

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOPOUGON'S CULTURAL POTENTIAL



Inauguration of the Municipal Library on the 28th August 2014 (PHILIPP CARTER III Library)

HERITAGE COMMUNITY CULTURAL POLICY
SUSTAINABILITY INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT **YOUTH**
ECONOMIC PLANNING **COOPERATION** LOCAL

1. Context

With a surface area of 152.11km², the commune is home to more than one million, five hundred thousand inhabitants, of which 50% are women and 56% are under 20 years old. Located on the Banco Plateau and home to a protected forest (territory of the 'Achan' or Ebré people), Yopougon has 11 traditional villages, which constitute its rich heritage. It has a body of water shaped by the Ebré lagoon and the N'Braké lake. It is a modern town that is deeply rooted in tradition. The districts are made up of the villages within the town. Their architecture is modern but their socio-political and cultural arrangement are still based on the traditions of their forebears. It is a cosmopolitan area that includes 20 nationalities, of which there are several ethnic communities, notably Akan (38.42%), Kru (20.48%), Mande (23.46%), naturalised citizens (0.32%) and immigrants (16.97%). The commune has several public and private educational establishments and specialised institutions. It also has a large concentration of factories (Industrial Area), which provide many job opportunities for the population. The young population of Yopougon have renamed it 'Yop City' or 'Poy'. It is a mixing

place for traditional, modern, Ivorian and foreign culture and hosts traditional cultural events (Feast of Generations) as well as national and international events (FICGAYO, Traditional Dance Festival, Lagoons Film Festival, Carnivals...).

The implementation of the strategic development plan and the development of Yopougon's cultural potential were initiated by the Yopougon council's Department of Sociocultural Affairs, within the framework of a consultation with artists, cultural operators and national structures. The aim was to put a stop to the constant improvisatory state of its culture and to introduce a model that would change the way that communities within the Ivory Coast approach culture. Moreover, the funds that the council have dedicated to culture only represent a small portion of the overall budget. The execution of planned spending was carried out as a matter of urgency and not for pre-defined strategic priorities. This resulted in an unsatisfactory pilot for cultural contributors and local cultural administrators. However, as they were aware of Yopougon's potential in terms of creativity, knowledge and know-how, they nevertheless deemed it necessary to put together a strategic document.

THE MUNICIPAL FUND HAS TAKEN THE ISSUE OF WOMEN INTO PARTICULAR CONSIDERATION FOR ITS MICRO-PROJECTS.

With its various festivals (popular cinema theatre), breeding ground of creative musical artists (Zouglou, dance, fashion design), rich historical heritage and natural landscapes, Yopougon has great potential for development. However, the commune has faced difficulties efficiently optimising this potential in order to ensure human development and create the necessary conditions for diversifying the local economy by strengthening its creative economy. These difficulties can simply be explained by a lack of programs specifically dedicated to the development of this potential and the lack of financial means. This strategic plan is needed by residents' and the council's in urban areas who are proactively trying to make Abidjan a cultural city of reference that can overcome impoverishment following the cessation of State intervention. Thus, they have combined the cultural development strategy with urban renovation and housing. Ultimately, the search for ways of creating business and income for the young population using local cultural resources has had to coincide with the economic diversification strategy for local development.



Canoe race in Yopougon - Bouley Island

2. Yopougon and Culture

Decentralisation of culture is a fairly recent phenomenon in the Ivory Coast, having only started in 2003. Local communities have long seen strategies and programs applied that have been designed by the State and taken over by the Abidjan district. They normally involve projects based on opportunities introduced by the State or by the District in order to meet the needs of local cultural associations. In fact, the Act for the Organisation and Distribution of Responsibilities between the State and the territorial communities legislates that sectoral plans and actions in communes must work with those from the District and that the latter must be in keeping with national policies that have been adopted in each sector. Even though a document for national cultural policy has actually been developed and adopted in the Ivory Coast, it has not been promulgated. However, this situation is offset by elements from sectoral policy, notably with regard to broadcasting.

As a result of this situation, the territorial communities had no strategy to guide their cultural dynamic. The analysis of actions supported by the Yopougon town council, up to the creation of a Department of Sociocultural Affairs, revealed that the organisation of occasional cultural events was the predominant feature of municipal intervention. This was to the detriment of the strategy based on training, formation of a network of infrastructures and cultural programs for the commune to develop local competences and cultural resources. To break away from this approach, initiated by the Department of Sociocultural Affairs and local cultural organisations, the town council broke new ground by being the first in the district to adopt a strategic development plan and a plan for the development of sociocultural potential. It is, therefore, thanks to this pilot document that programs and cultural policies have been designed and developed for the municipality to commit to. Henceforth, the challenge is to provide Yopougon with sectoral policies and cultural programs that prioritise human development. Generally speaking, it involves the young population and their artistic, technical and professional training in order to boost employment and social cohesion through cultural dialogues. On a sectoral level, it involves the expansion of policies and programs to develop reading, the promotion and development of performance arts and particularly music and the growth of cultural tourism.

