



Annual Report 2013



## Municipal Public Libraries of Beirut

*Operation, Visitors, Activities, Events*



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ASSABIL, Friends of Public Libraries Association

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## Introduction

ASSABIL is pleased to present its annual report on the operations and activities of the municipal libraries in Beirut during the year 2013. ASSABIL, Friends of Public Libraries Association was commissioned by the Municipality of Beirut to manage and operate the Municipal Public Libraries in Beirut in 1999. The libraries have been established in a joint effort between ASSABIL and the Municipality in the Beirut neighborhoods of Bachoura (in 2000), Geitawi (2004), and Monnot (2008) with the generous support of the Ile-de-France Region (RIF), Open Society Foundation, and numerous other supporters.



## Activities of the Municipal Public Libraries

This report provides an overview of the activities that were organized during the year 2013. The municipal libraries continued to play an important cultural role with different age groups in Beirut and served as a community space for a variety of activities. They hosted readers of all ages who enjoyed a place to read and also the services of the libraries, which provide a public space for meeting and dialogue. Libraries also allow free access to information, which is one of the basic conditions for development and participation in national affairs. Municipal libraries support and collaborate with public schools thereby strengthening and complementing their cultural and educational roles. Most importantly, libraries offer all of their services to people of all backgrounds regardless of age, class, gender, and educational degrees.

We are proud of what we accomplished in 2013 – especially in light of the critical security situation in Lebanon. It has been a success to keep the library doors open and to continue offering activities. This has been possible because of the committed team of staff and volunteers who provide a welcoming and stimulating environment for all visitors.



## **Municipal Public Libraries...**

### **.... spaces of lifelong learning**

#### **What have the libraries offered in the year 2013?**

- Served more than 31,063 new and returning visitors
- Lent more than 15,878 books free of charge
- Registered 293 new subscribers bringing the total number of subscribers to 3,323
- Hosting 4,292 students through visits organized by the schools with permission from the Lebanese Ministry of Education
- Organized over 167 cultural activities for children & youth
- Organized over 70 creative and cultural workshops for people of all ages

The Municipal Public Libraries of Beirut are much more than spaces that provide access to books and information; they are indeed spaces of lifelong learning for members of all ages from the surrounding communities. The following pages will provide an account of the numerous educational and training activities that ASSABIL has organized at the libraries in 2013.

#### **Collaboration with public schools:**

##### ***Why ASSABIL works with Public Schools***

*With the support of the Ministry of Education, ASSABIL organizes a major program at the Municipal Public Libraries of Beirut and the mobile libraries with public schools in the surrounding neighborhoods.*

*ASSABIL was established in part as a reaction to the alarming state of public school libraries in the country. Many public schools have no libraries at all. In many cases, the libraries that do exist are weak and ineffective and fail to spark an interest in books or reading in general among students. Reading - not just reading to satisfy a school assignment but reading for pleasure as well - plays an essential role in education. It provides access to different points of views and encourages debate and critical thinking and thus plays a very important role in the development and education of individuals.*

*Since 2000, classes of students from over 27 public schools have visited the Public Libraries in Beirut. The program 'Public Schools and Public Libraries' is a great success and puts the public library at the center of Lebanon's educational system. The goal of the program is not to replace school programs but to instead complement them by introducing pupils to the concept of reading for pleasure, suggesting different ways for older students to conduct research, and introducing them to the concepts of public space, public debate, citizens' duties, and human rights.*



During the year 2013, the public libraries hosted 4,292 students in 211 school visits, as follows: 138 classes at the library of Bachoura, 42 classes at the library of Jeitawi, and 31 classes at the library of Monnot. This number represents a significant increase in the number of student visitors in 2012 (3,692 students).

The activities program is prepared in consultation with the activity coordinators and school teachers to meet their needs and demands for different classes in terms of subject, time, and nature of the activities.

#### - “Kids Read” Program

This special program was prepared by the public libraries in collaboration with the British Council and funded by HSBC Bank. The program aims to motivate children – and especially those in public schools – to explore and enjoy reading during and after school hours.

The program includes reading activities, teacher training, social events, and other activities. The activities that were conducted in the public libraries included story reading, handicraft, face painting, contests, and awards.

#### - Introduction to Music

Musician Peter Nehme hosted the students in the public libraries of the Municipality of Beirut, where they had the opportunity to discover different musical instruments, learn their histories, and to actually play them as well.





