

REVIEW OF MÉRIDA'S CULTURE 21: ACTIONS SELF-ASSESSMENT

AUGUST 2016



culture 21

Agenda 21 for culture

Mérida is an important city in Mexico because of its long historical and cultural traditions. It was founded in 1542 and is situated in the south eastern part of the country. Its cultural diversity is widely recognised for its Mayan origins and presence, as well as for mixed, Arabic, German, and Korean cultures as well as many others that are the result of recent migrations. Together, these enrich its overall cultural makeup. It is a metropolitan centre that is connected with nearby communities, and is an epicentre where connections are born than bolster many internationally recognised heritage sites, including Chichen Itza, Uxmal, and many others. Its population is 781,144, in which a little over 182 thousand are from Indigenous communities. The Mayan, Chol, Tzeltal, and Mixe languages are spoken in Mérida given recent, growing migration. The city is home to some important cultural heritage from the 19th century colonial era and the first half of the 20th century. These include museums, galleries, cultural centres, squares, parks, and markets which are part of the cultural richness of Yucatán capital, Mérida. The presence of state and university infrastructure enriches the landscape of the city through broader cultural dynamism.

The City Council of Mérida incorporated Agenda 21 for culture, and became a 2016 Pilot City after having carried out an intensive awareness-raising program among various stakeholders in the areas of academia, culture, arts, design, photography, cultural managers, entrepreneurs, media professionals, and the municipality, including spheres of development such as urban, environmental, social prevention, tourism, and the Autonomous University of Yucatán (UADY). All of these work closely with the municipality in creating public policies. The spirit of Agenda 21 for culture is reflected in the principles of the 2015-2018 Municipal Development Plan of Mérida. The Autonomous University of Yucatán is essential in arts and cultural management education. One noteworthy practice is promoting the Masters in Cultural Management programmes alongside the Municipality, to be able to develop a sectoral analysis of the cultural sphere.

From the 29th to the 30th of August, 2016, Mérida's "Olimpo" Cultural Centre held a workshop/seminar called, "Mérida - Pilot City for Agenda 21 for culture: 2016-2018 Development and Perspectives. During this time, the Mérida self-assessment was carried out based on the [Culture 21 Actions](#) guideline document, a tool designed by the UCLG Committee on Culture for such projects. The document was approved by the United Cities and Local Governments Committee on Culture in March of 2015 and allowed cities all over the world to examine their strengths and weaknesses with regards to the role that culture plays in the other three pillars of sustainable development as based on common guidelines. It is also based on common guidelines, with 9 commitments and 100 actions that synthesise an overall focus on relating culture and sustainable human development. These common guidelines are used by all Agenda 21 for culture pilot cities. The self-assessment exercise is one of the initial activities undertaken by every pilot city. The scores obtained locally were then compared to the results obtained by the UCLG Committee on Culture 2015 Global Panel.

This report, entitled "Radar 1", was written by Lucina Jiménez, an expert in the implementation of Agenda 21 for culture, in close collaboration with the Secretariat of the UCLG Committee on Culture. It synthesises and analyses the assessments made throughout the workshop in Mérida. These are compared with elements of the global average, and posits suggestions for some aspects that may warrant monitoring. The Committee on Mérida was established to monitor the Agenda 21 for culture 2017-2018 work programme. The Committee is comprised of business representatives, municipal representatives from the environmental, cultural, social development, social prevention, and tourism sectors, as well as from the University of Yucatán. The following were the main results.

