### UNIVERSIDAD ABIERTA DE RECOLETA



ROOTED
KNOWLEDGE: HOW
POPULAR EDUCATION
CAN DRIVE SOCIAL
TRANSFORMATION



Pluriversidad





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Ejecutive Director UAR: Rodrigo Hurtado Director TNI: Fiona Dove Project Coordinator TNI: Lavinia Steinfort Texts: UAR Team Design: Manuel Jiménez Photographs: UAR Archive November 2023

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### Abstract

This article addresses the trajectory of the Universidad Abierta de Recoleta (UAR), founded in 2018 by the local government of the Chilean municipality of Recoleta, a popular education project committed to social transformation and the search for alternatives to neoliberalism. Funded mostly by the municipal budget and to a lesser extent by international allies, the UAR is an institution focused on offering educational opportunities throughout life, in order to cultivate a critical citizenry capable of building politically democratic, socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable communities. Its proposal updates the tradition of Latin American popular universities through permanent educational innovation, focusing on municipal workers, social leaders and diverse collectives that struggle for their emancipation. The UAR's educational programs have tens of thousands of students in sixty-five countries, including international bilingual diploma programs offered in collaboration with foreign entities. In a complementary way, the UAR strengthens its links with the territory that hosts it through the implementation of research and extension projects co-constructed with the different communities that live there.





### Introduction

As the cradle of neoliberalism. Chile continues to attract the interest of intellectuals, activists and progressive collectives around the world, as has just been demonstrated by the countless commemorative events marking the 50th anniversary of the civil-military coup that overthrew the Popular Unity government headed by President Salvador Allende. The country that emerged then -and that evolved up to the present- constitutes a historical, cultural and political space that represents multiple challenges and complexities for those who approach reality from the honest conviction that another world is possible.

Facing such challenges and complexities from the territories, through their local governments, demands additional efforts due to the chronic insufficiency of material and human resources at their disposal to fulfill the function of first line public action.

Recoleta is an urban municipality located in the northern sector of the city of Santiago de Chile. Created in 1991, the commune of Recoleta has an estimated population of 156 thousand inhabitants, of which 80,000 are women.<sup>1</sup> More than 20% of its inhabitants are migrants,<sup>2</sup> the vast majority from Latin American countries (Peru, Colombia, Venezuela and others), although historically it has also welcomed communities from Palestine, Korea and other Asian nations. On the other hand, almost 11% of Recoleta's population are members of an indigenous people of Chile (mainly Mapuche, with 8.4%); and an as yet undetermined percentage belong to other indigenous peoples of the Americas. According to the 2015 National Socioeconomic Characterization Survey (CASEN), almost 14% of Recoleta residents have incomes below the poverty line. If the multidimensional poverty rate is considered, this figure exceeds 26%.3

<sup>1. 2017</sup> Census, Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas (INE)

<sup>2.</sup> Departamento de Extranjería y Migración and INE, 2019.

<sup>3.</sup> This rate seeks to measure the number of people who suffer deprivation in the following dimensions: education, health, work, social security, housing and standard of living in general, beyond their income level.





Since 2012, the Municipality of Recoleta has been led by Mayor Daniel Jadue, a militant of the Communist Party of Chile, who will finish his third term in December 2024. During his administration, the local government has promoted several initiatives that seek to guarantee universal access to basic rights for its inhabitants, among them the "popular" pharmacy, opticians and real estate agency.

The Universidad Abierta de Recoleta, UAR, is another of the initiatives promoted by a municipal government whose objective is not only to manage a city hall, but also to transform the reality of its neighbors. For this social transformation to be possible, it is not enough just to invest more resources or improve management. It is necessary to take advantage of all the knowledge and intelligence of citizens, which requires that people have information and knowledge to address their problems and challenges, have access to culture and have spaces where they can exchange knowledge and experiences. On the other hand, managers, professionals, technicians and municipal officials demand continuous training and a localized diagnostic knowledge of the reality in which they perform their functions.

In short, the challenge is that citizens have access to education throughout their lives, and that local government authorities and workers have the knowledge and technical tools necessary not only to improve management, but also to transform reality. After decades of neoliberal educational policies, the UAR's mission is no other than to break the commercial logic that governs higher education and thus to democratize knowledge, using it at the service of the community of Recoleta, Chile and the world.

The following pages offer a synthesis of the work of the Universidad Abierta de Recoleta as it approaches its fifth anniversary.





### **Executive summary**

In November 2018, the Universidad Abierta de Recoleta was inaugurated with the aim of democratizing access to a plurality of knowledge, generating critical thinking and contributing to the exchange of ideas in an educational space designed to produce and reproduce useful knowledge that responds to the interests, demands and needs of people in a perspective of social transformation.

