

The Alliance Française and its activity in Latin America



Alliance Française

The Alliance Française (French Institute Alliance) is an international organization. It was founded in 1883 by two French historians, Pierre Foncin and Pierre Cambon, who were both committed to the development of French culture in the world and who recommended the dispersion of the French language globally. The association is located in the heart of Paris, in the Latin district near the famous Paris-Sorbonne University. The Alliance Française is one of the most important international French associations. It is a non-profit organization that operates through subsidies, donations and partnerships.

The main aim of the Alliance Française is to promote the French language throughout the world. French is already one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. Like English, it is spoken to some extent on five continents, with an estimated 175 million speakers. To promote French, the Alliance Française offers language lessons to anyone who wishes to learn be it students, families, companies, as well as children and seniors. Courses take place not only in France but also at other Alliance Française centres around the world. They offer different types of courses, including general, intensive or extensive workshops and evening classes. By attending these courses, participants are presented with a recognized certification such as the DELF (*Diplôme d'études en langue française*) or the DALF (*Diplôme approfondi de langue française*), which are awarded by the French Ministry of Education. The quality of the courses run by the Alliance is recognised worldwide, thanks to its qualified teachers, multimedia resource centres, phonetics laboratories and tailor-made courses.

The Alliance Française also tries to promote French culture in foreign countries. All aspects of French culture, such as its history, gastronomy and the arts (cinema,

literature and music) are promoted through events, not only in France, but all over the world. These events include exhibitions, literary 'coffee mornings', concerts, French cinema showings, French theatre performances as well as the annual French Speaking World Week, usually held in March. However, the Alliance does not only promote French culture, it also actively engages with other cultures. Their actions are beneficial for both sides in that foreign people get to know France and the French also learn about other cultures. This can lead to enriching exchanges between numerous civilisations, which help people to better understand foreign cultures. They get to know each other better facilitating reciprocal exchange.

The international Alliance Française network is constantly developing. At the moment there are approximately 1071 Alliances Françaises centres in 136 countries and approximately 450 000 people have attended the association's schools. These schools are centres of culture that enable people from all over the world to meet and to share common interests. For example, the Alliance Française located in Paris has welcomed around 11 000 students from 156 different nationalities. The first Alliance Française institute was founded in Paris, with subsequent associations established in Spain, Africa and Latin America. The first Alliance Française founded outside of Paris, was in Barcelona.

Organizations in France do not have the same goal as in other countries. As I said before, there is an Alliance Française centre located in 136 countries. These are independent of the one located in Paris, and are statutorily and financially autonomous. In France, the aim is to enable foreign people to learn the French language. France wants to preserve its language and increase the number of French speakers by focusing on language courses and training. In locations abroad such as Latin America, associations focus on promoting French culture and French values through different events. In Latin America alone, there are Alliances Française centres based in Argentina, Mexico, Venezuela and Brazil. Throughout 19 Latin American countries, there are 227 Alliances Française centres and approximately 118 000 students attending French schools.

One of the Alliances in Argentina is located in Buenos Aires and was founded in 1893 by Dr François Simon. This association is renowned for the quality of its French

courses. In the beginning, the aim of this association was limited to running French courses for students, but over the years it has evolved and new services, such as courses for employers have been established. Over the years, the Alliance has become an important cultural centre hosting cultural activities such as concerts, theatre performances and conferences. Since 1960 the Alliance Française of Buenos Aires has had its own theatre, the TAF (Theatre of the French Alliance), which has its own actors who regularly perform famous French plays. Furthermore, the association recently underwent restoration of its headquarters in order to reinforce the distribution of French culture. New additions included an art gallery dedicated to contemporary art as well as a media library that contains a wide range of materials such as videos, books and CDs documenting French culture. Today, this centre represents one of the most important places where people can find information about France and her culture.

Founded in 1884, shortly after the one in Paris, the Alliance Française in Mexico is one of the oldest. The aim of the Mexican Alliance is not only to run French courses but also to establish a dialogue between French and Mexican cultures. The association promotes contemporary French and Mexican cultures through artistic events such as exhibitions, concerts, movies, circuses and dances. Other organizations have since been created in Mexico and the most important centres are located in Mexico City, Monterrey and Guadalajara. They have professional equipment, theatres, galleries and media libraries that enable the promotion of French culture. There are approximately 32 000 students who attend French courses in Mexico every year. The main aim of the courses is to learn a new language and to be awarded a diploma. The Alliances Française centres in Mexico are located in several cities, making it easier for people to learn because it is likely that there is an Alliance based within their region. In terms of courses, the association offers courses from home, the workplace or in schools. The organisation also offers linguistic stays for people who would like to learn in France. This is one of the best opportunities students have to improve their language skills. Moreover, these linguistic stays are fully organized by the association and so enable people to enjoy their stay in the best conditions, with the best services. The association also offers au pair programs, for people who want to discover the language and the culture directly in the country, whilst working.