SELF ASSESSMENT





GENERAL OVERVIEW

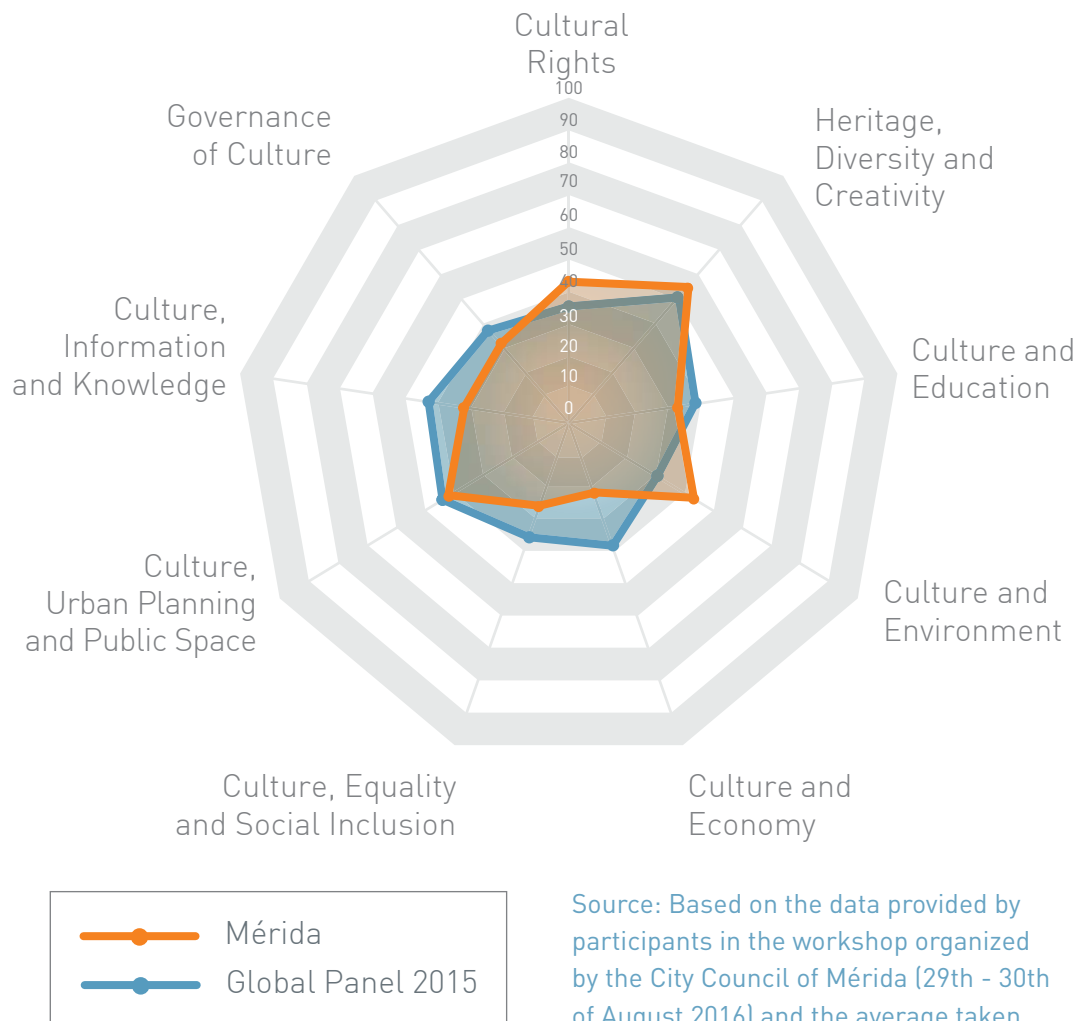
As a Pilot City for Agenda 21 for culture, Mérida scored highly in three areas, which were above the international average: *Cultural Rights* (43/100), 8 points above the global mean (35/100). This was due to the City's recent leadership role in adopting a Bill of Cultural Rights. *Heritage, Diversity, and Creativity* (54/100) was four points above the worldwide score (50/100). *Culture and Environment* (43/100) was significantly higher, scoring 13 points above the global average (30/100).

The commitment to *Culture, Urban Planning, and Public Space* has made significant progress, scoring 42/100, within 2 points of the worldwide score (44/100). In the field of *Culture and Education*, this gap widened, with a score of 33/100, and five points below the international mean of 38/100. Similarly, *Governance of Culture* (32/100) was also five points below the worldwide score (37/100).

Three commitments were rated significantly below the international averages: *Culture and Economy* (21/100), is still an underdeveloped sphere in Mexico, evidenced through comparison to the global score (30/100). Additionally, *Culture, Equality, and Social Inclusion* scored 26/100, in contrast with the 35/100 at the international level. Both cases saw a 9 point differential with their global standard. *Culture, Information, and Knowledge* was the least developed commitment with 32/100, 11 points below the world average of 43/100.¹

¹ The tool used during the workshop, the Culture 21 Actions Self-assessment Guide, asks cities to provide a score between 1 (undeveloped action or at the emerging stage) and 9 (action in full development) for each of the 100 actions that conforms to Culture 21 Actions, as well as to offer an indicative description in order to establish the cities' positions. For each action, a score between 1 and 3 corresponds to an "emerging stage"; a score from 4 to 6 indicates a "developing stage"; and an evaluation between 7 and 9 established the town at a "advanced stage". The percentage figures accompanying each of the areas of commitment from Agenda 21 Actions are derived from those scores between 1 and 9 issued to every action that has been analysed.