## - Meeting the Authors

During the year, authors were invited to meet with children, youth, and adults at the libraries to discuss the art of writing and their own publications. Among those authors were:

For children and youth – Fatima Charafedine, Mira Khoury, Nisrine Ajeel, Rania Daher, Samar Barraj, and Senegalese Storyteller Suleiman Mubdej.

For adults – Hasan Daoud on his Arabic novel “No Way to Heaven,” Abbas Baydoun on his Arabic novel “House of Abandonment,” Cherif Majdalani on his French novel “Our Brief Years of Glory.”

Also, as part of the “Hay Festival”, the public library of Monnot hosted the author Jana Fawaz al-Hasan, where she met with baccalaureate students from the Laure Meghayzel Public High School to discuss her novel “I, She, and the Others”, which was nominated for the Arab Booker Novel Awards.

The library of Bachoura hosted the British author and filmmaker Owen Sheers, who met with the students from Omar Farroukh High School and Mahmassani High School to discuss the film “Theatre of War.”

The library of Jeitawi hosted the Belgian comic strip author Koons, who met with the students from Public Heritage High School to discuss what it means to be a writer.

### - “Play with Science” Fair

The libraries organized a large number of activities related to the Science Fair, which introduces science in an interactive way through simple experiments carried out using common material found in every home. Because these experiments were taken from books found in the libraries themselves, these experiments also proved to be a great way to get students interested in borrowing books.

### - Popular Tales and Oral History

To revive the tradition of oral stories and to ensure that these stories are passed on to the younger generations, the activity coordinator Ali Sabbagh conducted different activities on popular tales at the libraries with the storytellers Sara Kassir, Khaled Nahnah, and Ghiwa Allam.

### - Child of the Cedar

In collaboration with “Protecting the Cedar Tree of Lebanon” association, the libraries organized various activities on the novel “Child of the Cedar” by Desiree Sadek. Activities coordinator Mira Khouri hosted the students at the library and read them a story. In the end, the students planted the seeds of the cedars and were given more seeds to plant at home.

### - Debate Activities

In the framework of ASSABIL’s debate project – funded by the Open Society Institute and implemented in collaboration with the mobile libraries – the libraries organized various activities with high school students and made it possible for them to conduct research on the debate topics they adopted during the year.



## National Reading Week

In 2013, as in previous years, the three public libraries of the Municipality of Beirut organized many cultural activities during National Reading Week, April 18-28, 2013. In addition to all the activities on books by authors, storytellers, and activity coordinators, many games, workshops, and screenings also took place. The official launching ceremony was attended by the Governor of Beirut Mr. Nassif Kaloush and the Chair of the Committee of Heritage and Culture in the Municipality of Beirut Eng. Bushra Itani.

The activities were attended by over 1,236 people of different ages. ASSABIL thanks all the authors, writers, artists, and activity coordinators: Fatima Charafedine, Sinan Hallak, Ahmad Tay, Rania ZbibDaher, Cathy Khattar, Khaled Nahnah, Sara Kassir, Randa Aboul Hassan, Nada Aboudi, Hassan Daoud, Mustapha Said, Jinan Hashash, Amal Freiji, Cherif Majdalani, Zeina Antonios, Abbas Baydoun, Joelle Khouri, Mira Khouri, Rana Khalil, and Michel Kupelian.



## Libraries Night:

One of the other events that took place during National Reading Week was Libraries Night when the three public libraries stayed open late into the evening and organized the cultural activities described below:

In the library of Bachoura: A discussion with the author Hasan Daoud on his novel "No Way to Heaven."

In the library of Geitawi: Storytelling evening for adults with Sarah Kassir and Ghiwa Allam.

In the library of Monnot: A discussion with the author Sherif Majdalani on his novel "Nos si brèves années de gloire" and a musical evening with the composer to listen and analyze the following pieces: Chansons françaises, les 3 B: Brel, Brassens, Barbara.

## Workshops for Youth and Adults

- Free computer courses for library visitors

In addition to the free computer classes that we introduced in 2012, we now offer multimedia workshops for children and teenagers.

- Creative Writing Workshops for trainers

In the public library of Monnot, the author Georgina Makhoul offered training workshops for people interested in managing these types of workshops at the public libraries.

Also, the poet Antoine Boulad moderated a group of reading and writing enthusiasts, including the author Georgina Makhoul and Mrs. Salma Kajak.

- Professional Screenplay Writing

The library of Monnot hosted a professional screenplay writing workshop organized by Cinephilia Productions and managed by Ms. Darine Hoteit.

