

CULTURE GOES BY NEIGHBOURHOODS



AGENDA 2030 - SDGs



CULTURE 21: ACTIONS - COMMITMENTS

1. CULTURAL RIGHTS
2. HERITAGE, DIVERSITY AND CREATIVITY
5. CULTURE AND ECONOMY
6. CULTURE, EQUITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION
7. CULTURE, URBAN PLANNING AND PUBLIC SPACE

COMMUNITY, RESILIENCE, PUBLIC SPACE,
INCLUSION, EQUITY, ACCESS, CREATIVE INDUSTRIES,
HEALTH, COVID, CULTURAL RIGHTS



1. Montevideo and culture

The city of Montevideo is the capital of Uruguay. It is the political and economic centre of the country and has the largest population with 1,947,604 inhabitants. Under its political structure and as the third level of government, the City is decentralized into 8 Municipalities and 18 areas. The city includes some rural areas, and its different neighbourhoods reflect a diversity of lived experiences that have led to the creation of specific cultural decentralization programs that focus on people's right to access culture.

The Municipality of Montevideo has worked to develop active cultural policies. It is home to a vast network of halls, museums, cultural centres, and permanent ensembles. Special emphasis is placed on decentralization and specific programs such as Esquinas, Strengthening of the Arts, which aim to spread cultural activities throughout the territory. They also host specific activities that demonstrate the culture of each neighbourhood, thereby contributing to the formalization of artistic work and access to various cultural projects.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, live artistic performances were cancelled, halls and cultural spaces were closed, and the touring of both national and international works and people was halted, which all severely harmed the cultural sector. The situation became quite serious because in most cases most artists and cultural workers, whose work is temporary by nature, lacked social security to mitigate the impacts caused by the ongoing cancellation of activities. In addition to the economic damage, the sector was affected by the challenge of maintaining in-person connections with the public, and although the city showed great creativity in its use of new technologies, none of these approaches replaced the value of a direct relationship between the work, the artist, and the public.

The project was initiated by the Municipality of Montevideo to address the cultural emergency. The program provided an adequate response to the lack of live artistic performances and art exhibitions under the COVID-19 public health safety measures. The goal was to meet the creative and economic needs of the cultural sector. In addition, this program enabled the Municipality to obtain a deeper and more relevant understanding of the different components of the independent artistic sector, creating a database to enable new contracts.



2. Project goals and implementation

2.1. Main goal and specific objectives

Given the state of emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and its significant effect on the independent artist sector, the “Culture By Neighbourhoods” program was created to promote various forms of artistic creation and expression, and make it possible to host events in open spaces. Its purpose was to maintain the activity of a sector that was hit so hard by the pandemic, and maintain ties with the community in the face of strict public health measures and bans on public performances.

The general goal of the program was to enable paid artistic work and allow public access to live artistic events even while mass gatherings were suspended.

The program had the following specific objectives:

- 1) To alleviate the economic impact suffered by the artistic sector by paying artists for their work
- 2) To allow the public to have in-person access to artistic works and facilities;
- 3) To meet the needs of lower-income sectors and those who have more difficulty in accessing digital media to enjoy artistic expressions.

GIVEN THE STATE OF EMERGENCY, THE “CULTURE BY NEIGHBOURHOODS” PROGRAM PROMOTED ARTISTIC CREATION IN OPEN SPACES.



2.2. Project development

The stage performances were selected through an open call process that included more than 200 creators of theatre, circus arts, puppetry, and music. The performances, held both in individual or group formats of up to five members involved two performances in different spaces. Each of the performances was not to exceed 10 minutes each. The performances were held without prior announcement of the place or time so as not to attract crowds.

Similarly, in the case of urban exhibitions, more than 60 artists, from groups of between two and four members, were selected to create visual and/or sound installations in open public spaces. The beneficiary of the program is the general public, since the events were held in public spaces throughout the different areas. However, there was a greater emphasis on sectors with the most significant lack of access to cultural goods and services.

Within the program, some 76 stage performance interventions and 26 urban installations were carried out in 2021, in which 271 artists participated. Civil society organizations such as the Independent Theatres Federation (*Federación de Teatros Independientes* [F.U.T.I.]), The Uruguayan Actors Union (SUA), etc. participated in selecting the projects that would be carried out. The program had a budget of \$4,200,000 USD (€3.9M) to cover the artists fees of the participants.

However, the reality of public health and the need not to publicize the events in advance imposed limitations on public attendance in some cases.

THE PERFORMANCES WERE HELD WITHOUT PRIOR ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE PLACE OR TIME SO AS NOT TO ATTRACT CROWDS.



3. Impacts

3.1. Direct impacts

The multitude of actions carried out, the number of artists involved, and the level of public participation demonstrated the program's effectiveness in responding to an unprecedented and unforeseeable circumstance. Although this program is still ongoing, for the artists supported by the initiative, this provided economic relief and fulfilled their need to perform at a live event, even if it was under non-traditional circumstances. As far as the general population is concerned, the presence of artists in the public space has been a welcomed change, transforming the program into a "brand" recognized by citizens. The number of applicants for each call (more than 600) and the number of actions carried out as a result demonstrate the effectiveness of the program in meeting its general and specific objectives.

3.3. Continuity

In view of the fact that the public health restrictions change, and the challenges to public events drastically diminished, we are analyzing the lessons learned from the program in order to adapt to the current landscape. This will foster forms of creation that makes artistic expressions more accessible to the public, creatively considering regional diversity of the spaces the public inhabits and develops.

THE PRESENCE OF ARTISTS IN THE PUBLIC SPACE HAS BEEN A WELCOMED CHANGE, TRANSFORMING THE PROGRAM INTO A "BRAND" RECOGNIZED BY CITIZENS.

4. Further information

Montevideo 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.

This report was written by María Inés Obaldía, General Director of the Department of Culture, Montevideo, Uruguay.

Contact: [maria.obaldia \(at\) imm.gub.uy](mailto:maria.obaldia@imm.gub.uy)

Website: www.montevideo.gub.uy