

A French Oasis in Cluj

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Abstract

The paper presents the collection and activity of the Media Centre of the French Cultural Centre in Cluj. Being part of a worldwide network of French cultural institutions, the Media Centre helps its visitors in their French language studies, offers them information on France and Francophone countries, on French culture and society. As a media centre its collection comprises besides books and periodicals a great number of CDs, DVDs and videotapes. By means of this varied collection and cultural programmes and events which take place here the media centre encourages the dialogue between cultures and cultural exchanges.

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The French Cultural Centre was founded in 1990 on the basis of a governmental decision as the result of negotiations and cultural agreements between Romania and France. An entire network of cultural institutions had been created, over the years, outside the borders of France already a century ago which comprises 1200 French institutes, cultural centres and Alliance française centres in 134 countries. This dense network is the oldest and most important such system, which has adapted itself permanently to the evolution of society, renewing the institutions, their missions and way of functioning. The network is the part of French diplomacy as a way to affirm the values of diversity and solidarity. It is given considerable material support each year that demonstrates the authorities' wish to promote cultural diversity. The teaching of the French language is one of the main objectives, but participation in discussions, the dialogue between cultures, cultural cooperation as well as giving information on present day France and studies in France are also important. The cultural network from abroad is closely connected with the embassies' cultural cooperation services,

multiplying the partnerships with cultural agents, local communities, as well as universities having an active role in the cultural exchanges.

Giving information on present day France is one of the main missions of the network's institutions. Most of them have media centres (mediateques) – information centres, whose main objective is to give information about France, keeping permanently in touch with the French intellectual and cultural novelties. These are the main lines of activity followed by the French Cultural Centre and its Media Centre, which is a real emblem for this institution.

The Ion I. C. Brătianu Street is a quiet spot in the heart of Cluj. At no. 22, passing under the gateway, one enters a courtyard with greenery and flowers, with statues scattered about the corners, a quiet courtyard, sheltered from the buzz of the city, where multiculturalism is at home. Here functions the library of the European Studies Faculty of the Babeş-Bolyai University, the Institute of German Studies and its library, the American Studies Library and the administrative units, the course rooms and the Media Centre of the French Cultural Centre.

The Media Centre of the French Cultural Centre, opened to the public in May 1991, is situated on the ground floor of the rear wing of the building. A former gymnasium with great height has enabled an ingenious architect to create a mezzanine which almost doubled the usable surface. The great variety of colours used in the painting of columns, props and the interior stairs in contrast with the white furniture creates a modern, welcoming, warm and spacious interior space. Many French people who visit us compare it with a corner of the Georges Pompidou Centre in Paris. The institution functioned at first as a simple library, but in 1993 it was transformed into a media centre by diversifying the types of the purchased document and the offered services. Besides books, our readers have access to other types of information sources as well: magazines, videotapes, CDs and DVDs; this explains the name media centre. All the documents are placed on open shelves and may be borrowed or consulted on the spot by anyone who has a library card. The ground floor is occupied by the loan department, and the mezzanine by the reading room with 36 stations for reading and consulting audio-visual documents.

The encyclopaedic book collection is classified as in any other French public library, including the National Library of France, according to Dewey decimal classification, our institution using a simplified version for small libraries. The classification numbers are at the same time the shelf numbers. In the beginning we used shelf numbers

of several digits to illustrate the subject of the book as accurately as possible. But we later realized that we had made our own work more difficult, since the collection was too varied and readers were intimidated by the multitude of numbers they did not understand. Thus we decided to make the shelf numbers shorter (6 digits at most). Subjects are shown by the subject headings which seem easier to understand. The books are placed according to the shelf numbers, from **0** to **9**, literature being at the end with shelf numbers containing an **R**, the first three letters of the author's name and the first three letters of the book title (Maguerite Yourcenar – *Memoires d'Hadrien* has the shelf number **R YOU MEM**). Novels and short stories are placed in four groups: books by French and Francophone authors, novels by foreign authors, detective novels and science-fiction. The subjects are not equally well represented, due to the lack of space and because the readers' needs have been taken into consideration. Literature, linguistics, sociology, political sciences, philosophy, economics, geography, and history, as well as the arts are domains which have been developed in the course of time because such books were intensely requested either because of the insufficiency of other information sources or because France was a pioneer in these branches of science. We have less material regarding technical sciences, however, there are materials which may help in acquiring a basic French vocabulary in these areas as well. In conformity with requests, we try to develop these subjects as well. Similarly, not every author is French: works created by great personalities and important representatives of universal culture, Noble Prize winners for literature, and also works by some Romanian writers can be consulted by the readers, in French of course. On the other hand, we also began to purchase books by French authors translated into Romanian in addition to the originals, which may facilitate the understanding of different important texts.

