

PUBLIC READING NETWORK TO FIGHT AGAINST CULTURAL PRECARIOUSNESS AND PROMOTE CULTURAL RIGHTS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19



AGENDA 2030 - SDGs



CULTURE 21: ACTIONS - COMMITMENTS

1. CULTURAL RIGHTS
3. CULTURE AND EDUCATION
6. CULTURE, EQUITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

EDUCATION, YOUTH, WOMAN/WOMEN, DEVELOPMENT,
SOCIAL, SUSTAINABLE, NETWORK, ACCESS,
PRECARIOUSNESS, EQUALITY

1. Agadir and culture

Agadir is the capital of the Souss Massa Region, and is located in west-central Morocco. Greater Agadir is home to 1,300,000 inhabitants. Its economy is based on fishing, agriculture, tourism, trade, and services. It is the top Moroccan destination for seaside tourism, and is also home to a culturally rich countryside including: Igudars (communal granaries), ksour, kasbahs, madrasas, and intangible heritage such as traditional dances, songs, and artisanal crafts, among others. The argan tree, an emblematic tree with World Heritage classification by UNESCO, is one of the area's local natural and cultural symbols.

The cultural sector has been one of the areas most significantly affected by the pandemic, although cultural products were the most consumed during lockdowns. The two media libraries of the Souss-Massa Centre are no exception. Launched in 2019, the Public Reading Network project coincided with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the fact that several economic and cultural sectors were hit hard by the pandemic, culture has paradoxically constituted a means of resistance and life-saving therapy against isolation.

The initiative has enabled young people to fully enjoy their cultural rights, including social inclusion, cultural diversity, personal growth, and local development. The initiative is part of the Agenda 21 for culture strategy, which provides people with the opportunity to create a long-term vision of culture as a pillar of development. The project addresses the 17 SDGs, particularly the areas of education and human rights. At the national level, the project adheres to the National Human Development Initiative (INDH), which places culture at the heart of its strategy.



THE OVERALL GOAL OF THE PROJECT IS TO ENCOURAGE READING AMONG CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN DISADVANTAGED NEIGHBOURHOODS.

2. Project goals and implementation

2.1. Main goal and specific objectives

The overall goal of the project is to encourage reading among children and youth in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The network aims to address the direct needs of recently settled populations living in vulnerable conditions in terms of public reading and culture.

2.2. Project development

In the media libraries, several activities have been offered, such as storytelling, writing, theatre, cinema, singing, drawing, and handicrafts workshops. This diversity of activities allows young people to get together, learn, and have fun away from the restrictions of quarantine. The target population is children aged six and up, and youth from disadvantaged neighbourhoods outside of the city centre. Particular attention is paid to gender with an equal opportunities approach. Generally, access to culture is the centre's primary aim, but the encouragement of reading is the main catalyst for change, driven by the slogan "Reading for All".

It was necessary to combine the efforts of several stakeholders in order to efficiently establish this network, which makes it a good example of synergy between civil society and government bodies. The municipality was in charge of the land acquisition, the INDH was in charge of the construction and provision of the first facility, the Souss-Massa Centre, as well as the overall management, with funding provided by the Regional Council.



Offering and updating the bibliographic and documentary funds was an essential step in the process, specifically the purchases carried out by the centre to meet local needs, and requests to university institutions whose students also frequent the media libraries.

Nevertheless, the centre has been faced with two major challenges. The first is its ability to meet the demand of applications for membership, whose number has already reached more than 1,200 in the Mohammadi neighbourhood alone, as well as over 300 in the village of Aourir in the north of Agadir. The challenges here include the centre's capacity as well as its level of supervision and support. The second challenge was simply the centre's ability to handle the increase in applications. In order to meet these needs, it was necessary to redevelop specific spaces and facilities. Project proposals are also submitted by authors or university researchers to the Institution within the framework of the mission to encourage and promote the publication of books.

THE ENCOURAGING MEETINGS HELD BY THE CENTRE REVEALED THE NEED TO EXTEND THE EXPERIENCE TO OTHER TERRITORIES, ESPECIALLY THOSE UNDERGOING CULTURAL VULNERABILITY.

3. Impacts

3.1. Direct impacts

The success of the initiative, both in terms of the number of members and the cultural activities organized, has been echoed by the Prefecture Committee of the INDH, the Regional Council, and the Communal Council. The encouraging meetings held by the centre with the various authorities revealed the need to extend the experience to other territories, especially those undergoing cultural vulnerability. The media libraries offer cultural actors a space to



regularly organize their activities. Here, the local population can find a place where children and young people thrive because of books and cultural activities. The centre guarantees access to culture without discrimination based on religion, origin, social or cultural background, colour, gender, or sexual identity.

THE CENTRE GUARANTEES ACCESS TO CULTURE WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION BASED ON RELIGION, ORIGIN, SOCIAL OR CULTURAL BACKGROUND, COLOUR, GENDER, OR SEXUAL IDENTITY.

3.2. Assessment

Several indicators are used to evaluate the project, including the network's attendance rate and family satisfaction. The requests for enrollment largely exceed the network's capacity, and informal interviews with parents have demonstrated the positive impact of the project, particularly because of the fact that children and young people experienced less of the pressure of the pandemic and have found a refuge and psychological relief in the cultural activities. For a more in-depth analysis, a questionnaire based on sociological standards should be prepared and distributed to users and their families. A registry will also be proposed in order to leave feedback and comments on the project.

3.3. Key factors

The project of establishing two media libraries has been a necessity for several years. Its ability to reduce feelings of discrimination among young and old alike is a factor of the success of setting up these in situ community centres. The high demand and the high occupancy of the spaces is also a positive sign. Furthermore, there has been a



clear, observed academic improvement in the users of the two media libraries, as well as the marked personal development of the young readers. Additional proof of the success of our programs are: the donations of documents, the volunteer supervision of members by artists and researchers, and media coverage of the centre's activities on radio, television, and social networks.

3.4. Continuity

An annual budget of approximately 50,000 Euros has been allocated to the Centre to carry out its mission for the years 2023, 2024, and 2025. The Centre is managed by an executive committee of 5 members and a board of directors comprised of 15 members. The administrative staff comprises a director, an assistant director, 5 leaders (2 men and 3 women), and one custodial staff member. The institutional support for this project is in and of itself a way to ensure continued work, in addition to the presence of qualified human resources for the management of cultural spaces.

4. Further information

Agadir was a candidate for the fifth UCLG Mexico City – Culture 21 International Award (February - June 2022). The jury for the award drew up its final report in September of 2022, and requested that the UCLG Committee on Culture promote this project as one of the good practices implemented under Agenda 21 for culture.

This article was written by Hassan Benhalima, President of the Souss-Massa Centre for Cultural Development, Mohamed Abzekka Cultural Centre - Hay Mohammadi, Agadir, Morocco.

Contact: [Culture.smd \(at\) gmail.com](mailto:Culture.smd@gmail.com)

Website: www.agadir.ma