

“A book is a dream
that you hold in your hand.”

Neil Gaiman

Libraries store the energy that fuels the imagination.
They open up windows to the world and inspire us to
explore and achieve, and contribute to improving
our quality of life.

Sidney Sheldon

If I was a book, I would like to be a library
book, so I would be taken home by all
different sorts of kids.

Cornelia Funke



EDITORIAL

“Bad libraries build collections, good libraries build services, great libraries build communities.”

R. David Lankes

Through the creation of a network of public libraries in Beirut and in the regions of Lebanon, ASSABIL has been working for public reading, free access to information and culture for all for the past 19 years and has implemented a variety of cultural, educational and rights' based activities in public libraries all over Lebanon.

When one says 'library', one of course thinks 'Reading'. Reading is so important. It helps us develop our imagination, our vital language skills, introduces us to new worlds and different points of view, and encourages debate and critical thinking. Reading is a tool that can be used to learn about people and places from other parts of the world and to improve understanding of and concern for humanity. Reading stories that are set in other places and time periods can give children a deeper understanding and acceptance of others through identification with individual characters and the world or culture they come from.

But, when one says 'library', one also thinks 'community', and 'community space'. Over the past 19 years, we have learnt to treasure the importance of our public libraries as social and cultural spaces, as spaces of expression and debate for the community. To speak in pictures: if the public library were to be a space in the community house, rather than being the quiet reading room, it would be the front porch of the house – the space where people meet, gather, discuss and exchange.

Indeed, the role of our libraries as public spaces, spaces where all are welcome, where people from different backgrounds meet and mingle is more than ever an extremely important one. Especially in the current context, we are proud that our libraries stay inclusive spaces, spaces where nobody is excluded, where all are welcome and where we actively work on maintaining that asset!



Ziad Bou Alwan,
President of ASSABIL

ASSABIL AT A GLANCE

Who we are

ASSABIL is a non-governmental association founded in 1997 to establish and promote public libraries in Lebanon that are free and open to all.

Our Vision

We believe that public libraries play an important role in the development of individuals and societies. Free and unlimited access to information is an essential prerequisite for the development of a well-informed citizenry and democratic society. Public libraries are also important public spaces: places where everyone is welcome and where people from different socioeconomic, religious, and political backgrounds can meet one another and exchange ideas.

“Freedom, prosperity, and the development of society and individuals are fundamental human values. They will only be attained through the ability of well-informed citizens to exercise their democratic rights and to play an active role in society. Constructive participation and the development of democracy depend on satisfactory education as well as on free and unlimited access to knowledge, thought, culture, and information. The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups. This Manifesto proclaims UNESCO’s belief in the public library as a living force for education, culture and information, and as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women.”

Our Objectives

- ◇ Providing free access to information, culture and learning opportunities for all
- ◇ Promoting a love of reading among children, youth and adults
- ◇ Promoting public libraries as public and social spaces for their communities
- ◇ Sponsoring cultural and social activities at public libraries throughout Lebanon
- ◇ Building the capacities of library professionals and teachers
- ◇ Encouraging the production of books and educational materials in Arabic language – especially for children

What we do

- ◇ We established and manage Beirut's three Municipal Public Libraries: Bachoura (since 2000), Geitawi (since 2004) and Monnot (since 2008)
- ◇ We operate a mobile library servicing public schools and community centers (since 2008)
- ◇ We support a network of public libraries throughout Lebanon
- ◇ We organize cultural and educational activities for people of all ages
- ◇ We manage a Resource and Training Center (since 2009)
- ◇ We provide consultancy services to those working in libraries and to individuals and associations interested in establishing new libraries
- ◇ We publish guide books and toolkits related to the establishment and management of public libraries, as well as to the organization of rights based activity programs.

Where we work

ASSABIL directly manages the municipal public libraries of Beirut, which are located in Bachoura, Geitawi and Monnot. Our mobile library serves various regions of Lebanon. Through our Resource and Training Center located in Beirut, we support to a network of partner libraries in all regions of Lebanon.

