



# CULTURAL POLICIES IN CONCEPCIÓN: MAIN RESULTS OF THE PILOT CITY PROGRAMME

JUNE 2018

The City of Concepción has taken part in the Agenda 21 for culture Pilot Cities programme between 2015 and 2018. Following the final conference of the programme, held in March 2018, this document presents the context in which the programme has taken place, summarises the main activities implemented and analyses their relevance as regards local sustainable development. It also presents some conclusions and assessment of the work carried out.

The document has been written by Mauricio Castro, Cultural Advisor to the City of Concepción and the focal point of the Pilot Cities programme in Concepción.

For further information about the programme, please visit Concepción's page on the Agenda 21 for culture website.

FINAL  
REPORT





In 2014, the Municipal Government of Concepción began an unprecedented process of innovation for local cultural policies through a participative strategic plan called Concepción 2030. Over eight months, a number of cultural actors, social organisations, and the general community worked together on surveys, interviews, sectoral committees, and neighbourhood meetings during the assessment stage, and to prioritise programmes. The aim was a series of actions that would be implemented in phases from 2014 to 2017 and from 2018 to 2020. The key objective was to lay the foundations for establishing culture as a priority in the city's development, which requires understanding culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development alongside the economic, social, and environmental aspects. This created a vision for the city to become the cultural capital of southern Chile by 2030, with connections throughout other regions and Latin America.

Concepción 2030 was designed at the local level with a high level of citizen participation. More than three thousand people were involved in this unprecedented exercise of local democracy. Since it began, the success of this plan has made Concepción part of the Pilot Cities programme of Agenda 21 for culture, an international initiative by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) that supports cultural policies in more than 300 cities around the world.

In the first stage of diagnosis and strategic planning, five development priorities were established: 1) Institutional; 2) Infrastructure and Public Space; 3) Training and Access to Culture; 4) Promotion and Innovation; and 5) Diffusion and Identity. First, the programmes that were prioritised by the community involved establishing a working group in the city dedicated to the area and to cultural advisory. This is to become the Department of Culture in 2019. Specific actions have included: strengthening neighbourhood identity; establishing cultural venues through the community; encouraging good practices along with the use of public space; supporting various activities, events, arts projects, and independent cultural initiatives; hosting cultural events throughout the year; helping the community become more involved in these activities; developing arts education, training new talents, and creating citizen art groups.

Added to this is the need to strengthen three areas of the cultural infrastructure, at different stages of the cultural value chain: the Cultural Arts Centre (CAC), dedicated to arts education; the Federico Ramírez Cultural Centre, focused on cultural diffusion; and the Concepción Creation Centre (C3), which supports the production of projects related to the creative economy.

These cultural policies are periodically subjected to evaluations and new adjustments to establish a road map. During these stages, the participation of different actors, transparency, and feedback remain key elements. Through the Concepción 2030 Cultural Plan, the city has come to work with a Cultural Advisory Board that includes representatives from cultural organizations and institutions. This has been expanded and diversified as a result of involving various actors across the city, through the Advisory Board's connections and collaborative networks.

A fundamental part of these processes was the city's adoption of the framework of the Pilot Cities programme by Agenda 21 for culture. This included methodologies, work plans, and direct contributions by the consultant Antoine Guibert. In May 2016, he led self-evaluation workshops in which representatives of cultural institutions, managers, agents, experts in charge of different areas of culture at the local level, and Mapuche associations worked together during open meetings to gather opinions and comments by the community.

During group meetings, discussions, and participatory workshops, participants evaluated and reflected on how to proceed with implementing the work plan, in accordance with "Culture 21: Actions", approved by UCLG in 2015. The document allows cities all over the world to examine their strengths and weaknesses with regards to these policies, based on common guidelines. It compares the evaluation of each city with comprehensive opinions taken from a panel of experts.

Subsequent evaluations highlighted areas of city that rated higher than the global average. According to the document published in October 2016, Concepción is also commendable for its practices relating to culture and education; its emphasis on heritage, diversity, and creativity; its focus on culture, information, and knowledge, as well as its governance of culture, particularly regarding citizens' participation. At the same time, there was also a notable effort in the field of cultural rights with a particular emphasis on Indigenous peoples. One area that may require more attention is that of cultural rights. Here, the report added that Concepción could benefit from the examples of other cities by forming relationships between: culture, urban planning, and public space; culture and economy; equity and social inclusion, and especially by linking culture with the environment.

As a result, subsequent efforts have been intensified throughout the different neighbourhoods of Concepción. This has involved various initiatives to strengthen actions, activities, links, and dialogue with various cultural and neighbourhood groups, residents, and the community overall in different spaces and venues. The Neighbourhood Culture Plans, carried out in November 2017, were key initiatives that included days for citizen consultations so as to develop the 2018 Neighbourhoods Festival programme in a participatory way. This programme included action plans to boost neighbourhood celebrations, support and strengthen local traditions, the community, the formation of new audiences for arts education, addressing residents' concerns about their areas, and stimulating the cultural capital of the neighbourhood.

