

A unique cultural project '6 Bab Sharq' breathes new air to Alexandria's scene

Following over two years of work that included training and implementation, today '6 Bab Sharq' is ready to embark onto large waters of Alexandria's cultural scene, where it will operate independently to Goethe-Institut Alexandria, its core creator. With the dawn of 2021, a lot can be told about the initiative that has been launched as a unique institutional model and how it brought countless benefits to cultural managers and practitioners in the Mediterranean city and beyond.

'6 Bab Sharq', an arts and culture space that aims to support emerging artists in Alexandria, was born as an initiative launched by Goethe-Institut Alexandria on 19 November 2019. At the heart of this initiative lied the Institut's need to understand, support, and develop the cultural scene in Alexandria.

Funded by German Federal Foreign Office, the beginnings of this unique initiative, are linked to a two-fold project that consisted of an educational aspect and a practical segment which involves actual management of a new space.

Accordingly, in its first phase, the Goethe-Institut held a five-month Cultural Management Training Program which aim was to support 12 emerging cultural managers, through capacity-building workshops. The participants engaged in conversations, workshops, and lectures about the fundamental components of an arts space ranging from program development and networking to fundraising, legal work, and sustainability. During the training, participants looked to cultural institutions locally and globally and were encouraged to think critically about the gaps in the arts and culture scene in Egypt at large, and Alexandria in particular. The training followed a model of Goethe's programs such as the Goethe-Institut's Culture Academy in 2017, which provided training for cultural management, with the '6 Bab Sharq' being the first cultural training program of its kind to include praxis and implementation.

The workshop gave the participants crucial know-how about management of the creative projects, with many being well equipped to run whether their own spaces. On the other hand, the Goethe-Institut Alexandria provided the '6 Bab

Sharq' as an alternative space for the program's participants to implement their managerial competencies. As such, the institutional modeling of 6 Bab Sharq is exceptional in a cultural field mitigated by questions of institutionalism and coming in response to questions surrounding the role and responsibility of institutions in Egypt's current socio-political and cultural landscape.

In January 2020, Goethe-Institut handed over its management to a collective team of three from the 12 participants who took part in the training program and who became fully in charge of the space management under supervision and guidance from Goethe-Institut.

Throughout the past two years, the space held numerous activities with the main ones being literary residencies led by the renowned Egyptian writers and novelists, an animation school that trained 12 participants with each producing one film, photography workshops that concluded with an exhibition of works created by the participants. In parallel, a number of other activities have been set in place helping over 150 emerging artists through capacity building workshops and programs, producing a total of 38 art projects, holding numerous online discussions, talks, and screenings, and creating a network between emerging artists in Alexandria and artists from all over Egypt. The space also offers rental service of the space main hall, rental service of the equipment, and access to its library.

So far, '6 Bab Sharq' collaborated with over 40 established artists in its projects and a number of renowned institutions in Egypt such as Goethe-Institut, Fig Leaf, B'sarya for Arts, Jesuit Cultural Center, CIC, Cinema Amir, Adef Deca, Museum of World Culture among others.

With the entry of 2022, '6 Bab Sharq' has now established itself as a fully independent institution that will continue to embrace and nurture the cultural scene of Alexandria while creating creative and mutually-beneficial links with the Egyptian art scene at large. Managed by Motaz Sobhy and Mostafa Ismail, the space offers numerous important activities that will support and disseminate countless artistic voices.