

THE BUS OF THE REPUBLIC



AGENDA 2030 - SDGs



CULTURE 21 ACTIONS - COMMITMENTS

1. CULTURAL RIGHTS
6. CULTURE, EQUITY AND SOCIAL INCUSION
7. CULTURE, URBAN PLANNING AND PUBLIC SPACE

**SUSTAINABLE, SOCIAL, LOCAL, INCLUSION,
PROMOTION, DIVERSITY, YOUTH, CULTURAL RIGHTS,
MOBILITY, ACCESS**



1. Istanbul and culture

In Istanbul, the communities in the area of action of the “Bus of The Republic” have limited access to the city’s cultural spaces and activities. These challenges are amplified by transportation barriers and affordability concerns, particularly noticeable in lower-income districts.

There is also limited availability of cultural venues and events in Istanbul’s peripheral districts, and low participation of underprivileged groups in such events due to various social and economic barriers. The lack of cultural and artistic activities catering to the needs of the communities facing barriers, inequalities in access to cultural education, socialization, and entertainment, as well as the lack of freedom of expression in public spaces and equal cultural rights for everyone, were among the most significant conditions observed prior to the project.

2. Project goals and implementation

2.1. Main goal and specific objectives

The “Bus of The Republic” in Istanbul, commemorating the Republic of Türkiye’s centenary, aims to bridge cultural gaps by reaching youth and children in communities that are not able to engage in cultural activities in their local area and facilitate their access to art and culture. The project’s goals include instilling democratic values, encouraging creativity, expanding knowledge through cultural education and raising social awareness. It also promotes cultural dialogue and inclusion, aligning with broader cultural policy objectives of democratizing access and fostering cultural identity within diverse communities.



Its main goals are:

- » Democratizing and facilitating access to culture and art.
- » Fostering sensibility and respect for diversity in early childhood.
- » Bridging the gap in access to culture.
- » Creating safe and inclusive cultural spaces for all, including accessibility for disabled people.
- » Supporting local artists and nurturing cultural dialogue.
- » Identifying and covering areas with limited cultural activities.
- » Ensuring professional competence of educators.

THERE IS LIMITED AVAILABILITY OF CULTURAL VENUES AND EVENTS IN THE PERIPHERAL DISTRICTS, AND LOW PARTICIPATION DUE TO VARIOUS SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BARRIERS.

2.2. Development of the project

The project was initiated by the Department of Culture of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (İBB Kültür), aiming to build a sustainable and lasting cultural policy through a comprehensive approach in promoting cultural development, social inclusion, and access to art and culture for all children.

The main actions carried out in the “Bus of The Republic” project include organizing mobile cultural activities such as workshops, games, street arts, children’s concerts, knowledge contests, and bubble and illusion shows with a vehicle that functions as a mobile cultural platform. These activities are designed to engage children and families from all over Istanbul, creating opportunities for them to participate in cultural and artistic experiences. Strong emphasis is placed on facilitating interaction and dialogue through inclusive activities free from discrimination. Also, by prioritizing eco-friendly activities, İBB Kültür places high importance on reducing carbon emissions. Carbon levels produced during the event’s destination are considered and calculated before the events. Our year-long plan balances emissions with other activities, especially those involving the “Bus of The Republic”.

The assessments of the neighborhoods where activities take place were conducted based on SES (socio-economic status) groups ranging from A (highest) to E (lowest). This allowed İBB Kültür to target and provide substantial support to neighborhoods falling within the D-E categories through a singular project, ensuring equal cultural opportunities for every child.



THE “BUS OF THE REPUBLIC” AIMS TO BRIDGE CULTURAL GAPS BY REACHING YOUTH AND CHILDREN IN COMMUNITIES THAT ARE NOT ABLE TO ENGAGE IN CULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN THEIR LOCAL AREA AND FACILITATE ACCESS TO ART AND CULTURE.

The project operates in phases:

- i) Planning and preparation.
- ii) Implementation, with the “Bus of The Republic” conducting cultural and artistic activities for children in various neighborhoods.
- iii) Evaluation, measuring the project’s impact after each activity and gathering feedback for continuous improvement (by comparing the number of participating children with the targeted child population in the region).

Partners involved in the project include NGOs, civil society organizations, private companies, artists, educators and citizen groups. The project may collaborate with other government entities at regional, provincial, state, or national levels to coordinate efforts, share resources, and align strategies for promoting cultural development and social inclusion. Working with district municipalities and neighborhood leaders allows to examine that area closely and gather insights on the needs of that specific area.

