



Hip-Hop music and the power of culture for the social transformation

*By Rebeca Grynspar**

The past 28th of October 2016, 12 dancers took the stage of the Heredia Theatre in Cartagena de Indias as part of the *Colombian Recital 2016*, the cultural program of the XXV Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government, where the main topic was “Youth, Entrepreneurship and Education”. Never before a Hip-Hop choreography had been presented to a King, as a Head of State or a group of Presidents. The choice of this type of show was not the result of a random selection, but the reflection of one of the pillars currently being promoted by the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB, according to its initials in Spanish): The culture as an instrument of inclusion and social transformation. Culture understood in a bigger sense as the way we live together and interact as a society.

The Hip-Hop was born from the everyday experience of marginal urban areas. Is the expression of young people living on the physical periphery but very often on the social periphery as well. The 12 dancers of the Colombian recital 2016 learn to dance in the streets, in the midst of violence and exclusion, in the most difficult neighbourhoods of the biggest cities of Colombia. Their childhood and adolescence were marked with extreme experiences. One of them told us “Dance saved my life”, while telling us how his closest friends had died because of the tensions between gangs and as a consequence of drug abuse. Hip-Hop music was for him, as for countless young people all over the world, a rescue rope, a way of expressing against violence and building bridges with the rest of society.

The project changed completely the lives of those 12 dancers, it gave them the opportunity to put their talents to work and develop their art. It gave them the opportunity to express themselves, but more importantly it gave them a chance to be heard. Because it’s not enough to have a voice, it is about the opportunity for all the members of the community to engage in a dialogue with respect of each other’s ideologies, and where we can celebrate our diversity. We do not need initiatives to include equals; we need initiatives that include those who are different, those who usually are seen as outsiders.

Social exclusion means invisibility. There is no worse form of discrimination than not being taken into account and to not recognise each other contributions to society. To reinforce culture means supporting mutual recognition among all members of the society. It is not enough to have artistic and cultural expressions, we must promote inter-culturality and the awareness that each person brings together multiple identities and belongs, simultaneously, to various groups. We are equals in our differences, that is why we are able to build a common vision and a project of the society.



These are the values that are being promoted by the Ibero-american Community and are the values that bring us together with the European Community and the EU-LAC Foundation. There is plenty that institutions can do in this direction. The first step is to recognise and to support the cultural expressions that spontaneously emerge in the society, leaving aside the prejudices and the invisibles barriers that impel us to divide the so-called “high culture” of “popular culture”. There is culture, without surnames.

The allocation of resources to the cultural sector is an essential element as well. Culture contributes around 5.5% of the Gross Domestic Product of the ibero-american countries. It is fair to reflect this contribution in an increasingly strong cultural institutionalism and in budgetary allocations. As we have said many times: investing in culture is investing in peace, is investing in citizen security, social stability and welfare.

Likewise, we must also continue to promote international cooperation in this area. Ibero-America prides itself on having built an excellent platform for cultural cooperation, with 14 regional programmes and initiatives and some South-South Cooperation initiatives at the country level. More than 70% of the beneficiaries of Ibero-American cultural programmes are young people. From dancers to filmmakers, from historians to librarians, our projects allow them to build the sense of community beyond borders.

Finally, we must give space for the citizens themselves to develop their ideas. The institutions of the future must be open and responsive, capable of listening but also capable of involving the citizens in their activities. From the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB) we have been successfully promoting the Laboratories of Citizen Innovation, where volunteers from dozens of countries work directly in solving community problems, using technology and multiple disciplines. We have also established the CIVICS platform (<http://www.viveroiniciativasciudadanas.net>), in which we will create thousands of citizen initiatives in different Ibero-American cities, both mega-cities and smaller municipalities. At the end of this year we will have 30 cities mapped and a network that articulates around 25,000 actors in citizen innovation throughout the region.

We hope to continue working in this direction, counting with the collaboration of the EU-LAC Foundation and with partners and allies who believe, like us, that culture holds the secret for better citizenship coexistence. There is no greater symbol of that than a hip-hopper greeting the President of a country.

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[<https://eulacfoundation.org/es/documentos/el-hip-hop-y-el-poder-de-la-cultura-para-la-transformaci%C3%B3n-social>]