

Report

NET Project

June - September 2026
Kurdistan, Irak

Table of Contents

About NET Project	3
Participants	5
Participants' needs & expectations	7
TFA Specialists	9
Programme	10
Recordings & Presentations	11
Workshop report	12
Funded projects	16
Outcomes	13
Partners	19



ABOUT NET PROJECT

Focus: Network & Structure

Projectteam
• Nwa Najmldin, Goethe-Institut Erbil
• Mutaz Abdulrahman, Goethe-Institut Erbil

Projectpartner
• Kurdistan Center for Arts & Culture (KCAC), Erbil
• Culture Factory
• The Festival Academy

Project description:
The NET project promotes the professionalization of festival managers in the KRI through further training. The aim is to initiate new festivals, revitalize cultural infrastructure and strengthen the development of sustainable networks between cultural institutions. The NET project is conceived and implemented in collaboration with Goethe Institut Erbil, Kurdistan Center for Arts & Culture (KCAC), Culture Factory, and The Festival Academy.

Long:
The NET project aims to professionalize and structurally strengthen the cultural sector in the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan-Iraq (KRI). The focus is on the qualifications of festival managers through a comprehensive training programme that covers central aspects of festival organization such as programming, budgeting, event planning, marketing, curation and management. The aim is to enable local cultural practitioners to independently develop and implement innovative and sustainable festival formats. Festivals are a central instrument of cultural representation and social visibility in the KRI. At the same time, however, in many cases they are neither innovative nor sustainable due to a lack of professional structures, qualified personnel and public funding. This is particularly evident in the largely unused cultural infrastructure, such as the citadel in Erbil, the castle in Akre or the tobacco factory in Sulaymaniyah, which offer great potential for cultural events but are hardly ever used. In addition, political paralysis and bureaucratic hurdles mean that the Ministry of Culture is hardly active in supporting cultural workers. Interested parties can apply with their own festival ideas via an open call. Selected participants take part in a modular training program. They then develop specific festival projects in groups and apply for financial support. **The three most convincing concepts receive funding for implementation**. They are accompanied by mentors. The implementation takes place in cooperation with regional cultural institutions. The project aims to revitalize the cultural landscape in the KRI in the long term. It promotes not only individual qualifications but also exchange and networking between cultural institutions. The combination of education, practice and partnerships creates new impetus for more resilient and inclusive cultural work in the region.

The NET project has partnered with The Festival Academy to design this tailor made online capacity building programme fit to the participants' needs, to provide follow up mentoring and for the co-curation of the experts.

What (social and/or location-specific) challenge is the project responding to?
The project responds to the lack of professional cultural managers in the KRI, the low innovative strength of existing festivals and the unused cultural infrastructure. It counters the isolation of cultural actors, the bureaucratic inactivity of the Ministry of Culture and strengthens sustainable structures through education and networking.

Which specific target group(s) are in focus?
The focus is on young cultural professionals and prospective festival managers in the KRI, especially people with their own festival ideas. Employees of existing cultural institutions should also be addressed to promote knowledge transfer and sustainable networking.

What activities and communication strategies will be used to reach them?
The target groups will be reached via an open call and by directly addressing them via existing cultural institutions, networks and social media. Information events, digital campaigns and cooperation with local partners are planned. The project will be made visible through targeted public relations work in social networks, local press and via the Goethe-Institute. Workshops, mentoring and public presentations of the festival ideas will also promote reach and commitment.

Focus 1 - What special (aesthetic) experience does the project enable?
Focus 2 and 3 - How can the project be continued after the end of funding?

Focus 2: Sustainability is ensured through the training of local experts, networking and long-term cooperation with cultural institutions.

What added value does the project generate ...

for the target group(s):
The project provides the target group with practical knowledge in cultural management, strengthens their skills and opens new career prospects. Through mentoring, financial support and networking, they are given concrete opportunities to implement their own festival ideas and establish themselves in the cultural sector in the long term.

for the project partner(s):
The project partners benefit from an active revitalization of their spaces, the development of qualified personnel and greater visibility in the region. By being involved in further training measures and festival organization, their structures are strengthened and new impulses for long-term cooperation are created.

regarding the target agreement:
The project contributes directly to the target agreement by strengthening the cultural infrastructure, tapping into new target groups and creating sustainable structures. It increases the visibility of the Goethe-Institute in the region, promotes cultural exchange and positions it as a central player in the field of education and cultural development.



