

## THE BYBLOS MUNICIPAL CULTURAL CENTRE



ACCESS TRAINING STRATEGY **CULTURAL POLICY**  
COOPERATION **KNOWLEDGE** DESCENTRALIZATION  
LOCAL PROMOTION **INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

### 1. Context

Situated just 40 kilometres from Beirut, Byblos is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. It is one of the most visited cities in Lebanon, whose archaeological sites are among the richest and most varied in the region. It was here that the oldest Phoenician inscriptions were found on the sarcophagus of Ahiaram, which serve as the origin of today's alphabet. Byblos is the administrative seat of 82 towns and villages, and is home to 25,000 inhabitants in a 4 square kilometre area. Having been spared the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1991), Byblos has preserved its tradition of harmonious interfaith tolerance.



The city boasts a number of services with eight public and private schools, two hospitals, a university, a diverse banking sector, and a restaurant industry that attracts tourism.

The CLAC (*Centre de lecture et d'animation culturelle* [Centre for Reading and Cultural Activity]) was created in 2009. Promoting reading literacy is its primary activity, particularly by lending books to children. Initially, the library was geared towards children under the age of 12. However, updating the municipality's mandate has made it possible to expand the centre's cultural mission. Assessing local needs revealed a lack of arts and culture activities that are affordable for everyone. There was also a notable lack of variety in cultural activities in which current initiatives centred on painting. Furthermore, there was a marked shortage of spaces for dialogue, meeting, and welcoming among children, youth, and inhabitants for educational and creative projects. There is a clear need to develop the potential of the cultural centre's surrounding area.

THE GOAL OF THE MUNICIPAL CULTURAL CENTRE IS TO CREATE A SPACE FOR ENGAGEMENT AND DIALOGUE WHILE OFFERING A VARIETY OF QUALITY ARTS, CULTURE, AND EDUCATION SERVICES TO EVERYONE.

## 2. Byblos and Culture

Cultural policy in the city is based on everybody's right to access a number of quality cultural activities. As a result, the Centre for Reading and Cultural Activity (CLAC) was established within a network supported by the Ministry of Culture. The Ministry provided basic equipment, while the Municipality manages the centre and undertakes the operating costs. The Centre has taken a broad approach to culture by integrating cultural, educational, and creative activities.

In order to ensure access for all, the centre offers free basic activities, including borrowing books, internet access, occasional party events, theatre, and concerts, among others. Other activities are priced according to the financial capabilities of families. The services offered make it possible to develop creativity and provide access to knowledge for the whole community, particularly through collaborations with the cultural centres of embassies and universities, as well as with research institutes. This policy has given the centre a national reputation. Currently, there are between 1000 and 1200 annual members.



The cultural centre joins A21C by offering diverse, high quality cultural services that are accessible to residents. This helps to unleash the creative capacities of every individual. The CLAC funds different activities thereby enabling their sustainability. It also creates a space for cultural meeting and interaction. Furthermore, it invests in the promotion of books and reading literacy.

### 3. Objectives and Project Implementation

#### 1.1. Primary Objectives

The goal of the Municipal Cultural Centre is to create a space for engagement and dialogue while offering a variety of quality arts, culture, and education services to everyone.

Specifically, its objectives include creating a meeting space open to children, youth, and adults alike where they can work, read, research, engage in dialogue, or participate in activities. It aims to provide a variety of cultural and education services for children from 3-12 years of age geared towards developing creativity and discovering knowledge, while also guaranteeing lifelong learning that meets the needs of residents, allowing them to expand their knowledge. Additionally, the centre is committed to organising quality cultural events during the school holidays.

THROUGH THEIR AVID PARTICIPATION, INVOLVEMENT, AND ENTHUSIASM, THOSE WHO HAVE BENEFITTED FROM THE CENTRE HAVE ALSO MADE THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL AWARE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF SPACES THAT PROMOTE DIALOGUE, COMMUNICATION, AND INTERACTION.

#### 1.2. Initial Stages

One of the project's particularly noteworthy aspects is the many workshops carried out for children on painting, DIY, papier-mâché, storytelling, and listening to music. It has also held exhibitions for renowned painters or launches for young artists, concerts for various types of music, summer festivals that encourage new artists with a space to establish confidence, as well as cultural and recreational summer camps. A number of meetings have also been held on various topics from English classes to an adult reading club which meets monthly to discuss books. The centre has also established an annual reading week which invites at least four or five Arabic and French authors to discuss literature with students. Research institutes and universities have also hosted conferences and workshops.