IT'S BEEN 19 YEARS - MILESTONES



2000

Foundation of ASSABIL
Friends of Public Libraries Association

Presentation of the Feasibility Study to
Expand the Network of Municipal Public
Libraries of Beirut to 12 sites

1997

2007

2002

Creation of the Network of Partner
Libraries all over Lebanon

2004





Opening of the Monnot Library

2008



First edition of our annual Horsh Beirut Festi-

2011

Start of cooperation with public libraries in Palestinian Camps

2013

Official Opening of the ASSABIL Resource and Training Center

2009

20 Years of ASSABIL

2017

2009



Inauguration of our second Kotobus

2008

2014



Launch of Reading Clubs

2012

Start of our continuous Youth Debate Program



Inauguration of our first Kotobus

2016 AT THE MUNICIPAL PUBLIC LIBRARIES OF BEIRUT

In 2016, the Municipal Public Libraries of Beirut have seen busy times:

- ◆ **28,000 visitors** were welcomed at the libraries of Bachoura, Geitawi and Monot,
- ◆ **44,000 titles** were offered in the libraries' catalogue,
- ◆ **122 cultural events** were attended by more than **1,900 participants**,
- ◆ **1,580 children** took part in our weekly storytelling sessions held in all three libraries,
- ◆ **158 public school classes** with more than **2,700 pupils** were received and
- ◆ **Book rentals** have gone **up by 20 %** between 2015 and 2016 and reached **19,439 books**.



SPACES OF INFORMATION

Youth Debate Clubs

Weekly Storytelling Events

Poetry Readings

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY SPACES

Reading Clubs (Arabic and

Arabic Musical Evenings

SPACES OF CULTURE

National Reading Week

Regular Class Receptions

Encounters with Authors,

SPACES OF

CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Legal Information Sessions

Monthly Cine—Club

Encounters with Music from all over the World

Computer Classes

SPACES OF EXPRESSION

Chess Club

Arabic Language Day

INCLUSIVE SPACES

Creative Workshops

THE MULTIPLE ROLES OF OUR LIBRARIES IN 2016

Learning Spaces: Cooperating with Schools

Servicing more than 20 public schools located at less than 10 Minutes Walking Distance from our libraries, ASSABIL regularly cooperates with public schools in Beirut in order to familiarize students with the concept of public libraries, the importance of reading and to broaden their horizons. Supported by the Ministry of Education, our librarians welcomed 158 classes and accordingly 2,786 students to the three libraries of Bachoura, Monnot and Geitawi in 2016.

Spaces of Expression: Debate Club Program



With the support of the Anna Lindh Foundation, Beirut's Municipal Public Libraries were once more spaces of debate. In line with the mission of ASSABIL, to promote public libraries as spaces of expression, 28 pupils of Jameel Al Rawas Secondary School and Sobhi Al Mahmassani Secondary

School took part in a debate club program. The participants benefited from an intensive training on debating techniques and skills and have successfully created debate clubs at their schools and libraries. After being trained they brainstormed and selected topics relevant to their daily lives, including issues such as citizenship, school and the environment. The project culminated in a public debate held at the Monnot Theatre in May 2016 which was attended by their peers, families and friends.

Weekly storytelling hours take place at all three libraries and are presented by experienced storytellers. They read Arabic, English and French books to the children and draw and paint together. Once a month, the Bachoura library presents a film for children.

Social and Cultural Spaces

In cooperation with Bank Audi, the Bachoura library launched a **Chess Club** for teenagers in 2016. This activity addresses a new audience and attracts teenage visitors to the libraries.



The **Cinema Club** was founded in cooperation with Nadi Likol El Nass Association. Films are shown monthly at the Bachoura public library. After the screenings, the audience is invited to discuss with the film directors.



Every month, the **Arab Reading Club** meets to discuss selected books. A second Reading Club was launched in 2016 at the Monnot library to discuss French language books and promises to be successful.

In the course of 2016, ASSABIL invited **authors, artists and activists** to meet and discuss their work our visitors. The invitees were: novelist Hanan al-Shih, author Rami El-Zain, journalist and writer Ivana Marchalian, poet Salim Alaeddin, French author and poet Pierre Parlant and the illustrators Mona Yqzan and Sinan Halaq.

On the occasion of the **International Day of the Arabic Language**, the famous writer Emily Nasrallah was honoured. The event was open to the public and attended as well by students from Sobhi Al-Mahmassani High School.



Once a month, at the Bachoura library, the historian and critic Elias **Sahhab** presented prominent singers and composers from the **golden age of Arabic music**: Um Kalthoum, Abdel Wahab and Farid El Atrach. At the Monnot library, Ms. Rita Mahfouz presents **composers from other parts of the world**.