Since its inception, the UAR sought to open a training space for all people who wish to learn free of charge on a wide range of topics, without distinction of residence, socioeconomic status or prior level of education.

In order to fulfill this mission, the UAR has deployed a strategy of national and international alliances. Among many other allies, the Universities of Chile and Santiago de Chile, the two main public universities in the country, can be highlighted.

Through these collaborations, hundreds of academics, artists and intellectuals have revived and updated the value of volunteer work as an effective tool to expand the margins of what is possible. Thus, in November 2018, an "academic call" was opened, aimed at the national academic community, as well as technicians and professionals interested in sharing, on a voluntary and unpaid basis, their knowledge and experiences around different thematic areas, with emphasis on current social issues.

This open call, as well as all the subsequent ones, have raised great interest, showing the support and the transversal sympathy that the UAR awakens among all those who aspire to build in Chile a higher education at the service of the community and not of profitability.

The Universidad Abierta de Recoleta is the first popular university providing municipal, national and international coverage in the world, a status based mainly on its teaching activities, since more than 120,000 students from Recoleta, Chile and around 70 countries have participated in its almost 500 educational programs in different modalities.

In 2019 alone, the UAR counted on the disinterested collaboration of almost 400 volunteer instructors, which made it possible to deliver more than 300 training programs in on-site sessions, using the facilities of 4 municipal high schools in Recoleta, with the participation of more than 7,000 students. In addition, in November of the same year, the UARDigital platform was inaugurated, which offers free and open courses, prepared and taught by academics from partner universities. This modality allowed the incorporation of more than 3,000 students from Chile and 28 other countries to the UAR community.

Additionally, during this first year an open call for research proposals was made, in the same thematic areas as the courses; and a series of outreach activities were developed, such as colloquiums, forums, lectures, open lectures, book launches and exhibition of documentaries, using spaces of Recoleta's Cultural Corporation, the Pedro Lemebel Municipal Library and other municipal venues.

In this way, the UAR has taken on from its origins the three traditional academic functions that make up a conventional university: teaching, research and outreach (creating links with the community). In addition, in October 2019, the Institutional Analysis Unit was created, with the purpose of providing data to support the management and strategic development of the University and implementing a systematic process of institutional self-evaluation.

This foundational stage of the UAR ends in early March 2020, with the presentation of the Institutional Strategic Project 2020-2024 (PEI),<sup>4</sup> which sought to define, through a participatory planning process, the mission of the University, its objectives and strategies for the first half of the new decade.

<sup>4.</sup> https://www.uar.cl/universidad-memorias-y-planes/

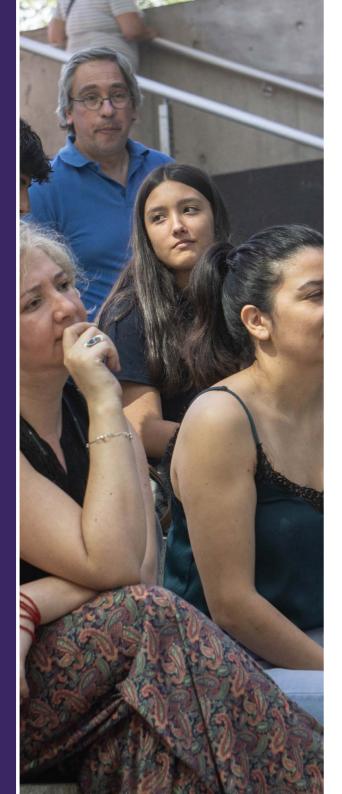


As history would have it, the elaboration and presentation of this PEI coincided with two extraordinary events. On a national level, in October 2019, a deep political and social crisis erupted violently throughout the country, demanding greater social justice and an end to inequalities. At a global level, meanwhile, a pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus was unleashed, resulting in countless loss of human lives and threatening health and social security systems around the world, among other consequences.

During the years 2020 and 2021, this situation forced the UAR to make important adjustments to its teaching, research and outreach work, taking full advantage of the technological capabilities and experience of its professional team with a view to enhancing remote modalities. Despite the complexities of the context, the Universidad Abierta de Recoleta grew and progressed significantly during this period.

In the educational area, 111 courses and workshops were offered in digital mode (asynchronous) or in virtual rooms (synchronous), which allowed expanding the UAR educational community with hundreds of volunteer instructors and more than 80 thousand students from different regions of Chile and the world. In addition, 8 hybrid (on-site and remote) workshops were held, which included some activities in high schools in Recoleta, as far as health conditions permitted. A total of 122 students participated in this modality.