PARTICIPANTS

Shay Mohsen Mohammed • Project coordinator and artist from Erbil. • Interest: Heritage/ History	**Lolav Piro** • Visual artist from Duhok, currently based in Erbil. • Interest: Visual arts, Public space/ community-based projects	**Fahad Harbo Kheder** • BA in English Literature + Centre and Music Band Manager. • Interest: Music, Literature, Heritage/ History, Public space/ community-based projects
Fatima Mazn karim • Emerging filmmaker from Erbil with experience as an assistant director, co director, camera assistant and production assistant. • Interest: Film/ Cinema, Visual arts, Public space/ community-based projects	**Husna Mahmood Jaafar** • Environmental artist and the founder of the first Eco Art Gallery in Kurdistan and Iraq, from Halabja-Kurdistan- Iraq. • Interest: Visual arts, Public space/ community-based projects	**Mahdi Hassan Mawlood** • Organic sculptor and cultural activist based in the Raparin region of Kurdistan. • Interest: Visual arts, Heritage/ History, Interdisciplinary/ mixed formats, Public space/ community-based projects
Bzhwen Jamal Haji Karim • Practitioner in the cultural sector from Sulaymaniyah. • Interest: Film/ Cinema, Literature, Visual arts, Interdisciplinary/ mixed formats, Public space/ community-based projects	**Rabar Ibrahim Hama Ali** • Filmmaker, Media Specialist & Academic from Halabja. • Interest: Film/ Cinema, Visual arts	**Hezha Amen** • Designer with a focus on product design and software development from Sulaymaniyah. • Interest: Music, Literature, Visual arts
Diyar Jabar Mohammed • The team behind ARTALK, a project born from the need to give young artists in our community a real voice. From Sulaymaniyah. • Interest: Visual arts, Interdisciplinary/ mixed formats, Public space/ community-based projects	**Hemn Mohammed Ibrahim** • DJ, cultural organizer, and founder of Deng Collective from Erbil. • Interest: Music, Interdisciplinary/ mixed formats, Public space/ community-based projects	**Razaw** • Calligrapher and visual artist based in Erbil. • Interest: Visual arts

Mir Sarhad • Tambourine and Violin Player | Live music presenter. • Interest: Music	**Are Sarchl Namiq Alhawezi** • Has an artistic practice in Erbil. • Interest: Heritage/ History	**Soz jabar karim** • Architecture student and film director from Sulaymaniyah. • Interest: Film/ Cinema, Music, Visual arts, Heritage/ History, Interdisciplinary/ mixed formats
Naz ali aula • Self-taught artist since childhood from Erbil. • Interest: Visual arts	**Sarwar Taha Fatih** • Cultural manager, arts policy professional, and translator based in Slemani. • Interest: Film/ Cinema, Literature, Heritage/ History	

PARTICIPANTS' NEEDS & EXPECTATIONS

1. Language
Be mindful that English is not the mother tongue for most of us, both speakers and participants. We advise you to adapt your speed of speaking and check in with the group. There are 2 participants who lack sufficient knowledge of English for who translation will be foreseen.

2. Who is in the Room?
There is a diversity of experience in the room:

The Strategists
These participants understand large-scale execution and policy.

- Sarwar Taha Fatih: Holds an MA in Arts Policy (UK, Chevening Scholar) and was part of the core team that delivered a 4-day music festival for 20,000 attendees. He has a strong grasp of institutional networks and international fellowships.
- Rabar Ibrahim Hama Ali: A filmmaker and Kurdsat Media producer with 17 years of experience across theater, film circuits, and complex team management. He is currently structuring the "Green Lens Halabja" festival.
- Fahad Harbo Kheder: Band/Center manager at Mirzo Music Centre with deep NGO roots (Red Cross, Save the Children, Oxfam) who has already completed a Festival Academy programme in Jordan.
- Bzhwen Jamal Haji Karim: An art writer and logistical powerhouse who has managed logistics for intensive, annual regional festivals (e.g., Space21 Experimental Music Festival, Metrography).
- Are Sarchl Namiq Alhawezi: Former Design Team Lead for the Rwanga Foundation, accustomed to managing visual branding for 1,200+ attendee events.

