



**culture 21**

Agenda 21 for culture

Agenda 21 de la culture

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## If the Agenda 21 for culture is the answer, what was the question?

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United Cities and Local Governments  
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## If the Agenda 21 for culture is the answer, what was the question?

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## Cultural policies

Defining culture means defining yourself and defining cultural policies also means defining yourself. After the Agenda 21 for culture, it is no longer neutral to say that cultural policies, especially public ones, are not a priority.

**Agenda 21 for culture is first and foremost a question which is as follows: Is another model (of cultural policies, obviously) possible?**

A *non-cultural policy* is a cultural policy that is coherent to the hegemonic model: to make as much money as possible in the shortest possible time and of course without caring about its impact and other side effects. This is also the law for culture. The first world imports, and it imports raw materials, emigrants and all kinds of resources (natural, energy, cultural and heritage). And obviously enough it exports manufactured goods, loans, tourists and all kinds of cultural products suitable for all right around the world. It is a "winning" model which is consistent with a development model which is exhausting the Earth's natural, economic, social and, obviously enough, cultural resources. It is a model which is leading the planet and its culture into desertification. Agenda 21 for culture is first and foremost a question which is as follows: *Is another model (of cultural policies, obviously) possible?*

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## Letters and figures

At any event, it is best not to delude yourself. Agenda 21 for culture was set up in 2004, has swum against the tide and has not adapted to the dominant model. If public cultural policies are not necessary, then planning culture, especially in the long-term, is frivolous. If what we measure is only audiences and rankings (for sales, visitors, seats filled, tickets sold, miles of queues, etc.) then we do not need to worry about excellence. This is true for music but also for museums, theatres, festivals and so on. From this point of view people are figures and their cultural practice is reduced solely to what can be measured by official statistics, cultural "consumption". Albert García-Espuche summed the position up some time ago in an article entitled "*Culture, letters and figures*". Culture seen purely in terms of figures is nothing more than a metro passageway, where the best equipment or plan is that which gets the highest number of people through a given point in the shortest time possible. Obviously the only thing of any interest is knowing how many people. Cultural practice is *shrunk* and reduced to a simple presence: a person, in the hands of the tyranny of cultural statistics, is a visitor, the spectre of someone who at a particular time has been to a place. At most we know if they are a man or a woman, a local or a visitor, a schoolchild or a retiree. We know nothing, however, about the impact of the work on their life, about their feelings, about how they interacted with the thing they "have visited", about whether on coming out they were or were not the same person as the one who went in. It is clear that conceptually the winning development model is rather limited and repetitive. It is an updated version of the old tavern motto that says "*they come in, they drink, they pay and they leave*".

## Cultural practice versus cultural consumption

What is more, the dictatorship of the audience (more suitable for television than for public policy) does not go with a full notion of culture. In the network society, relationships have changed radically. Now not only are bonds established (if they have ever been established in this way) between creation and the audience, but also a range of factors (access to information and communication technologies, to name but one) have contributed to a new reality. Everyone can now be both creator and receiver of culture at the same time. The hierarchical vision has been shattered and spaces and interfaces are proliferating everywhere. Cultural practice has diversified and as a result the positions (active, passive, as emitter, as receiver, etc.) that a person or group can adopt have multiplied. The idea of cultural consumption serves to designate only one type of cultural practice. And, while audiences go one way, people, formally or informally grouped either individually or collectively, go another. This way, not illuminated by cultural statistics, is the most fertile strip in cultural development.

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## Should we increase cultural development?

The *Nous Accents 2006* Strategic Plan, draw up in Barcelona two years after the approval of the Agenda 21 for culture, seeks to answer this question. And it does so forcefully: ensuring the cultural development of a city means working in two basic and complementary directions at the same time. Firstly it means increasing cultural practice possibilities and opportunities for all. This goes back, obviously, to the old idea of the democratisation of culture which though it may be old still remains valid, just like democracy. Then secondly there is the goal of giving as many opportunities as possible to creation, to creators, which in turn is connected to another idea, namely cultural democracy viewed as the creation of the greatest possible number of opportunities for creation. This is not new either, but it is little used.