That same month, the first "Rotating: Contemporary Art Practices in Communities" programme was held with artists from different regions of Chile as well as Córdoba (Argentina). This involved artist residencies in neighbourhoods and education establishments, which sought to contribute to territorial processes with an open exhibition in December at the Federico Ramírez Cultural Centre, and in January at the Municipal Library.

Additionally, the film “Un Sueño Color Violeta” [“A Violet Coloured Dream”] was screened at the Cultural Arts Centre (CAC). Furthermore, through the help of the Alliance Française, the Music Festival that brought artists and local groups to different sectors of Concepción established a music season in neighbourhoods across the city that has continued into 2018. This has included shows by the citizen groups, the Concepción Big Band Jazz group, and the Chamber Orchestra.



## INSPIRATIONAL CITY

To ensure Concepción’s participation in the Agenda 21 for culture Pilot Cities programme, the international “City, Culture, and Development” seminar was held on March 21st and 22nd, 2018, with guests from Chile and other countries from Latin America and Europe: Julia Romero (Media Education Coordinator PACE University of Chile); Rayén Carimán (Active Programme Coordinator, Talca); Marianela Riquelme (Cultural Citizenship, Ministry of Cultures, Arts, and Heritage, Santiago); Monserrath Tello (Minister of Culture, Cuenca, Ecuador); Irene Cabrera (Director of the Migration Museum in Montevideo, Uruguay); Mónica Reyes (Director of Infrastructure for La Paz, Bolivia); Antoine Guibert (Expert on Agenda 21 for culture, Quebec, Canada); Jordi Pascual (Coordinator for the UCLG Committee on Culture); Patricia Pieragostini (Secretary of Culture for Santa Fe, Argentina); Gladys Sandoval (Cultural Corporation Manager for Peñalolén), and Francisca París (Balmaceda Director of Youth Art, Puerto Montt), in addition to representatives of infrastructure and cultural organisations in Concepción.

There were two days of presentations and talks in the Magna Room of the Archdiocese of Concepción, as well as in the Andes Room of the Chilean Chamber of Construction, with the participation of over 170 people. The meeting was organized around four themed panels: “Curiosity, Arts Education, and Activist Training”, “Participation and Cultural Rights”, “Art, Community, and Public Spaces”, and “Autonomy and Creative Economy”, all of which are fundamental areas for the new stage of the cultural plan. In addition, the workshop took place during an especially relevant year, in which the Bicentennial of the Declaration of the Independence of Chile was celebrated, originally signed here in 1818. The meeting was an opportunity to share experiences, successes, and mistakes in the application of community cultural policies from 2014 to 2017. It was also a time for contributing to one another’s mutual enrichment and for a discussion of the city we want to build for the future in this new step.

In order to carry out the meeting, it was sponsored by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG); the University of Concepción; the Directorate of the Extension Centre at the University of Concepción; the Ministry of Cultures, Arts, and Heritage; Corfo (Corporation for the Promotion of Production); IRADE (corporation of productive companies and services of the Bío Bío region); Building Culture as part of the Chilean Chamber of Construction; Concepción Creates and Makes (Regional Strategic Programme for Creative Industries); SEMCO (Social and Cultural Corporation of Concepción), and the History Gallery.

As a result, Concepción had a high level of cultural experts from the national and international stages. Some notable members included, among others, Gladys Sandoval Campos, Director of Culture for the Municipality of Peñalolén: “This was rewarding for me personally because I was able to refresh my knowledge, learn, and observe how cultural policies are implemented using different management models, and how they take into account the fact that each reality is a completely different and diverse world that places us in unique fields of action”.

For Concepción, the methodology developed by Agenda 21 for culture was also important. It was “able to adapt to different territorial, administrative, legal, and economic realities, where people matter and they are not only to be listened to, but are also part of the work process, relied upon to identify, define, and engage,” said Irene Cabrera, director of the Migration Museum (MUMI) of Montevideo.

The progress made in Concepción was widely recognised. “With Concepción as an inspirational city, we were able to share collaborative work practices implemented across the different cities, discuss strategies, identify problems, and propose alternatives for resolving conflicts in order to improve our practices,” said Patricia Pieragostini, Secretary of Culture for the Municipal Government of Santa Fe.

Mónica Reyes, Director of Municipal Cultural Spaces under the Municipal Secretariat of Culture for the City of La Paz, highlighted the notable connection between the local government and other levels of the State or public institutions, the creation of spaces, the promotion of culture and the arts, the promotion of citizen participation in local cultural public management, and the democratisation of access to the use of public spaces.

