

URBAN II Evaluation

Project Level Case Study: Media Libary (Le Havre)



1.0 Goals

In September 2006 the Léopold Sedar Senghor multimedia library was built in the heart of the Southern Districts of Le Havre with the use of URBAN II funding. The idea of building a new multimedia library had existed for a while, as the area is characterised by low library attendance rates and even lower levels of reading abilities. These issues are reflected in the low educational attainment levels of the population, with more than one third of local residents having no school degree (against 27% in Le Havre). In 1999, less than 6% of the population (aged 15 or more) of Le Havre had attained a higher education degree against more than 8% in France¹. This is also reflected in the lower employment rates, but especially in the higher unemployment rates which are 20% in le Havre in 1999 compared to 13,5% in France².

Part of the problem was that the Southern Districts did not have any fixed public reading facility. Moreover, there was a lack of meeting places within the area and gathering places where local inhabitants (especially women) could interact and meet. Before the opening of the library, the only reading facility was a “biblio-bus³” serving the zone.

These facts were decisive in terms of a decision to develop a new public reading facility equipped with innovative services in the Southern Districts. Special attention was devoted to a range of new and innovative services including:

- Facilities dedicated to learning and training. The library does not only lend books and multimedia material (CD, DVD) but also offers its members learning facilities for ICT or language training (including French). Child care provision was also organised to ensure greater access to services.
- A conference room allows the organisation of larger scale events which can be hired out, therefore providing an important revenue stream for the project.

The building of this multimedia library falls under the first priority of the URBAN II programme of Le Havre which is focussed on social cohesion, employment and training initiatives. More specifically, the library is integrated into the first measure entitled Support and stimulation of the districts’ life and improve tranquillity.

2.0 Implementation

¹ Source: INSEE local statistics - local French statistics website (available for 1999 and 2006)

² Unemployment rate 15-64 years, INSEE local statistics.

³ Mobile library.

The library is integrated into the Library Network of Le Havre which links one central library with eight district offices (of which this project is one of them). As with other public libraries in France, the library is run by a French public servant appointed by the “Inspection Générale des Bibliothèques” (General control organisation for French libraries), a department set within the French Ministry of Higher Education & Research and the Culture & Communication Ministry. This body also serves as an evaluation mechanism.

The city of Le Havre acted as a project promoter and financed the production of a feasibility study that was developed as part of the projects inception phase. Overall, the budget for the construction of the library amounted to 2.16 million euros of which 42% was co-financed through ERDF. The remainder of the project was financed by the State (27%), the region (2%), the department (14%) and the city of Le Havre (14%). Overall, the project represents about 6% of the total URBAN II budget for Le Havre (for the period 200-2006).

3.0 Results and impacts

The table below summarizes the main results of the project as outlined in the closing report of the CIP URBAN II Le Havre.

Table 3.1 Outputs and Results – CIP Urban II Le Havre

Output				Results			
Indicator	Target value	Actual value	Rate	Indicator	Target value	Actual value	Rate
Built m ²	720	780	108%	Members end of June 2008	2000	2386	119%
Seats offered to the audience	150	176	117%	Attendance 2006 (cumulated)		2386	
Number of books	16700	16700	100%	Attendance 2007 (cumulated)		105071	
Number of CDs	2500	2500	100%	Attendance 2008 (cumulated)		49163	
Number of DVDs	1000	1000	100%	Animations held		55	
Number of CD-ROMs	530	530	100%	Persons benefiting from ICT training		1413	

Output				Results			
Connected computers	10	10	100%	School groups welcomed		129	
				Number of children welcomed for specific animations		494	
				Adult groups welcomed		27	

Source: CIP Urban II Le Havre, Closing Report (preliminary version)

As shown in the table, the media-library attained or exceeded its output targets. The material offered corresponds to the initial target, the surface of the library is slightly larger than initially planned and the structure offers more seats to potential audiences than planned).