Figure1: Self-Assessment of Mérida and the 2015 Global Panel Data



Source: Based on the data provided by participants in the workshop organized by the City Council of Mérida (29th - 30th of August 2016) and the average taken from a panel of 34 experts from different regions around the world.



CULTURAL RIGHTS

Mérida placed well above the international average with respect to cultural rights, with a self-assessed score of 43/100. By comparison, the Global Panel of Experts established an international standard of 35/100. Mérida is the first city in Mexico to adopt a Bill of Cultural Rights approved by the Local Government, the Business Coordinating Council, the Mexican Chamber of Radio and Television, the Autonomous University of Yucatán, and representatives of artistic groups from throughout the city. This area was highly praised by the participants because it is a fundamental aspect of the current City Council.

Participants proposed lending more continuity to this process to be achieved by outlining a catalogue of rights to be established in accordance with budgetary margins, and by carrying out mass communication campaigns. These would allow citizens to seize opportunities and take on responsibilities. Additionally this would strengthen accessibility for those with disabilities, broaden gender perspectives, and also specifically add the rights of Indigenous communities to the Bill of Cultural Rights. Strengthening community cultures is considered one of the primary tasks in allowing people to exercise their cultural rights.



HERITAGE, DIVERSITY AND CREATIVITY

Mérida was also above the international average for Heritage, Diversity, and Creativity, with 54/100, compared to the 50/100 attained worldwide. Participants positively evaluated municipal policies for their recognition of diverse, local cultural expressions, which included strengthening the Mayan language in certain public services, and proposing this extended to legal advocacy. They also praised the existence of support funds for artistic expressions in the city, even though it was felt that such funds should be increased given the city's cultural wealth.


Some important examples include Mérida Fest and the Noche Blanca (White Night), which promote the diversity of cultural heritage and mobilise the population. It was suggested that the frequency, management, and rules for carrying out such activities be analysed. Participants also suggested facilitating access to municipal events, creating an inventory for intangible cultural heritage, and promoting the social appropriation of museums, galleries, and other cultural infrastructure.



CULTURE AND EDUCATION

With regard to the commitment to culture and education, Mérida scored 33/100, which was five points below the global mean of 38/100. The group recognised the importance of the art education offered in the city, but noted that there needed to be tools for disseminating cultural life in order to strengthen participation by certain social spheres. The latter referred especially to those living in the southern part of the city. It was highlighted that there is collaboration among artists, cultural institutions, and civil society organisations in Mérida. It was suggested that this be regulated in order to systematise such interaction.

Some noteworthy examples are the Yucatán School of Arts (ESAY) and the bachelor and master's degrees in Cultural Management taught in several Universities of the city, the Municipal Center of Dance, the Academy of Mayan Languages, and efforts undertaken by the Modelo University to teach handicraft techniques, and cultural heritage. One underdeveloped area pertained to basic education schools, with which there was very little collaboration working toward a strong focus upon sustainable development of cultural management training.



CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

Mérida has developed significantly in connecting culture and the environment by considering mobility and sustainability both as core objectives and cross-cutting components of 2015-2018 municipal policy. As a result, Mérida scored 43/100, which was much higher than the global average of 30/100, making the city a leader in this area.

Its good practices include the Municipal Plan for Green Infrastructure that is currently underway, the promotion of the use of bicycles, the city's existing ecotourism routes, supporting local gastronomy, fostering exchange among local cooks, and a present focus upon promoting environmental sustainability in every sector. In addition to this was the production of a Spanish-Mayan communication manual for doctors, which facilitates intercultural dialogue in medical practices.

The intention is to further involve the cultural and artistic sectors, and promote campaigns that emphasise healthy eating. These would include schools and markets in designing environmental measures linked to culture.



CULTURE AND ECONOMY

Conversely, Culture and Economy was an area that required improvement, in which Mérida's score of 21/100 was significantly below the global score 30/100.

This area is still insufficiently addressed at a national level. It is one of the fields of interest for participants, as they recognised the importance of making cultural life sustainable, as well as strengthening the basis for cultural production and its impact on the well-being of producing communities.

