
MAISON DES JEUNES ET DE LA CULTURE (MJC) – AS FOR YOUTH AND CULTURE CENTER

YOUTH COMMUNITY SUPPORT
INCLUSION **CREATIVITY** **ARTS** SOCIAL
PARTNERSHIPS **WOMEN** PEACE

1. Context

"Smile, you are at Zouk Michael", this slogan welcomes any visitor who enters this city of Lebanon, located 14 km from Beirut.

Zouk Mikael lived several periods of wars and occupations, from the Turkish occupation to the French one, without forgetting the civil war in 1975. Prior to that, old civilizations occupied Lebanon and left

us with many ruins from different times, such as Romans and Phoenicians ones. During the French occupation during World War 2, it became a really important city in Lebanon, especially because the Lebanese president headquarters were transferred to our municipality after the bombing of Beirut. Lebanon endured many demolitions, but it didn't stop us. It has known afterwards an economic, intellectual, cultural and urban revolution, and it is aiming to an even better future by developing itself and by providing cultural experiments for its citizens.

Responding to the need to be more open and having more diversity and culture, Zouk Mikael witnessed a rebirth thanks to the municipality, which pioneered in terms of progress and city services. Thanks to the competency and devotion of its staff, the municipality have become the lighthouse to several achievement and up to date events.

2. Zouk Mikael and culture

One of main objectives after the war and crisis in Lebanon was to direct youth towards a better future, so the municipality created the "Youth and Culture Center" [Maison des Jeunes et de la Culture – MJC]. Its main purpose is to be an open eye for all the community, and especially the youth, and women, aiming at overcoming precreated boundaries, stepping out of our comfort zone and creating a better future for the whole community. In this regard, the MJC created partnerships with NGOs and universities, and expanded its activities with embassies through socio-cultural exchanges to open out the culture of the zoukiotes.

ONE OF THE MAIN OBJECTIVES AFTER THE WAR AND CRISIS IN LEBANON WAS TO DIRECT YOUTH TOWARDS A BETTER FUTURE, SO THE MUNICIPALITY CREATED THE "YOUTH AND CULTURE CENTER".

The municipality organizes events and many other activities in collaboration with foreign embassies (Armenia, USA, Brazil, France, India, Switzerland, Philippines or Ireland for example). Also, Zouk Mikael established the first links with the European Union, starting in 2003. In 1999, Zouk Michael was awarded the UNESCO "Cities for Peace" Prize of the Arab regions of the Middle East.

The MJC also establishes an atmosphere of dialogue and cohesion among the people of the city, starting from board educational games nights, where children, young people and families come to discover new ways and tactics, to spaces for communication and interaction with new friends, thus enriching and deepening interculturality. The municipality offers a wide range of social activities: origami workshops, quizz nights where teenagers and adults compete on answering questions about different cultural topics, and also "kids genius", the Bird Show competition, rally papers, or the Zouk Mikael photography completion.

Zouk Mikael received around 7,000 Syrians who were running from the war in Syria. Some voluntary activities were organized especially for them, in partnership with specific embassies such as the Swiss and the US Embassies.

Zouk Mikael considers that culture is the 4th pillar of development, alongside the social, local economic and environmental pillars; as shown by the intensity of cultural events organized by the municipality all over the year.

While going through the activities of the programme, links were drew off between the MJC and the UN 2030 Agenda:

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- **Goal #4: Quality Education & Goal #16 Peace Justice & Strong Institutions**
Translates for example by a program called "SCHOOL +" aiming at generating a fair education atmosphere for all, including the creation of additional courses for the third and final classes, as they have official exams to fill student's gaps. We also offer language courses, additionally to the native three languages of Lebanese people (Italian, Portuguese, Spanish), as well as calligraphy courses. More programs will be developed in the description part 4.2
 - **Goal #5: Gender Equality & Goal #8: Decent work & Eco growth**
As part from the accomplishments in Zouk Mikael, is equality between men and women. The city reached that 60% of employees are women.
 - **Goal #17 Partnerships for the Goals**
We have several partnerships with embassies, ministries and individual private sector.

3. Goals and project implementation

1.1. Main aim and specific goals

The aim of the project is to have Culture within the reach of all the Community. The strategy is to get the best of its citizen, aiming at expanding culture to all the territory, and at reaching to all levels and ages, by pushing creative needed ideas given by the community, getting more partners involved and empowering and acknowledging the responsibilities of everyone.

1.2. Development of the project

Main actions carried out

The strategy was set to influence 3 different circles: The Zouk Mikael community, The Kesserwen Community and the Lebanese Community. We believe that the culture isn't exclusive to some people more than others. The more it is spread the better, and for this reason we developed partnerships with local and international NGO's both based in Lebanon and abroad. We meant to partner with a lot of organizations from the South, the North and the Center of Lebanon in order to create awareness that

we are here if any help is needed. We wanted the MJC to be one of the main places for any organization to come and spread awareness about their vision and mission:

- 1- To Encourage NGOs and volunteers to keep giving back to the community by offering them the venue with all the services
- 2- To have interactive and diversified communication especially in Lebanon, where we have around 18 religions, with different mentalities and priorities.
- 3- To have more people coming from all Lebanon.