Strategic Culture Plan. Nous accents 06.  
Photograph: © Francesc Boixader

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The *Nous Accents 2006* Strategic Culture Plan sees culture not as an instrument, but rather as a dimension of development. The new Plan gives priority to three lines of action:

1. A commitment to proximity
2. Quality and excellence in cultural production in the city
3. A more connected cultural ecosystem

*Proximity, excellence and connectivity* are expressed in 10 structuring programmes:

**BARCELONA LABORATORY:** support for initiatives (associative, private and public) which provide spaces for taking risks, trying things out, rehearsing and experimenting in all types of artistic languages. Amongst others it includes the Factories for Creation project.

**CULTURE, EDUCATION AND PROXIMITY:** to extend all kinds of cultural practice as a means of individual and collective expression. The most significant project here is the Artistic Education Plan, which involves setting up public and private schools which specialise in artistic education and cultural practice.

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**READING CITY:** to boost reading by the general public especially through the implementation of the Libraries Plan. To support the publishing industry in the city; to ramp up literary creation and also to put in place policies and funding which foster reading and the spread of books, bringing access to the printed word to all.

**PROGRAMME FOR INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE:** to use the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008) to lay the foundations for converting diversity as a policy: a concept which entails generality, permanence, a new public culture based on diversity and also a structural change in Barcelona's cultural policies.

**BARCELONA SCIENCE:** to bring scientific culture to the entire city and stress the vision of science as an inseparable part of the definition of culture. To enhance the contribution of scientific culture to promoting a more active and critical citizenship, consolidate the public image of research and innovation as activities which generate development by providing new scientific vocations, and afford Barcelona international visibility as a city of science.

**QUALITY OF CULTURAL FACILITIES:** to strengthen cultural facilities as instruments for producing culture and knowledge. This involves actions which entail enhanced quality and excellence in extant centres, expanded floor area and infrastructure and greater investment in acquisitions and conditioning and in production and management capabilities. It also involves strengthening their educational aspect by increasing their link with their surroundings, boosting accessibility and extension to the public and enhancing cultural cooperation and international visibility.

**KNOWLEDGE, MEMORY AND CITY:** to stress cultural heritage as a means of building shared accounts and visions of the city. To reinforce the public system of access to the city's heritage based on setting up a new generation of museum infrastructures with the aim of driving greater local and international visibility and impact for museums.

**CULTURAL CAPITAL STATUS:** to reinforce Barcelona's capital status within the framework of partnership with the Catalan and Spanish governments. This includes working together to fund and run the system of facilities in place in the city and to start up new ones.

**CULTURAL CONNECTIVITY:** the dynamics of connectivity need to help incentivise, maintain, reinforce and consolidate extant networks made up of the large number of agents in the city's cultural sectors and also to create new ones, based on a concept of a culture network which cooperates at the local, metropolitan, Catalan, Spanish and international levels.

**CULTURE COUNCIL:** to set up options for participation in elaborating, implementing and evaluating the city's cultural policies made up of representatives of cultural associations and NGOs, distinguished intellectual and academics, representatives of the various political parties and municipal officers and which integrate executive and advisory functions.

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## Complexity, diversity, evolution

Increasing means augmenting and diversifying. Cultural practice includes all kinds of processes and activities, ranging from the most basic and popular to the most skilled and minority; from the most amateur to business projects and including a wide array of community or associative initiatives. Culture, just like nature, is complex. And cultural wealth, just like natural wealth, is based on complexity and diversity. Another law of nature, evolution, is also observed in culture. As a result, seeing to the development of culture also entails, as Joan Ollé has said, helping all those initiatives and processes which, due the implacable workings of the law of environmental adaption and the survival of the fittest, would be condemned to extinction “to come into being and preventing them from dying”.

## Education and culture

In this respect, policies geared towards expanding educational options for cultural and artistic practice gain in significance. It thus becomes a question of highlighting the educational profile of cultural policies and also adding to the cultural aspect of educational policies. Obviously these kinds of cultural policies are not only made by departments for culture. They are the policies of educational cities, and also policies geared towards supporting creation. Without raising awareness and providing an introduction to artistic languages there is no aesthetic education or diversity in artistic practice. And without support for creation there are no spaces for risk, experimentation, rehearsal, mistakes, etc. Then there are those who ask: What about the cultural industries? There is another law which never fails, the law of continuity in the food chain: without small fish there are no big fish, and the ocean is large enough for all. So the wider the base (of cultural practice, support for creation and artistic education), the stronger will be the intermediate space (the system of facilities, production and distribution) and the better the vertexes. This does not mean just one vertex which would suggest the idea of a pyramid. Culture is a system of variable geometry. So what about the cultural industries? Without education and without creation there would only be one option: to remain as consumers of what is produced by the hegemonic cultural industries.