The Grassroots Founders & Space Creators
These practitioners have successfully built physical hubs or niche communities but need the tools to scale up structurally.

- Mahdi Hassan Mawlood & Husna Mahmood Jaafar: Founders of independent hubs (Mali Aw NGO and Eco Art Gallery, respectively) who have managed local exhibitions and student growth under tight constraints.
- Lolav Piro: Combines 7+ years of international NGO Quality Control with running Kurtisan Studio to make art accessible.
- Hemn Mohammed Ibrahim: A DJ who founded the Deng Collective to build an independent electronic music ecosystem in Erbil.
- Diyar Jabar Mohammed: Developed the "ARTALK" event model for live, competitive art showcases at the Culture Factory.

The Emerging & Niche Innovators
Younger or highly specialized creatives bringing fresh, interdisciplinary ideas.

- Hezha Amen: A remote software developer/product designer who brings strong tech, UX, and hackathon organization skills to the cultural table.
- Shay Mohsen Mohammed: A 23-year-old co-founder of a custom Kurdish board game that fuses cultural heritage with climate change awareness.
- Soz Jabar Karim & Fatima Mazn Karim: Emerging film directors, cinema practitioners, and architecture students focused on storytelling and 3D heritage archiving.
- Razaw & Naz Ali Aula: Visual artists specializing in pushing traditional boundaries (Islamic calligraphy mixed with contemporary forms , and recycling art utilizing traditional Kurdish fabrics).
- Mir Sarhad: A 21-year-old virtuoso and co-founder focused entirely on preserving ancient Kurdish tambourine and Yarsani mystical music.

3. Core Thematic Clusters (Their Festival DNA)
The cohort's festival concepts naturally group into three compelling pillars. You can design breakout sessions or peer-review tracks around these profiles:

Cluster	Key Focus Areas	Core Participants
Eco-Awareness & Sustainable Art	Fusing environmental action, climate dialogue, recycling art, and green spaces with local cultural identity.	Rabar, Husna, Mahdi, Shay, Naz Ali.
Heritage, Ritual & Sacred Traditions	Re-creating oral histories, traditional crafts, mystical music, and regional textiles into contemporary festival frameworks.	Shay, Fahad, Mir Sarhad, Razaw, Mahdi, Are Sarchl, Soz Jabar.
Alternative Formats & Live Experiences	Breaking the "silent gallery" motif via live art tournaments, sub-culture electronic music, independent cinema, and tech integration.	Lolav, Diyar, Hemn, Fatima, Bzhwen, Hezha.

4. Expectations and needs of the participants

Focus Area A: From One-Off Event to Sustainable Platform
A recurring request across the cohort is how to transform a singular creative idea or short event into a long-term, structurally sound institution.

- M*asterclass Priority*: Teach governance models, strategic project management, and cultural entrepreneurship. Focus heavily on financial planning and diversified fundraising strategies so they don't rely entirely on volatile, short-term grants.

Focus Area B: Navigating Fragile & Resource-Constrained Infrastructures
Many participants operate in marginalized, underrepresented, or post-conflict zones like Halabja, Sinjar, or Ranyah. They face serious administrative, political, and spatial hurdles.

- M*asterclass Priority*: Run sessions on risk assessment, navigating localized bureaucratic/legal tape, and community advocacy. Emphasize "pop-up" or adaptive infrastructure—Bzhwen's interest in converting unfinished spaces or landfills into art hubs is a perfect template for this.

Focus Area C: Thoughtful Adaptation of Rituals & Curation
Participants like Shay want to learn how traditional practices can be recreated respectfully without losing authenticity , while others want to adapt international models (like European "Art Battles") to local contexts.

- M*asterclass Priority*: Focus on curatorial ethics, audience development, and experience design. Teach them how to design interactive community feedback loops to ensure their festivals are locally grounded but internationally competitive.

