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BELO HORIZONTE





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Arena da Cultura - Artistic and Cultural training programme

CONTEXT

Belo Horizonte was the first city actually planned in Brazil (during the Republic, after 1889), with the intention of making it the capital of the State of Minas Gerais. Today, it is the third largest city in Brazil, home to 5 million persons (including the metropolitan area). Belo Horizonte has grown in a disorganised and unequal fashion (mostly during the 1960s), widening the social gap and increasing the demand for public services. With the worsening of social problems came the need to reduce social inequality and promote a better distribution of public services, bearing in mind decentralization.

In the 80s, the Constitution of Brazil guaranteed cultural rights to all citizens and set the starting point for various public policies regarding cultural and artistic education throughout Brazil. In 1989, the Department of Culture of Belo Horizonte was organized to manage the cultural policies of the city. In the 1990s, after the country had regained democracy, the city gained momentum in building democratic public policies with popular engagement, being recognized for its Participatory Budget, as well as for the development of a cultural policy based on the values of popular culture and tradition and a new and bold artistic experimentation in the areas of drama, music, dance and audiovisual production.

In 2005, the Department of Culture became the Municipal Foundation for Culture, expanding its field of action and managing municipal policies with the engagement of citizens and the participation of public and private partners. In this cultural melting pot, Belo Horizonte has inherited

permanent and innovative traditions that have given rise to new values, encompassing and encouraging all cultural areas and offering opportunities to everybody, particularly to the socially excluded.

In 1998, the city of Belo Horizonte structured and implemented the Arena da Cultura program, as a result of the need to promote and facilitate access to cultural goods and services. At that time, citizens were eager for cultural spaces and opportunities to experience culture. Some data to be considered: in these years, 12 out of the 16 Municipal Cultural Centres were born from requests presented by the people through participatory budgeting, a process that had been successfully implemented by the municipal government.

GOALS, CHALLENGES AND PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Since 1998, when the program was launched, Arena da Cultura has been promoting access to cultural goods and services through capacity-building, training and outreach activities, making the program an integral part of the city's daily and continuous policy. The program is regarded as a road to be travelled to transform the city, in terms of social inclusion, job creation, business opportunities and stronger identification of the citizens with their city. Belo Horizonte considers culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development.

The program is based on two axes: a) cultural promotion, aiming at disseminating the local and regional production by promoting the exchange among the various districts in the city, as well as actions to revitalise public spaces, and by fostering the interaction among citizens and the articulation of Belo

Horizonte's cultural movements, and b) education and training, to promote access to different artistic languages, facilitating the technical and artistic initiation and development of people and groups in different city districts and areas, and contributing to professionalize artists and generate quality productions.

Arena da Cultura works with various audiences, people from 6 to 80 years old, with heterogeneous education and socioeconomic levels. It operates in different territories through decentralized actions that are geographically available to all regions of the city. It promotes artistic experience, appreciates the contact with professionals and artists as elements within the pedagogical methodological process, and gives priority to the cultural and social development, and to a better knowledge of users, trying to integrate artistic and pedagogical methodologies. The program stands out for its cross sector actions - a management system that integrates several public agencies into social and cultural policies and actions. The program is active in 16 cultural centres, 33 BH Cidadania centres (one of the most important social inclusion programs in Belo Horizonte) and in an extensive network of partnering organizations, churches, clubs and NGOs. It is coordinated from an office located in the centre of the city, which, apart from organising all activities, acts as a place where teachers have the opportunity of creating new proposals and actions, developing new working axes and working on the pedagogical scheduling of classes.

The program faces some challenges. The Municipal Foundation for Culture has been working to institutionalise its actions into a permanent



policy by providing for the continuous operation of schools (not stopping during school holidays), accrediting activities at all project execution levels, expanding education to the Popular Design, Fashion and Audiovisual areas, improving and qualifying physical spaces by implementing labs, classrooms and auditoriums, providing spaces with favourable conditions to carry out the activities and host students, and establishing new partnerships, including the attendance of beneficiaries of other social programs implemented by the city, particularly education and sports programs.

Based on this perspective, Arena da Cultura will become "ELA - Escuela Libre de Artes - Open School for the Arts" in 2014. It will expand the scope of the training program in arts and culture and will become the baseline for cultural education in the state of Minas Gerais and in Brazil. The program is an initiative developed by the city of Belo Horizonte, through the Municipal Foundation for Culture and, regardless of the interfaces developed with the Foundation's network of cultural units, it has a close relation with the Department of Social Policy, particularly with the BH Cidadania cross sectoral action program.

The program targets at a wide audience: people from 6 to 80 years old with heterogeneous education and socioeconomic levels. The number of beneficiaries has been growing since 1998, when it was not higher than 500 persons, but in 2012, such number had grown to 4,782 and reached 5,397 persons in 2013. The number of beneficiaries estimated for 2014 totals 6,940 persons. More than 20,000 persons have attended the program's workshops since its creation, and over 216,000



have attended shows and activities in the street and in public places. It should be pointed out that, during its 16 years of operation, Arena de Cultura has organized 758 workshops, 73 round tables, 98 cultural circuits (exhibition of results), 6 extended artistic shows, and has participated in the two Virada Cultural events in Belo Horizonte (24 hours of scheduled artistic and cultural activities).

However, the program is not only focused on the people that are engaged in training activities. The actions of the program reach families, communities, artists, teachers and opinion makers.

IMPACTS

The most significant impacts are the increase in the number of beneficiaries and the annual increase in the number of students. Another major achievement has been the territorial coverage of the program, which has enabled access to culture, experimentation, artistic production and knowledge, right to create, and the dissemination and circulation of artistic goods. By promoting quality training, many students have become professionals that are recognized throughout Brazil in the fields of music, plastic arts and performing arts. Both students and teachers are increasingly able to perform as professionals and cultural agents.

There are two other major impacts from the program: the positioning of the society, which is starting to understand that cultural policy should act in the long term and continuously, and the increasing demand by people during the participatory planning project of 2012, when 261 culture related proposals were presented and 206 were cross sector proposals. This is the result of situations that have arisen over time and helped identify culture as an important tool to build up citizenry.

The program's budget accounts for 40% of the city's budget in culture (excluding sponsors, associates and partners in the Foundation).

Finally, as it has been mentioned above, the Arena da Cultura program will become "Open School for the Arts – Arena da Cultura" in 2014, will grant official certificates to the students that complete the four year training program, will enhance the recognition of teachers, and will secure an annual budget with funds coming from the municipal treasury. These actions secure the continuity and improvement of the program.



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