



ESCAZÚ: PILOT CITY

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FINAL REPORT

In the framework of the finalisation of its participation as a Pilot City of the Agenda 21 for culture (from 2016 to 2023), Escazú held in May 2023 the closing stage of the process with a final seminar. This report aims to highlight the implementation of the pilot measures and the different activities carried out in Escazú since 2016 within the framework of its work programme as a Pilot City, as well as to provide a critical analysis and recommendations for the future.

The assessments presented in the report are based on a working and evaluation session held in May 2023 with the "Agenda 21 for culture" Committee of Escazú, which brings together the different municipal services that worked on the implementation of the pilot measures, as well as on the final seminar where the results of these measures developed by Escazú as a Pilot City were presented and publicly discussed.

This report has been written by Antoine Guibert, the expert appointed to accompany Escazú in its process as a Pilot City, in collaboration with the UCLG Committee on Culture.

FINAL
REPORT



BACKGROUND

Since the beginning of the Pilot City programme, Escazú has carried out the following activities and work phases:

- February 2017: a **self-assessment exercise** of the city's cultural and sustainable development policies was carried out on the basis of the document Culture 21 Actions. This exercise helped to assess the city's strengths and weaknesses, to provide a perspective on the work carried out, and to identify areas that may require further follow-up.
- November 2017: a **work programme** with pilot measures was designed to respond to the needs and proposals identified during the self-assessment process. Three (3) pilot measures were defined within this work programme, consisting of seven (7) pilot projects.
- November 2017 - May 2023: Escazú implemented the work programme and its various pilot measures through a series of local activities described below. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the closure of the programme initially planned for 2020 was postponed until health conditions allowed work to resume in 2023.
- October 2018: Escazú carried out a **peer learning visit** to Mexico City (Mexico), which is part of the Leading City programme.
- May 2019: several work and evaluation sessions were held in Escazú, as well as the workshop course "Culture of peace and gender perspective in the territory: cultural and artistic community practices" delivered by the organisation La Nana de México to support the city in the implementation of the pilot measures defined in its work programme, followed by a **follow-up report**.
- May 2023: final closure phase. A working and evaluation session was held with the "Agenda 21 for culture" Committee of Escazú to evaluate the implementation of the work programme. In addition, an **international seminar** was organised with several Latin American and Costa Rican cities.



ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS OF THE WORK PROGRAMME AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

1. IN THE SOCIAL SECTOR, Escazú implemented the pilot measure "Policy to promote actions for the inclusion and integration of the different groups in the region of Escazú" with the objective of "promoting the participation of the different populations of the region of Escazú to facilitate their inclusion and integration".

This pilot measure was developed around the following pilot projects and activities:

PROJECT 1: COMMUNITY CO-MANAGEMENT WITH THE NEIGHBOURHOOD EL CARMEN

El Carmen neighbourhood is a highly vulnerable area of Escazú. The lack of community organisation or social and associative fabric in the neighbourhood to promote the co-management of municipal interventions with the community was one of the difficulties in intervening in this neighbourhood. The project aimed to establish community co-management through the reinforcement and empowerment of citizen action in the neighbourhood, with the constitution of a neighbourhood committee and the implementation of neighbourhood cultural planning.

The methodology of intervention aimed to encourage active participation of the neighbours in the definition of a neighbourhood cultural project. It began with a community diagnosis phase that determined in a participatory manner the different needs and problems of the neighbourhood (among other things, challenges related to public insecurity, the lack of public spaces, or the lack of cohesion between neighbours) and tried to define a cultural project to respond to this situation. These participatory spaces allowed to open a dialogue between the community and municipal services (e.g. with the police), which was very positive. Following this process, a cultural agenda was created in collaboration with the community and the formation of an organised community group named Recovering Roots (Rescatando Raíces) was supported. Training and capacity building accompaniment were provided.

This project is articulated with two other initiatives of the work programme: 1. The Neighbourhoods for Coexistence (Barrios para Convivir) programme, which also organises activities in El Carmen neighbourhood. The community agenda developed in the neighbourhood during the process, and the community group created, supported the Neighbourhoods for Coexistence programme and provided a community base to promote co-management of the programme's activities. 2. The creation of an amphitheatre for the promotion of coexistence and social cohesion in the neighbourhood, trying to provide a community base for this new infrastructure.



ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS OF THE WORK PROGRAMME AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

The project developed in El Carmen neighbourhood seems to be a success. It has led to the strengthening of community organisation and action, and has laid the foundations for community co-management of the Neighbourhoods for Coexistence programme. Given this success, the municipality decided to replicate the methodology more systematically in other neighbourhoods to support the implementation of Neighbourhoods for Coexistence. Regarding the new infrastructure, there are difficulties in terms of community ownership and co-management of these facilities. Grassroots work is still necessary to achieve the co-management of this new infrastructure.

PROJECT 2: NEIGHBOURHOODS FOR COEXISTENCE

Neighbourhoods for Coexistence aims to develop cultural community experiences in the neighbourhoods of Escazú in order to foster community identity, encounters between neighbours, coexistence and social cohesion. One of the activities developed by the programme, entitled Open Corridors, is an activity co-organised with the neighbours and adapted to the cultural particularities of each neighbourhood. It consists of "opening" the corridors of the neighbours' houses to the community and facilitating exchanges between them. It is worth highlighting the participatory methodology used, as the programme approaches the communities, whether or not they have organised groups, with the aim of identifying leaders who can collaborate in its development, and tries to encourage co-management of the activities. This programme has had very positive impacts and has been considered a success. It has evolved into a community co-management programme, which incorporates the methodology developed in El Carmen neighbourhood with a systematic community diagnosis and the strengthening of the capacities of local communities. This project has fully achieved its objectives and can be considered a best practice.

PROJECT 3: INVENTORY OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE REGION OF ESCAZÚ

Escazú made an inventory of the intangible cultural heritage with the description of the main heritage elements of the region, which resulted in a publication. In the diagnostic phase, 7 consultation workshops, 80 interviews and 92 identification sheets of the intangible cultural heritage of Escazú were carried out. A safeguarding plan with 49 lines of action has also been defined. Finally, intergenerational exchange, awareness-raising and dissemination workshops were held in order to ensure the recognition, respect and valorisation of the intangible cultural heritage of the region of Escazú.



ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS OF THE WORK PROGRAMME AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

2. IN THE AREA OF URBAN PLANNING AND TERRITORY, Escazú implemented the pilot measure "Enabling and promoting spaces for participation in the region of Escazú as environments for coexistence" with the objective of "promoting the participation of the inhabitants of Escazú in public spaces as a means of stimulating dialogue, interaction and social cohesion".

This pilot measure was developed around the following pilot projects and activities:

PROJECT 1: COMMUNITY AMPHITHEATRES IN EL CARMEN NEIGHBOURHOOD AND THE MUNICIPAL SPORTS COMPLEX (VILLA DEPORTIVA MUNICIPAL)

From 2019 to 2022, Escazú built two high quality community infrastructures to respond to the lack of public infrastructure: the amphitheatres of El Carmen neighbourhood and the Municipal Sports Complex (Villa Deportiva Municipal). These infrastructures offer sports facilities (with a gymnasium for sports, futsal, volleyball and basketball, rooms for table tennis, judo and karate, a semi-Olympic swimming pool), educational resources with a municipal early childhood education centre for families in vulnerable situations and, in the cultural field, amphitheatres that hold cultural performances. These infrastructures seem to have a high degree of satisfaction among the population, as they offer high quality services that are similar to those provided in private centres. In the cultural field, however, it is recommended to strengthen the management model towards participation and co-management, and to encourage greater citizen ownership.

PROJECT 2: INTERDISTRICT CULTURAL TOURISM ROUTE

Cultural routes were defined in a participatory manner based on the inventory of cultural heritage. The aim of this project was to recognise and promote the region's cultural heritage and its different cultural expressions in order to improve its visibility among the inhabitants and thus develop different capacities to promote local tourism, cultural, social and economic development through the safeguarding of these resources and manifestations. Through the implementation of the defined tourist routes, the aim was to strengthen the visibility of the cultural and natural heritage of the region of Escazú within the framework of the strategy to safeguard the cultural manifestations of the region. Among the routes identified, two were selected: the Ruta del Boyero (the Boyero's Route) and the Ruta de la Bruja (the Witch's Route), and a pilot experience was conducted with participants from the region. However, the Covid-19 pandemic seems to have paralysed the implementation of these routes, which should be reactivated.



ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS OF THE WORK PROGRAMME AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

3. IN GOVERNANCE, Escazú implemented the pilot measure "Mechanism for the Identification of Municipal Intervention Priorities in the region" aimed at "identifying the socio-economic and cultural priorities of the people of the region of Escazú in order to define the actions for municipal intervention". The priority populations for municipal intervention were defined in terms of social, environmental and security risks.

This pilot measure was developed around the following pilot projects and activities:

PROJECT 1: MEASUREMENT AND PLANNING TOOL

Escazú developed an integrated social information system (SIGES) with the aim of obtaining more accurate data and having a continuously updated information system. Since 2018, we have worked in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to develop this unique system in Costa Rica at the local level. Initially, information was collected in 7 vulnerable neighbourhoods, and this was the first information to be incorporated into the system. Subsequently, SIGES continued gathering data on the users of educational, cultural and social services, among others. This system allows to guide and facilitate the development of municipal programmes with updated data on population characteristics, needs and interests, risks, socio-economic vulnerability, education, infrastructural needs, etc.

PROJECT 2 | MUNICIPAL CULTURE POLICY

The Municipal Cultural Policy of Escazú 2019-2029 was adopted after the elaboration of an assessment, carried out through discussions, consultations, interviews with 80 people from the community, documentary research and in-depth interviews with key actors in cultural production and management. The policy has three strategic axes: 1. social cohesion, interculturality and cultural participation; 2. economic dynamization of culture; 3. protection and management of cultural heritage. For each axis, the policy establishes key objectives and actions, as well as those responsible and the periods of implementation. In general, the policy is based on cultural rights and the social inclusion of the inhabitants of the region.

In the field of governance, it is worth highlighting the important effort of the municipality with these two pilot projects to strengthen its institutional system of public management of culture, achieving a high level of institutional strength, stability and resilience that is unusual at the local level.



CONCLUSIÓN Y RECOMENDACIONES

The following are some recommendations for further work:

- Escazú created an internal working group, the A21C Committee, which brings together the different municipal services involved in the work programme as a Pilot City. The permanent constitution of this internal coordination mechanism is recommended in order to continue the collaboration and coherence of all municipal actions.
- Escazú has made a very important effort to promote the co-management of cultural actions with local communities, but beyond the operational aspects, there seems to be a lack of representative bodies of civil society (such as a Council of Culture) that could serve as interlocutors with the municipality in its cultural programmes, in decision-making as well as in the implementation, co-management and evaluation of cultural programmes. It is recommended to start considering the creation of mechanisms for participation and co-management with civil society at the level of the region.
- In the same vein, it is recommended that Escazú continues to strengthen the co-management of cultural activities and the capacities for community action. A next step could be the formalisation of co-management, for example by strengthening the formal capacities of community organisations, the formalisation of community groups, the implementation of formal co-management and funding mechanisms (e.g. with a specific fund for community organisations, etc.). Other practices developed in Latin America, for example with Living Community Culture (Cultura Viva Comunitaria) in **Bogotá** or **Lima**, could be a source of inspiration for Escazú. Furthermore, an analysis of practices developed by other cities in the region is recommended to help determine Escazú's own co-management mechanisms.
- Finally, to continue the work, a collective reflection is recommended to identify new cross-cutting themes with which to develop the perspective of cultural rights and sustainability. For example, the relationship between culture and public spaces, culture and the environment, and culture and gender equality could be relevant themes for further work.

Finally, it should be noted that Escazú has developed some pioneering and innovative pilot measures in the areas of social inclusion and citizen participation that are undoubtedly exemplary practices for other cities in Latin America and around the world. The Neighbourhoods for Coexistence programme and the project in El Carmen neighbourhood, as well as the other measures developed, constitute a highly relevant methodology to foster cultural co-management of the territory with the population. With these experiences, Escazú proved to be a city at the forefront of cultural policies at the international level, and its recognition as a Leading City of Agenda 21 for culture is recommended.



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