The “Bus of The Republic” visited 392 neighborhoods across 39 districts. Within only six months, the project reached 100,000 children. For each neighborhood visited, local community leaders requested additional follow-up engagements. The results of the project include increased access to culture and art for children in underprivileged areas of Istanbul, enhanced social and cultural development. Most importantly, it helped foster democratic values and social awareness among participants, promoting cultural diversity and creativity, and contributing to social cohesion within communities.

3. Impacts

3.1. Direct impacts

The project has benefitted the covered territory, its inhabitants, cultural actors, and the local government at multiple levels, and helped boost self-confidence in children and strengthen values of cooperation and sharing. It has also fostered social inclusion by creating safe and inclusive spaces, promoting a sense of unity and belonging within communities.



The project has effectively addressed local challenges, such as limited access to culture and social inequalities, thereby enhancing the quality of life for residents. It has also responded to broader societal issues by promoting children's rights and gender equality through creating equal opportunities for cultural participation.

The project has empowered local artists, educators, and cultural actors by providing platforms for collaboration and creativity and enriching cultural dialogue. This has contributed to a deeper appreciation for local traditions and customs.

Furthermore, the success of the project has led to enhancements in cultural policy within the local government, demonstrating a strengthened commitment to cultural development and social inclusion. Overall, the project has played a pivotal role in fostering a vibrant, inclusive and culturally rich environment in Istanbul.

3.2. Evaluation

The project uses a systematic and data-driven approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods for the evaluation and monitoring stage. For instance, surveys are conducted by İBB Kültür's media unit, and indicators such as the number of participants, demographics, and satisfaction levels were used for data analysis. İBB Kültür also collects data on the number of participants through the "Istanbul Senin" (Istanbul is Yours) technology platform and app. Key indicators used in the evaluation include cultural access metrics, social inclusion indicators, community engagement levels, and feedback from participants and stakeholders. Surveys and interviews are conducted periodically to track progress and identify areas for improvement. Additionally, the project utilizes performance dashboards and reporting tools to monitor activities, outputs, and outcomes against predefined targets and objectives.



THE PROJECT OFFERS MOBILE CULTURAL ACTIVITIES SUCH AS WORKSHOPS, GAMES, STREET ARTS, CHILDREN'S CONCERTS, KNOWLEDGE CONTESTS, BUBBLE AND ILLUSION SHOWS.

3.3. Key factors

The project's community-centric approach has been instrumental in understanding and addressing the specific cultural needs and challenges of low-income neighborhoods. By prioritizing local input and participation, the project has fostered a sense of ownership and pride among residents, leading to increased engagement and, thus, sustainability of cultural activities.

Secondly, the project's inclusive and collaborative design has ensured that cultural initiatives are relevant, engaging, and accessible to a diverse audience. The project has created meaningful and impactful cultural experiences that resonated with the community by working closely with local artists, educators, and stakeholders.

Proactive outreach efforts, including social media campaigns and community events, have raised awareness and enthusiasm for cultural activities, leading to increased motivation, participation and support from stakeholders and the broader public. Also, the project's flexibility and adaptability have allowed for continuous improvement and relevance, enabling it to respond effectively to changing needs, circumstances, and feedback from participants.

Strong leadership, clear governance structures, and strategic decision-making have been key drivers of the project's success, garnering support from local government and stakeholders and ensuring sustained impact and positive outcomes for Istanbul's cultural development.

3.4. Continuity

At the organizational level, the local government has integrated the project's success into its cultural policies and strategies, demonstrating a commitment to sustaining similar initiatives. This includes dedicating resources to support ongoing cultural activities and outreach efforts.

The project's methodology and lessons learned are systematically documented and shared within the İBB Kültür, ensuring that future cultural projects benefit from past experiences.

Public-private partnerships at operational and maintenance levels are considered for the project's continuity.

For replication in other territories, key considerations include community engagement, stakeholder collaboration, flexible design, adaptive management practices, and robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

4. Further information

Istanbul was a candidate for the sixth UCLG – Mexico City – Culture 21 International Award (November 2023 – March 2024). The jury for the award drew up its final report in June 2024, 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 Leyla Öztürk, Department of Culture, Cultural Policy Advisor, Istanbul, Turkey.

Contact: leyla.ozturk@ibb.gov.tr

Website: www.kultursanat.istanbul