ZOUK MIKAEL CONSIDERS THAT CULTURE IS THE 4TH PILLAR OF DEVELOPMENT, ALONGSIDE THE SOCIAL, LOCAL ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL PILLARS; AS SHOWN BY THE INTENSITY OF CULTURAL EVENTS ORGANIZED BY THE MUNICIPALITY ALL OVER THE YEAR.

Different actions and yearly, monthly and weekly events took place, all with the same one goal: Keep on creating sustainable culture on different levels and in different ways.

As for example, the BOKADDICT is a program which aims at fulfilling the needs of the community by offering people a space to relax and travel, by reading books of all kinds offered by the municipality, which leads to an inner peace that begins at home, and then goes out and spreads in the outside environment allowing to develop more empathy and love, and less conflict among people. The Municipality encourages young talents to write & share their work with the municipality's library, and also organizes book clearance for the exchange of books and the sharing of new stories.

On another hand, the MJC offers Yoga classes & Anti-stress coloring nights, and puzzle nights and Lego nights in order to distress the community, as well as many courses to develop the community ability to communicate, empower their leadership skills and teach them the basics of technology. The MJC is also at the initiative of conferences on women rights, social media awareness that target how to protect kids, breast cancer awareness, etc...

Furthermore, the municipality believes in women and their role in the community. That is why it is supporting programmes aiming at empowering women, including some knitting learning sessions with the objective to support those who do not have a degree so they can learn how to produce goods to then sell. The City didn't want the remains from our ancestors to fade in the past. Zouk is famous for the "marzipan", therefore, the city encourages the old generations to teach young ones the art of marzipan, passing it generation to generation and spreading the flavor everywhere.

Because we believe that together we can achieve more, we thought partnering with other institutions; local or international, public or private sectors, would be a good way to achieve more of these Goals. As an example the city is in partnership with the French Embassy through the "Institut Francais" in order to create lots of activities around culture. It also beneficiates from funding from the Ministry of Culture, and from support to touristic development from the Ministry of Tourism – the city has lots of as marvels in terms of architectural heritage: temples, old monasteries, the roman amphitheater, and such, where international festivals are held every year, and which have been equipped with recent techniques which place it high on the list of world theaters.

The municipality has progressively managed to preserve the city from a wild urbanism, implanting many green spaces. Families with children can come by the public garden to contemplate the architecture of the nature and smell a wide range of flowers. Thanks to the restoration of the old souks, many craftsmen perpetuate their know- how, mainly the "NAWL", a technique of weaving and manual embroidery.

Finally, the MJC also provided music classes for children (piano, guitar, drums, singing...) and spaces to develop their music ear. It has organized musical events, including the annual "Music Festival", where all kind of bands come to play. They also encourage young artists to discover their talent by organizing art exhibitions, mandalas competitions and drawing classes.

Some of the challenges faced was to get people to step out of their comfort zone and try something different they were not used to. The adaptation to change was and still remain a strong issue because the community isn't used to read books, play with people they don't know, speak outloud with respect or share ideas that are not emotionally driven. Another challenge was about funding, especially knowing that all the activities are offered either for free, or for a small participation, when the implementing cost is high, with limited resources.

THE MJC HAS BEEN GETTING FAME IN LEBANON, BEING THE PIONEER IN THIS FIELD, AS WELL AS THE MOST POPULAR, AND IT IS NOW A ROLE MODEL FOR OTHER MUNICIPALITIES IN LEBANON.

4. Impacts

1.1. Direct impacts

Since 2009, the municipality updates and adapts the MJC project depending on the need of the community. It has been getting fame in Lebanon being a pioneer in this field, as well as the most popular, and it is now the role model for other municipalities in Lebanon. We grant this department more budget in order to keep it shining year after year.

Our main target which is the Youth, Women and the whole community are considering the place their 2nd home and the atmosphere is so friendly that people are much more enthusiastic to know and learn more. With the large variety of activities that address different interests, families now showing up together when they didn't before.

This is something that was missing in Lebanon, and we used to envy the European or the American to have such places; now other municipalities in Lebanon envy us to have such a place. With such a project, we contributed to a better economy in the region since we have 5 dedicated employees, and more than 20 freelancers, depending on the events.

DIFFERENT ACTIONS AND YEARLY, MONTHLY AND WEEKILY EVENTS TOOK PLACE, ALL WITH THE SAME ONE GOAL: KEEP ON CREATING SUSTAINABLE CULTURE ON DIFFERENT LEVELS AND IN DIFFERENT WAYS

1.2. Evaluation

A yearly evaluation is done in order to respond to the market need. One of the result of the evaluation is to create a YOUTH CLUB gathering volunteers in order to help them experience the real work market and help us in achieving more.

1.3. Continuity

After seeing and sensing the great impact of this center, we raised the yearly budget of this section in the municipality and we invested in the equipment (computers, advanced sounds, furniture, etc). To

keep-up with the level, we are investing in people by choosing the best teachers for the different programs that we offer in this center.

5. Further information

Zouk Mikael was a candidate for the third "UCLG Mexico City – Culture 21 International Award" (November 2017 – May 2018). 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.

This article was written by Roula Eid Sawan, CEO of Maison des Jeunes et de la Culture, Zouk Mikael Municipality.

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