

---

## CULTURAL POLICY OF THE CANTON OF BELÉN



## NETWORKS LOCAL HERITAGE INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT HUMAN RIGHTS IDENTITY CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

---

### 1. Context:

The canton of Belén has 22,530 inhabitants in an 11.81 sq. km area. From the beginning of its existence as a canton, the residents of Belén have had the vision to organise themselves in order to carry out activities that united them as a family and supported them as a community. As the years have passed, Belén has strengthened itself in its community organisation to the point that at the present time it has more than 96 community organisations for neighbourhoods, young people, the disabled, women and sports; in short, as strategic partners that offer the community a generous contribution to the well-being of artistic and cultural activities. These initiatives rely on support and leadership from the local government, generating an adequate sustainable synergy that has allowed the development of citizens' activities toward building management and empowerment strategies, inclusion and fairness in community, cultural and artistic endeavors, among others.

These actions have allowed the Municipality of Belén to be named at the national level as a pioneering local government in most of their institutional tasks, reflected by the arduous teamwork of the community and the municipality, envisaging the development of the canton in recent years and offering quality services to their inhabitants. With regard to the specific case of cultural development, since 1997, Belén has relied on the Culture Unit within the Municipality's Social Development Area. It

is charged with “Promoting the cultural development of the canton, through democratic participative processes, by means of a variety of artistic and cultural manifestations, with equality of opportunities and fomenting the analysis of cultural identity, in order to improve the quality of life.” This municipal unit is located in the cultural center, the first municipal building built between 1915 and 1916. The center was declared a National Historical Landmark in 1995 by the Conservation and Research Center of Cultural Heritage of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports.

Through the Culture Unit, information, consultancy and support services have been made available to the different cantonal organisations, public institutions and private companies, in fulfillment of their respective cultural activities. The Culture Unit is developing an Artistic Training Program in a decentralised way in each of the canton's three districts, consisting of providing community residents with courses in the different artistic disciplines: music (guitar, piano, singing, choir, violin and music theory), performing arts (dance and theater) and visual arts (drawing, painting and crafts). These courses target the local community of all ages and aim to offer training and awareness opportunities. Additionally, the cultural center serves as a space for providing the program's courses, expositions and art exhibits, workshops, seminars, round tables and recitals, as well as training and rehearsals for the community's arts groups.



The cultural center also houses the *Billo Sanchez Gallery*, an award created via a municipal agreement that is granted to people with outstanding altruistic community work. In this same space one finds the Order of Rita Mora Lopez, a posthumous honor given to those who have generated community support for the canton. Another one of its functions is coordination with the artistic groups assigned to the Culture Unit. Some are community groups that already existed when this Unit was created, and others have arisen as a result of the management that has taken place (Belén Municipal Band, the Argamasa theater group, Choral Workshop, the municipal wind band, drawing and painting exhibitions, student workshops, the cultural center and craft exhibits).

All these actions have allowed the local government to get to know its surroundings, its activities and especially its needs, allowing the lack of a guide and an orientation framework that delineates short and medium-term cultural priorities to become known. hand-in-hand with cultural rights. It allows community and cultural development strategies to be established. Belén's cultural policy is an initiative of the Cultural Affairs Committee in coordination with the Municipality of Belén's Culture Unit, alongside the canton's integrated vision of economic development, driving the relevance of culture in local work and promoting legal regulations for material infrastructures through the articulation of the community and the local government as activators of social processes and diverse cultural and artistic events.

The Municipality of Belén's Culture Unit is the first instance in Costa Rica to use a participative process to build local cultural policies. This panorama allowed this municipal unit to participate actively in the process of building public policy, which is why it is important to mention the connection and existing correlation between the Canton of Belén's cultural policy and the national cultural policy. This involves the relationship of the strategic axes to each other, that is: **“Promotion of actions, cultural coordination and revitalisation, patrimonial protection, strengthening of cultural management and the decentralisation of programs and projects.”** Culture is currently a resource

that has not been sufficiently harnessed and it is important to revert to that feeling to build a fairer community with higher standards of quality of life.

CULTURAL POLICY IS DEFINED AS THE FACILITATOR OF ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT, STRENGTHENING IDENTITY AND SENSE OF BELONGING THROUGH PARTICIPATION CONTRIBUTING TO HUMAN DEVELOPMENT.