By offering a wide variety of activities, the library managed to attract more members than estimated. The library does not limit its activities to the simple lending of books and media contents but also offers a wide range of activities going from ICT self-training facilities (Office and Language training modules on computer) to awareness actions (with respect to the local heritage, etc.) and special child care sessions. As a result, a wide audience going beyond the typical target group for libraries is using the facilities. In 2007, almost 40% of the members were under 18 years and the unemployed constitute the second largest group of users (16%) followed by employees (14%) and executives (11%)¹.

A key factor of success for the project has been the ability of the library to attract visitors from outside of the district. One of the reasons why people from outside of the neighbourhood visit the library is the specialised and innovative services it provides and generally these services cannot be found in the other libraries in the city. This is of course means the project benefits all of Le Havre rather than simply those living near to the library. After its first year of activity, 2466 active members were registered (December 2007). Within this group of members, roughly 40% lives in the Southern Districts.

3.1 Intangible impacts – partnerships and integrated approach

An interesting feature of this project is its degree of integration in the local neighbourhood. The library has succeeded in building links with other initiatives and local organisations (such as schools). Some of these links have been established by the library itself; others

¹ Source: "Origines géographiques et socioprofessionnelles des usagers de la Médiathèque L.S. Senghor (2007). Figures have to be carefully interpreted as they result from self-statements of subscribers.

by the “District manager”. The District manager is appointed by the city authorities and is responsible for the integration of the projects in the local neighbourhood. His role is to actively seek, create and promote interactions and synergies between the different actors in the area with the ultimate ambition of strengthening the social fabric and infrastructure serving disadvantaged groups.

As the library developed more partnerships with multiple actors in the Southern Districts, it has become more than a book-lending service. For instance, it collaborates with a childcare association that organises library visits for children and their parents every month (often, these people are socially isolated such as single mothers). For them, a library visit is often equal to renewed contact with the 'outside world'.

4.0 Identified good practice

The key aspects identified through the evaluation are as follows:

A successful integrated approach and level of partnership working

Too often in the past, these types of infrastructural projects had difficulties in generating any impact over and above the physical elements. This project is an exception, as its integrated approach also extends to the social aspect of regeneration by providing high quality services for the local community. It does not limit itself to the 'book side of the library offer' but instead relates these core activities to educational and training initiatives in collaboration with local partners.

The existence of a “District manager”

The District manager is appointed by the city authorities and is responsible for the integration of the projects in the area. A critical success factor is his physical presence in the target area and his knowledge about what is going on to support local disadvantaged groups. This allows him to develop a local network of contacts and to follow-up the situation on the ground. As he is aware of all the new developments and initiatives that are launched, he actively seeks to develop synergies between the different involved actors and stimulates as much cross referral of people as possible.

The presence of the District Manager has had a significant influence on the Southern districts. An area that used to have a poor social fabric with a very limited number of associations is today slowly changing into an area with a well-balanced social mix where

inhabitants can make use of qualitative social services, as they can be found in the other neighbourhoods of the city.

Increased openness and connection with other neighborhoods

The Southern Districts used to be an isolated neighbourhood of the city. Its inhabitants were seen to hardly ever leave the neighbourhood. Moreover, the other inhabitants of the city tended to avoid the districts, as they were synonymous with deprivation, poverty and crime. However, the library deliberately chose to provide specialized upscale services not available in other libraries in the city and succeeded in becoming a landmark for the entire city of Le Havre, attracting local residents from across the city. This strategy proved to be successful as 35% of the visitors of the library came from the neighbouring city centre. At the same time, local inhabitants were not neglected since they represent the majority of the visitors. This strategy is of course beneficial for the library in general (as the number of visitors increases), but it has also connected the entire neighbourhood to the city centre, leading to a mix of population and an increased openness of the area from elsewhere.

The library was strategically built in the heart of the Southern Districts in a street where several other URBAN II initiatives have been developed. The fact that several projects focused on this street, generating tangible change, gave the library more visibility and integrated it in a broader context of regeneration. Most stakeholders feel that the proximity to the city centre has been a critical success factor for this project, as it has allowed for a rapid integration with the rest of the city.