**Policies geared towards expanding educational options for cultural and artistic practice gain in significance.**

## Chance and the Agenda 21 for culture

The law of chance is implacable. Perhaps there would have been a (second) Strategic Plan in 2006; perhaps also this Plan would have included the idea of cultural development as a core concept. It might even have been the case that the *Factories for Creation*, the *Culture Council*, the *Artistic Education Plan*, *Barcelona Science* and the *Intercultural Dialogue* would have been the structuring programmes for this Plan. All of that might have happened had there been no Agenda 21 for culture, but what is certain is that after the Agenda 21 for culture, the only plan for culture possible in Barcelona was the following.

**Factories for Creation** seeks to increase the network of public facilities which support cultural production in Barcelona. The city and its metropolitan area have a dense cultural fabric stemming from their artistic creativity and excellence. The capacity to produce and create of many of these artists has made an outstanding contribution to fostering innovation and progress in the city and has been a major asset in Barcelona's international visibility. Though at present there are a range of cultural production centres, the urban transformation of the central parts of the city is reducing their number. These centres, which have traditionally concentrated in urban industrial zones to take advantage of lower land prices and the suitability of facilities, are disappearing as former industrial areas are turned into new neighbourhoods.

The Institute for culture (Icub) has set out four main principles which regardless of the management model chosen must be built into all the city's Factories for Creation:

- Public interest
- Artistic and cultural interest
- The territorial dimension
- The technological dimension

Likewise the Icub has run a consultation process with cultural stakeholders to evaluate the main demands to be met by this programme. This consultation process will be decisive in mapping out the formal proposal and has made it possible to draw the first conclusions about the different types of factories:

**Multimedia production and creation centre.** With high technological content which prioritizes experimentation and excellence with new technology. Numerous technological and artistic partners have shown great interest in developing this type of centre.

**Training, rehearsal and creation facility for circus performers.** A type of centre to supplement the education provided in this field by the Ateneu Popular de Nou Barris. The Catalan Association of Circus Professionals (APCC) worked on the project for a centre which since July 2008 has taken shape in *La Central del Circ*.

**Workshops for visual artists.** Workshops which can be used on a rotation basis for carrying out projects. The Catalan Association of Visual Artists and other organisations are working on ideas especially in the Poblenou district where these workshops have traditionally concentrated.

**Intermediate facilities for the performing and movement arts.** Small spaces where creation, experimentation and dissemination for minority audiences are combined. Independent groups have professionally run very interesting spaces in recent years, such as la Caldera in the Gràcia district, la Nau Ivanow in the Sagrera district and the venues run by the Catalan Actors and Directors Association at the Can Fabra Cultural Centre.

**Music resources centre.** Based on the experience with "rehearsal rooms" which are now to be found in many civic centres around the city, the idea is to develop a type of centre which adds all the other stages in musical production – experimentation with new formats, new distribution channels, etc. – to rehearsal

The remaining facilities in the *Factories for Creation* network:

**El Graner:** in autumn 2008 the two main associations in the dance sector (Dance Professionals and Dance Companies) agreed on the basic structure of a *factory* in the el Graner facility in the Zona Franca.

**Fabra i Coats:** in 2009 a two-storey provisional facility has started up with music and performing arts projects. The artistic and architectural plans for the building are to be decided.

**La Escocesa:** the artistic and operational plans for the facility are to be decided on shortly.

**Ateneu Popular de Nou Barris:** work on extending the facility is to be begun.

**La Seca:** work has begun and the facility has been made over to become a performing arts and exhibitions centre.

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Furthermore, local cultural policies, like all basic policies, need to have their own theoretical framework, glossary and shared code. In this respect there is a before and after about the Agenda 21 for culture. It provides cultural management, cultural policies and planning with a theoretical corpus and a common view of culture. That is pretty significant. Any practice (professional, political, academic, social, etc) which seeks to be recognised needs this conceptual background. In Agenda 21 for culture the approaches and positioning taken by actors, who are no longer timorous but rather by working together have achieved a great deal of maturity, are precipitated and crystallised. Local cultural policies achieve a considerable degree of centrality and the Agenda 21 for culture is both a driving force for and a reflection of that.