## 2. Belén and culture

Following on the Municipality of Belén's experience, other national municipalities and institutions have undertaken related strategies to have the necessary directives in cultural matters. Such is the case of the Ministry of Culture, which in 2013 approved the Culture Public Policy. Both policies are oriented toward a focus on rights, cultural sensitivity, gender, articulation, transversality, interculturality and sustainable development.

Is important to highlight that the ministry formulates as its overall objective "To promote the effective exercise of cultural human rights and the effective participation of the people, groups and communities in the cultural life of the country, so that they can express their cultural diversity freely and strengthen culture's contribution to sustainable development at the local, regional and national levels for the period 2014-2023," denoting the congruence with the strategic axes that the cultural policy develops:

- (1) the effective participation and enjoyment of cultural rights in diversity
- (2) the economic revitalisation of culture
- (3) the protection and management of tangible and intangible cultural heritage
- (4) the strengthening of institutions for the promotion and protection of cultural rights
- (5) the cultural rights of the indigenous peoples

Additionally, Agenda 21 for Culture summarises on the global level the basic characteristics that cultural management must exercise through the commitment of the cities and local governments that belong to it and certainly Belén's cultural policies are directly related to this agenda, just as is established in the following way:

Agenda 21 for Culture	CULTURAL POLICY OF THE CANTON OF BELÉN
Culture and human rights	To facilitate participation in the generation of continuous and sustainable processes of artistic cultural development, stimulating teamwork.
Culture and social inclusion	Coordination of activities and the cultural agendas of all the cultural agents' initiatives.
Culture, sustainability and territory	To strengthen artistic management, facilitating training and awareness by means of cooperation, programs and projects that promote cultural development.

A series of characterisations that have come to define culture has been made available, just as the canton of Belén's cultural policies have been. The Belén Office of the Mayor faithfully supports investment in culture through a specific budget for such effects, and it actively participates in the development and concretion of the actions that are implemented. The budget established by the Municipality of Belén is 5% of the income from municipal patents for cultural management. This percentage is enough to facilitate a variety of agreements in communities and neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, an indispensable aspect is the support, logistics and sponsorship provided by companies located in the canton as part of their enterprise social responsibility. The majority of the canton's companies coordinate with the local government for such purposes. This interaction is encouraged by the Culture Unit for most of the activities developed by strategic partners.

The Culture Unit has a variety of methods of disseminating its activity to reach the entire population. It also carries out a brief evaluation of activities to come to understand the perception of the population on the matter, its assessment, impact, identity and aspects to improve. Another one of the primary objectives of the canton's cultural management is to be inclusive with regard to the preferences of all those who participate in the activities, to guarantee expression and participation. At the same time, the entire population can access and participate in the activities free of charge.

The Culture Unit participates actively in municipal commissions and is implementing research projects into cultural heritage, identity, and architectural heritage and its preservation, as established by the Cultural Heritage Law. The activities that are developed in a decentralised way by organised groups and cultural partners for process facilitation are carried out in public spaces for the convenience of the community. The Belén Office of the Mayor faithfully supports the investment that is being made in culture by means of a specific budget for such effect, in addition to participating in the development and concretion of most of the actions that are being implemented.



Decentralisation is a process that began in cultural management in 2009. It was ratified in 2011 in light of the beginning of the canton's cultural policies. It is seen as a constant process. It is an indispensable element that is established in the following way in the policy: "Decentralisation is understood to be the process that began several years ago in order to achieve participation in the cultural process. This includes reallocating responsibilities and resources in order to carry out artistic and cultural processes and activities. The different participants in the cultural process are considered and respected as true strategic partners. The coordination function exercised by the Culture Unit is considered of vital importance, but no less important is the work and the effort of each one of the cultural agents or actors, either individually or collectively. What it is valued is the contribution to the canton's cultural development."

The Culture Unit, as a facilitator of artistic and cultural processes, coordinates with institutions to create a program of activities, whether with units of the same municipality, educational centers, universities, private companies, state institutions, etc., towards an optimisation of the resources it has and in the attainment of the established objectives and goals. There is also a database of artists, craftsmen and neighbours in the community who actively participate in activities in the search for learning and participation in other cultural processes and best practices.