Special attention is given to works which help one to learn French and to prepare for different French language examinations. Books presenting language learning methods, grammar books, test books, works about teaching methods are available for the public. We initiated a project from the French Institute of Madrid which has been copied by many other institutions from the network due to its viability and practical usefulness. We are referring to *La Bibliothèque de l'apprenant* which beside the language books also contains handbooks which offer the learner information on the French culture and civilization. Thus, books on the development of the French society or literary works adapted to the

proficiency levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment are available.

We have not forgotten our youngest readers either: there is a separate area for them in the loan room with numerous richly illustrated documentary and story books, and other document types as well. It is our interest to familiarize them with the library, with reading – no matter whether it is in their mother tongue or a foreign language – in a period when young people are tempted to use other information sources or pastimes. A rich collection of comics represents this genre which combines text and image, a perfect collaboration between writers and graphic artists. Children's books are not classified according to the Dewey system since shelf marks have no relevance for this public: books with a documentary content have for a shelf mark **DJ** (document jeunesse) and the first three letters of the author's name. The shelf mark of fairy tale books is **CJ** (conte jeunesse), the first three letters of the author's name, and the first three letters of the title. They are placed on the shelves according to the levels of language proficiency they require – elementary or advanced.

We pass on now to the audio-video area of the loan room. Videotapes and DVDs form the cinemathèque of the Centre. Classical and contemporary art films by French directors or by other directors of international importance, basic for general culture are placed at the disposal of those who like the genre (Annaud, Cocteau, Kieslowski, Bunuel, Chaplin, Hitchcock, Mihalkov, Costa-Gavras, Malle, Lelouch, Truffaut, Polanski, Oury). The movie collection satisfies every taste, being a varied collection of comedies, dramatic comedies, crime films, adventure movies, and historical dramas and films, theatre and opera, concerts and dance performances too. A series of interesting documentaries take the lovers of travel to foreign regions through various domains: architecture, medicine, history, literature, traditions. Documentaries are classified according to the Dewey classification system and they have subject headings, identical with those of the books, in order to offer as detailed information as possible on a certain subject. Information on different domains and virtual visits are also to be found on the CDs offered to the public.

Compact disks invite music fans to listen to various genres: French and francophone songs from different ages (Aznavour, Piaf, Jacques Brel, Moustaki, Gainsburg, Nana Mouskouri), and also modern tunes, rock, pop, rap, reggae (Celine Dion, Axelle Red, Lara Fabian, Patricia Kaas, Lilicub, Mano Negra, Miossec), French jazz (National

Jazz Orchestra, Michel Petrucciani, Sophia Domanchich, Jean-Marc Padovani) and the great names of the international jazz (Armstrong, Ellington, Fitzgerald, Garbarek, Mingus, Petersen). Concerts, symphonies, recitals, operas and operettas from all the ages and regions, traditional music from different parts of the world, all these purchased to offer a pleasant and instructive way of spending leisure. A series of non-musical records can be used for acquiring language skills.

Ascending to the mezzanine, to the reading room where there is, as in any library, a reference collection which is only for consultation only on the spot: the French edition of *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, the New Bordas Encyclopaedia, Larousse encyclopaedic dictionaries and encyclopaedias and dictionaries in different domains: encyclopaedias of administration, philosophy, literature, economy, geography, the Moore historical encyclopaedic dictionary, dictionaries of religions, symbols and myths, dictionaries of mathematics, astronomy, physics, medicine, management and marketing, of composers and performers, actors and directors, authors, literary works and characters, and comics. Of course, French language dictionaries have the place of honour starting with *Le Grand Robert de la langue française* and *Le Grand Robert des noms propres*, *Le Petit Robert*, and dictionaries of synonyms, of language difficulties, etymological dictionaries, dictionaries of idioms, of slang as well. We also have a rich collection of art albums in the reading room, with subjects from antique to contemporary art: monographs of art movements (impressionism, cubism, surrealism, expressionism, futurism, pop art, underground), and also of painters, sculptors, photographers, classic and modern graphic artists (Arman, Soulages, Picasso, Zao Wou-ki, Helicon, Miro, Erro, Dalí, Brâncuși, Cartier-Bresson, Man Ray), museum guides. Among the reference books there are also works on office automation and administration, opera librettos, movie guides, French and Francophone literary anthologies, monographs of different regions, geographical guides, and cookery books.