Mérida also has an innovative side. A new generation of cultural entrepreneurs is appearing in emerging fields like fashion design that goes back to artisanal roots, jewellery, and even mapping, which has become an emerging field. This is happening in tandem with a creative sector that is defined by its recreation of identity with a unique sense of humour.

The revival of trades has generated enormous interest and potential in Mérida. Aside from those outlined above, some noteworthy examples include textiles, basket making, sisal weaving, and any other trades. These combat the influx of products that create cultural homogenisation in the artisan goods market, and thus detract from the visibility of Mérida's local products. It is important to identify the most promising fields in the city's creative economy. In fact, support and stimulus policies have only just begun to appear.



CULTURE, EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

In this area, too, Mérida was far from the global mean of 35/100, with a score of 26/100. The Agenda 21 for culture monitoring committee noted that while Mérida has a rich cultural life, it is concentrated in the historic centre of the city. Furthermore, there is a marked inequality due to a lack of access to cultural life in Mérida's outlying and rural areas. The committee also noted a lack of policies geared towards people in vulnerable conditions, as well as a lack of focus on gender or universal access to cultural infrastructure.

There must be more recognition and diffusion of the growing number of cultural spaces which are sustained by civil initiatives. They offer alternatives to specific communities outside traditional government channels, such as the Murmurante theater, La Rendija, la Negrita, La Casa de Todos (House for All People), el Bodegón del Arte, the Artists Foundation, and many others. Furthermore, it was proposed that cultural managers be trained in issues such as inclusion, diversity, and intercultural dialogue.



CULTURE, URBAN PLANNING AND PUBLIC SPACE

Mérida scored 42/100 in this area, which was just 2 points below the worldwide 44/100. Mérida is a city of squares and parks full of people, where musical, dance, and folkloric traditions play an important role. Coexistence in public spaces is a vital component of citizens' security, and is highly valued in Mérida. This especially refers to the historic centre, and areas where festivals, the White Night, and other activities are held. Subsequently, it can be said that peace and coexistence among various sectors are goods that belong to the public.

One of the notable challenges is the need to regulate the use of public space, and promote integration within the city, particularly between the north and south, with regard to infrastructure and cultural life. Similarly, it was suggested that innovation and cultural diversity be explored further to bring different generations into public spaces.

There is an apparent need for improvement with regard to the promotion and inclusion of graffiti. It can act as a means of giving options to youth and adolescents for education and expression in different parts of the city.



CULTURE, INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE

Given that this commitment had the largest disparity with the global score, it presents a window of opportunity for Mérida. The city received 32/100 compared to the worldwide 43/100.

Participants expressed interest in creating a Cultural Information System for the city where proposals by artists, creators, and entrepreneurs gain visibility. Additionally, this system will favour identifying cultural managers and communicators.

It is essential to create other tools for disseminating and promoting social participation in cultural life, as well as both cultural and artistic attractions, especially in the south of the city. It was proposed that a focus on gender be emphasised in cultural actions, in addition to children, adolescents, and youth. It was also suggested that greater visibility be established for existing cultural offerings for people with disabilities, and for civil society proposals. Furthermore, it was suggested that awareness campaigns be created for cultural rights in the city. These would be based upon the established Bill of Cultural rights.



GOVERNANCE OF CULTURE

Mérida has developed in its ability to coordinate efforts across different sectors for the co-production of cultural life, and focus these towards a perspective on sustainable human development. Of particular mention is the city's collaboration across three levels of government, private companies, chambers of commerce, the Autonomous University of Yucatán, and various civil society organisations. However, it still scored 37/100, which is 5 points below the international average.

There is an apparent need to strengthen partnerships across the social, economic, and urban development spheres, as well as to institutionalise collaboration between civil society and private enterprises with respect to culture. Civil society in Mérida has grown significantly, establishing artistic production and dissemination networks. These exist particularly for performing arts, visual arts, design, and initiatives that give the city an identity; whose scope extends beyond the local due to international cooperation networks. However, there is a need for a registry of civil society organisations with good practices, in addition to a stimulus policy for their development.



CONCLUSIONS

Mérida is a city that stands out for its cultural leadership across many areas. It is above the averages assessed by the [2015 Global Panel](#) of international experts, in its commitments to Cultural Rights, Heritage, Diversity, and Creativity, as well as Culture and Environment. It is at a crucial turning point as it transitions towards models that articulate cultural rights and sustainability.

