

# Focus Experience

#29

**Educating Cities**  
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## Title

### The House of Urban Cultures

**A place for young people where they can express themselves and receive training related to urban cultures.**

## Basic data

**City:** Dakar

**Country:** Senegal

**Number of inhabitants:** 1,001,468

**Topics:** artistic activities, social inclusion, youth, equal opportunities, Identity, Creativity, socialization, lifelong learning, work placement.

**Principles of the Charter:** 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 10, 14, 15, 19

## Summary

The **House of Urban Cultures** (hereon, MCU, original acronym from the French name Maison des Cultures Urbaines) in the city of Dakar is the first centre in Senegal created to promote a new framework of expression and training for young people devoted or wanting to devote themselves professionally to different urban cultures, such as hip-hop, disk-jockeying, graffiti, dance, urban poetry, etc. Through this initiative, the idea is for local artists to benefit from the opportunities that this space offers them, while at the same time, letting their own work contribute to the realization of the personal project of each youth.



The MCU is located at the Ouakam cultural centre. It was set up by the City Council of Dakar in 2014 as part of its participation and inclusion policy. Thus, it created a place where young people from urban cultures have access, on the one hand, to free information, documentation and training in their artistic discipline, and, on the other hand, to developing their creativity and being able to establish their own cultural endeavours.



The MCU strives to become a benchmark for urban cultures, and at this time is the only one in



**Diverse activities offered by the House of Urban Cultures.**

## Objectives

- To gather together in a single space all the urban cultures in the city by offering young people a place for information, encounter, creation and training.
- To train and promote young people who devote themselves to urban cultures, providing them with spaces where they can improve their discipline.
- To give value to the contribution of young people and the urban cultures to the cultural development of the city.
- To promote the creation of companies specializing in urban cultures.

## Methodology

The MCU provides artists and professionals with a space equipped with modern technology where they have access to a wide variety of courses: rap, dance, graffiti, DJing, VJ, beatbox, etc.; start-up and management of cultural projects; copyright issues; cultural marketing; computer-generated music and videos; photography; written and oral techniques of expression; urban scenography; graphic design; silk-screening; fashion and streetwear, skate boarding, amongst others. To do so it has adapted spaces to each discipline: DJ room, graffiti room, dance floor and polyvalent room for diverse activities, such as lectures, film screenings, debates, etc.

To make progress towards achieving its goals the MCU created a Cultural Incubator, for which 10 young people were selected, based on a competition in which there were a total of 120 participants, in order to train them in design, administration and management of a company, to make them into cultural managers and future trainers.

As part of the Incubator, the “Cultural Entrepreneurship Thursdays” initiative was developed where experiences and thoughts are exchanged in order to find mechanisms for economic development adapted to current socio-cultural realities. Sociologists, anthropologists and other trainers are invited to participate at this encounter, which takes place around 12 times per year.

Within the framework of training activities, the MCU also works with primary and secondary schools, through workshops (written and oral expression, graffiti, disk-jockeying, etc.) that take place at the school themselves. The goal is to provide children and young people who show an interest in urban cultures with the chance to benefit from this training program.

A Support Fund for Urban Cultures was also set up to subsidize projects to find solutions to the employment problems of these young people. In 2016 a total of 21 projects were subsidized.

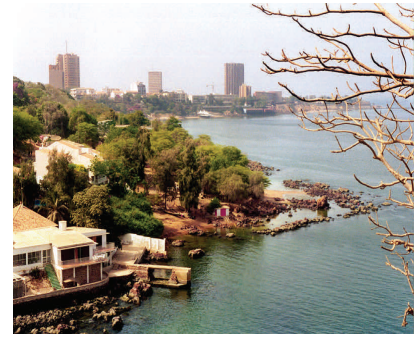
The City Council of Dakar organizes a large multi-disciplinary festival each year for the entire citizenry. In this framework, the MCU participates in the Ribidion Urban Show, in which urban culture artists offer a wide variety of shows that are very popular with the public.



**Creativity and training in the MCU**

## Social and urban context

The city of Dakar, the capital of Senegal, is located in the far west of Africa. It has a population of 1,001,468 inhabitants and covers a surface area of 547 km<sup>2</sup>. It is the political, economic and cultural centre of the country. The location of Dakar has given its harbour a privileged role in the intersection of sea routes between Europe, Africa and South America.



**View of Dakar**  
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Senegalese hip-hop emerged at the beginning of the 80s, specifically in Dakar, and has become a very committed social activity, with its own unique character, through which young people are developing a new form of expression. There are now many groups in the city devoted to this discipline, with very talented artists.

## Assessment

The MCU contributes considerably to the promotion of urban cultures, creating opportunities for expression and creation for artists working in these cultures, who learn to become professionals in one or more disciplines.



The young people see that they can make their passion into their profession, and can live off their art, which they thought of only as a hobby. To date around 500 young people have benefitted from the training provided by the MCU.



**Youth enjoying night concerts**

Weaknesses:

Although there are many artists interested in these disciplines, there is still a lack of cultural managers, and, accordingly, it is often difficult to coordinate the work of the artists in a regular way.

Future proposals:

-To continue expanding the spaces for the expression of urban cultures, either at the House (large dance hall, a semi-professional recording studio, a radio station for young people, etc.) or at the urban space (a large stage for mass events, a skate-boarding park, etc.).

- The MCU wants to set up a section specialising in bibliographical material on hip-hop and other urban cultures at the municipal public library of Ouakam.

## Contact

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