TFA SPECIALISTS



OUSSAMA RIFAHI

Cultural Management Consultant (Lebanon/Germany)

- Oussama Rifahi is a cultural and management consultant based in Berlin. He provides advisory services to cultural organizations, international and national foundations, private corporations and governmental bodies. Oussama is a board member of the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture and supports the development and operation of various similar regional cultural funds internationally. Oussama has managed the development and implementation of national and regional cultural strategies and directed museum development projects in architecture, curation and economic impact analysis. He leads the design and implementation of public art programs and commissions, and develops and implements fundraising strategies for non-profits in Africa, Europe and the MENA region. Alongside his consultancy, he teaches arts management and mentors artists and emerging cultural organizations internationally.

Workshop:
- ***Strategic Management & Governance***
- **Monday 29 June - 11:00-14:00 Erbil time** (10:00-13:00 Brussels time)



ALIA ALZOUGBI

Artistic Director and CEO of Shubbak Festival London (Lebanon / UK)

- Alia is a cultural strategist, artist and facilitator working at the intersection of art and social & environmental justice. Her practice uses the arts to interrogate the fundamental causes of inequality and explore alternative modes of understanding the world and being in it. She has worked with national and international organisations as a curator and storyteller to create critical encounters in education and the arts towards collective liberation, from local corner shops to world-renowned museums. Shubbak Festival is an Arab artists focussed festival based in London.

Workshop:
- ***Curation, Cultural Mobility, Social justice, Post conflict and healing communities***
- **Tuesday 30 June - 11:00-14.00 Erbil time** (9:00-12:00 UK time // 10:00-13:00 Brussels time)



SOPHIE BECKER

Artistic & festival director of Spielart (Germany)

- Sophie Becker studied dramaturgy at the Bayerische Theaterakademie München, majoring in theater studies, musicology, and modern German literature. She subsequently worked as a dramaturg at Theater Aachen, Sächsische Staatsoper Dresden (Semperoper), and Bayerische Staatsoper München. Since 2008, Sophie Becker has been a lecturer in dramaturgy at the Bayerische Theaterakademie; since 2016, she has served as deputy program director for the directing class. Since 2009, Sophie Becker has been involved with the international theater festival SPIELART, initially as a dramaturg and member of the programming team, since 2016 as part of the artistic direction, and since 2020 as artistic and festival director.

Workshop:
- ***Contemporary Curation & Artistic Sustainability, working with international co-curators and running an international festival.***
- **Thursday 2 July - 11:00-14:00 Erbil time** (10:00-13:00 Brussels time)

PROGRAMME

OUSSAMA RIFAHI

Workshop:

- ***Strategic Management & Governance***
- **Monday 29 June - 11:00-14:00 Erbil time** (10:00-13:00 Brussels time)

Most festivals begin as one person's idea, and few grow into institutions that last. This session is about that journey, and the shift every festival-maker eventually faces, from independent artist or practitioner to the manager who can build a durable structure around the work.

Through the story of a real festival from the region, traced from its first idea to a funded, recurring event, the session makes the craft of festival management concrete: shaping vision and mission, mapping stakeholders, knowing your audience, building and segmenting a base of donors, producing the reports and materials that earn institutional trust, and putting in place the operational, partnership and fundraising foundations that let a festival outlive its founder. It looks at the tension between the creative and the managerial, between the freedom that makes the art good and the discipline and leadership that make organizations endure.

The session also introduces practical tools and working methods that small teams can use to do more with less. Throughout, participants weigh the real choices festival-makers face: when to stay informal and when to build a formal structure; how far to professionalize before the spirit of the work is lost; whether to follow the funding that is available or hold to a vision; and where to direct scarce energy, into the program or into the foundations that let it happen again.

ALIA ALZOUGBI

Workshop:

- ***Curation, Cultural Mobility, Social justice, Post conflict and healing communities***
- **Tuesday 30 June - 11:00-14.00 Erbil time (9:00-12:00 UK time // 10:00-13:00 Brussels time)**

This workshop explores how festivals can be sustained platforms for cultural renewal, community healing, and environmental stewardship. Participants will examine how traditional rituals, musical heritage, and cultural practices can be reimagined for contemporary audiences, challenging the notion that heritage and contemporary art exist in separate spheres. Through co-production, commoning, and adaptive reuse of disused spaces, the workshop will explore how recycling and circular approaches can serve as both sustainable practices and tools for community building. It will also consider how art and festivals can support post-conflict healing, amplify marginalized voices, and help reshape narratives from conflict and loss toward creativity, resilience, and collective futures.