In April 2020, the Research Department was created to give a strong impulse to research applied to the local community. This made it possible to carry out new open call processes and to try to give continuity to ongoing projects, severely hampered by isolation and social distance. But it also encouraged the direct execution of research projects by the UAR in collaboration with various municipal units, aimed at investigating local social problems and systematizing and evaluating the municipality's innovative policies, plans and programs. Thus, since 2020, research has been carried out on the situation of people with disabilities and severe dependency in Recoleta and their caregivers, the Territorial Health Model of the municipality has been systematized, and the "Popular Pharmacy" and "Popular



Real Estate Agency" programs have been evaluated, to mention the most relevant initiatives.

Finally, in the institutional area, cooperation agreements were established with important entities such as Unicef, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Save the Children and the Transnational Institute, among others, plus two Institutes were created, which have allowed the promotion of academic activities around strategic issues for social transformation and the quality of life of the communities: the Institute of Local Governments, whose focus is to contribute to the strengthening of local governments and territorial social organizations in Recoleta, Chile and Latin America; and the Institute of Disability, Inclusion and Caregiving, dedicated to the development and generation of knowledge about people with dependencies and their caregivers.

A highlight of 2022 was the return to face-to-face learning, with a special focus on the link between the local government and the community of Recoleta. In the educational area, seven community workshops were held in schools and social organizations of the commune, which brought together more than 300 students, mostly residents of Recoleta; in addition, an open call was made to offer more than 50 on-site courses this year. At the same time, distance learning continued with 82 courses and workshops that attracted almost 11 thousand students, including the "International Diploma in Transformative Local Governments," which includes four bilingual courses developed in conjunction with the Transnational Institute.

In the area of research, once the bulk of the COVID-19 pandemic was behind us, it was possible to resume the execution of field activities and conclude several ongoing projects, as well as reactivate links with municipal units and researchers of some open projects. In addition, a coordinating unit for open projects was set up, and progress was made in the creation of the Center for Media Studies, which will carry out studies and analyses of the mass media.

In the outreach area, a new Department of Extension and Communications was created, which seeks to project the presence of the UAR in different spheres, achieving international visibility, national recognition and a deeper link with the

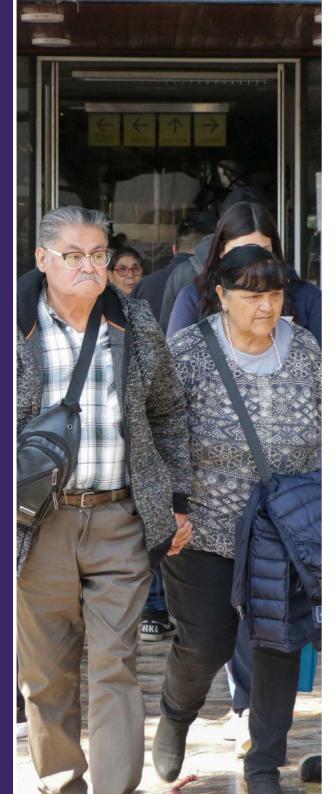


territory of Recoleta. During 2022, 67 public debate activities were organized on contingent and artistic topics in various disciplines; and the project Tejido Social de Recoleta (Tesore) was launched, with the aim of developing initiatives, activities and joint projects with the organized community of the municipality.

At the institutional level, two new institutes were created: the Institute of Political Economy, which promotes participation and social debate on economic issues from a critical and transformative perspective in the face of neoliberal hegemony; and the Institute of Open Education, which seeks to innovate in educational content and practices to develop knowledge, values and skills for sustainable development and a culture of peace. Finally, during this period, a first annual process of institutional self-evaluation was carried out, which made it possible to prepare a strategic diagnosis on the progress of the UAR during the period 2020-2022 and to define future challenges, based on a participatory process.

In the current year, the UAR continued its process of institutional expansion and consolidation, with the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the military coup that overthrew the government of President Salvador Allende as a cross-cutting theme in all its activities. During this period, the university deepened its ties with the world of labor and organized civil society, through the signing of cooperation agreements with the country's main trade unions and various citizen groups related to the main issues that trouble Chilean society.

In short, the Universidad Abierta de Recoleta is a benchmark for inclusive education and community transformation in Chile and internationally. The UAR looks towards the future with the determination to continue being an engine of change and a bastion of quality education at the service of social transformation.



### Political and administrative framework

After twelve years of local governments headed by the Independent Democratic Union (UDI), the party of pinochetism, in 2012 Mayor Daniel Jadue, a militant of the Communist Party of Chile, took over the Municipality of Recoleta. After a first period of 4 years dedicated basically to clean up the financial situation of the municipality, a stage marked by important innovations begins, whose common feature is the search for solutions to critical problems for the poorest citizens, who suffer the abuses of a concentrated and deregulated market that often operates on the basis of collusion of large companies. Thus, first the Popular Pharmacy is created, followed by the Popular Opticians, the Audiological Center and the Popular Real State Agency, which builds the housing complex "Social Justice I" made up of two apartment buildings for rent at a fair price, with a priority focus on women who are heads of their households.

