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The cultural challenges of Seville

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The cultural challenges of Seville

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Abstract

The process of thinking about, planning and implementing new systems of cultural management carried out over the last ten years in Seville has led to a real change in its appearance and in perceptions of the sector, which rather than being seen as a social activity is now recognised as a growing economic sector. Much of this transformation is the result of a new way of approaching cultural policy in the city: sector funding mapped out by the actors themselves, an extensive programme of regular cultural events, new facilities in areas where previously there had been none, innovative and multidisciplinary projects undertaken by public and private managers and civil society, and the city's current cultural image. This article looks at the contribution made by the Agenda 21 for culture to these achievements along with the new challenges facing cultural policy in the city.

Background

Seville formally joined the Agenda 21 for culture in December 2005 after a vote by the City Council. It thus became committed to the principles of this declaration and to sharing with other cities and governments around the world a firm pledge to make culture into a key aspect of urban policy through the active participation of the citizens in cultural projects and building the cultural perspective into all urban projects.

This membership gave formal expression to the thinking that came out of a long debate that had begun at the end of the previous decade once the economic crisis following Expo 92 had been overcome, and in the light of the need to drive emerging sectors including culture.

The paper *Sevilla, Factoría Cultural (Seville, Cultural Factory)*, written in 2001, together with other economic studies from the same period showed the need to view cultural policies in a different way so that instead of being merely an instrument they should become a development dimension.

The process culminated in the drawing up of the Strategic Plan for Culture (October 2002) which probed deeper into the same idea and argued that culture should be approached as a factor conducive to the integral development of Seville and that this should be based on a cross-cutting approach with a central role for culture.

One of the most significant outcomes of this Plan was that it led to a discussion between numerous cultural actors in the city, officials from institutions with a cultural remit and other interested organisations. These debates were an innovative experience in participatory planning in culture and revealed the appropriateness of applying democratic principles to cultural policy.

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Contribution of Agenda 21 for culture to Seville's cultural policy

These parameters gave rise to a new way of managing cultural policy based on participation and professional management with clear goals and an overall strategic view. Here the Agenda 21 for culture provided the conceptual and operational framework for the strategy put in place with Seville's cultural policy over recent years, the necessary shortcut from theory to practice.

Thus in 2006 Seville City Council decided to set up the Instituto de la Cultura y las Artes de Sevilla (ICAS – *Institute for Culture and the Arts*) in order to modernize the institution and give it greater management independence and flexibility. ICAS is tasked with mapping out and running Seville's cultural policy with goals and an action plan based on citizen participation and partnership with other government bodies and public and private actors.

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Furthermore, in order to foster the joint responsibility of civil society and the cultural sector for drawing up sector policies, three advisory bodies were set up: the Culture Council, the Culture and Business Council, and the Forum of Cultural Actors.

The Culture Council represents cultural sectors which advocate the qualitative aspects of culture, while the Culture and Business Council provides the private sector point of view on quantitative aspects such as financing and the economic and social return on cultural projects.

The Forum of Cultural Actors brings together culture professionals and creators and operates from the bottom up. The working committees (cultural facilities, education and communication) discuss issues that are of interest to the sector and relevant for the city and put forward specific proposals for political action.

The Institute works to achieve the following goals set by the Agenda 21 for culture:

1. SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

The participatory projects set out above have been extended to the business sector with the setting up of sector action plans as a means of fostering the joint cultural and social responsibility of the sector along with institutional commitment. The outcome has been a more regular and sustainable cultural programme for the city.

2. CULTURAL DIVERSITY

This entails a twin-track approach based on UNESCO's Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity: diversity in supply by including all creative singularities and helping to distribute and promote them, and diversity in sensibilities and cultures in the contemporary world which ensures that relations between societies and regions are sufficiently dynamic to bring about a permanent change in urban and social reality.

In line with this basic principle, which is included in all international declarations and is one of the main cultural rights, Seville's cultural policy furthers the creation of channels for interaction between the different sensibilities that coexist in the city by pursuing an effective balance between cultures, investing in different forms of expression and languages, promoting foundations such as the Tres Culturas Foundation and the Barenboim-Said Foundation, and organising festivals including *Sevilla Entre Culturas*, *WOMEX* and *Territorios*, which are platforms for cultural exchange based on music.

3. SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Article 22 of the Agenda 21 for culture recognises expressiveness and creativity as basic factors in human dignity and social inclusion irrespective of sex, origin, poverty or any other form of discrimination. In line with this principle, projects in which culture is an instrument for the regeneration, integration and recovery of people and spaces for community living are supported and promoted.

Instances include the Flamenco Auditorium in the Polígono Sur, the most disadvantaged neighbourhood in the city where more than 15% of local residents are gypsies; against this sociological backdrop, music and in particular flamenco is one of the activities that best helps to build cohesion and social and cultural development. A similar case is the TNT Theatre Research and Experimentation Centre, which seeks to become engaged in the lives of the almost 80,000 people who live in the poor El Vacie district and turn them into the protagonists of this creativity activity.

Other measures look to foster access and artistic expression for the disabled through pioneering multidisciplinary festivals such as Escena Mobile, or to explore the reality for contemporary women by fostering effective sex equality.

4. COMMUNITY

Libraries are viewed as the core functional components of community policies. All of the basic factors and goals which make up Seville's cultural policy model converge in them: they are places for meeting and getting close to the public in which priority is given to the education of people and digital literacy, and they are forces for social and economic development in which diversity and dialogue between cultures is fostered. The city's libraries are a major instrument for integration. The implementation of the Master Plan will bring more than thirty libraries to the city's districts thus ensuring culture is available to ordinary people in their own communities.

This line of action also includes the *Sevilla dc* programme, which takes activities to the city's neighbourhoods in order to provide cultural centrality to peripheral areas.

5. CULTURAL COOPERATION

Ensuring quality development of growing activity in the cultural sector makes the interweaving of cultural and other public policies and their interaction with business and civil society more necessary than ever. As a result, interaction and mutual support between public, private and mixed facilities, institutions and organisations is promoted and facilitated on an urban, regional and international scale.

The coordination and management of a large number of activities, festivals and major functions (18 cultural events a year, an average of 1.5 per month) seeks to achieve the aforementioned goal along with others that include enhancing cultural offerings, meeting the demand of all social and economic sectors, ramping up the city's international visibility, reactivating its cultural industries and balancing public and private initiatives. This is buttressed by driving the setting up of networks through funding private cultural venues and partner libraries which in turn seek to redress geographical imbalances.

A cross-cutting approach has made it possible to bring the cultural perspective to urban projects in other areas. There is, for instance, constant cooperation between the urban planning and culture offices, and between the latter and the tourism office, which has come out of the drawing up of the city's strategic plans and which remains in place with extremely satisfactory outcomes. The impact of cultural action should not be underestimated and not only in areas where it has been traditionally used such as education or the social field; it is also significant in other policy areas such as women, the economy and the environment (programmes to bring music, theatre, arts and films into schools, cultural vouchers for people with social disadvantages, music programmes run by markets, parks and gardens, etc.). This principle has become so deeply rooted in this new form of government that cultural initiatives spring from virtually all administrative agencies. It would thus appear that the benefits culture can bring to all the key spheres of people's lives have been firmly grasped.

6. BOOSTING THE BUSINESS SECTOR

Measures designed to drive and decentralise the business sector have been put in place including:

6.1. QUALITY AND DECENTRALISATION IN CULTURAL FACILITIES

In order to keep the cultural industry active and engaged in the cultural project, the Master Plan for Private Cultural Facilities (2006-2010) was drawn up by the Cultural Facilities Committee at the Forum of Cultural Actors. It provides for decentralised expansion and enhancement of private cultural amenities and infrastructures together with support for regularly scheduling quality events. Using funds from the City Council, eight new venues have been set up and actions are being taken to consolidate 12 theatres and 47 cultural containers with priority being given to those sited in districts with fewer cultural infrastructures.

Turning to public cultural amenities and institutions, work is being done to modernise and upgrade facilities so they can meet new initiatives emerging from a market that is increasingly demanding in terms of technology. In addition, events scheduling is being enhanced to accommodate greater complexity in contemporary creative expression.