Speaking about the seminar, she said, “It remains clear that the right path is towards the decentralisation of cultural activities, which is a common theme in the different exhibitions carried out with invited and host cities. That is, working in neighbourhoods or urban areas where the results are not the cultural event itself, but the impact on the community. With respect to different cultural experiences, a second common theme throughout the workshop was the importance and need for deepening the development of participatory mechanisms of citizenship”.

With regard to presentations, dialogue with the public, and internal work, the event included visits to cultural infrastructure sites, such as C3, the CAC, the Federico Ramírez

Cultural Centre, and the recently inaugurated Bío Bío Theatre, managed by a hybrid corporation. Pieragostini noted that these spaces could also become “locations that create new centres for the city’s outlying regions, in which to reorient and reconfigure vulnerable areas of the territory in a community-integrated approach”.



## CREATIVE CONCEPCIÓN

“We know that culture has the enormous potential to transform a city. In Concepción, there is much more cultural life in public spaces, and there has been a notable development in centres that provide arts and culture education, a very interesting dynamic that is gaining momentum”, emphasised Antoine Guibert.

Mayor Álvaro Ortiz also recognised that Concepción “is a city that has begun to regain its position as a leader in the field of culture. We are close to forming a Department of Culture within the municipality. We must remember that, when we arrived in December 2012, culture was not a significant concern for the municipal administration, which had other priorities. The work we have conducted over the last few years is beginning to show its fruits, and is being recognised by residents throughout the city, who are realizing that it is a livelier city, with more spaces, more access, and where there is much more to do... Concepción is at a pivotal stage with respect to art and culture. There is encouragement to participate and build, and based on the conclusions taken from the workshop, we will refine our work plan to continue working on strengthening local culture”, he concluded.

The Cultural Plan has been an active process aimed at reaching a level of consolidation where focus continues to be placed on community neighbourhoods, opening cultural programmes up to interculturality, protecting heritage and the environment, and an idea of culture as a right in which all citizens should participate. The workshop highlighted the fact that these advances were the culmination of the joint effort with Agenda 21 for culture over the last four years.

During the meeting, Jordi Pascual, Coordinator for the UCLG Committee on Culture, said that this cultural plan, “is one of the best we know. It is very well formulated, partly because it was undertaken through very clear and decisive discussions, which were the result of the collaboration between the municipality and the various actors. The truth is that we are very proud of this work, which we hope to showcase as an example on an international stage (...) The enormous progress made in the cultural sphere over the last four years is unparalleled. No city has done such great work in such a short amount of time.”

For municipal cultural adviser Mauricio Castro, the challenges now lie in continuing to strengthen Concepción as a cultural city: “We have done a lot in the municipality in the past four years alongside Agenda 21 for culture, beginning with aligning our cultural policies with international standards, and building a city through participation that identifies culture as a mainstay of its sustainable development. We are satisfied, but also aware of the work left to do. We must ensure the right for residents to feel increasingly closer to culture as it relates to their own lived experiences. We want more and more people to choose this city as a place to study, live, and envision a home for themselves, through cultural policies that establish creativity and innovation as the hallmarks of its inhabitants.”

At this critical point in the workshop, time was given to provide feedback and unique perspectives on these shared, historic local processes. This step is centred on the belief that the administration should be a driver, participant, and leader in these discussion processes.

With the Bicentennial celebration of Independence, and the end of the city’s participation in the Pilot City programme under Agenda 21 for Culture, Concepción launched a design contest to establish a new city brand based on “Creative Concepción”, a concept that will redefine the next three years of cultural policy. Sponsored by the municipality, Corfo, and IRADE, “Concepción City Brand”, involved the design of an image that represents and conveys the independent and creative spirit of Greater Concepción. It would serve as an identifiable symbol for the character of the regional capital and its sister communities. The goal was to reflect Concepción as a university city, as a cradle of social movements, and the capital of rock, with a high quality of life, nature, and historical and artistic value.

Thanks to the above institutions, the accompaniment of the Pilot Cities programme of Agenda 21 for culture, and the discussion network opened with cities inside and outside of Chile, new methodologies have been learned. These will be implemented from 2018 to 2020 in areas such as interculturality, creative economies, environment and urban planning, neighbourhood cultural plans, and participative governance. Practices such as partnerships, collaboration, and participation have been crucial lessons for the future. These were democratically established in 2014 and have been continuously updated following discussions with the administration, different actors, organisations, and institutions. Therefore, an essential step will be to hold recurring participatory meetings that include various representatives, such as citizens or those in the cultural community. The aim is to regularly expand and revitalise the Advisory Board’s actions. This is because it is made up of representatives from key cultural institutions in Concepción that have been monitoring cultural policy in the community, deeming it necessary to expand and diversify these processes.

We also believe that support for neighbourhood leaders and local officials is vital. Political leaders change, and if there are established cultural activists in neighbourhoods, those very organisations and residents can ensure that processes are strengthened over time. For shared local governance, another goal is to draft a declaration of cultural rights document, thereby drawing a roadmap for future administrations..





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