

POTO-POTO CULTURAL CIRCLE



2030 AGENDA - SDGS



CULTURE 21 ACTIONS - COMMITMENTS

- 2. HERITAGE, DIVERSITY AND CREATIVITY
- 7. CULTURE, URBAN PLANNING AND PUBLIC SPACE

**DEVELOPMENT, EMPOWERMENT, SUPPORT,
LOCAL, RECONSTRUCTION, RENEWAL, BASIC SERVICES,
ATTRACTIVENESS, HERITAGE, COMMON GOOD**



1. Brazzaville and culture

Brazzaville, the political, economic and cultural capital of the Congo, is located on the right bank of the eponymous river and is divided into nine districts. With a population of 2.1 million, the majority of whom are young people, Brazzaville is experiencing strong demographic growth, which is leading to urban sprawl. The dynamism of young people is hampered by the lack of basic services to meet the needs of residents and improve their living conditions. Its location, between the river and the forest, makes it a green town, but one that is vulnerable to flooding. Its history and the architecture of its old town make it a cosmopolitan city of art and history, the former capital of French-speaking Central Africa and one of the two cradles of Congolese rumba, along with Kinshasa.

In 2012, the Departmental and Municipal Council (CDM) adopted its “Cultural and Tourism Development Strategy” in line with the national cultural policy. The results revealed that there was insufficient cultural infrastructure in the boroughs to achieve its objectives. The creation of a Department of Cultural and Tourist Development (DDCT) in 2013 provided a response to inter-ethnic conflict and intergenerational divides, with the creation of the City History Committee and the “My Cultural Heritage and Diversity” project. As part of this strategy, the DDCT has conducted a multi-year programme of equitable cultural development of the metropolitan area, involving all neighbourhoods, including disadvantaged ones. The “New Cercle” will serve as the network head for the branches set up in the neighbourhoods, two of which are currently under construction in MFILOU and TALANGAI.

2. Goals and implementation of the project

2.1. Main aim and specific goals

The general objective of the New Cercle, the cultural, artistic and civic centre in Poto-Poto, is to contribute to the social integration and well-being of the residents by transforming the existing building into a renovated and dynamic administrative and cultural centre, the driving force behind the regeneration of a new creative district. In particular, it involves:

- » Developing the region and facilitating people’s access to basic social and cultural services;
- » Transforming Poto-Poto Town Hall and its Cercle Culturel into a cultural, artistic, civic and network hub, while preserving its heritage, so that it becomes a true cultural branch for the districts of Brazzaville;



THE AIM IS TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND WELL-BEING OF RESIDENTS BY BUILDING WHAT WILL BE THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND REGENERATION IN A CREATIVE NEW NEIGHBOURHOOD.

- » Reinforcing the memory of Poto-Poto, the cradle of Congolese rumba and a multicultural Brazzaville;
- » Providing the performing arts professions with a resource centre for structuring the sector, with training, creation and dissemination spaces, a pool of equipment, and a meeting space and community life.

2.2. Development of the project

The main actions and/or strategies implemented are : (i) consultation between cultural operators, municipal staff and elected representatives; (ii) architectural design of the project; (iii) construction work to transform the Town Hall and build the New Circle; (iv) training municipal departments in project management and the management of networked cultural infrastructures; (v) training cultural associations in Poto-Poto and Greater Brazzaville as part of the metropolitan network; and (vi) communication and the search for local, national and international technical and financial partners.

The overall project is being implemented at Poto-Poto:

- » Phase 1: Renovation of the Town Hall and its Cultural Circle to transform them into an artistic cultural hub.
- » Phase 2: Creation of a cultural incubator.

In Greater Brazzaville:

- » Phase 1: Construction of branches for the New Circle in MFILOU and TALANGAI.
- » Phase 2: Extension to other districts.

The project has joined forces with cultural NGOs, artists' associations (musicians), several training centres in the performing arts, and community and religious associations in Poto-Poto. The cultural associations of MFILOU and TALANGAI have been informed, and collaboration is being discussed with the Ministry of Technical and Vocational Education and FESPAM.



The budget for phase 1 (Poto-Poto) was €772,000, co-financed by Brazzaville and the AIMF, while the budget for Greater Brazzaville (MFILOU and TALANGAI branches) was €80,000.

Despite the lack of human resources specialised in cultural infrastructures, the difficulty of obtaining public funding, the absence of private funding at this stage, the lack of consultation between public authorities and civil society, and the lack of knowledge of cultural rights and governance principles, local authorities have been mobilised, cultural operators have been informed, and some of them are collaborating on the project. An operations team comprising cultural actors and municipal staff has also been set up.

Phase 1 of the New Circle is nearing completion, and the project has gained international recognition.

3. Impacts

3.1. Direct impacts

This project had the following impacts

- » New cultural facility nearing completion in Poto-Poto;
- » Construction of branches underway in MFILOU and TALANGAI and inclusion of people from the outskirts;
- » Transformation of the Town Hall area;

- » Involvement of religious communities and residents, and contribution to social peace
- » Contribution to the emergence of a small cultural cluster thanks to its proximity to other cultural facilities such as the painting school and the Canal Olympia theatre in Poto-Poto;
- » Involvement of schools in raising children's awareness of their cultural heritage;
- » Setting up and training (in progress) a team of independent operators and municipal staff;
- » Project to build cultural spaces in the boroughs in stages;
- » Promotion of public-private partnerships as a means of financing.

THE PROJECT INCLUDES THE RENOVATION OF THE TOWN HALL AND ITS CULTURAL CIRCLE, THE CREATION OF A CULTURAL INCUBATOR, THE CONSTRUCTION OF BRANCHES IN MFILOU AND TALANGAI, AND ITS EXTENSION TO OTHER DISTRICTS.

3.2. Evaluation

A working group co-chaired by the Mayor's councilors responsible for town planning and socio-cultural affairs meets regularly with the Development of the project and Culture and Tourism Department to monitor the project and decide on any changes of direction. A work monitoring group made up of cultural professionals and an architect draws up progress reports. Reports and ad hoc consultations linked to the evaluation of the initiative are carried out with the AIMF, the main co-founder. At the same time, meetings with cultural operators are organised for consultation or information purposes.

Indicators used:

- » Number of actions carried out;
- » Progress of actions, particularly construction or training;
- » Types of associated partners: Ministries of Culture and Technical and Vocational Education; cultural associations, international organisations (OIF, UNESCO and UNDP Congo).

3.3. Key factors

The key factors are the constant political have been shown by the Town Hall since 2012, the support of cultural operators and the consistency with national public policies on culture and technical and vocational education.

3.4. Continuity

The Strategy document and its action plan guarantee continuity of action over several years: more than ten years since 2012. Other indicators lie in the fact that it is being implemented in stages, and finally, in the plan to create a public-private fund to support the cultural and tourism sector.



THIS PROJECT IS THE RESULT OF CONSTANT POLITICAL WILL, THE SUPPORT OF CULTURAL OPERATORS AND ITS COHERENCE WITH NATIONAL PUBLIC POLICIES WITH REGARD TO CULTURE AND TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION.

4. Further information

Brazzaville was selected as a special mention for the sixth UCLG - City of Mexico - 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 also promoted this project as one of the good practices to be implemented through Agenda 21 for culture.

This article was written by Hugues Gervais Ondaie, Sociocultural Advisor to the Mayor of Brazzaville, Republic of Congo.

Contact: [ondaye20 \(at\) gmail.com](mailto:ondaye20@gmail.com)