Other associational initiatives from the public at large and public institutions are being put forward which involve interesting projects to reuse heritage facilities in different parts of the city (the old artillery factory, Puerta de la Carne market, the dockyards) as well as new ones (the SGAE auditorium) which are set to increase supply by driving fresh demand and will help towards achieving the balance required for the dynamic development of cultural systems.

Clearly, a balance needs to be maintained between the private cultural sector and institutions during this development, and that means it is essential for actions to foster interaction, combination and interdependence at the conceptual, territorial and economical levels. It is here where joint responsibility between government, business and civil society needs to be most marked.

6.2 SUPPORT FOR CREATION

Support for new experimental initiatives enhances the city's creative and cultural foundations through:

6.2.1 *CREATION CENTRES* which are committed to contemporary creation, in lockstep with the development of native local cultures, and support is given to creators by setting up places for meeting, dialogue and recognition between artists, institutions and citizens.

One good example of this is the Centro de las Artes de Sevilla (caS – Seville Arts Centre), a lively facility for creation and discussion and a means for connection and coordination between creators, gallery owners and producers. Another is the Casa de los Poetas de Sevilla (Seville Poets' Centre), which focuses on discussing, publicising and supporting literature and its creators.

6.2.2 *BUSINESS SUPPORT AND TRAINING FOR EMERGING CULTURAL ENTREPRENEURS* as a result of the economic importance of the cultural sector and the role of cultural industries as a growth vector.

The marquee initiative is the Proyecto Lunar, an innovative model for giving support to creators and geared towards the study, development and consolidation of the various creative industry sectors. It uses synergies from a range of government agencies and is implemented through outsourced creative sector companies with the participation of the sector itself. Through a range of actions in a number of areas around the city it has already fostered the setting up of the Alameda Cultural District and it seeks to develop different branches of the creative industry in another two industrial areas in the city, thus aiding their urban regeneration.

7. COMMITMENT TO INNOVATION

Advances in communication technologies over recent years have made it necessary to put in place measures to bridge the digital divide while at the same time researching and promoting their use.

The new media offer unprecedented access to cultural information and goods, and they need to be publicised and made available to the public at large. To that end two innovative projects have been started up which use new technology; one is for contemporary video creation (i+caS), while the other involves setting up a large media library providing direct access to documentation centres, archives, shows, concerts and all types of local activities which have a global reach (Espacio Virtual de las Artes).

8. USE OF PUBLIC SPACE

The creation of new urban spaces resulting from the pedestrianisation of extensive areas has changed the city's appearance and opened up new settings for community living that can turn the quotidian into an artistic experience and bring social and territorial cohesion to the city. This factor has become so significant that new projects are adapted to accommodate it by becoming modular and more versatile, able to move out of institutions into public space and get closer to the citizenry.

Cultural challenges in the forthcoming years

The Agenda 21 for culture has provided ideas for building a contemporary political project which helps to position the city very favourably with respect to the future. Nonetheless, the principles which have helped to build the city's cultural architecture have not been interiorised and are frequently not to be found in sector situation analyses and public discussion and hence not in the city's global policies.

High-level political leadership, which undoubtedly exists in terms of raising government awareness, has yet to achieve a direct impact on funding set aside for culture (2.64% of the city budget) and it is not likely to do so in these times of economic crisis. This shows that the general principles on which cultural policy has been built need to be stressed more in the city project and in other sector policies in the future.

These principles also need to receive greater prominence and publicity in the sector and in civil society, especially in terms of the principle of joint responsibility, which entails a presence in the city's governance. Greater attention may be required from the actors involved, but government also needs to review extant instruments and adapt them to the new realities.

We have all learnt from the experience, and now we need to find new ways of cultural mediation. It should be said that the advisory councils have been an unprecedented initiative, and they have sat down with significant cultural and economic private and public institutions and with intellectuals, businesspeople, associations and influential people in the city who have something to bring to Seville's cultural policy. Nonetheless, at this stage there is a need for a clearer formulation of their functions and possibly giving them more executive decision-making capabilities to achieve greater engagement of their members and consequently deliver better service to the public.