On November 26, 2018, the creation of the Universidad Abierta de Recoleta, was announced, news that caused a great stir in a country with a highly commoditized education, which in the case of higher education exhibits 85% of the total enrollment in private hands. Administratively, the UAR is a program attached to the

Municipal Education Administration Department (DAEM). Its funding, meanwhile, comes mainly from the municipal budget and is devoted almost entirely to operational expenses and the payment of the salaries of the technical-professional team that adds value to the work of hundreds of academics, artists and intellectuals who collaborate voluntarily with this popular adult education project. The initial budget of the Universidad Abierta de Recoleta was CLP \$300 million, increasing year after year to reach a figure close to CLP \$500 million at present. Additionally, since 2021 the UAR has received from different allies and foreign donors a figure close to 40,000 euros per year.

In 2022 the UAR carried out an exhaustive institutional self-assessment process that shed light on its main weaknesses and provided proposals for their solution, which have been progressively implemented. Currently, with the support of the UAR's Research Department, a project for the systematization and evaluation of the UAR is being developed. In addition, as part of the activities designed to celebrate the first five years of the university's existence in November, an economic and social evaluation of the project is planned, which will ideally be carried out by one of the UAR's allied conventional universities.

Finally, it is estimated that by the end of this year the UAR will become a private corporation, governed by a board of directors made up of renowned academics, artists and intellectuals, whose basic objective is to safeguard the continuity of the project in the event of a possible change of local government and, above all, to provide the university with an agile and flexible administrative structure that will ensure its sustainability over time.

<sup>5.</sup> https://www.uar.cl/investigacion-proyectos-de-investigacion-educacion-popular-e-innovacion-municipal-el-caso-de-la-universidad-abierta-de-recoleta/



### Teaching: Adult education to create a critical citizenship

The Universidad Abierta de Recoleta is part of a long tradition of open/popular universities and its teaching project is centered on andragogy<sup>6</sup> or adult education, within the framework of popular and critical education.

The first popular university dates back to 1899. In Paris, France, a group of intellectuals, mostly philosophers from the Sorbonne, together with a group of workers, led by the typographer George Deherme, established this non-compulsory form of university. Their common desire was to build a new society, based on the collaboration of ideas and intentions, and with education at its core, that is, as a substantive tool for liberation and transformation.

Returning to the present, the popular university has great relevance, since the development of formative actions linked to the needs of citizen and transformative education of the adult population is the priority objective of a growing diversity of organizations and institutions around the world. Conventional and popular universities often share an institutional mission that is expressed in teaching, research and outreach activities, but of a different nature, purpose and function. Table 1 proposes a synthesis of these differences.

#### TABLE 1. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CONVENTIONAL AND POPULAR UNIVERSITIES.

Nature	Conventional	Student-teacher interaction
	Popular	Interweaving of popular social world and knowledge
Goals	Conventional	Scientific, theoretical, doctrinal development
	Popular	Democratization of knowledge Social transformation Creation of knowledge from the territory
Functions and structure	Conventional	Granting of professional and academic degrees Structured in schools, departments, centers, programs
	Popular	Social actors, centers for the integration and mobilization of citizen participation and local knowledge  Certification/confirmation of knowledge that arises from reflection-action  Autonomous governance, self-managed and in collaboration with conventional and popular university forms in the country and abroad

In Latin America, open or popular universities constitute an educational model and an institutional framework that has come to fruition since the beginning of the 20th century. As a document from the University of Cordoba, Argentina, the cradle of the University Reform of 1918, recalls, and within the framework of that same reform process, "popular universities became a symbol of worker-student unity, and institutions of this type were created throughout Latin America". Brazil, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela today have important institutions of this type.

<sup>7.</sup> Universidad Nacional de Córdoba (s.f.). Programa Universidades Populares. En <a href="https://www.unc.edu.ar/sites/default/files/Programa-Universidades-Populares.pdf">https://www.unc.edu.ar/sites/default/files/Programa-Universidades-Populares.pdf</a>

In the specific case of Chile, it is worth mentioning the Universidad Popular "Lastarria", a project that was undertaken between 1910 and 1927, and later, the Universidad Popular "Valentín Letelier", created between 1945 and 1959, both born under the auspices of the Universidad de Chile. More than a century later, and as a result of the changes that the civil-military dictatorship (1973-1990) introduced to the higher education system in Chile,8 the debate on both university "forms" has been reopened precisely because of the emergence of the UAR.

