiential learning opportunities through internships, local and regional workshops, and collaboration with cultural institutions. Practical training can significantly enhance practical skills in cultural management and strategic cultural planning.

**International Collaboration and Exchange:** Utilizing partnerships with international universities and cultural organizations to offer exchange programs, joint research projects, and opportunities for students to attend workshops and academies abroad, enhancing global perspectives and regional cooperation.

**Graduation Project or Thesis:** A capstone project allowing students to apply what they have learned to real-world cultural management issues, contributing to original research or practical solutions to challenges in Iraq's cultural sector.

**Guest Lectures and Networking Opportunities:** Regular seminars and lectures by prominent cultural policymakers, cultural managers, and academics to enrich the curriculum and provide networking opportunities for students.

## Implementation Strategy

The implementation strategy for the proposed Master's program involves a phased approach that ensures a comprehensive and sustainable rollout. It provides a structured pathway to successfully establish the program and ensure that it meets the needs of cultural management and policymaking in Iraq through the following stages:

**Planning Stage:** Establishing a steering or preparatory committee that includes representatives from Iraqi universities, cultural institutions, and international partners. Their work includes drafting the initial concept for the program's idea, vision, objectives, and justifications for its launch, planning how to secure initial funding from the government and international donors, and considering the mechanism for developing the detailed curriculum and identifying faculty members. It is proposed that the Ministries of Culture and Higher Education



undertake this program through a joint committee to outline its basic steps, after which a public call is launched for potential partners to sponsor and fund the program.

**Development Stage:** Formalizing partnerships with local and international universities, cultural organizations, and stakeholders, followed by identifying or hiring faculty members. They will be trained on the program's nature, fundamentals, vision, and all related aspects. Ensure the completion of designing study materials and creating an online platform to manage the program and facilitate the learning process.

**Launch Stage:** Promoting the program at the national level, targeting interested students and potential partners. Then, start the first cohort with a pilot group of carefully selected students through clear selection mechanisms to refine the curricula and collect feedback.

**Sustainability Measures:** Ensuring continuous funding through diverse sources, including government support and international grants allocated to the program. Continue the ongoing evaluation process and regularly adjust curricula based on feedback, emerging cultural policy trends, and the growing needs of Iraq's cultural sector.

**Engaging Stakeholders:** Maintaining active collaboration with government bodies, cultural institutions, NGOs, and international organizations to enhance the program's importance and impact, ensuring it remains aligned with national and regional cultural policy goals.

## Recommendations

To successfully establish the Master's program, the following policy recommendations are proposed to ensure the program's sustainability, enhance the skilled workforce in the cultural sector, and strengthen Iraq's capacity in cultural management and policymaking:

**Securing Funding:** Obtain funding from government bodies and international donors to cover initial costs, including curriculum development, hiring faculty members, and necessary infrastructure.

**Forming Strategic Partnerships:** Establish strategic partnerships with local and international universities, cultural organizations, and NGOs to share resources, expertise, and research opportunities, building a solid institutional partnership base for the program's launch and sustainability.



**Careful Selection of Host University:** The university hosting the program should be chosen with great care, ensuring it is qualified to host such an important and specialized program. It's preferable to set clear and detailed criteria to determine the best university to host this program, which has the necessary infrastructure and staff capable of performing the task successfully. Some of these criteria may be available in prestigious universities such as the University of Baghdad, Al-Mustansiriya University, the University of Kufa, and the University of Basra.

**Ensuring Curriculum Adaptability:** Ensure that the curricula are adaptable, linked to the concepts of cultural policies and cultural management, consistent with international standards, integrating theoretical knowledge and practical skills, considering its relationship to Iraq's diverse cultural context, and ensuring its ability to develop and keep pace.

**Capacity Building and Faculty Training:** Build capacities and train selected faculty members by developing a comprehensive training program on all aspects related to the program, including mechanisms, visions, and outcomes. Involve international experts to enhance teaching quality and the program's importance.

**Regular Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establish a framework for continuous evaluation, integrating feedback from stakeholders, to ensure the program meets evolving cultural policy needs.

**Promotion and Communication:** Promote the program and clarify its importance and advantages, developing a strong marketing strategy to attract interested students from various provinces of Iraq. Utilize partnerships and alumni networks.

**Viewing the Program as a Professional Specialization:** Consider this program a professional specialization, not just an academic one. Therefore, strict admission criteria should be set to ensure the acceptance of students genuinely interested and active in the cultural field, excluding those who only wish to obtain the degree for other purposes. Consider the number of students to be accepted and align it with the program's capacities, especially in the first experimental year.

**Covering Study Costs:** To assist students accepted into the program, it is suggested to cover study costs for each person through a dedicated financial grant, helping them perform well academically if sufficient funding is received from the government or international organizations. Alternatively, offer the program without any financial fees charged to students, meaning canceling the self-funded channel and keeping only the public channel in admissions.



## Monitoring and Evaluation

To ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of the Master's program, a robust monitoring and evaluation framework should be implemented. By executing specific measures, the program can remain responsive to the evolving needs of the cultural sector and maintain its relevance and quality over time. This framework should include:

**Performance Indicators:** Establish specific and measurable indicators to assess the program's success, including student enrollment rates, graduation outcomes, application of acquired skills in their cultural careers, feedback from stakeholders, and the cultural impact graduates have in their communities.

**Regular Evaluation:** Conduct annual reviews of curricula, teaching methods, and partnerships to ensure alignment with the needs of the cultural field, cultural policies, and global standards.

**Stakeholder Feedback:** Collect regular feedback from students, faculty members, cultural institutions, and policymakers to identify areas for improvement and adapt to changing dynamics in the cultural sector.

**Impact Analysis:** Periodically assess the program's impact on Iraq's cultural sector, including contributions to cultural policy development, capacity building, and regional cooperation.



## Conclusion

The proposed program in Cultural Policies and Cultural Management represents a pivotal opportunity for Iraq to revive its cultural sector by addressing critical gaps in leadership, policy development, and cultural management. By implementing such a program, Iraq can begin rebuilding its cultural infrastructure strategically and gradually, preserving its rich and diverse heritage, and nurturing a new generation of cultural leaders capable of shaping its cultural future.

Aligning the program with global best practices and its ability to adapt to the unique cultural challenges faced by Iraq will ensure that graduates are well-prepared to lead cultural institutions, develop sustainable policies, and contribute to the growth of the creative economy. Given that the cultural sector has the potential to drive significant economic growth—especially in areas such as tourism, heritage, and arts—this program would help diversify Iraq’s economy beyond its reliance on oil. This will not only support the country’s economic stability but also encourage cultural tourism, investment, and regional cooperation, placing Iraq in a position of regional leadership in cultural policies and cultural management.

Ultimately, the successful implementation of this program would constitute a turning point in the Iraqi cultural sector, creating pathways for sustainable growth, capacity building, and protection of cultural rights. It would also serve as a model for other countries in the Arab world facing similar challenges in developing and managing cultural policies. By investing in the education and training of cultural managers and policymakers, Iraq can take decisive steps toward a more vibrant, creative, and innovative cultural future—one deeply rooted in its heritage but strongly engaged with the global cultural community, keeping pace with all its developments and events.





**For an Active state  
and a participating society**

---

[www.bayancenter.org](http://www.bayancenter.org)  
[info@bayancenter.org](mailto:info@bayancenter.org)

---