

“WERKEN ESCOLAR” - TRANSMITTING MAPUCHE KNOWLEDGE IN SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXTS IN TALCA



HERITAGE INTERGENERATIONAL MINORITIES
IDENTITY **INDIGENOUS PEOPLE** INTERCULTURAL
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMUNITY EDUCATION
WOMAN/WOMEN

1. Context

Talca is one of the oldest cities in Chile. It is located at the confluence of the Claro and Loncomilla rivers, and by the coastal mountain range. It was founded in 1692 by the General Governor of the

Kingdom of Chile, and on 12 May 1742 it was re-founded by Governor José Antonio Manso de Velasco under the name of Villa San Agustín de Talca, which was granted city status in 1796.

Originally, the area of Talca had 44 “cuadras” (equivalent to approximately 28 hectares) on the eastern shore of the Piduco lagoon. In 1872, the town comprised an urbanised area of 90 hectares and had a population of 30,000 inhabitants. Currently, it has a surface area of 232 km² and a population of 234,760 inhabitants, with 96.5% of them living in the city and 3.5% in rural areas. Like the rest of the country, Talca is experiencing an ageing process.

2. Talca and culture

The public cultural policies of the Corporación Municipal de Talca (Municipal Council of Talca) on indigenous people are based on the principles of UNESCO, the policies of the State of Chile and its Consejo Nacional de Cultura y de las Artes (National Arts Council), the proposals of the Agenda 21 for culture, Act 19.253 on Indigenous Peoples in Chile, and ILO Agreement 169. The Communal Plan includes a section on the Strategic Management of Heritage and within it an action line on the “Promotion of Indigenous Peoples” through the “Werken Escolar” programme.

These policies should be related to the socio-political context of Chile and to the “Consulta Indígena” (“Indigenous Consultation”) elaborated in 2017 to address the constitutional recognition and political participation of indigenous peoples within the National Constituent Process. Its measures include the recognition of the right of indigenous peoples to preserve, strengthen and develop their own history, identity, culture, languages, institutions and traditions. This reflects the changes that Chile is undergoing; it has advanced towards a more tolerant society that acknowledges its ethnic and cultural diversity,

THIS PROJECT IS THE RESULT OF THE WORK INITIATED 3 YEARS AGO BY THE PROFESSIONALS AT THE TALCA ARTS CENTRE, TOGETHER WITH THE MAPUCHE INCHE TA ÑI MAPU ASSOCIATION, WHO PROMOTE THE MAPUCHE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE.

This experimental process began in 2015 with two strategies: a Mapuche language workshop held at the Talca Arts Centre, in the framework of the six-monthly workshops aimed at providing art and learning facilities to the Talquina community, and the start of “Werken Escolar”, a programme with an intercultural approach in education and community contexts. This is the result of the lack of intercultural education centres and facilities for the transmission of knowledge of the Mapuche people to the new generations in Talca because of the geographical dispersion of its members, the loss of their culture and the monocultural practices of the Chilean state.

This came together with the construction of the *ruka* (ancestral typical dwelling) of the Inche Tañi Mapu, made possible through the “Werken Escolar” programme, as they now have their own space to enhance and revitalise the cultural and linguistic practices of the Mapuche people. Moreover, this enables them to learn the Mapuche language and its culture and pass on what they learnt in the *ruka* to their schools and families.

The cultural policy of the Communal Plan of Culture of the Municipality of Talca has been re-approached with the values of Agenda 21 for culture, according to the assessment of the objectives of the Municipality. Moreover, the local government is working with guidelines that can feasibly be applied, which include heritage restoration, the recovery of historical routes, and the work with different organisations to strengthen the role of culture in the city.

3. Goals and project implementation

3.1. Main aim and specific goals

The main aim is to promote the right of indigenous peoples to preserve, strengthen and develop their own history, identity, culture, languages, institutions and traditions through the “Werken Escolar” programme in education and community contexts.

Specific Objectives: To foster the preservation, transfer, recovery and promotion of the cultures of the indigenous peoples of Chile, recognising in them the start of the development of the identity that Chile has today as a territory. This can be achieved through a process of experiential learning between the indigenous peoples in the area and local citizens.

3.2. Development of the project

Main actions carried out

The Municipal Council of Culture, through Talca Arts Centre, puts at the disposal of the schools in Talca a free-of-charge education experience in the *ruka* (Mapuche house) of the Mapuche Inche Tañi Mapu Association, which maintains their traditions, cosmovision, gastronomy and intercultural development in the city of Talca, and has links with other centres in other municipalities.

WERKEN ESCOLAR SEEKS TO PROMOTE THE CULTURAL DIVERSITY OF THE TERRITORY. ITS PILOT PHASE BEGAN IN 2015 WITH A DIAGNOSIS UNDERTAKEN TOGETHER WITH THE INCHE TAÑI MAPU MAPUCHE COMMUNITY, WHO IDENTIFIED AS THEIR MAIN OBJECTIVE THE PROMOTION OF THE CULTURE OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND, IN THIS CASE, THE MAPUCHE CULTURE.

In this facility, located on the banks of the river Claro, nature is at the root of each of the actions undertaken. Schools meet with the Mapuche community to learn about their cosmovision, the Mapuzungün (language of the Mapuche people), respect for nature, *epeü* (stories underpinning their culture) and everything related to their culture. The children who visit the *ruka* must follow the ceremonial steps of this people: to calm their thoughts faced with the Che Mamüll (Protectors, Men of Wood) and enter the *ruka* according to the sunrise, form an eternal circle around the fire, listen to the stories of the eldest Mapuche in the community, and share food. Finally, each of them will be initiated into their role as Werken, who were in charge of passing the messages of the Lonko (Chief of the Community) onto other communities.