THE AIM WAS TO PUT A STOP TO THE CONSTANT IMPROVISATORY STATE OF THE CULTURE AND TO INTRODUCE A MODEL THAT WOULD CHANGE THE WAY THAT COMMUNITIES WITHIN THE IVORY COAST APPROACH CULTURE. (...) THE EXECUTION OF PLANNED SPENDING WAS CARRIED OUT AS A MATTER OF URGENCY AND NOT FOR PRE-DEFINED STRATEGIC PRIORITIES.

Through its strategic development plan and its plan to enhance sociocultural potential, Yopougon is committing to a long-term vision of making culture one of the cornerstones of the Commune's development. Since the diagnostic phase of the plan, local authorities have progressively been able to identify the needs of the populations within its territory and to study the best ways of implementing a continuous liaison with contributors from civil society by involving various local contributors affected by the cultural development of their territory: this marks the next step in the implementation of the plan. Informed and participatory governance is essential for social cohesion that is inclusive and respectful of diversity that has been undermined by war. The cultural contributors are henceforth co-responsible for a new 'living together' condition of the territory's sustainable development; its new-found stability can only strengthen the dynamics of international cooperation.

The first projects for the implementation of the plan involve developing culture as a sector that creates wealth (setting up cultural stalls), meanwhile providing young people and those in difficulty with the possibility of expressing themselves and achieving greater visibility through their art. A music centre will be created with facilities for training. Amateur and professional musicians will be able to rent rehearsal studios at a low cost. The network of libraries will be strengthened. There will be a 'fortnight of cultural diversity' and traditional festivals will be promoted to ensure intergenerational dialogue. The municipal fund has taken the issue of women into particular consideration for micro-

projects aimed at supporting women's projects, especially those led by women working in the cultural sector. Young women who work on stalls that sell cultural products have also been given an important place in order to improve the communal network within the territory. The council plans to give a new life to spaces made available to the inhabitants so that they can express their creativity beyond what is already provided by institutions and therefore encourage the emergence of new talent. This is why it is holding discussions on artistic and technical training, but also promoting the examples of Ivorian artists who have achieved international recognition. For all these components to work, there must be cooperation between different levels of government (District, State).

3. Objectives and implementation of the project

3.1. Main and specific objectives

The general objective for developing this strategic plan is to consider which guidelines need to be taken in order to organise the city's sociocultural policy by contributing developing this territory, weakened by poverty and social tensions in connection with State policies. A preliminary study was carried out by the Yopougon commune to analyse the needs, existing resources and sociocultural potential of the commune. The study also helped identify the projects that were a priority in the sociocultural sector and helped develop a plan of action and training plan for their implementation.

This strategic plan has been drawn up to target the following specific objectives:

- Promoting a participatory approach in order to encourage synergies between different local cultural contributors and their appropriation of the project;
- Creating a shared vision of the town's future through actions and projects;
- Encouraging a cross-sectional approach to different sectoral policies;
- Understanding the dynamics of the territory in order to consistently implement the cultural development strategy with various public policies;
- Defining development strategies for sociocultural potential and formulating recommendations for the implementation of the strategic plan by identifying realistic and viable actions;
- Promoting dialogues with the private sector so that it feels involved with this socio-cultural development plan, in keeping with the territory's active Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR).
- Identifying indicators for development and a policy for evaluating initiatives.

3.2. Phases

The development and implementation of the strategic development plan and plan for developing the Yopougon commune's cultural potential have been carried out in three main phases:

- Preliminary study: stock-taking and analysis of cultural heritage, community organisations, facilities and places for cultural expression and the preparation of a matrix for the overview of this analysis.
- The validation of the strategic plan through a workshop with the various parties involved;
- The implementation of a strategic plan through coordination with other public policies for local development, as well as the definition and implementation of pilot projects.

THROUGH ITS STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND ITS PLAN TO DEVELOP SOCIOCULTURAL POTENTIAL, YOPOUGON IS COMMITTING TO A LONG-TERM VISION OF MAKING CULTURE ONE OF THE CORNERSTONES OF THE COMMUNE'S DEVELOPMENT.

3.3. Actions

Following the adoption of the strategic plan, several pilot projects were launched in 2013, in notably:

- The creation of a network of thirty stalls selling cultural products in partnership with the Ministry responsible for culture and Francophonie, which aims to encourage young people selling illegal cultural products to obtain legal employment (selling CDs, DVDs, cassettes,

performance tickets, other related products). The stalls have been set up in different areas in Yopougon in order to create a network of opportunities to access culture.