Factories for Creation. Fabra i Coats central bay.  
Photograph: © Sergi Díaz

## Geometry of the Agenda 21 for culture in Barcelona

The Agenda 21 for culture has a variable geometry. On its own it intrinsically contains the values and goals that would be expected cultural policies. Extrinsically it connects up a worldwide network of cities that are committed to those values. It therefore enables a local perspective (as a guide for cultural action) and a global perspective (as it links up multiple cooperation networks). From this twin perspective, the inside and the outside are no longer sealed-off concepts but rather make up spaces for intersection. And this frontier condition of the Agenda 21 for culture is connected with the fact that it is the cities which have driven it. Because as we know, cities are the places which bring together the majority of the cultural dealings and appropriations produced by human beings. Cities localise a global dynamic and at the same time globalise local dynamics. This means that the cultural policies of cities are connected with the construction of a planetary society, and this is the main innovation of the Agenda 21 for culture.

**The Agenda 21 for culture has a variable geometry. Intrinsically, it contains the values and goals that cultural policies develop. Extrinsically it connects up a worldwide network of cities that are committed to those values.**

Thus as the Agenda 21 for culture is a device which connects with the world, its development has been associated with other devices, some pre-existing and some created subsequently. Agenda 21 for culture's power comes from its ability to connect with these other devices for cultural policies. In Barcelona, this has created a singular geometry. The Agenda 21 for culture needs to be seen in a geometry that also includes cultural planning processes (the Libraries Plan in 1998, the Cultural Sector Strategic Plan in 1999, and the *Nous Accents* Strategic Culture Plan in 2006), the main instruments for cultural policies (the Institute for culture, the constellation of consortiums set up with other governments and civil society) and the articulation of opportunities for participation and dialogue in mapping out the city's cultural policies with the finest example being the Culture Council (2007).

### The Culture Council: the architecture of dialogue.

The Council has been set up as a means of dialogue between the city council, the various cultural sectors and distinguished intellectual and academics in the sphere of culture and the arts. It is a platform trusted to dialogue as a condition for cultural policies.

It is a joint committee that is both advisory and executive. It is independent of the public authorities.

Its plenary session, consisting of a maximum of fifty people all of whom are entitled to speak and vote, is its leading consultative body. Its duties include setting up executive committees to open up participation and debate to all those people, groups and organisations that go to make up the city's cultural system.

The plenary session consists of 16 people who represent cultural associations and NGOs; 16 distinguished intellectual and academics; 10 people representing the Culture Councils in each District; a representative of each of the political parties with seats on the City Council (5 in the period 2007-2011); a representative of the Public Reading Committee; the Vice-President (chosen at the suggestion of the representatives of cultural associations and NGOs); and, finally, the President (the Mayor of Barcelona).

The *Executive Committee*, chaired by the Vice-President and made up of another six people (all of them appointed from among the distinguished intellectual and academics), operates independently and holds the executive powers of the Council. These can be summarised as follows:

- a) To report, either mandatorily, on its own initiative or at the request of the plenary session, about the setting up of new municipal cultural bodies or facilities; about proposed municipal legislation and regulations which impact on cultural or artistic policy; and on the appointment of the heads of municipal cultural facilities.
- b) To take part in allocating funding for culture in line with Barcelona City Council's funding rules and regulations.
- c) To put forward members of the "City of Barcelona" Awards juries.

Thus in Barcelona the Agenda 21 for culture cannot be viewed in isolation but instead it should be seen as one of the main driving forces which operate in lockstep. Cultural planning can help us to think about the goals of cultural policies, about the what; participation and dialogue form part of the how. And Agenda 21 for culture is in the radical sense of cultural policies, in the why for everything. These are the three vertexes of the triangle.



Barcelona Culture Council.  
Photograph: © Francesc Boixader

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