Later, a group of boys and girls who took on the mission of the Werken (“messenger”, in the Mapuche language) and Kalfü Malen (“girl”) will promote and foster knowledge of and respect for the culture of the indigenous peoples in their schools. With the support of a guide-teacher, students will organise cultural activities in their schools, in which they will share the ancestral knowledge of the Mapuche people that they received in the *ruka* Inche Tañi Mapu of the Loft Talca.

The programming phase began this year and involves contacting the schools and planning the visits with the Inche Tañi Mapu Association. The phases developed are the following:

- diagnosis on the real and current situation of the work with the indigenous peoples, about their apprehensions, objectives and level of commitment to the proposal. Following the meetings held, the design of the programme began by detailing each Gantt chart.

- managing invitations to schools and commitment by the local Education Department to schedule visits by members of the indigenous association to different schools, in order to introduce the objectives to teachers and students prior to the visit to the *ruka*.
- on the day of the visit, the youths extensively explored the Mapuche cosmovision, discovered their lifestyle and realised that the indigenous peoples are close to the citizens and in dialogue with the day-to-day life of the city. Those who would become the Werken Escolar were chosen from all participants, and would later be responsible for passing what they learnt onto the schools.

The Inche Tañi Mapu Association notes that the joint work with the Municipal Council of Culture was done in a framework of respect for their customs and their own rhythms along with the effort to recover and invigorate the Mapuche language.

THE “WERKEN ESCOLAR” PROGRAMME HAS BOOSTED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BY PROMOTING THE INDIGENOUS LOCAL ARTS AND CRAFTS, SPECIALLY THE WORK OF CRAFTSWOMEN FROM HUILICHE COMMUNITIES, WHO HAVE PROMOTED THEIR PRODUCTS AND NETWORKED WHILE ASSERTING THEIR SENSE OF BELONGING TALCA.

4. Impacts

4.1. Direct impacts

Impact on the local government

Based on the “Werken Escolar” programme, a cross-over policy of respect for diversity and interculturalism has been promoted, bringing together the initiatives planned at a municipal level. This resulted in the Commemoration of the Indigenous Women, organised by the Women’s Municipal Office, to which all women in the city of Talca were invited. Other events include a lecture on the cosmovision and rights of indigenous peoples, followed by an invitation to sample the gastronomy of the Mapuche people. Sustainable development actions were carried out, such as recycling sessions organised by the City Council with signs written in Mapudungün (Mapuche language) to raise awareness of the importance of taking care of the planet.

Impact on culture and on local cultural actors

Education in interculturalism and the rights of the Mapuche people have been promoted. Indigenous educators have joined the Talca Arts Centre, such as the Chachay Jose Trafiñanco Neculqueo, Mapuche speaker, who was hired to promote linguistic rights. Economic development has been strengthened by promoting the indigenous local arts and crafts and links with craftswomen from the Huilliche communities. Mapuche women were also present in stands and learning workshops held at the Talca Arts Centre.

Impact on the territory and population

The educational model of intergenerational and inter-ethnic transmission of the “Werken Escolar” program has been awarded by the Association of Municipalities of Chile and deeply called the attention to the National Council of Culture and Arts of the seventh region, to the point of replicating it in the region of Maule with schoolchildren from different communes.

4.2. Evaluation

The “Werken Escolar” programme is subject to a quantitative assessment based on the number of students, planning and budget using qualitative indicators to measure the state of the programme and also linguistic or cultural input tools.

4.3. Key factors

Partnership with key actors, such as the Municipal Council of Culture, the Inche Ta Ñi Mapu Association, schools, the local government, and governmental bodies sensitive to the indigenous issue and committed to the rights of indigenous peoples.

Students wishing to learn, committed teachers, sensitive schools to intercultural issues, citizens more tolerant to ethnic diversity.

4.4. Continuity

The local government, through the Municipal Council of Culture and the Talca Arts Centre, is committed to coordinating both the educational and management issues with the Inche Tañi Mapu Association within the framework of the “Werken Escolar” programme, and to giving continuity to the Mapuche language workshop with the Chachay José Trafiñanco.

Moreover, the National Council of Culture and Arts has strengthened the joint work with the Talca Arts Centre through Mapudungün capacity-building workshops with the eight speakers in the Maule region in order to teach the Mapuche language.

The budget has been increased from \$3,000,000 to \$5,000,000 in three years.

IT HAS HELPED REDUCE THE ASYMMETRICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE SOCIETY OF TALCA AND THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, WHOSE DESIRE TO PRESERVE, STRENGTHEN AND DEVELOP THEIR HISTORY, IDENTITY, CULTURE, LANGUAGE, INSTITUTIONS AND TRADITIONS MATERIALISED IN 2017 WHEN THE CHILEAN STATE CONDUCTED THE “INDIGENOUS CONSULTATION”.

5. Further information

Talca was a candidate for the third “UCLG Mexico City – Culture 21 International Award” (November 2017 – May 2018). The jury for the award drew up its final report in June of 2018, and requested that the Committee on Culture promote this project as one of the good practices to be implemented through Agenda 21 for culture.

This article was written by Cristina Andrea Zuñiga Araya, Executive Secretary of the Municipal Council of Culture of Talca, Maule Region, Chile.

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