

AN AGENDA OF CULTURAL POLICY FROM BARCELONA



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“The capacity to transform its surroundings is the reason for being of culture. We need to make knowledge travel at the same speed as information and this is only possible if we make culture and education work together.”

Barcelona and Catalonia are experiencing times of intense political debate, and culture and cultural policy are not exempt from this. Culture has always been present in our country's key moments of change and transformation. We have always appreciated culture's ability to transform, develop new alliances and create new avenues for progress. In Barcelona, we make a daily effort to place culture at the forefront of municipal action to advance our own society and the wider world around us.

The responsibility of a city's cultural policy is more than just a passionate project; there is the added privilege of obtaining an overall view of a cultural system that is not always appreciated. Daily contact with creative people, artists, managers, entrepreneurs and cultural entities makes it possible to have a complete vision of how, day after day, culture acts as a catalyst for the city. The projects are as diverse as a neighborhood library, a grassroots cultural center, an animation start-up company, a space dedicated to circus arts, a music festival, and a museum, to name a few examples.

The way I see it, an agenda of urban cultural policy that is both conceived and written in Barcelona must take into account the big picture and see the city as a wider cultural ecosystem where the cultural act itself is integrated into the way of doing things. We must also strive for both excellence and creativity as core goals while also recruiting the participation of the greatest number of people in the cultural act. This is a rich and vibrant culture that recognizes the importance of Catalan culture while also promoting its expansion. It is a culture that, today, is also at the forefront of efforts to tackle new challenges we constantly face in the decisive moments in which we live.

These days it is crucial for us to think beyond the traditional borders that have defined different aspects of culture. First of all, I believe in a cultural policy committed to returning culture to the people. Cultural projects are only relevant to the extent that they engage the surrounding social fabric, turning the public into active protagonists rather than merely promoting passive access to culture. In this way, the public becomes an active part of a social debate.

This participation is precisely what differentiates a transformative culture from simple show business. The capacity to transform its surroundings is the reason for being of culture. This ability to affect change goes beyond amusement, the creation of wealth and improved social inclusion, though these elements are also extremely important.

Secondly, we have to recognize knowledge or, more specifically, the diffusion of knowledge as the core of our cultural policy. And, if we are to speak of the spreading of knowledge, we must make education the first priority of our cultural policies. The value of Culture can be found in the transmission of values and the development of new knowledge and abilities. All these things have traditionally been attributed to education. It is clear that information does not travel at the same rate as knowledge; as we know, it moves much, much faster. Today's dominant hypertext culture is characterized by easy access to information thanks to new technology. However, it is also marked by increased difficulties in deciphering and interpreting this same information. We need to make knowledge travel at the same speed as information and this is only possible if we make culture and education work together. The principal problem faced by many societies today is academic failure.

We must also not forget that the promotion of creativity and talent is only possible if we establish alliances between emerging production sectors, academia, cultural non-profits and creative industries, all sectors that go beyond traditionally defined cultural sectors.

Thirdly, we must promote a culture of innovation, a permanent attitude which is reflected in all cultural sectors. This transformative value of Culture has been gradually lost as large cultural structures have grown.

Finally, we have to strive for cultural excellence. Today, in a context where the idea of a “smart city” has so much currency, we cannot forget to seek out intelligent citizens who broaden both the content and usefulness of the technology and infrastructure within our reach. Cultural excellence is truly attained when we manage to not forget our roots and the heritage of past experience, when we maintain connections with the surrounding society and when we participate in larger, universal cultural debates. In the early years of globalization, we experienced a false cosmopolitan unity, where *local* and *global* seemed like interchangeable concepts. Today, we understand that a vision of a global *cosmos* is only possible from a local *polis*. Giving value to our cultural roots not only reaffirms our obligations of cultural identity but also gives us a firm base from which to share this wealth with the wider world.

From Barcelona, we share a commitment to cultural cooperation and the work that cities are carrying out as part of a global network, especially within the framework of the Committee on Culture of UCLG. Cities are privileged laboratories of innovation, creativity and talent while also accumulating the experience and *savoir-faire* that is developed by collaborative participation. Nevertheless, we must strive to transform our political agenda from mere theory into real action and convert our cooperation into an effective exchange between the true protagonists of our work.