In the aforementioned perspective of critical citizenship, it is evident that "(...) citizenship and democracy are today urgent in our Latin American and global context". Consequently, the UAR places its focus not on academicism or on the mere transmission of knowledge ("contents" or "subjects"), nor on a certain utilitarianism in vogue in the market society: generation of competent and qualified labor (ergo, much more skilled to compete, than to work in teams or in solidarity). Likewise, the UAR disbelieves in the theory of the end of history, so appropriate to ensure the victory of capitalism, in a sort of constant "repetition of the present". 10

This is coherent with the formative pillar for adults whose learning processes, as it is known, from Knowles (1970) onwards, have been increasingly described in their particularities.

Thus, aspects such as objectives, competencies, skills, abilities, topics and activities that will allow the construction of personal and collective learning, are adequately anchored in the situational characterization of those who participate in the training program and, therefore, in the factors of liberation that arise from these particularities. Each formative experience within the framework of the UAR emphasizes the constant search, the permanent training, rather than the hypertrophy of knowledge that pretends - consciously or unconsciously - to exhaust them in a single formative experience. "If there is something that contradicts the nature of the human being, that something is the non-search and, therefore, it is immobility". <sup>11</sup>

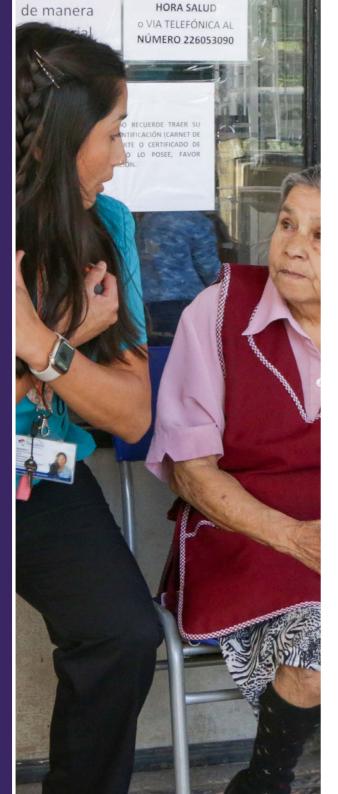
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- 11. Freire, P. (2018). El grito manso. Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores.





The UAR understands the requirements and demands of a society that requires the exercise of an authentically free citizenship where communities produce and critically appropriate knowledge. UAR students must experience how this knowledge is interwoven in and with their historical-territorial-social-political situation, allowing them to broaden their paradigms of personal and collective freedom for effective social transformation. In such imbrication resides the knowledge that this educational project fosters.

Thus, the hallmark of the UAR is its relationship with the community, with the territory where it is located. In the face of social, political, cultural, and work-related challenges, the response of this andragogic educational model is education for change, promoting an epistemological and social transformation (reflection-action).



## Tools to improve the skills of municipal workers

Since its first educational activities, held in 2019, the UAR has prioritized communication with the management areas of the municipality, so that each of the training programs has considered the specific and general training of municipal workers. In accordance with this purpose, of the 319 classroom courses that were taught that year, at least 50% of them were attended by employees of the municipality of Recoleta.

As of the academic year 2020, the institutional Strategic Project 2020-2024 came into effect, in accordance with which systematic processes of articulation between the academic area and the management areas of the municipality were activated, in order to gather their needs and generate specific training programs to meet such requirements.

In addition, the teaching activity that year was determined by the limitations imposed by the health situation (the COVID-19 pandemic). In this context, the training emphasis was directed to the Municipal Health Department (DESAL), in particular to those of its officials who had to deal primarily with the care referrals of those affected by the virus. Thus, during the first semester of 2020, the digital course Infections associated with primary health care in the context of COVID-19 was delivered to 60 participants, all of them DESAL workers. Its objective was to apply the fundamental concepts of infections associated with health care (IAAS) in preventive and control actions, in the context of diseases with epidemic/pandemic





potential, such as COVID-19 and others. For this educational action, the UAR partnered with the School of Public Health "Dr. Salvador Allende Gossens", part of the Universidad de Chile, which made it possible to have a teaching staff of the highest academic level.

During the 2021 academic year, we worked with the Municipal Education Administration Department (DAEM), in charge of the administrative and pedagogical management of the 19 municipal educational establishments that operate in the municipality of Recoleta. It was the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions were still in place, especially quarantines in most of the country. In this context, the workshop Teaching tools for a popular and critical virtual classroom was held, whose learning outcomes focused on the participants developing their professional and personal skills to innovate in various areas of pedagogical management in the face of the challenges of remote teaching. The academic faculty was made up of specialists from the Centro Saberes Docentes of the School of Philosophy and Humanities of the Universidad de Chile. Forty (40) teachers from educational establishments in Recoleta participated in this program that lasted 12 weeks (3 months).

