



CONCEPCIÓN

CIUDAD PILOTO • CULTURA 21

Pilot City of Agenda 21 for culture,
United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)

PUBLIC REPORT ON THE CRITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEW AGENDA 21 FOR CULTURE, BY CONCEPCIÓN'S POPULATION AND CULTURAL AGENTS

Antoine Guibert,

Consultant

Expert on the implementation of Agenda 21 for culture

Antoine.G.Guibert@gmail.com

This document presents the critical feedback provided by the local actors of the City of Concepción in drafting Agenda 21 for culture. Input was provided by citizens and local actors during the pilot-city process. It also stemmed from an analysis of policies, actions, and issues that were raised during debates.

The pilot-city process has allowed us to present extensive information about the new draft of the Agenda 21 for culture to numerous regional and local actors, as well as citizens of Concepción. In general, the actors and citizens advanced a prolonged agreement for adopting Agenda 21 for culture. This included those objectives best suited to the environment in Concepción.

The city is currently in a difficult economic situation, being an industrial and fishing city. In addition, it faces heavy international competition as well as a lack of marine resources. Concepción is also located in a significant seismic and tsunami zone. It has been destroyed several times throughout its history. The last earthquake in February 2010 caused significant casualties and deaths. It also inflicted heavy damage on the city and was followed by a "social earthquake" with widespread looting and theft. This social and natural catastrophe has had a profound effect on the city's inhabitants.

Concepción boldly wants to support culture, as an investment that will prompt a new dynamic in sustainable development. Of particular note is the great strength and resilience of the city's inhabitants (called "Penquistas"). The city has managed to reconstruct and reinvent itself time and again after each disaster, in spite of enormous difficulties. In October 2014 after an extensive process of civic participation, the city adopted the Cultural Strategic Plan, "Concepción 2030". Its objective is to transform Concepción into a cultural, effervescent, dynamic, and inclusive place. These will be the driving forces in the sustainable development of the city. The new Agenda 21 for culture proposes practical guidelines for integrating culture as an essential part of development into all levels of society. It was very well received by the large majority of actors and citizens involved in the process. All of the participants recognised the enormous potential of this approach for Concepción, as well as for driving a new local dynamic.

Some issues proved especially significant for Concepción. As a result, the following improvements were proposed for the draft.

Generally, the area of cultural rights was quite relevant, especially for the Chile's indigenous Mapuche population. Concepción accounts for a substantial part of the Mapuche population who face considerable challenges with regard to their local and national cultural rights. If cultural rights are very important for all citizens, then they have an enormous significance for indigenous populations that are under a great deal of pressure and difficulty in the transmission of their culture. Concepción is not a unique case. Numerous indigenous populations around the world confront challenges for the

survival, protection, and spread of their cultures and languages. For some there is even a high risk of disappearing altogether. The Agenda 21 for culture should dedicate an explicit part of its text to the importance of **the cultural rights of the indigenous** populations. The cultural rights of indigenous populations must be acknowledged in the section on culture and education, and enable the education system to transmit their culture and languages.

Through its culture plan, Concepción seeks to develop a **dynamic cultural life in public spaces** by establishing open and accessible temporary spaces. These would be in the population's everyday spaces such as plazas, streets, and parks, among others. The plan may include street theatre or an annual parade celebrating the anniversary of the city. These activities reinforce everyone's access to cultural life. Furthermore, they promote a feeling of effervescence in public spaces, giving territories a new dynamic. This focus has significant potential for Concepción as much as other cities, and could be much more present in Agenda 21 for culture.

At governmental level, Agenda 21 for culture has been instrumental in favouring exchange. It has helped establish the conditions necessary for frameworks of cooperation between the local and regional governments. This has been very important for Chile as a country known for its heavily centralised administrative powers. It has also been important for making regional government a key actor in local development processes. The need to establish a **joint effort with all levels of government** has been very relevant in the context of Concepción.

As for the integration of the culture into territorial and public space planning, Concepción is in a unique situation because of its location in a seismic zone and its history of repeated destruction. Its history does provide Concepción with a special territorial identity, making it a modern-day city that is perpetually reinvented. If the population has a negative perception of its territory, then Agenda 21 for culture has enabled a focus on the potential of culture to transform and renew the region. The result of which would be a change in the perceptions of the population. The case of Concepción raises an important point about cultural and territorial planning. It engenders the idea that territory is something **inconstant evolution** that can be **reconstructed and reinvented**. New senses of meaning, as well as a consistency in territorial identity can be ascribed to it in spite of the **ephemeral** nature of the city's construction.

On an ecological level the importance of linking **cultural diversity with the biological diversity** has been raised in Concepción. This is the result of the Mapuche population having a very respectful world view of, and relationship with, the environment. This issue could be more present in the Agenda 21 for culture.

As for culture, **social inclusion** and the fight against poverty have also been of particular relevance to Concepción because of the significant number of citizens living in extreme poverty. Numerous organisations have mobilised to facilitate everyone's access

to culture through economic policies and by offering cultural services to the poorest neighbourhoods of the city.

On a cultural and economic level, emphasis has been placed upon culture as an essential sector and driving force, rather than a simple component or tool in development. It has been stressed in debates that culture is an important channel for promoting **more inclusive and endogenous development**, as well as the **dynamic overhaul and revitalisation of the local environment**. The importance of the local ecosystem and social fabric were highlighted as the important base and major forces in development.

Finally, with regard to information, connectivity, and technology, Concepción's culture plan seeks to favour technologies as platforms for cultural information and diffusion. Some participants are of the opinion that technology presents an opportunity to promote citizens' active participation. It also facilitates a dialogue between the municipal government and civil society. Concepción is involved in a smart city pilot project, whereby it will adopt **technologies to service the community and to help resolve social problems**. These are very important focuses for Agenda 21 for culture.

In conclusion, Agenda 21 for culture seems to have provided a practical and theoretical framework for transforming Concepción into a cultural city. This framework also responds to the goal of including culture as a pillar of the city's sustainable development.