The Forum of Cultural Actors has enabled stakeholders to meet and get to know each other, see what interests they share, including those from different sub-sectors, and put forward specific proposals. However, participation formulas are much more well-known and implemented in drawing up projects than in their evaluation and reformulation. The Cultural Facilities Master Plan 2010 also needs to be reviewed and assessed with greater participation from its beneficiaries, and there is a need for a clear evaluation and planning methodology to guide cultural managers and actors when they revise the Plan. Cultural actors and civil society also have to draw the attention of government to commitments that the latter has entered into. Participation, the main cultural right included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and one of the strengths of our current political system, needs to be real and democratic.

Here the drawing up of the Charter of Cultural Rights and Duties, recommended as a means of implementing the Agenda 21 for culture (Various authors, 2006a: 5), might well become an edifying democratic exercise in thinking about people's cultural rights and duties. A significant number of international bodies, says the paper, recommend a local cultural strategy based on cultural rights which can play a key role in its promotion and inclusion in other specific policies and programmes by using the intrinsic values of culture, which are those of cultural diversity.

Has the city really thought through the complexity and the consequences of the scale which diversity is taking on in contemporary society? Our challenge is to create a favourable atmosphere for this thinking.

A number of institutions are working in Seville for cultural diversity. Seville is proud to be a cultural melting pot and to have found ways for the people and cultures that have lived there to coexist in harmony. This is part of the imaginary of all, and quite probably as a result the city was chosen as the venue for the International Federation of Coalitions for Cultural Diversity and the International Network of Ministers of Culture meeting which passed the Seville Declaration in support of cultural diversity. But has the city really thought through the complexity and the consequences of the scale which diversity is taking on in contemporary society? Our challenge is to create a favourable atmosphere for this thinking.

The drawing up of the Charter is in this respect a chance to increase public awareness and knowledge of this new reality and to explore the fresh opportunities offered by diversity in the setting up of new companies and new creative markets. As has been noted recently, 'diversity is productive' (Various authors, 2006b: 9).

This paper would also serve to innovatively build the principles of cultural diversity and pluralism into local policies as a whole. Up until now, much of the involvement of other departments with culture has been based on the advantages that it can bring to their programmes when putting in place their own isolated projects. However, as has been pointed out by Jordi Pascual, culture offers 'an overall vision, a unifying force which builds bridges with other spheres of governance' (Various authors, 2006b: 7), and this is also true of cultural diversity.

It is a time for action but also for thinking that enables these new approaches to be built into local policies. And there has never been a better moment than the present, as the Strategic Plan is being reviewed and a fresh one drawn up.

Given the difficulty of measuring culture and hence evaluating the impact cultural measures have had on the local development, the use of other tools is now being reviewed. Here the reference framework for self-evaluation put forward by UCLG's Committee on Culture for the Agenda 21 for culture (Various authors, 2006c: 4), is the most appropriate and entails the presence of local actors and people in the process by creating a favourable atmosphere for the use of internal capacities and getting the cultural sector to see itself as a leading figure in strategic development. Nonetheless, the idea of adding external actors, peer review mechanisms and exchanges of experiences to the process is innovative. The proposal involves new practices with the stimulation of being able to discuss one's own actions and also put them into perspective with respect to other government bodies, and being able to learn from other projects put in place using the same principles with the added incentive of being able to see outcomes on the ground.

Moreover, a holistic analysis of this type enables the search for interdependence between different strategies drawn up by different local government departments which are often not synchronised. Interiorising the cross-cutting nature of resources as put forward by the Agenda 21 for culture entails a new way of managing geared towards sustainable development which we hope we will be able to use fruitfully.

In this respect, networking carried out by UCLG's Committee on Culture has proved extremely encouraging in the implementation of the principles of sustainable development which make up the Agenda 21 for culture in local policies. This is especially so because it has set up a platform that connects cities and people and facilitates exchanges, and has made extremely useful resources and information available to the cities involved.

As Bonet (2005: 8) notes, 'in an increasingly complex and globalised world, the exchange of experiences drives progressively more uniform yet also richer practice. Sharing diverse experiences horizontally (and not from the one-way throne of cultural and economic power) and being able to adapt them to plural realities is one of the challenges of multiculturalism'.

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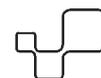
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