Three areas were noted for development potential: 1) Strengthening the diffusion of the Bill of Cultural Rights, alongside 2) New decentralisation plans for cultural life that connect the north and south sides of the city, and geared towards visibility and strengthening civil society proposals and intercultural initiatives by Indigenous communities or those with disabilities, with 3) an emphasis on engagement between culture and economy, with the aim of fortifying bases for artistic and cultural production, connected to social well-being and the promotion of sustainable tourism, while simultaneously generating support mechanisms for cultural, artistic, audiovisual, and design entrepreneurship.

ANNEX 1: INITIAL WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

PILOT CITIES WORKSHOP: STAKEHOLDERS

NAME - SURNAME	POSITION
Enrique Dominguez León	Assistant Director for Tourism Development; Municipal Government
Rafael Gamboa	Visual artist
Patricia Martín	Artist and cultural entrepreneur La Negrita, traditional restaurant
Maria Herrera Páramo	Director of the Institute for Women; Municipal Government
Itzé Hernandez Ramírez	Programmes and Projects coordinator. Municipal Institute for Women
Rebeca Uuh Sonda	Community coordinator. Municipal Institute for Women
Jose Manuel Civeira García	Chief of Museums; Municipal Department of Culture
Paola Guzmán Argáez	Coordinator for the Office of the Municipal Director of Culture
Liliana Bolio Pinelo	Assistant Director for Reading Development; Municipal Department of Culture
Ana Valeria Rodríguez Florian	La Rendija Theatre Company
Erica Herrera Saucedo	Assistant Director for New Development Department of Urban Development; Municipal Government
Loreto Noemí Villanueva Trujillo.	Director of Municipal DIF (Integrated Family Development)
Ernesto Novelo	Yucatán visual arts
Juan José Durán Nájera	History Museum; Municipal Government
Diego Abreu Rendón	Assistant Director of Operations for the Municipal Department of Culture
Daniel Rivas	Cultural department at the Autonomous University of Yucatán
Bryan Caballero	Yucatán Alternate Network of Performing Artists
Ana Várguez Perez	Artistic Innovation coordinator. Department of Culture; Municipal Government
Luis F. Sánchez Islas	Artistic Innovation coordinator. Department of Culture; Municipal Government
Wendy L. Lugo Ancona	Technical Secretary for the Department of Urban Development; Municipal Government
Diana Pérez Jaumá	Head of Environmental Education - Sustainable Development Unit; Municipal Government

ANNEX 1:

INITIAL WORKSHOP

PARTICIPANTS

PILOT CITIES WORKSHOP: STAKEHOLDERS

NAME - SURNAME	POSITION
Valerie Amador Hurtado	Assistant Director of Cultural Innovation; Municipal Department of Culture
Cecilia Pérez Berzunza	Academic and cultural promoter
Esmé Ramírez Dávila	Coordinator of the city galleries; Municipal Government
Arq. Edgardo Bolio Arceo	Director of the Planning Municipal Institute
Enrique Chacón Vela	Planning and Operations Coordinator Sustainable Development; Municipal Government
Lisset Herrera Chab	Head of Networks Strategic Management Unit; Municipal Government
Tatiana Zugazagoytia	Dancer and Contemporary Dance Manager
Roger Torres Peniche	Director of Strategic Management Unit
Irving Berlín	Cultural promoter, Former Director of Culture for Mérida
Victor Hugo Lozano	Community Policy Coordinator; Municipal Government
Felipe Ahumada Vasconcelos	Director of Culture for Mérida; Municipal Government
Karla Salazar	Assistant Director of Citizen Participation in the Social Development Direction; Municipal Government
Raquel Araujo	Director of the “La Rendija” theater
Limbergh Herrera	Secretary of the Built Heritage Rehabilitation and Conservation Specialists Association of Yucatan
Kirbey Herrera	Assistant Director of Culture for Development. Human Development Direction; Municipal Government
Sergio Chan Lugo	Director of Human Development; Municipal Government
Cecilia Patrón	Directora of Social Development; Municipal Government
Carolina Cárdenas	Directora of Tourism and Economic Promotion; Municipal Government
Aref Karam Espósitos	Director of Urban Development; Municipal Government
Ileana Cerón Palma	Municipal Institute for Planning
Jose Luis Martínez Semerena	Deputy Mayor – President of the Culture Committee; Municipal Government



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