### **3. Objectives and project implementation**

#### **3.1. Primary objectives**

To contribute to the comprehensive training of the residents of Belén, humanising the economic development of the canton by way of citizen training and awareness, with greater consciousness of its historical, environmental, artistic and cultural heritage and of its role in the strengthening of individual and collective participation organised for the improvement of their quality of life.

To be the facilitating and integrating body for the common efforts that they seek to identify, to develop and to strengthen the values and the cultural elements that guarantee their sustainability in local development. This cultural policy is defined as the facilitation of artistic and cultural development, strengthening identity and sense of belonging through participation contributing to human development.

#### **Specific objectives**

- To position culture as a factor for humanising economic development and improving quality of life.
- To strengthen individual and collective active and organised participation in the cultural process.

- To disseminate, conserve and recover the canton's tangible and intangible heritage.
- To promote a change of mentality among municipalities aimed at developing, recovering and preserving a sense of Belemite identity
- *To incentivise artistic and cultural awareness and innovation in the local population.*

THE BELÉN CULTURE UNIT IS THE FIRST MUNICIPALITY IN COSTA RICA TO HAVE A PARTICIPATIVE PROCESS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF LOCAL CULTURAL POLICIES. IT HAS ALSO PARTICIPATED ACTIVELY IN THE NATIONAL PUBLIC POLICY CONSTRUCTION PROCESS.

### 3.2. Mission

The policy's purpose is to achieve participative, sustainable and equitable cultural development, defining the functions of its participants in the process, using all possible alternatives with regard to spaces, human capital and local resources to improve inhabitants' quality of life.

Human development assumes the promotion of the values of belonging, respect for difference, solidarity and appreciation for life, without distinction for race, nationality, sexual orientation, gender or religion. Artistic and cultural training and awareness promote the creative capacity and innovation of individuals and form a tool for the development of abilities and values as well as of other forms of knowledge. The sense of belonging and identity in a community are developed based on the recognition and valuation of the diverse aspects of cultural heritage. The facilitation and support for the active and conscious participation of the community in favor of shared objectives and common interests gives rise to the participation of local residents in decision making, as well as in the organisation, execution, evaluation and enjoyment of the programs, plans and projects made by the agents or organisations of civil society.

### 3.3. Axes of action

#### **Strategic axes.**

- Promotion: To facilitate and promote participation in the generation of continuous and sustainable processes of artistic cultural development, stimulating teamwork.
- Coordination: Of the activities and cultural agendas of all of the cultural agents' initiatives.
- Heritage: To promote and make known the results of research related to cultural historical heritage.
- To strengthen artistic and cultural management, facilitating training and awareness by means of cooperation, programs and projects that promote cultural development.
- To help social, cultural and entrepreneurship groups to improve the quality of life of socially disadvantaged populations.
- To decentralise the programs and projects that entail the optimal achievement of the cultural process, executed by the different cultural actors from the community, properly organised in such a way that the local government executes an appropriate process of supervision.

#### **Cultural axes.**

- Awareness and training: The cultural agents, actors, promoters and workers are the executors of the processes and activities. They cooperate to carry out policy implementation.
- Strengthening of the agents: The Culture Unit must develop this axis.
- Stimulus and promotion of individual and collective cultural production.
- Research and Registration.

The Cultural Agents are the participants and executors of local cultural life, encompassing all its inhabitants and visitors as determined in the following way: "cultural workers, promoters, agents, managers and actors are all those people or organisations who carry out artistic and cultural processes and activities in a permanent or temporary way." The Culture Unit is called to coordinate, promote and supervise the canton's cultural development, with the primary function of being the integrator of the different mediation and promotion activities. Since this policy was implemented in 2011, the Culture Unit has had the task of creating modifications for the faithful fulfillment of what has

been established, namely directives welcomed by the strategic partners and the other active actors in the canton's cultural management.

### 3.4. Obstacles

With regard to the obstacles faced in implementation, one notes:

- Lack of formalisation of partners; not all function as formal associations.
- Resistance to change. Some partners resist the new role of being executors of the artistic and cultural activities that they develop.
- The resistance of some partners to create activities for searching for financial resources and sponsorships, given that the Culture Unit cannot meet all the requirements.
- The surplus of functions and lack of budget have not allowed for the satisfactory stimulus and promotion of individual and collective cultural production, but for 2014, actions are being taken to get these activities started.