SOPHIE BECKER

Workshop:

- ***Contemporary Curation & Artistic Sustainability, working with international co-curators and running an international festival.***
- **Thursday 2 July - 11:00-14:00 Erbil time (10:00-13:00 Brussels time)**

Building on the international SPIELART Festival in Munich and accompanying texts (including those by Robin Arthur and Michiel Vandelvelde), the third module explores curatorial strategies. Topics include contemporary presentation formats, co-curation, contextualisation, spatial planning, sustainable collaborations, hospitality, audience development and communication.

RECORDINGS

Here, you can (re)watch the recordings of the Masterclasses by the TFA Specialists*:

→ **Oussama Rifahi**

→ **Alia Alzougbi**

→ **Sophie Becker**

PRESENTATIONS

Here, you can find the presentations of the Masterclasses by the TFA Specialists:*

Oussama Rifahi ←

Alia Alzougbi ←

Sophie Becker ←

*Acces to the video's and documents can be asked through info@thefestivalacademy.eu on an individual basis.

WORKSHOP REPORT

Sulaymaniyah | 2–4 July 2026

Introduction

This report summarizes the discussions, presentations and collaborative work that took place during the three-day NET (Build Culture Together) workshop in Sulaymaniyah. The workshops brought together emerging cultural practitioners from across the Kurdistan Region to further develop their festival ideas, exchange experiences and strengthen their skills in festival planning, curation and collaboration.

Day 1 – Developing Festival Ideas

The first day began with the final online session led by Sophie Becker, focusing on contemporary curation, artistic sustainability, working with international co-curators, and the challenges and opportunities of running an international festival. Following the online session, participants took part in an interactive icebreaker that helped everyone get to know each other in an open and relaxed atmosphere. They then presented how their festival ideas had evolved throughout the online sessions. Each presentation was followed by constructive feedback, questions, and group discussions, allowing participants to further refine their concepts through peer exchange and expert input.

Rabar introduced his festival concept, leading into a broader conversation facilitated by Mutaz Abdulrahman who introduced key principles of festival development, organizational structures, fundraising strategies and donor relations. Mahdi presented a project inspired by traditional Kurdish heritage, proposing the revitalization of historical spaces through artistic activities. Participants discussed making heritage more accessible for younger generations.

Shay shared an early concept focusing on cultural visual arts, while Lolav proposed an artistic competition to strengthen appreciation for art in Kurdistan. Bzhwen introduced a literary festival bringing together poets, writers and thinkers. Razaw presented the Khama Kurdish Festival of Arts centered on Kurdish calligraphy. Meer concluded with a proposal dedicated to the tambur instrument and Kakai musical heritage.

Throughout the day, participants reflected on how sustainable structures, clear artistic visions and realistic funding models contribute to successful festivals.

Day 2 – Festival Structures and Organizational Models

The second day focused on analyzing existing festivals and identifying common challenges. Participants first reflected on experiences they had made at other festivals and listed aspects they would like to avoid in future events. Topics included poor communication, weak programming, lack of accessibility, insufficient planning, environmental sustainability, gender balance, audience engagement, marketing, volunteer management, visitor services and inclusive design.

After lunch, participants worked in mixed groups to design ideal festival structures. Each group developed an organizational model including artistic direction, festival management, finance, technical production, communications, marketing, operations, volunteer coordination, partnerships and guest management. These presentations led to valuable discussions about the differences between curation, co-curation and overall festival management. The day concluded with presentations by Culture Factory and KCAC, introducing their work, facilities and role in supporting the cultural sector in the Kurdistan Region.

Day 3 – Project Development, Site Visit and Team Formation

The final workshop day focused on transforming individual ideas into collaborative festival concepts. Mutaz Abdulrahman encouraged participants to make full use of the opportunity and continue developing their projects beyond the workshop.

