

# APART TOGETHER – INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ART, IDEAS AND BORDERS



## AGENDA 2030 - SDGs



## CULTURE 21 ACTIONS - COMMITMENTS

1. CULTURAL RIGHTS
6. CULTURE, EQUALITY, AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

PEACE, DEVELOPMENT, SUSTAINABLE, GLOBAL, LOCAL, ARTS, DIVERSITY, CULTURAL, INCLUSIÓN, SOCIAL, EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCES, INTERCULTURAL, PARTICIPATION, ACCESS, COMMUNITY, EMPOWERMENT, LEADERSHIP, CROSS-SECTORIAL, CITIZENSHIP, IDENTITY, MEMORY, COMMON GOOD

# 1. Context

Cúcuta is home to about one million inhabitants, and it is not only a natural, but also a political and cultural border. It is now involved in the mass exodus from Venezuela, a situation that has seen this migratory flow transform into a serious humanitarian crisis. In this context, art and culture have been the vehicle to improve coexistence and the promotion of values in an innovative way by generating opportunities for development through participation, and to eliminate problems of xenophobia and aporophobia.

TOGETHER APART is a civil society initiative that arose out of the migration crisis. It uses a comprehensive proposal to develop the cross-border area through art, with an emphasis on cultural diversity, a culture of peace, and sustainable development.

The city offers spaces for production, exchange, and infrastructure, which act as a catalyst for ideas and proposals both by and for society. Through innovations in pedagogy and mediation, the project has sparked local discourse with a global perspective with inclusive participation. It has stimulated knowledge and education in the area, with renowned international authors taking part in exchanges with local authors and society, and has boosted the cultural economy, training, and labour integration, while professionalizing the entire sector and economically revitalizing other sectors. By influencing strategic and relational communication, the project has promoted the use of technology in citizen participation, leading to a city where commercial, productive, social and intellectual development initiatives converge, seeking to respond to issues such as the environment, justice and peace.

**THE AIM OF TOGETHER APART IS FOR THE CÚCUTA REGION TO SURVIVE THE BORDER CRISIS, TO REGENERATE ITS SOCIAL AND CIVIC FABRIC, TO LEAD A TRANSNATIONAL PROCESS OF DEBATE AND REFLECTION, FORGING A NEW CIVIC MODEL AND BUILDING A NARRATIVE THROUGH EXCHANGE AND GLOBAL DIALOGUE**

## 2. San José de Cúcuta and culture

APART TOGETHER has reemphasized the value of the border as part of the area's intangible heritage. It has also revitalized the tangible heritage. The International Conference on Art, Ideas, and Borders APART TOGETHER elevated the role of art and culture in citizen development and identity. It established critical awareness and new modes of social interaction linked to a border context.

The international value of the project is rooted in its local approach to global phenomena – migration, refugees, borders, humanitarian crises – which brings together global artists and thinkers, creating spaces for exchange and dialogue on art, culture, social justice, social transformation, and urban regeneration.

## 3. Project goals and implementation

### 3.1. Main and specific objectives

The aim is for the region to survive the border crisis, to regenerate its social and civic fabric, to lead a transnational process of debate and reflection, valuing its own identity, sense of belonging, coexistence, learning, reflection and integration, forging a new civic model and building a narrative through exchange and global dialogue.



### Specific objectives

1. Promote artistic productions and cultural events as open, inclusive spaces for citizen interaction.
2. Shape the public sphere through contemporary art by encouraging multiple voices and pave the way for critical debate and reflection.
3. Launch new models for participation, mobilization, and citizen interaction linked to the collective invigoration of public spaces.
4. Enable partnership models between agencies, entities, and unions, including public administration, business networks, academia, diplomacy, and international cooperation.
5. To make Cúcuta appealing to international artists and thinkers.
6. Establish Cúcuta and its region as global leaders in critical thinking, idea building, and pluralistic views on border and migration phenomena through art.

## 3.2. Project development

### Beneficiary population

The population of Cúcuta and its general area will benefit from this initiative, with a particular focus on inclusion and support for vulnerable sectors, minorities, and other at-risk groups. It will also involve the spheres of arts, culture, and ideas focused on border issues as well as social rejuvenation on a global scale.

**APART TOGETHER HAS GIVEN CÚCUTA A LARGE INCREASE IN ITS VISIBILITY AND DEVELOPMENT, WITH CULTURE SEEN AS A KEY PART OF THE CITY'S IDENTITY, ITS SOCIAL COHESION CROSS-CUTTING APPROACH ENSURE FUTURE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

## Components of the programme

- Inaugural Parade.
- Exhibition tour.
- Audiovisual events.
- Teaching programme.
- Specific site project.
- Mental Border Control Laboratory.
- Interventions in public spaces.
- Participatory actions.
- Children's Safari.
- APART TOGETHER process.