THE SENSE OF BELONGING AND IDENTITY IN A COMMUNITY ARE DEVELOPED BASED ON THE RECOGNITION AND VALUATION OF THE DIVERSE ASPECTS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE.

## 4. Impact

### 4.1. Impact on the local government

As the Culture Unit is the organisation in charge of the formulation, execution and evaluation of all artistic and cultural activities developed in the canton, it has become a coordinator and regulator of these activities, as a promotional body and cultural engine of the canton.

It has become the organiser of the entire artistic and cultural agenda, the facilitator of anticipated activities and products, the builder of activity lines for cultural development, the builder of strategies for the promotion and elaboration of agreements, scholarships, contests, strategic alliances and technical assessments, projects on architectural, archaeological and cultural heritage and the promoter of all cultural activity in the local, national and international spheres in support of initiatives aimed at identifying the spaces that host artistic and cultural activities. Additionally, the sphere of action has been modified and the experience has been very enriching.

### 4.2. Impacts on the territory's culture and cultural agents

Active and participating strategic partners have had to stay updated, receiving training and even assuming a much more proactive attitude in their activities. They have shown themselves to be more interested in carrying out activities in their neighbourhoods, working to implement other complementary activities while simultaneously allowing the community's activities to be strengthened. Strategic partners have tried to participate in some temporary or permanent cultural processes, activities or projects in the search for the sociocultural growth. It has been found that they have a plethora of characteristics such as organised, proactive, creative bodies in constant growth, with continuity and fairness in their actions, and with a high degree of responsibility in the development and fulfillment of projects in which they participate. All the activities that have been implemented since 2011 have been satisfactory.

### 4.3. Impact on the city and population

The project's impact on the community is on target; in addition to active participation in all the existing spheres, the people who participate in the activities can identify the diversity of actors who are behind the organisation of these activities, primarily rooted in community leaders, base organisations and the local government, demonstrating the capacity for the interaction and participation of all.

### 4.4. Transverse impact

The participation of other municipal units in the coordination of the respective activities was also achieved. Such is the case with recycling management, which has been defined in the different areas

for refuse gathering, with coordination with usage activities also being developed in a decentralised manner. The implementation of cultural policies, in addition to being obligatory, has allowed them to function as an agreeable norm of coordination with the other agents that were already in artistic operation, but who came to encourage their participation up to the level of taking control and empowering themselves. The Culture Unit has a specific budget, which is why the budgetary content is a constant in the development of activities. It is also essential to establish that policies be updated at least every 10 years, in light of innovation and other changing aspects that will allow the Culture Unit, as well as the Municipality, to remain pioneering organisations.

Within the main powers of the Canton of Belén's cultural policy for 2014, it is important to mention the formulation and regulation of the vincularTE Belén program, an initiative indicated in the policy and for which a biddable grant for projects that safeguard of the intangible cultural heritage has been established. This initiative also places the Municipality of Belén Culture Unit as a pioneer in this type of incentive, defined as the first local government to generate the canton's citizen participation, with an eye toward maintaining community identity with regard to the uses, representations, expressions, knowledge and techniques, together with the cultural instruments, objects, artifacts and spaces that are inherent to them, comprising living expressions inherited from our ancestors and transmitted to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social uses, rituals, festive acts, knowledge and practices relative to nature and the universe, and knowledge and techniques related to traditional crafts.

## **5. Other information**

The City of Belén was a candidate in the first edition of the "UCLG International Award - Mexico City-Culture 21" (January-May 2014). The prize jury prepared its final report in June 2014 and asked the UCLG Committee on Culture to disseminate this project as an exemplary practice.

Request approved in September 2014.

Best practices published in November 2014.

This datasheet was written by Lillyana Ramirez Vargas, Culture Unit Coordinator, Municipality of Belén.

Contact: [cultura1 \(AT\) belen.go.cr](mailto:cultura1(AT)belen.go.cr)

Web site: [www.munibelen.go.cr](http://www.munibelen.go.cr)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/munibelen>