Fahad presented the inspiring development of the Mirzo music initiative in Sinjar, demonstrating how music education can strengthen communities, preserve cultural heritage and create sustainable learning opportunities for young people. Further project ideas were presented and discussed before participants joined a guided tour through Culture Factory's creative spaces, including studios, exhibition spaces and cultural production facilities.

Following the site visit, participants began forming interdisciplinary teams based on shared interests. Four groups developed collaborative festival concepts that combined their original ideas into larger projects. These included festivals dedicated to Kurdish music and folklore, interactive cultural experiences, neighborhood-based cultural activation, traditional crafts, literature, architecture, visual arts and community participation. At the same time, a few participants decided to continue developing their festival concepts individually rather than joining a group, as they wished to further refine their own ideas independently. Each group and individual participant presented their initial concept and received valuable feedback from the trainers, project partners and fellow participants.

Participant Reflections

The workshop concluded with an open reflection round. Participants expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to meet cultural professionals from different cities, exchange ideas and build new professional relationships. Many highlighted that the collaborative atmosphere, practical exercises and constructive feedback had strengthened both their confidence and their project ideas. Several participants wished the workshop had been longer to allow more time for discussion and collaboration. Others suggested including even more interactive sessions alongside presentations. Overall, participants agreed that the programme had created a valuable network of emerging festival organizers that they intend to maintain beyond the project.

Next Steps

Participants will continue refining their festival concepts individually or within their newly formed teams. While collaboration is strongly encouraged, individual applications with well-developed festival concepts are also welcome. Project proposals must be submitted by 15 August 2026. Each proposal should include a clear description of the team structure and responsibilities. Additional team members may be involved where relevant to strengthen the project and ensure the successful implementation of the festival.

The proposal should also provide a detailed description of the festival concept, planned activities, implementation timeline, target audience, communication strategy, expected outcomes, and a detailed budget structure. It is important that all key aspects of the project are clearly explained to allow for a comprehensive evaluation during the selection process.

During the proposal development phase, participants will have the opportunity to receive individual mentoring from the trainers. Anyone interested in one-to-one mentoring is encouraged to contact Nua Najmldin (nwa.najmldin@goethe.de) After participants send their questions or indicate the topics they would like to discuss, the mentoring sessions will be arranged accordingly. Online meetings can then be scheduled to discuss project ideas, answer questions, and provide tailored feedback.

When developing their concepts, participants are encouraged to prioritize historical and cultural heritage sites as festival locations. Revitalizing and reactivating these important cultural spaces is one of the key objectives of the NET programme.

Three winning projects will each receive a grant of max. USD 15,000. The selected projects will be announced on 1 September 2026, and the grants will be awarded at that time. The implementation phase of the festival should take place from September until November 2026.

Participants should note that the grant is intended as seed funding rather than covering the full costs of a festival. Teams are therefore encouraged to develop sustainable funding strategies by applying for additional grants, seeking sponsorships and building partnerships. Throughout this process, the Goethe-Institut Irak, KCAC, Culture Factory and the Festival Academy will continue to provide guidance and support. Assistance in identifying suitable venues and cultural spaces may also be available through the project partners where possible.

The NET programme has demonstrated the creativity, commitment and potential of emerging cultural practitioners across the Kurdistan Region and has laid the foundation for future collaborations and innovative festival initiatives. We wish all participants every success in developing their proposals and look forward to seeing your festival ideas come to life.



FUNDED PROJECTS

Minutes of the NET Jury Meeting

1. Opening and approach

The meeting opened at 13:00 with a joint discussion of the submitted proposals. The jury considered the numerical evaluations together with the qualitative comments and focused on artistic relevance, community impact, feasibility, budget, sustainability, and the teams' capacity to implement the proposed festivals. The Festival Academy was unable to attend the jury meeting. However, Inge Ceustermans had reviewed all proposals in advance and provided written qualitative feedback. Her comments and recommendations were available to the jury and were taken into consideration during the discussion.
At the beginning, the possibility of merging some groups was raised. It was noted that this had already been explored during the development phase and that, at this stage of the process and within the remaining implementation period, merging teams would be difficult.

