

The culture of Competitiveness

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Introduction

During the early hours of June 25th, various agents of the arts and cultures from the Chilean scene expressed their discomfort over the unexpected announcement of the early dates for the application of competitive funds from the Ministry of Cultures, Arts, and Heritage (MinCAP, for its Spanish acronym) of Chile. This three-month advance, explained as a desperate attempt to improve the image of an outgoing government by “supporting” the cultural sector, put various institutions and artists in a tight spot, having to create projects and obtain the requested documentation in less than a month. Additionally, there were strong complaints when it was revealed that many of the calls for 2024 are delayed in the delivery of funds and publication of results.

The Problem of “Competitiveness”

The “crisis of competitiveness,” as it has been known for years in the sector, highlights the fragility with which the arts are financed in the southern cone. In Chile, as in much of Latin America, artistic production and circulation are heavily dependent on state funds. These, to provide equal opportunities among different agents, are distributed through a competitive system of competitiveness where the state plays a subsidiary role. However, this system established during the return to Chilean democracy, far from democratizing the allocation of resources for the implementation of cultural projects, has tended towards greater marginalization since the evaluation criteria reward form over content.

The funds remain with the same people, accustomed to the bureaucratic format, creating a logic of exclusion where those with more education and practice in competing continue to win grants without providing space for new projects and generating an oversupply of short-lived cultural manifestations. The competitive lines, in turn, create a significant bias between what is considered art and what is not, perpetuating a closed idea of “culture” (as unique and legitimate) and leaving little room for interdisciplinarity.

Additionally, an extra problem of competitiveness is the financial dependency it creates in the artistic circuit. The sustainability of a sector accustomed to administrative paternalism that subsidizes without real commitment becomes difficult [1]. Numerous are the cases of foundations and corporations that have had to stop their regular activities for one or two years due to lack of funding.

Promises of Change

The Chilean political landscape during the 21st century, characterized by an oscillating bipartisan dynamic, has had attempts to implement sustainability models for the cultural sector. Support programs for cultural institutions recognized by the state have been created, modified, and closed every four years, changing according to the visions and priorities of each government.

Today, Chile has the PAOCC (Support Program for Collaborative Cultural Organizations, for its Spanish acronym), Red Cultura, and Puntos Cultura. All these are support programs for the cultural sector that put resources directly into the hands of cultural agents. However, the budget they have is still limited and insufficient to generate a real long-term impact.

The current administration, led by President Gabriel Boric, has set out to achieve two important milestones: (1) reach 1% of the annual budget in cultural programs and (2) create the Cultural Worker Statute. In the last public account—more than halfway through the government period and with a majority opposition in the National Congress—the promises were once again put on the table, but they still seem distant.

Looking Towards the Future

As proposed by the former Minister of Cultures, Arts, and Heritage, Julieta Brodsky, “Chile must move towards a national cultural financing system that balances dignities and narrows gaps. A system that addresses both tradition and modernity; that

allows the sustainability of cultural institutions; that gives dignity to cultural work; that supports the emerging while recognizing the trajectory; that sustains the reproduction of collective and popular cultural practices; that generates supply but also an increasing demand for cultural content; and that narrows structural inequality both in production and cultural participation.” (own translation).

The competitiveness in which they are currently immersed

fosters the perpetuation of production, access, and consumption gaps of cultural goods in the local population, maintaining structural inequalities. Ultimately, Chile and Latin America must move towards sustainability models for the cultural ecosystem.

References

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