During 2022, the Universidad Abierta de Recoleta and the Transnational Institute (TNI) of the Netherlands carried out the International Diploma on Transformative Local Governments, a unique training program that gathered almost 3,000 people from around 50 countries in any of the four courses that comprise its Spanish and English versions. This year, the second version of this diploma course is underway, with similar results.



The first semester of 2022 saw the completion of an academic program that responded to the Department of Health's need to resume an initiative from 2016. It is an intervention strategy aimed at the implementation of medicinal gardens with a preventive and health-promoting approach, with a pluralistic and intercultural perspective, focused on individuals, families and communities, promoting different resources through herbalism, and encouraging the creation of about 30 community gardens. For this purpose, a disciplinary team was formed to prepare a Procedure Manual for the implementation of a Complementary Health strategy within the framework of Primary Health Care (APS) in the municipality of Recoleta. The workshop - which was called Complementary Health: medicinal gardens and/or medicinal food - oriented its learning outcomes to the development of skills to build, from the situated knowledge on complementary medicine, a model of integrative health through medicinal gardens. The workshop was held for 6 weeks in the last quarter of 2022.

During 2023, UAR's academic planning included a live course for Health officials, namely: Technical skills for the food and medicinal garden. This course is aimed at training officials of the health centers of Recoleta as a platform to strengthen therapeutic practices in the primary care centers of the municipality. Emphasis is placed on innovative actions that can offer possibilities for improving access to self-care practices.

A second distinctive action to support municipal management during the current year arose from the articulation of the UAR-Community Development Office (DIDECO). This took the form of the creation and implementation of the School for Social Leadership as an integral affirmative space for UAR's teaching activities. The purpose of this School is to contribute to form social organizations in Recoleta and other territories, thus opening a pool of organized knowledge that supports the



realization of common desires and the transformation of community reality. During the first semester, the following courses were part of the curriculum of this School: Power to the neighbors: local citizen participation, Communication for leadership, Introduction to Excel programming for web development, Workshop on formulation of social projects, Critical citizenship, Basic legal concepts for citizenship, Inclusive strategies for diversity in the community, Update on digital technologies and disruptive phenomena.

In this same period, digital courses and diploma courses directly related to municipal management in various thematic perspectives are being implemented, namely: new municipalism (second edition), community support for people with dementia, human rights education, political training and new approaches to public enterprises. In all these cases, the UAR has partnered with international entities that ensure trajectory and specialization in these areas, in addition to building together a top-level academic faculty from Latin America, the Caribbean, the United States and Europe.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the face-to-face diploma course on political training for unions held in the last quarter of 2023, within the framework of an agreement signed between the municipality of Recoleta and the most important workers' unions in the country.



# Research to assess, innovate and improve municipal services Research and local policies in Chile

Since its consolidation as an independent Republic in the mid-19th century, the administrative political system in Chile has been characterized by a strong centralism, which concentrates much of the power in two central level institutions -Presidency and Parliament- historically controlled by the oligarchy, while severely restricting the political autonomy of its 16 regions and 346 municipalities or communes.

Throughout this period, the different political forces have done little to modify this hyper-concentration of power, focusing their efforts on the electoral dispute for the government and Parliament. In spite of what Luis Emilio Recabarren, founder of the Communist Party of Chile, stated, the progressive forces have not been oblivious to this dynamic and, with honorable exceptions, have not been able to come up with a political project that emphasizes the importance of the local level in the processes of social transformation.

At the communal level, the administration falls to the municipalities, which only have 12% of the national budget, despite being responsible for the administration of key functions for the quality of life of the people, such as primary health and part of primary and secondary education; while the central government manages about 80%, while the Regional Governments manage the remaining 8%.

In this context, most municipalities function in practice as entities that manage or administer the execution in the communal territory of public policies and programs designed at the central level, rather than as "local governments" per se. Lacking both technical capacities and a specific political project, these central programs

tend to be replicated in a standardized manner at the communal level, without a local diagnosis to ensure their relevance and allow for adjustments to the local reality.

On the other hand, municipalities also have a certain margin of action for the implementation of local programs or initiatives in various areas, including health and education establishments under their administration; planning and regulation of territorial development, construction and urbanization; promotion of community development and the cleaning and ornamentation of the municipality, among others.