- 'Fortnight of Cultural Diversity' is a result of the transformation of '*Rencontres Artistiques et Culturelles de Yopougon*' (Yopougon's Artistic and Cultural Encounters) into an annual event, which aims to showcase the cultural diversity of the commune, made up of a mosaic of populations from the Ivory Coast and Western Africa. Thus, for two weeks, each community will be able to present their cultural and artistic expressions to the different districts on *Rue Princesse* and *Place Ficgayo*. This event is part of the national reconciliation strategy to promote cultural diversity.
- It is the beginning of a network of five communal libraries in the existing locations (abandoned home, villa). These libraries are of a professional level and will provide access to knowledge.
- Training council officers on the subject of social cohesion, providing basic services, general contractors, management of organisations and management sociocultural and sport infrastructures.



Visit from the reggae singer Ismail Isaac performing his latest album (Album title: "Je reste")

3.4. Results

- The inclusion of culture in the commune's three-year plan (2013-2016);
- The inclusion of cultural activities in the 2014 annual budget;
- The facilitation of the use of public property for cultural promoters, with an aim to set up stalls selling cultural products (Culture Information Point);
- The search for technical partners on a national and international level to set up a network of libraries and develop the music industry;
- The inclusion of culture in the municipal fund's support for micro-projects;
- The organisation of cultural activities such as the Festival of Independence, music festival, cultural holidays, the Renc'Arts (encounters between artists and the public)
- Financial and technical support for the commune's cultural activities (Abidjan's International Theatre Festival, International Film Festival of the Lagunes, '*Zouglou en fête*', scattered performances from the Art Market of African Performances (MASA) in Yopougon)

During the implementation of the strategic plan, the following difficulties have been met:

- Convincing the authorities of the necessity of a new approach based on a study;
- Building mutual confidence at a time of institutional instability between cultural contributors and the local elect;
- Using a common vocabulary of cultural issues;
- Using a number of qualified human resources to carry out the initiatives;
- Obtaining the necessary financial resources to carry out the plan.

4. Impacts

4.1. Impact on the town's local government and cultural officers

In contrast to the traditional system where only technicians were responsible for development planning, this strategic plan has been developed with great participation from the territory's cultural contributors as a paradigm of the increasing decentralization of the Ivory Coast. It has enabled a better understanding of the sociocultural situation in the Yopougon commune (a summary of the existing cultural potential, strategic focuses, expert committee, etc.), identification of priority projects and lastly, the inclusion of a sociocultural section in the commune's overall development policy.

4.2. Impact on the culture and the local cultural officers

As a decision-making tool, the strategic plan is a better way of taking into account the aspirations and difficulties of the commune's cultural contributors. It helps the local authorities recognize the key role that cultural contributors play in Yopougon's development. It changes the municipal authority's perspective on the cultural sector in general, and more specifically, on cultural contributors. It has led to the increased subsidy allocated to community associations and cultural contributors in the 2012 budget, the improvement of data available on the sociocultural sector and lastly, the start of new synergies between contributors.

THE STRATEGIC PLAN CONTRIBUTES TO A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE ASPIRATIONS AND DIFFICULTIES FACED BY THE COMMUNE'S CULTURAL CONTRIBUTORS, AS WELL AS ENABLING THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO RECOGNIZE THE KEY ROLE THAT CULTURAL CONTRIBUTORS PLAY IN YOPOUGON'S DEVELOPMENT.

4.3. Impact on the town and population

The impact of the strategic plan on the town and its population goes beyond the production of tools accessible to the community. It highlights the sociocultural sector's potential and its contribution towards the development of the commune. It has enhanced cultural diversity, urban cultural development, job creation, sociocultural industry (and its need for structure), mastery of project assembly techniques in accordance with the calls for proposals from development partners, as well as management and reporting procedures for the funds granted. It has also highlighted the employment opportunities, which can help bring down unemployment and tackle poverty.

Furthermore, the commune relied on the strategic plan in order to present a project for strengthening social cohesion through culture. This project has benefited from funding from the Ivory Coast's European Union delegation.

4.4. Cross-sectional Impacts

The strategic plan has enhanced Yopougon's sociocultural potential among public contributors and has inspired interest in sociocultural activities among residents and artists from the commune. As such, the strategic plan has confirmed the need for dialogue and consistency between national and local public policies, as well as cultural decentralization, recognition of sociocultural skills transferred from the State to communities, the necessity for a synergy of initiatives and pooling of resources and skills between ministries and the community, the development of cultural cooperation at local, national and international levels (promoting trade/opening and developing markets) and the

importance of taking local cultural potential and specificities into account within the context of diversity, social cohesion and national unity. Thus, this consideration of the implementation of a sociocultural policy should result in a cross-sectional policy that includes education, environment, territorial development, economy, tourism, crafts, social matters, international relations and research etc.

5. Further Information

The commune of Yopougon was a nominated candidate for the first 'UCLG International Award - Mexico City - Culture 21' (January-May 2014). The awards jury produced a final report in June 2014 and asked the UCLG Committee on Culture to promote this project as a practical example for the implementation of Agenda 21 for Culture.

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