## **Municipal Public Libraries** *... Spaces for Cultural Activities*

A public library is not just a place to read and borrow books; it is also a space for creative and free expression. Based on extensive experience, it is clear that cultural activities are invaluable in ensuring that public libraries are active and interactive spaces.

Organizing cultural activities provides an important opportunity to promote the public libraries and to attract first-time visitors to the libraries. Cultural activities have also proven to be an effective way to encourage past visitors to return and explore the valuable books available. Whenever we organize an activity, we buy new books and resources about the topic that is the focus of the activity so there are always new materials in the library for visitors to discover. The activities in 2013 targeted both children and adults.

By organizing activities for children, we are also attracting their parents to the libraries and ensuring that they too are made to feel comfortable. We provide them with books, magazines, and various documents, which encourages them to accompany their children and explore the beautiful world that books create.

### **Weekly story sessions and children's activities**

Weekly story sessions are held at the libraries of Bashoura, Jeitawi, and Monnot, and are eagerly anticipated by children who want to hear new stories. These stories are read by experienced storytellers in three languages, which enriches children's imagination and creativity. 1,777 children attended the weekly story sessions in 2013.

أيار: عبد الحليم حافظ  
حزيران: فيروز والأخوان رحباني: أغنيات مميزة  
تموز: فيروز بألحان زياد الرحباني  
أيلول: محمد عبد الوهاب، أغنيات رومانسية أولى  
تشرين الأول: محمد عبد الوهاب، أغنيات رومانسية متقدمة  
تشرين الثاني: فيروز بألحان محمد عبد الوهاب  
كانون الأول: فيروز بألحان زكي ناصيف



#### **Story session schedule:**

- Bashoura: Fridays at 4:00pm
- Jeitawi: Saturdays at 11:00am
- Monnot: Fridays at 4:30pm

- Also, once a month, a children's movie is screened at the library of Bachoura. It is especially popular for the many children who do not have the opportunity to visit movie theaters.

## The Municipal Public Library of Bachoura opens its doors on the first Sunday of the month:

In order to attract more people to the library – especially people who cannot visit during weekdays – the library of Bachoura is open the first Sunday of the month. We have been able to expand our hours because of the assistance of a group of volunteers from Bank Audi. Many library visitors have expressed their appreciation for this initiative and were especially grateful for the various activities that we have organized for both children and adults.

### 'Mondays at Bachoura' and other activities

For the last several years, ASSABIL has organized cultural activities in the public libraries of the Municipality of Beirut.

"Cultural Mondays" and other activities have attracted 1,214 participants in 2013. These activities have enabled ASSABIL to place the Public Municipal Library of Bachoura on the map of cultural events in the capital.

In 2013, Mr. Sahhab introduced the following subjects:

January: Wadih al-Safi, Zaki Nassif, and Toufic al-Basha

February: Stanzas

April: Felmon Wehbe and his compositions for Fairouz

May: Abdel Halim Hafez

June: Fairouz and the Rahbani brothers – special songs

July: Fairouz and the compositions of Ziad Rahbani

September: Mohamad Abdel Wahab – his first songs

October: Mohamad Abdel Wahad – his latest songs

November: Fairouz and Composer Mohamad Abdel Wahab

December: Fairouz and Composer Zaki Nassif

### Arab Musical Evening with Mr. Elias Sahhab

On the first Monday of every month, visitors come to the library to meet the critic, journalist, political columnist, and musical historian Mr. Elias Sahhab, who discusses the life and work of prominent authors, musicians, and singers in the world of Arab music. Mr. Sahhab is widely recognized as an expert who has extensive knowledge of "The Golden Age of Arab Music."



## Cine Club

To provide an opportunity for people to watch films that are rarely seen on television or are screened for only a limited period in film festivals, we have collaborated with “*Nadi li kul il nas*” association, a non-governmental association that specializes in cinema that organizes the annual student film festival. The director often attends these film screenings and participates in discussions and debates about the movies.

In 2013, the following films were screened:

January: Douwar Shatila

February: 1958 – Ghassan Sahlab

March: Al-Hawd Al-Khames – Simon Habr

April: Rsasa Tayshe – George al-Hachem

May: Al-Qitah Sifr – Nadim Mechlawi

July: Masrah Wa Harb – Hicham Kayed

October: Eih Howa al-Hob – Mona Ghandour

November: Soual Al-Ciniema – Mona Ghandour

December: Tariqh Beyrouth – Fajr Yaacoub

## Evenings on Western Classical Music with Joelle Khoury

Since January 2013, Ms. Joelle Khoury has hosted musical evenings on Western classical and jazz music in the library of Monnot every fourth Friday of the month. Ms. Khoury is a renowned Lebanese musical composer who introduces the audience to Western music and jazz.