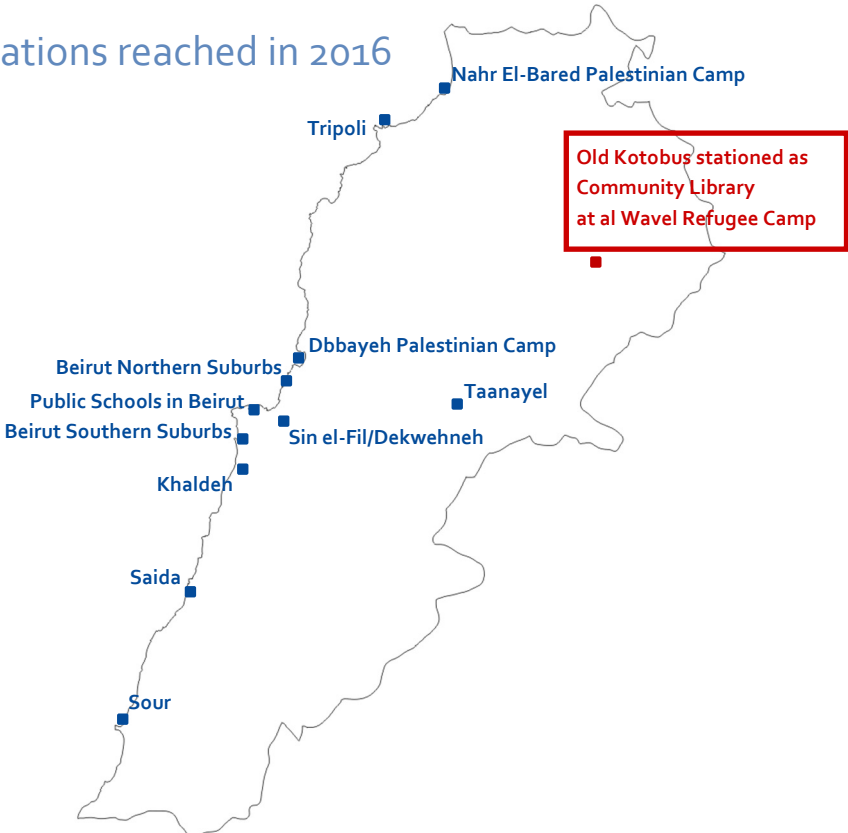
LIBRARY ON THE MOVE - KOTOBUS

Our mobile library - called **Kotobus** - is working with public schools and community centers all year round, reaching out to the most vulnerable children from various population groups in Lebanon. In a program funded by Taawon (Welfare Association), our mobile library is offering its services 1-2 days per week to Palestinian children. These visits are accompanied by an intensive activity program in 7 public libraries located in Camps all over Lebanon.

In 2016, the Kotobus team has worked with

- ◆ **30 schools and community centers**,
- ◆ where it reached more than **7.600 children** on a regular basis
- ◆ **50 high school students** participated in the debating project and attended the final public debate at the Monnot Theater
- ◆ and **borrowed some 11,033 books**.

Locations reached in 2016



Acting against Xenophobia

In 2016 the Municipal Public Libraries as well as the mobile library have seen a particular focus on the promotion of our libraries as inclusive spaces, spaces where all are welcome, disregarding their social backgrounds and nationalities. With the financial support of the Anna Lindh Foundation as well as OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), our librarians were trained on how to spot and address xenophobic and racist behaviours at the libraries, and how to interact and deal with mixed groups.

Over the course of six months a series of creative workshops for children and teenagers brought together youth from different population groups – Lebanese, Syrians and Palestinians – to work together, to discover as a group, different tools and means of creative expression and create joint artworks and performances addressing the topics of xenophobia and racism in their daily lives.





ASSABIL 'HORS LES MURS' - THE HORSH BEIRUT FESTIVAL

On September 17 and 18, the fifth edition of ASSABIL's annual Horsh Beirut Festival took place. Initiated in 2011 with the aim to lobby for the permanent opening of Horsh Beirut for the general Public, the 2016 events were generously supported by the Heinrich Boell Foundation and Taawon.

A rich cultural and artistic program attracted some 7,000 visitors.





HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR RESOURCE AND TRAINING CENTER

ASSABIL's Resource and Training Center continues to provide support and consultation to public libraries throughout the country. In 2016, the center organized a series of specialized trainings for librarians and cultural activists, and distributed book donations to our 23 partner libraries.

Jihad Darwish –

Capacity Building for Lebanon's Storytellers

ASSABIL has organized an intensive training program for professional storytellers under the direction of Jihad Darwish, international writer and an acclaimed expert in the field. Twelve storytellers took part in a five day training program and held storytelling events for adults and children in libraries in Beirut, the regions and Palestinian refugee camps alike.

The training enabled some participants to increase their monthly incomes with a new job opportunity – storytelling. Given this great success and demand ASSABIL is seeking to continue this kind of trainings and activities in 2017 and the coming years.

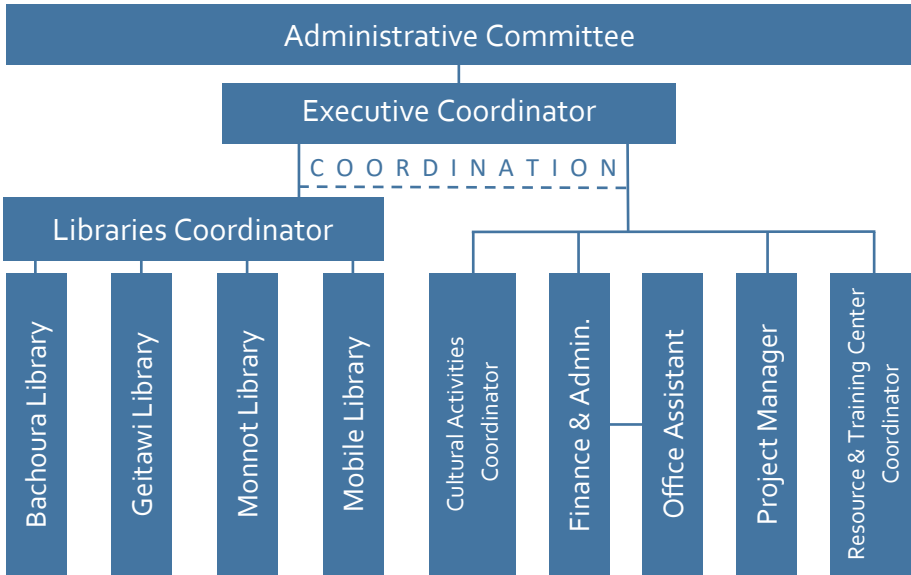
This training was part of a program implemented by the Qattan Foundation and the Prince Claus Fund and financed by روابط من خلال الفنون: صلوات with co-financing from Taawon (Welfare Association).



Network of ASSABIL Partner Libraries



ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



Members of the Administrative Council

- Ziad Bou Alwan, President
- Maud Stephan, Vice-President
- Cathy Khattar, Treasurer
- Elsa Zakhia, Secretary
- Antoine Boulad, Member
- Rana Jubayli, Member
- Isabelle Peillen, Member

Executive Coordination

Ali Sabbagh

Annual Budget in 2016

LL 760,000,000.

PARTNERSHIPS & COOPERATION

Our Long-term Strategic Partners

ASSABIL is greatly benefiting from the support of and cooperation with some strategic partners. They supported us over many years to pursue our mission of promoting public libraries as active and lively public spaces, spaces for education, for culture, and for debate.



We are proud to count the **Municipality of Beirut** as our main partner for the operation of Beirut's Municipal Public libraries.



HEINRICH
BÖLL
STIFTUNG
الشرق الأوسط

The **Heinrich Boell Foundation** has been supporting ASSABIL's work for more than ten years and has provided great help in institutional support, training and activity programs, especially activities aimed at raising the awareness about gender roles and discrimination. In 2016, the Foundation was also greatly involved in the Horsh Beirut Festival.



2016 has seen the consolidation of our partnership with **Taawon** (Welfare Association). What started as an effort to improve the public libraries in seven Palestinian camps for which Taawon sought the consultation and advice of ASSABIL in 2008 has become a lasting and important partnership.

Other Funders in 2016

Ministry of Culture

Anna Lindh Foundation

Qattan Foundation and Prince Claus Fund

Lebanese National Commission of UNESCO



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