However, most of these policies, programs and projects of local initiative are not based on a local diagnosis based on evidence, but rather respond to other types of logic. In the best of cases, they originate in processes of "citizen participation", which allow to gather the opinion of the community and thus prioritize certain objectives, activities and goals. In many other cases, they simply respond to the will or political commitments acquired by the incumbent authority; to the demands of the community, through the financing (direct or by public tender) of projects presented by social organizations or other social actors; or simply to tradition, i.e., giving continuity to activities that have been carried out for many years and are rooted in the community of beneficiaries.

This disconnection between municipal management and research is not only seen in the design or local implementation of policies, programs and initiatives, but is also replicated with respect to their assessment. Regularly, this task is limited to verifying the coverage of the activities carried out and user satisfaction, so that the assessment takes on the characteristics of an administrative supervision. Thus, it is not possible to know the real impact of local public policies in relation to the fulfillment of their objectives and the quality of life of their beneficiaries.



Under the administration of Mayor Daniel Jadue, who took office for his first term in 2012 and will finish his third and last term in 2024, the Municipality of Recoleta has taken very significant steps to move towards the establishment of a true local government, implementing multiple innovative initiatives aimed at challenging the market and the private sector for the provision of goods and services that are fundamental for the quality of life of its neighbors. The following are the most emblematic projects, for example:

- The Popular Pharmacy, the Popular Opticians and the Audiological Center, which offer medicine, health supplies, prescription glasses and hearing aids to the entire community of Recoleta, at prices well below those of the private market.
- Popular Real Estate Agency, which builds and manages apartment buildings for rent at fair prices for women who are heads of household or victims of domestic violence, senior citizens and migrant families from Recoleta and other communities.
- The Popular Rehabilitation Center, which provides rehabilitation services to people with disabilities who live, work or study in Recoleta.
- The Universidad Abierta de Recoleta, which is reported on in these pages.

The impact of these projects has transcended the borders of Recoleta, being replicated in different municipalities in the country, by mayors with very different political tendencies. Moreover, they have opened a national public debate on these issues, questioning the commodification of basic goods and services and laying the foundations for a transformative political project of a municipalist nature.



### Why do research?

The UAR was born with the main mission of democratizing knowledge, mainly through training programs open to the community. However, from its origins it included a unit specifically dedicated to the promotion of research. In this first stage, the main emphasis of this unit was to promote the collaborative development of very diverse scientific research projects, and to consolidate itself as a space open to young researchers and to subjects that have no place in traditional universities.

However, the intense process of social and political transformation that Chile has been experiencing since 2019 highlighted the need to establish a more direct link between research and the improvement of people's material conditions; and to reposition in the collective imagination the key role of the public sector, social participation and universal social rights, as opposed to the individualistic, privatizing and subsidiary logics promoted by neoliberalism.

This context prompted a deepening and redefinition of the role of the UAR in the social and political process, which in the field of research resulted in the following definitions:





- Research should be oriented to generate new knowledge that not only promotes a critical perspective towards the current model of development, but also proposes public policies or other concrete initiatives with territorial relevance, which impact on the living conditions of Recoleta's neighbors and the communities that use municipal services in general and prefigure alternative models of development.
- It is necessary to provide a critical view in the reports and other outreach products, which will show the inequities produced by the current development model, offer concrete alternatives to overcome them at the local level, and allow progress in the construction of strategic horizons at the national level regarding the issues addressed.

In this new scenario, the UAR defined to prioritize the development of scientific research projects that would specifically contribute to:

- Characterize and understand social phenomena or issues at the local level, which have an impact on the quality of life and welfare of the community of Recoleta and other territories.
- Systematize, assess and/or produce recommendations to improve policies, plans and programs in various areas of local management.



### UAR's Research Model

In order to fulfill this mission, the Research Department's staff has been expanded, allowing it to operate as a research center at the service of the local government and the community of Recoleta. During the last few years, this has allowed the development of several research projects executed directly by the professional team of the UAR, in collaboration with one or more municipal units of Recoleta.

Each of these investigations has the support and advice of an academic and social panel, made up of academics, municipal workers, representatives of civil society and social leaders, who collaborate on a voluntary basis. These panels allow, from the professional or personal experiences of their members, to gather proposals that contribute to the achievement of the research goals, propose improvements to the methodological design and information gathering instruments, critically review the reports and other results of each study and elaborate public policy recommendations. In addition, they contribute to promoting dissemination, adherence and participation in the study in their respective areas.