2. Discussion of the proposals

1. **Festîvala Dengbêjiyê û Govendê – Dengbêj and Govend**

The proposal received very strong support. The jury highlighted the relevance of the location in Shingal, the potential community impact, and the importance of safeguarding and reconnecting communities with traditional music and cultural practices. The proposal was also seen as having strong potential for continuation in future editions. Points requiring further attention were the structure of the team, a clearer budget breakdown, and stronger branding and marketing to reach audiences given the location.

2. **Runaki Festival**

The jury considered Runaki a strong, modern and well-developed idea with a capable team. At the same time, several elements were considered too broad or insufficiently clear for the current scope. In particular, the number of rooms/experiences, the Silent Room, and the meal experience were discussed. The jury recommended narrowing the concept and clarifying which elements are central to the festival. A separate follow-up meeting was therefore considered necessary before a final funding decision on the proposal.

3. **BAREDAN – Reviving Koya's Heritage Through Cultural Pockets**

The jury responded very positively to the activation of heritage houses in Koya and to the involvement of local stakeholders. The main concern concerned safety and feasibility when using older buildings for public activities. The need for appropriate technical assessment, visitor management and protection of the houses was emphasized. The partners expressed willingness to support the project where possible, including through communication and marketing.

4. **A Living Festival of Kurdish Culture & Folklore Games**

The jury considered the idea culturally relevant and distinctive, particularly because traditional games are rarely addressed in a festival format and could connect families, schools, universities and different communities. The potential for documentation, research and future expansion was viewed positively. At the same time, questions were raised about whether the initial format was sufficiently developed as a festival, how the authenticity and regional variations of the games would be verified, and how the first edition could remain realistic in scale. A smaller first edition with a limited number of games and locations was discussed as a possible approach.



5. **Green Lens Halabja Documentary Film Festival**

The jury considered the theme and environmental focus important and relevant. However, there were concerns about whether the films and programme were sufficiently ready for implementation and whether the available grant could realistically support the scale proposed. The jury noted that the concept may require a larger budget and more developed infrastructure than the current funding can provide.

6. **NEXŞ – 3D Heritage Festival**

The documentation and digitisation of heritage were considered valuable, but the proposal was viewed as not yet sufficiently developed as a festival format. The jury discussed the substantial time, technical expertise and specialist input required for documentation and 3D work. There was concern that the implementation period would be too short and that the result could become closer to an exhibition than a festival.

7. **Kurdistan Art Festival**

The public-space setting was viewed positively, but the competition/tournament model raised concerns. The jury questioned whether established artists would be attracted by a competitive format and whether competition could reduce the artistic and curatorial value of the programme. The concept was considered broad and in need of a clearer curatorial framework.

8. **Khame Festival & Awards**

The concept and focus on calligraphy were seen as interesting, but the proposed scale was considered too ambitious for a first edition. The jury discussed the large team and scope, the international ambition, and the need to clarify the relationship between Kurdish, Arabic and wider international calligraphy practices. A more focused national or regional first edition was considered more realistic.

9. **ARTALK – Art That Speaks, Talent That Shines**

The jury considered the proposal less developed than the stronger submissions and noted similarities with other art- focused concepts. The concept would require further development and a clearer distinctive approach.

<u>3. Overall jury position and follow-up clarifications</u>

Based on the jury discussion, Dengbêj and Govend, BAREDAN, Runaki Festival, and Folklore Games emerged as the four strongest proposals under consideration. However, this does not represent a final funding decision. Before concluding the selection process, the jury agreed that several points should be clarified with the respective project teams. Follow-up questions were therefore raised regarding the research behind the traditional games proposed by the Folklore Games team and the safety and suitability of the selected heritage houses within the BAREDAN project. For Runaki Festival, the jury recognized the strength and potential of the overall concept, while identifying several elements that require further clarification and refinement. A follow-up meeting with the Runaki team is therefore scheduled for 31 August 2026 to discuss these points in more detail. Following the outstanding clarifications, including the follow-up meeting with the Runaki Festival team, the jury members were given the opportunity to provide any additional comments or raise further concerns regarding the selection. No further comments or objections were received.