Two cultural facilitators were hired and trained by the Ministry of Culture to carry out the activities. They have been immersed in French communities to get a closer look at, and understand, the activities that are being held elsewhere.

Redevelopment and renovation projects, as well as purchasing equipment such as computers, books, and games were undertaken to help the facilities to better accommodate the public. Its entrance, garden, and exhibition hall have been improved to properly accommodate events. Funding was secured in the first year to launch the cultural and educational activities, including workshops, summer camps, exhibitions, concerts, and plays.

Currently the centre covers the operating costs of its activities, and the Municipality financially supports all other additional charges and costs. Initially, the CLAC faced a lack of registration and attendance, in addition to the fact that schools were also reluctant to participate in activities. Today, however, these issues have been resolved by increasing public confidence in the quality of events.

IT HAS BEEN RATED THE SECOND BEST CENTRE IN LEBANON THANKS TO ITS DYNAMIC, QUALITY SERVICES.

The centre has grown from 120 to between 1000 and 1200 annual members. While it used to only host one activity per week, it now guarantees more than four or five. Previously, groups were made up of children from 5 to 12 years of age, but currently events include all age groups, except for adolescents who will be the focus of the centre's future initiatives. The centre has a nationwide reputation, is visited by people from across the country, and is a sought-after place for meetings and conferences by universities and associations.

Those who benefit directly from the centre include: children aged 3 to 12, who can access cultural, artistic, and educational activities; adults who have reading, research, and group programmes;



associations, universities, and research centres that organise conferences, debates, project launches, and other events; artists who host exhibitions for painters, photographers, and calligraphers; and women's groups with English classes and artistic workshops. However, the population of the entire city and surrounding villages all benefit from its presence.

## 4. Impacts

### 1.1. Direct Impacts

#### Impact on the Local Government

The local government has recognised the importance of investing in culture. Through their avid participation, involvement, and enthusiasm, those who have benefitted from the centre have also made the municipal council aware of the importance of spaces that promote dialogue, communication, and interaction.

#### Impact on Culture and on the Local Cultural Actors of the City/Territory

The CLAC has established itself as a place offering quality cultural and education services. Schools in the region are more aware of its projects, and subsequently send their students to participate in activities such as the annual reading week, or science exhibitions. The space is part of an active process of sustainable cultural development.

#### Impacts on the Territory and Population

It has become a place for meeting, healing, as well as a welcoming space for reading, culture, and learning. Residents are aware of the opportunities at the centre and they, in turn, offer support for those activities.

### 1.2. Crosscutting Impact

The CLAC has made an impact beyond the domains of culture and education. It now addresses environmental issues with select training, food safety education, and meetings for restaurateurs to



establish hygiene standards to be implemented throughout the city. It is also a place to express the rights of the families of those who disappeared during the civil war. All of these areas have a direct impact on health, the environment, and human rights.

### 1.3. Evaluation

Two evaluation mechanisms have been put in place. The first involves a number of participants who are involved evaluation sessions. These meetings focus on the results achieved by an activity as compared to public expectations, as well as the efficiency of actions in terms of cost, duration, and results. This is usually carried out before an action has been completed. The second is an annual meeting organised along with the Ministry of Culture. The main criteria are quantitative, relating to the number of activities held, as well as the number of participants per activity, and per year. The centre has been rated the second best centre in Lebanon thanks to its dynamic quality services.

### 1.4. Continuity

The CLAC is deeply rooted in the community, and while it is presently managed by two associations, this responsibility is to be undertaken by the municipality through an integration process. The municipality has worked to consolidate services and devote an annual budget to the centre, allowing them to be more successful in the long term.

## 5. Further Information

Byblos was a candidate for the second International Award "UCLG – Mexico City – Culture 21 " (January – May of 2016). The jury for the award drew up its final report in June of 2016, and requested that the Committee on Culture promote this project as one of the good practices to be implemented through Agenda 21 for culture.

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This article was written by Najwa Bassil Pietton, Municipal Council Member of the city of Byblos, head of the Municipal Cultural Centre, Byblos, Lebanon.

Contact: njbassil (at) gmail.com