

CREATING AND SHARING IN TIMES OF COVID-19: STRATEGY FOR HERITAGE MANAGEMENT IN THE HISTORIC CENTRE OF OLD HAVANA



RETO VIRTUAL
DESCUBRIENDO EL PATRIMONIO

Programa Cultural

AGENDA 2030 - SDGs



CULTURE 21: ACTIONS - COMMITMENTS

1. CULTURAL RIGHTS
2. HERITAGE, DIVERSITY AND CREATIVITY
8. CULTURE, INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE

INNOVATION, HERITAGE, ACCESS, DIGITAL,
COVID, CULTURAL RIGHTS, CRISIS

1. Havana and culture

Havana is the largest city and capital of Cuba, home to 2.13 million inhabitants, the country's main port, the economic and cultural centre, and its main tourism sector. The Historic Centre of Old Havana and its system of fortifications were designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1982. According to the last Population and Housing Census of 2012, 55,488 people live in the historic centre, with a population density of 259 inhabitants per hectare. This area is home to the Office of the Historian of the City of Havana (OHCH), the institution in charge of the protection, restoration, and conservation of the area's historic and cultural heritage.

Even just four months into 2020, and only one month into the pandemic, the effects of the COVID-19 health crisis were being felt. Faced with the imminent closure of cultural institutions due to public health isolation measures, experts were forced to conceive new ways of reaching different audiences. This involved redirecting and empowering cultural work through social networks and digital platforms. Up until that point, these were only used for marketing and promotional purposes. The situation led to the emergence of an innovative project for the online communication and experience of heritage, which included different social networks and websites. All this took place within the national and institutional context of a significant lack, or limitation, of access to technology and the internet.



FACED WITH THE CLOSURE OF CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS DUE TO THE PANDEMIC, EXPERTS HAD TO CONCEIVE NEW WAYS OF REACHING DIFFERENT AUDIENCES.

2. Project goals and implementation

2.1. Main goal and specific objectives

The project consists of creating an online communication network for the enjoyment of the historical and cultural heritage of the Historic Centre of Old Havana.

2.2. Project development

The following main actions were carried out:

- Drafting guidelines for the management of social networks and general guidelines on the development of each campaign.
- Training of administrators and content managers on the use of social networks.
- Development of different online campaigns for different platforms that included: challenges, creative workshops, thematic areas, contests, exhibitions.
- Enabling specialized services such as counselling for adolescents, WhatsApp groups for deaf people, and exchanges for infants, adolescents, and young people with intellectual disabilities and their families.
- Development of the Virtual Route: Women in Thought, Art, and History.
- Awareness-raising campaign on natural heritage and environmental work in the Historic Centre.

The project achieved the following:

- New channels were created for inter-institutional communication and multiple digital platforms, as well as a network of 46 Facebook pages for museums, cultural centres, libraries, and research offices; 9 WhatsApp groups for guidance and support for families, the elderly, the deaf, and persons with intellectual disabilities, totalling over 400 people.
- Fifty page administrators and content managers from 30 institutions throughout the Directorate of Cultural Heritage were trained.
- Two Discovering Heritage Virtual Challenges were held. Two were virtual Routes and Walks to Discover with Family project; the Route of Women in Thought, Art, and History; the Green Route through a garden with 6 paths with trees, plants, animals, the butterfly garden, and the history of the Quinta de los Molinos, a centre for environmental preservation under the Office of the Historian; a virtual edition of the Children's Book Festival; 17 workshops for teenagers; two virtual Day of the Elderly events; 35 virtual workshops for people with disabilities; and in total among the different campaigns 92 workshops through WhatsApp, Facebook, and Telegram tutorials in which 1073 people participated and 33 virtual exhibitions mostly through Facebook and one of them through a specialized platform were held.



THE PROJECT CHANGED THE WAY CULTURAL HERITAGE IS MANAGED, THROUGH THE USE OF MULTIPLE DIGITAL PLATFORMS, NETWORKING, AND TRAINING OF CULTURAL ACTORS.

3. Impacts

3.1. Direct impacts

The project changed the way cultural heritage is managed, through the use of multiple digital platforms, networking, and training of cultural actors. The campaigns fostered participation from diverse audiences. The workshops were free of charge and in some cases internet service for children and adolescents was paid for.



3.2. Assessment

A system for monitoring and analyzing Facebook pages was devised, which took into account 6 main categories related to the general functioning of the page, the level of activity, the main contents, the information resources, the type of interactions, and the profile of the people who interact with the page.

3.3. Key factors

The key factors for success pertained to the strengths of the Office of the Historian as an institution, as well as having methodological tools and effective communication channels that made it possible to coordinate and sustain a project of this nature. Likewise, the preparation, commitment, and creative capacity of the staff, coupled with their experience in the management of culture and heritage, facilitated the development of the activities.



THE PROJECT AIMS TO CONTINUE EXPANDING ACCESS TO CULTURE AND OFFER ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF PARTICIPATION TO THOSE WHO CANNOT PARTICIPATE IN PERSON.

3.4. Continuity

After resuming cultural life in person, the project aims to continue expanding access to culture and offer alternatives forms of participation to those who cannot enjoy the project in person, and ultimately continue winning over potential audiences. Networking has continued, while the technological capabilities and skill of staff at museums and cultural centres are continually improving. An agreement was signed with the Cuban Information Technology and Audiovisual Media Company (Cinesoft) for virtual visits to museums. Work is being done to update the web portal <http://habanacultural.ohc.cu/>, which will include links to social networks, and more. Conditions are being created for online reservations and payment of services.

4. Further information

Havana 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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