Proposal / issue	Clarification	Outcome / next step
Folklore Games – research and authenticity	Shay was asked whether the traditional games had been sufficiently researched. She confirmed that she and her colleague, Mr. Gashbeen, have been working on the subject for approximately two years and have researched the games using different sources.	The clarification addressed the jury's question regarding the research basis and authenticity of the games.
BAREDAN – safety of the heritage houses	Mahdi was asked how the houses had been selected and whether safety had been considered. He confirmed that the project has a team consisting of the applicants and people from Koya, and that only houses considered safe for the planned activities were selected.	The jury's safety concern was clarified; appropriate attention to safety and site management remains important during implementation.
Runaki Festival – scope and concept	The jury agreed that the core idea is very strong, but several elements of the proposed format remain unclear and require further discussion.	A follow-up meeting with the Runaki team and the partners took place on 31 August 2026 to clarify the concept and discuss the next steps.

4. Final jury decision

Following the follow-up meeting with the Runaki Festival team, the jury members were given the opportunity to provide any additional comments or raise further concerns regarding the selection. No further comments or objections were received.
The selection therefore remained as previously discussed, with the four strongest proposals confirmed for funding under the NET project:

- **Festîvala Dengbêjiyê û Govendê – Dengbêj and Govend**
- **Runaki Festival**
- **BAREDAN – Reviving Koya's Heritage Through Cultural Pockets**
- **A Living Festival of Kurdish Culture & Folklore Games**

The four selected teams will be contacted individually regarding the next steps. Each team will enter into an agreement with the Goethe-Institut for the implementation of their festival within the framework of the NET project.

OUTCOMES

General outcomes:

- Created **more informed and aware festival makers** in Kurdistan.
- **A network of Kurdish festival makers** has been established.
- Practical and discoursive exchange on **the impact of art and festivals on local communities, the landscape and environment**.
- **Exchange about the role of arts in contexts of conflict/war** and deeper understanding how creativity can support solidarity and care.
- Experienced and explored strategies for working and producing in challenging contexts, **learning how to navigate logistical, social, and political obstacles.**

Projectspecific outcomes:

The four selected festivals (**Festîvala Dengbêjiyê û Govendê** – Dengbêj and Govend | **Runaki Festival** | **BAREDAN** – Reviving Koya's Heritage Through Cultural Pockets | **A Living Festival of Kurdish Culture & Folklore Games**) will get funding from Goethe Institut and organise the first edition of their own festival.



PARTNERS

GOETHE INSTITUT

In exchange with the world.
For diversity, understanding and trust.

We connect people worldwide. As a cultural institute of the Federal Republic of Germany, we promote cultural exchange, education and social discourse in an international context and support the teaching and learning of the German language. Together with our partners, we focus on global opportunities and challenges and bring different perspectives into a trusting dialogue. We see listening and reflection as the key to understanding. We are committed to the principles of openness, diversity and sustainability. These principles shape our offerings and working methods.

KURDISTAN CENTER FOR ARTS & CULTURE

Kurdistan Center for Arts & Culture (KCAC), Erbil is a non-profit cultural organization dedicated to preserving, documenting and promoting Kurdistan's heritage, culture and arts. Through digital archives, exhibitions, publications, educational programmes and artist support initiatives, KCAC works to strengthen cultural knowledge, creative exchange and public engagement in the Kurdistan Region and beyond.

CULTURE FACTORY

Culture Factory, Sulaymaniyah is an independent cultural space and creative hub based in the former Tobacco Factory in Sulaymaniyah. Through exhibitions, performances, workshops, residencies and community-based cultural initiatives, Culture Factory supports artistic production, cultural exchange and creative collaboration while contributing to the revitalization of cultural infrastructure in the Kurdistan Region.

THE FESTIVAL ACADEMY

The Festival Academy is a global capacity-building infrastructure strengthening cultural leaders who operate festivals as spaces for civic engagement, dialogue, and societal transformation. With a community of over 1,700 festival leaders across 140+ countries, The Festival Academy supports a distributed global ecosystem of cultural actors collectively reaching more than 40 million audience members annually.

The Festival Academy believes festivals are bridging platforms with a direct link to people and civil society structures. We believe a critical reflection between artists, arts and cultural managers worldwide and cross-sectoral stakeholders can bring about positive change, informed awareness, new ideas and proposals for actions through personal human relations and based on knowing, respecting and tolerating different value and belief systems.