In Brazil, organizations are located in Nova Friburgo, Niterói, Brasilia and Rio de Janeiro. In Brazil, it is very common to learn a foreign language, and French and English are popular choices due to the wide range of job opportunities available between the European Union and Brazil. The association located in Nova Friburgo was founded in 1979 and its mission is to teach the French language and to expand and disseminate the culture of all French-speaking countries. The association promotes cultural exchanges between Brazil, Nova Friburgo and France. For example in September 2003, the association organized a student language exchange between Brazil and Montmorillon in France. In addition, it also organized a French Week to promote French culture. There was also the “Varilux” Festival at the end of 2008, which broadcast French movies. As a result, 2.021.141 people in Brazil saw a French movie in 2007. In Merida, events such as “Lire en Fête” took place in October 2008 where Jean de La Fontaine’s great fables were read. Also, during the “Fête de la Musique” (Musical Festival), songs by the famous French singer Edith Piaf were performed and during the “Fête du Cinema Français” (French Cinema Festival), famous French films such as “Jeux d’Enfants” (Love me if you dare) and the successful movie “La Môme” (La Vie en Rose) were screened. In Valencia, there were two exhibitions. One called “Les cent ans de la Bande Dessinée francophone” (A hundred years of French comics), and another about the French painter Hélène Crécent. Events aimed at promoting the French culture were also held in Maracaibo in March 2009. As in many other cities, a French-speaking country festival was held followed by two cinema sessions with two French films: “Sauve-Moi” by Christian Vincent and “Samia” by Philippe Faucon. A concert by the Martinican Mario Canonge was also organised.

There are six Alliances in Haiti located in Cap Haitien, Gonaives, Les Cayes, Jacmel, Jeremie and Port de Paix. For a hundred years, Haitian men and women have commandeered cultural projects relieving the burden of the Alliance Française’s workload. This has led to a huge cultural and learning network throughout the country. The aim of the association is not only to promote the French language and culture, but also to intensify cultural exchanges between France and Haiti, in particular through performance and cultural debates. In order to attract people, the Haitian network also organises cultural activities such as festivals, games,

competitions and school exchanges. In terms of cultural activities, in Cayes for example, the association offers cinema sessions, exhibitions and conferences.

In Colombia, the Alliances Françaises centres are situated in Armenia, Barranquilla, Bogotá, Bucaramanga, Cali and Carthagène. Just as in other Latin American countries, events celebrating French culture are hosted annually. For example, in Bogotá last year, numerous French films and documentaries that deal with topical issues such as globalization and fair trade were broadcast in French with Spanish subtitles. In Barranquilla, the 2008 French Speaking World Week hosted events such as a French dictation competition, a literary evening and a French food festival.

In Venezuela, the Alliance Française centres are located in Caracas, Barquisimeto, Maracaibo, Merida, Nueva Esparta, Valencia, and Porlamar. The one in Caracas was founded in 1974. On the one hand it organizes cultural activities to promote French culture and on the other, it aims to promote Venezuelan culture in France. The promotion of cultural diversity is the main aim of the cooperation between France and Venezuela. Events that took place in November last year included the Beaujolais Nouveau celebration that gave participants the opportunity to take part in a wine tasting session. Additionally, a French conversation club was created and the month of November was dedicated to French-Canadian literature.

In a bid to attract even more people, the Alliance Française launched its first international advertisement campaign in 2005. Another initiative, "Oui, je parle français" ("Yes, I speak French") was launched by the Alliance Française, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in 2006. The aim of this initiative is to encourage French companies to develop the use of the French language in their subsidiaries abroad. Promoting the French language around the world is a worthwhile cause economically, because it could prove to be an asset in terms of trade. The Alliances Françaises not only promotes French culture, but also attempts to defend cultural diversities and encourages cultural exchanges and understanding between different countries. At the moment, the Alliance Française is unquestionably one of the most important "cultural multinational" institutions in the world.

Sources

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