

"APRIL ONE THOUSAND ARTS" AND "I LOVE YOU, CUENCA": ECONOMIC REACTIVATION OF CUENCA THROUGH ART AND CULTURE



AGENDA 2030 - SDGs



CULTURE 21: ACTIONS - COMMITMENTS

2. HEIRTAGE, DIVERSITY AND CREATIVITY
5. CULTURE AND ECONOMY
6. CULTURE, EQUITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

ECONOMIC, RESILIENCE, ATTRACTIVENESS,
WELL-BEING, CREATIVITY, CREATIVE INDUSTRIES,
EMPLOYMENT, GROWTH, TOURISM, COVID



1. Cuenca and culture

Cuenca is the third largest city in Ecuador with a population of 646,171. It is located in the southern region of the country in a valley formed by unique mountain ranges that are part of the Andes. It has a river system made up of four rivers that cross the city from west to east. The architectural richness of its historic centre, its traditions, archaeological sites, artistic neighbourhoods, markets, and several other important cultural and scenic sights have earned Cuenca its designation as a World Heritage Site (UNESCO, 1999); Macizo de El Cajas designation as a Biosphere Reserve (UNESCO, 2013); Best Short Vacation Destination in South America (World Travel Awards, 2019, 2020, 2021); and, World Crafts City (World Crafts Council, 2020).

Between 2016 and 2018, Cuenca undertook the task of implementing Agenda 21 for culture through the UCLG Pilot Cities program with the aim of turning culture into the fourth pillar of sustainable development in the city. Today, it remains in place, and reflects the city's political will to position culture as a fundamental step to overcoming the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The public health measures implemented throughout 2020 and 2021 had a strong negative impact on the economy for the most of the population, particularly in Cuenca's cultural sector. The closure of museums, theatres, galleries, and cultural spaces alongside the redirection of public funding to address emerging public health issues significantly affected this area of the economy.

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2. Project goals and implementation

2.1. Main goal and specific objectives

Within the context of the pandemic, the Municipality of Cuenca decided to create an intense calendar of artistic and recreational activities to celebrate city's festivities in 2021. The aim was to promote the strengthening of cultural economies, the use of public space, and encourage the exercise of cultural rights as a means for citizen well-being.

The project's initiative arose out of the need to focus attention on the cultural sector following COVID-19. In addition, there was a sense of urgency around offering the general population arts and recreation activities that were considered essential for the physical and psychological well-being of the population, as well as fundamental for social cohesion and resilience.

THE TWO PHASES PUT ON 227 ACTIVITIES, ATTRACTED A LARGE NUMBER OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS, AND FOSTERED ENGAGEMENT BY THE CULTURAL AND TOURISM SECTOR OF THE REGION.

2.2. Project development

The festivities were encapsulated by two proposals: Thousand Arts of April and the I Love Cuenca Festival. The first was held in commemoration of the 464th anniversary of the founding of Cuenca and was built on the basis of a public call for artists and cultural managers of the region. It was held during the month of April and gathered 614 artists and cultural managers, 5800 attendees, and reached a total of 285,990 people on digital platforms. It should also be noted that this all occurred while Ecuador was in a state of emergency due to the global health emergency.



The second event was held during the month of November in commemoration of the 201st anniversary of the city's independence. The Department of Culture, Recreation, and Knowledge promoted the participation of 909 artists and cultural managers. While adhering to the capacity limits under the public health protocols the event saw 133,398 people attend in person, and a reached a total of 263,300 people on digital platforms.

The activities were based around performing arts, visual arts, music, audiovisual arts, exhibitions, informal education, and more. These initiatives were enjoyed in public spaces, heritage sites, museums, and theatres throughout the city, also while respecting capacity and public health safety measures. They were also made available on digital platforms.

**THE PROJECT HAS BECOME A LOCAL AND NATIONAL BENCHMARK
DUE TO THE WAY THAT ARTISTIC, CULTURAL, AND RECREATIONAL
ACTIVITIES ECONOMICALLY REVITALIZED THE REGION.**

3. Impacts

3.1. Direct impacts

Overall, this initiative promoted 227 activities involving 1,523 cultural actors, attracted 139,198 attendees, and was made available to 549,290 people through digital platforms. The project benefited the equivalent of 75% of the total number of people officially registered as cultural workers in Cuenca and 22% of the area's total population.



The proposal was carried out in two phases during the months of April and November. It was successfully executed with the help of \$440,000 USD in funding from the City Hall of Cuenca, \$375,000 of which was used to directly pay artists, producers, and local managers.

This program also helped fundamentally strengthen the culture and tourism sector because it attracted national and international visitors. According to official statistics, in November 2021, 95,000 tourists visited, which saw hotel occupancy reach 95% and close to \$20 million USD flow into the city.

3.2. Assessment

To determine the impact of the project, several parameters were considered, such as the capacity of the Municipal Department of Culture, Recreation, and Knowledge, as well as statistics on capacity, interaction on digital platforms, and the number of involved cultural actors and managers, among others.

3.3. Key factors

The key factors for the success of the project were: the diversity of artistic disciplines; the fact that it took place during periods of quarantine and strict public health measures, making the Thousand Arts of April / I Love Cuenca an important space for interaction and fostering resilience; and finally the timeline in which the project was executed, which considered the months of April and November as periods dedicated entirely to cultural activities.

3.4. Continuity

Thanks to the success of the project, the second iteration of this proposal was developed in April 2022. The 2022 edition had a special interest in decentralizing the activities from the city's urban area and taking them to the more rural and suburban regions. This included film proposals with live music, as well as activities focused on recreation and education, music, dance, urban art, and more. The idea was to host activities that were always carried out hand in hand with local artists with whom the city also worked on a unique timeline for the project's dissemination. Thousand Arts of April 2022 added 170 cultural activities to the agenda, directly benefitting 1191 artists and managers. Furthermore, over 50,000 people of all ages and social backgrounds enjoyed the events in person.

4. Further information

Cuenca was a candidate for the fifth UCLG Mexico City – Culture 21 International Award (February - June 2022). The jury for the award drew up its final report in September of 2022, and requested that the UCLG Committee on Culture promote this project as one of the good practices implemented under Agenda 21 for culture.

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