Evening topics in 2013:

January: Three Requiems: Mozart, Brahms, Faure

February: Robert et Clara Schumann,  
entre Génie et Folie

March: The Ionious Monk,  
composer and jazz pianist

April: French songs, the 3 Bs:  
Brel, Brassens, Barbara

May: Horace Silver, jazz pianist and composer

June: Montserrat Figueras and Jordi Saval,  
Music of the Mediterranean

July: Miles Davis: from Be-bop to Cool Jazz,  
the unique style of a jazz Great

October: Classical music in cartoons

November: Billie Holiday: une poétique minimaliste,  
biographie, écoute, film

December: Jazzy Christmas and more...



## **World Music Day**

On the occasion of World Music Day on June 21, the public library of the Municipality of Beirut in Jeitawi held a diverse music festival organized by university students in the garden of the “Saint Joseph University” where the library is located.



## ***Municipal Public Libraries “Beyond the Walls”***

### **Horsh Beirut Festival**

For the third year in a row, ASSABIL association organized the Cultural Festival of Public Spaces on September 20-29. Over a period of six days, an estimated 6,400 citizens visited Horsh Beirut to enjoy both the greenery and the variety of cultural and artistic activities for children and adults, such as: music, poetry, singing, theater, puppet shows, kite flying, cirque, magic, etc. The festival was open to the public and free of charge.









## The Municipal Public Libraries participate in the 2013 Francophone Book Fair

The Francophone Book Fair was held in Biel November 1-10, 2013. It was a wonderful opportunity for ASSABIL to organize gatherings and cultural activities, which included the following:

- Hosting a number of authors and artists from Ile de France in a book-signing event in collaboration with Burj Library. Among the featured authors and artists: Dolphin Jacko, Danny Laferriere, and Serge Bloch.



- Hosting school classes at the Assabilstand at the book fair. Almost 3 00 students visited the stand and participated in cultural activities with organizers from the association and met a number of French authors who visited Beirut for the occasion.

- Holding a writing workshop by the poet Antoine Boulad with students from Mabarrat Association.

- Multiple voice reading of a text by the French poet Katie Barrow with Antoine Boulad, Katie Khattar, Salma Kajak, and Ali Sabbagh.

- The afternoons were filled with storytelling for children with Randa Aboul-Hasan, Rana Al-Khalil, and Khaled Nahnah, and were attended by 172 people.

- The stand also exhibited book animations which attracted more visitors.



## The Municipal Public Libraries participate in the 2013 Beirut Arab Book Fair

The Arabic Book Fair was held in Biel December 3-19, 2013. While the Municipal Public Libraries did not have their own stand, their librarians participated with ASSABIL at the stand of the Ministry of Culture. It was an opportunity to promote the public libraries and their programs. It was also an opportunity for public schools to visit the fair and attend the cultural activities organized by the publishers of children's books.

## ***Expanding the Network of Municipal Public Libraries***

Based on the feasibility study that it commissioned for the Municipality of Beirut in 2006-07, ASSABIL is continuing to expand the network of Municipal Public Libraries.

The first round of construction for the fourth municipal public library in the neighborhood of Tariq el-Jdideh was finalized in fall 2013. A second round of modifications and improvements is scheduled for 2014.

The construction is being funded by the Municipality of Beirut, following a detailed BOQ submitted and commissioned by ASSABIL from Polypod Architects and funded by the Ile-de-France Region. Construction of the 3 story-library is expected to be completed in 2014.

The library's official opening to the public is scheduled for 2015! The library will occupy two floors; there will be a multi-purpose space on the ground floor.



## **Preparing for the new libraries with the 'Kotobus'**

ASSABIL's mobile libraries, the Kotobus, have been preparing the residents of Tariq el-Jdideh since summer 2008 for the opening of the new public library in their neighborhood.

In fall 2013, the two mobile libraries re-launched the debate program for secondary schools which is introducing secondary school students to the tools and techniques of debating, a program that is funded by the Open Society Institute-Youth Initiative. At the same time, the two mobile libraries are continuing to visit primary schools for various reading promotion activities.