The French periodicals complete the information given by the books and inform the public on novelties. The fields are varied: information and political analysis (*Monde sélections hebdomadaires*, *Monde diplomatique*, *Nouvel Observateur*, *Express*, *Courrier international*, *Paris Match*, *Figaro Magazine*), art and architecture (*Beaux arts*, *Artpress*, *Connaissance des arts*, *Dossier de l'art*, *Techniques et architecture*, *Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, *Elle décoration*), music and film (*Monde de la musique*, *Diapason*, *Cahiers du cinéma*, *Première*, *Rock & Folk*), literature (*Magazine littéraire*, *Lire*, *Europe*),

sciences (*Science et vie, Science et vie junior, Sciences et avenir, La Recherche, Pour la science, Médecine science, Santé*), informatics (*PC Expert*), debates (*Débat, Esprit, Temps modernes*), history and travel (*Histoire, Historia, Monde de la Bible, Geo, Terres sauvages*), women's magazines (*Femme actuelle, Elle, Prima, Cuisine et vins de France*), children's and teenagers' magazines (*Phosphore, Okapi, Wapiti, Pif*).

Those who do not have the necessary equipment to watch movies at home or want to listen to some music can do this in the reading room where there is a special place for consulting videotapes, DVDs and CDs. A TV set connected to a parabolic antenna is at the disposal of those who wish to watch the programmes of the TV5 and Arte channels. There is also a wireless WIFI antenna for Internet connection.

To manage the collections, the public and the loans the Media Centre uses the special library programme BCDI 3, created in France initially for school libraries and later extended to small libraries, including many media centres of the M.A.E. network. The complete and up to date catalogue can be consulted in the reading room or, since autumn 2008, online on the site of the Media Centre: www.ccfrc.ro.

The document collection is permanently updated according to the budgetary possibilities (and it is very difficult to select from the thousands of titles which form the editorial and multimedia production of each month and the multitude of titles within the limits of a budget) and the reading public's needs. The readers no longer consist of a small group of Francophile intellectuals interested in humanities. The interest is more general, from pupils to the elderly a great number of people wish to find out new things about the life of the French society and want to be able to communicate in this language. There are far more possibilities to study, to obtain an MA or a PhD degree, and even to find a job in France. Being familiar with that language and society bring the two nations closer.

In order to extend the range of information and to promote the collections we organize programmes connected to the anniversary or commemoration of leading scientists, artists and writers or of important events of the French society: thematic exhibitions of books and other document types, debates, film screenings, exhibitions of original creations. These are closely connected to the general activity of the French Cultural Centre, being advertised in the activity programme of the Centre or on the site and are organized in collaboration with different schools and cultural institutions in Cluj. Some examples from the year 2007: *Maurice Béjart 80 years old* (document exhibition and the

screening of the film *B comme Béjart*), *Tunisia, a Francophone Land* (document and photo exhibition with the occasion of the days of Francophonie and the visit in Cluj of the Tunisian poet and painter Nja Mahdaoui who participated in a workshop organized with the students of the Art and Design University), exhibition of the creations of the students from Cluj with the occasion of the rugby World Championship in September, another exhibition of children's drawings for the commemoration of René Goscinny's death, who was the father of Asterix and Obelix (*Un César pour Goscinny*), and a book exhibition, film screenings and a round table for the poet René Char's 100th anniversary. There are two "festivities" directly connected to the media centre: "Les Journées de la Francophonie", in the second part of March (the celebration of the social and affective link of the French language which connects the most different people who get to know one another and make cultural exchanges) and "Lire en fête" in October (a real celebration of books and reading which has a fixed theme each year).

Though numbers are prosaic and strict, everything is always measured by them and future directions of activity are always based on these; therefore here are some data regarding the media centre at the end of 2008:

- 17,500 books
- 2,000 compact disks
- 775 DVDs
- 600 video tapes
- 145 CDs
- 90 subscriptions to French periodicals
- 120 readers registered
- 63,000 borrowed documents
- 26,000 documents consulted in the media centre
- 20,200 visits

Translated by Ágnes Korondi