## Phases

- **Pre-production:** Development of a road map for outreach, planning, research, selection, and organization; creating a plan that will last the entirety of the project and help fulfil the goals.
- **Production and execution:** Management, execution, and public engagement in key activities
- **Post-production:** Data collection, updating and digitization of results, cataloguing and archiving contents and documentation, reports, and changes.

## Associate entities

The project has institutional allies, public bodies of the high government and municipal administration, cooperation and multilateral organisations, academia, diplomatic representations, private companies, the media and civil organisations.

## Obstacles

- The lack of background raised doubts about viability.
- The absence of a strong and professionalized cultural establishment required extra effort from the management team.
- Limited resources have required the project to manage contingency approaches.
- Public distrust in culture is a large challenge for widespread adoption.
- Political and diplomatic uncertainty permanently changes the management and relationship models of the border region.
- Establishing international credibility is more difficult in outlying areas.

## Results

In its first year, TOGETHER APART it had 9027 participants, which increased by 10% when it hosted 10,034 people.

# 4. Impacts

## 4.1. Direct impacts

APART TOGETHER has given Cúcuta a large increase in its visibility and development, with culture seen as a key part of the city's identity, its social cohesion cross-cutting approach ensure future economic development.

The participatory and universally inclusive model has proven the potential for coexistence and integration. The geographical scope, as well as the free and open nature of the programme, have updated the idea of accessibility to culture. Also, the differentiated approach to mediation programmes has helped prioritize women, youth, children, migrants, refugees, returnees, different ethnicities, LGBTQ+ people, and those with (dis)abilities.

It has received the support of the President as well as support from various international cooperation agencies and diplomatic missions. From an international perspective, it has generated interest in this region as a civic border and cultural epicentre. This has transformed the cultural sector, with a particular emphasis in social and regional development, professionalization, and productive engagement with the global arts union.

## 4.2. Evaluation

Evaluation has been a systematic activity, with different methodologies being used: formats to quantify and characterize participants in each activity; paper and digital satisfaction surveys; registration of participating artists by geographic region, and registration of strategic partners.

**THE PARTICIPATORY AND UNIVERSALLY INCLUSIVE MODEL HAS PROVEN THE POTENTIAL FOR COEXISTENCE AND INTEGRATION. THE GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE, AS WELL AS THE FREE AND OPEN NATURE OF THE PROGRAMME, HAVE UPDATED THE IDEA OF ACCESSIBILITY TO CULTURE**

## 4.3. Key factors

- Dependency on context
- Methodological innovation
- Relevance of cultural events
- Consolidation as a comprehensive development proposal
- Ability to actively involve all organizations and sectors
- Achieving a vote of confidence by citizens on culture
- Setting up truly inclusive participation scenarios
- Fostering unprecedented citizen cultural mobilization in the region
- Investment in the collective construction of the public sphere with debate, creativity, and critical reflection
- Consolidation as a factor for peace
- Emphasis on training and mediation
- Development of a clear landscape for the exercise of social responsibility
- Redirecting attention to Cúcuta as a transformative place
- Lending credibility to the city and its actors
- Enrolment in the international BIENALSUR programme - Biennial Contemporary Art of South America in 2017 and the declaration of Cúcuta as "BIENALSUR capital alongside Buenos Aires in 2019.
- Establishing strong relations at local, regional, national, and international levels
- Strong investment in cultural entrepreneurship at the border
- Strategic communication model
- Dialogue between real and virtual platforms.
- Conference for **one of the most relevant projects on contemporary art related to borders**

## 4.4. Continuity

APART TOGETHER will continue to be supported by the City Hall and it will also serve as a place for testing and implementation on the comprehensive strategy for citizen culture by the local administration, expanding the social and regional influence and strengthening the civilian project through synergy with governing bodies.

In addition, state entities and the business network have all been supporting this initiative since its inception have expressed their desire and interest in the sustainability of the project.

For its third event in 2021, the project is part of the official programme for the commemoration of the bicentenary celebration of Colombia's independence and the Congress of Cúcuta, which will mark an official cultural event at the national, regional, and local levels.

## 5. Further information

San José de Cúcuta was a candidate for the fourth "UCLG Mexico City – Culture 21 International Award" (November 2019 – May 2020). The jury for the award drew up its final report in June of 2020, 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 Alex Brahim, Director of Apart Together, San José de Cúcuta, Colombia.**

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