Since its creation in 2020 to date, seven research projects have been developed following this collaborative model of situated research, contributing on topics such as housing, health, sexual diversity, disability and care. This has allowed the UAR to:

- Generate synergies with academia, the Recoleta community and municipal workers to address complex local issues, from an intersectoral and interdisciplinary approach.
- Systematize the implementation processes and the functioning of innovative municipal initiatives originated in Recoleta, including the actors involved, management, human and material resources, among others; and make recommendations for their improvement and replicability in other territories. This constitutes a relevant input for other local governments interested in implementing similar initiatives.
- Assess the impact of these innovative programs, using scientific research methodologies. This has made it possible to confirm the significant contribution of these initiatives to the quality of life of their beneficiaries and of the Recoleta community in general. As a result, it has confirmed the high social and political valuation they have raised; and it has provided objective information on experiences of remunicipalization of basic goods and services, a debate usually biased by ideological positions, economic interests and the media at their service.
- In an incipient manner, it has made it possible to investigate budgetary and economic aspects of some of these initiatives, with a view to assessing their social profitability.

In addition to these investigations, the Research Department is in charge of coordinating an annual process of institutional self-evaluation, which allows the UAR, on the basis of a participatory process, to generate a strategic diagnosis on its progress in relation to its Institutional Project and other planning tools, promote internal reflection processes and define challenges and future tasks for its different units.



### Next Steps

In the future, we expect to consolidate the current lines of research and progressively incorporate topics such as citizen security, entrepreneurship, indebtedness, migration and others of relevance to local governance and the daily problems of the community. The greatest challenge is to achieve a more significant impact of research results in the design, implementation and assessment of innovative municipal policies, plans and programs with high social impact.

To this end, the creation of a Local Public Policy Center is planned, which will make it possible to institutionalize and expand the professional team dedicated to research tasks in areas of local impact, generate concrete public policy proposals, advance in the economic analysis of municipal programs and open spaces for collaboration with other municipalities.

Simultaneously, the UAR will continue to periodically issue open calls for research, with the purpose of maintaining a counter-hegemonic space for the production of knowledge, open to all types of scientific research projects that contribute to the construction of politically democratic, socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable communities, as well as to the strengthening of local governments throughout Chile.

These calls are open to individual researchers, research teams, institutions or organizations in the social, educational, scientific, cultural or artistic fields, who collaborate on an unpaid basis, with the support of the professional team of the UAR and some municipal units.



### Extension and Outreach

Since its creation in 2018, UAR has developed countless outreach initiatives designed by and for the various communities and interest groups.

These activities seek to generate impact on public debate, stimulating dialogue from a reflective standpoint and delivering theoretical and practical tools for the solution of common problems in multiple areas of human development. It also seeks to provide access and participation in the arts and cultural heritage under the concepts of transformation and co-creation, reviving local expressions and the invisible history of the practices of cultural resistance.

With a focus on connecting with the territory and the permanent construction of networks at local, national and international levels, the UAR develops activities in face-to-face and online formats, highlighting current issues from different areas of knowledge.

Each activity is organized collaboratively with the areas and institutes of the UAR; departments and areas of the Municipality of Recoleta; academic institutions, social and territorial organizations, etc., with whom the UAR has cooperation agreements.



Within the UAR Extension area we find the sub-areas of Cooperation, Communications and the Recoleta Social Fabric program. The latter is a cooperation initiative between organizations of the community of Recoleta and the UAR. The objective is to open spaces for dialogue and collaboration that allow community organizations to network, generate tools and knowledge to strengthen social organization and leadership, and to develop, together with the UAR, initiatives, activities and projects that are relevant to the needs of the territory.

During the current year, the Extension and Outreach Department oriented its internal work towards updating the principles and objectives of the work carried out by the university in this area. Some of these guiding principles, which are based on the strategic objectives of the UAR, are as follows:

**Relationship with the territory:** To become a permanent bridge between the academic, organizational and community spheres, placing the needs of the communities of Recoleta at the center and contributing decisively to initiatives that contribute to the improvement of people's lives.

**Collaboration and openness:** To encourage work in local, national and international networks, in a horizontal and thoughtful way, for the achievement of sustainable and effective actions with the greatest impact.

**Inclusion and diversity:** To promote access to knowledge opportunities for all people regardless of their origin or condition, fostering the recognition of the diversity of experiences and perspectives.

**Dialogue and thought:** To promote encounters with a critical, democratic approach and based on citizen dialogue, as well as the development of knowledge resources on issues of political, social and cultural relevance in today's society. Co-creation and experimentation: To offer experiences of collaborative creation and





expressions of the arts and cultures, from a critical and constructive point of view, contributing to territorial and national artistic-cultural production.

On the external front, a rich program of activities was organized to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the civil-military coup that overthrew the government of President Salvador Allende, including the **Open Academic Congress "Relevance and Lessons of the Popular Unity Project"**, a space for the confluence of the political and cultural sectors of the country. It was a space for the convergence of the traditional academic world and the growing world of popular research and creation, which aimed to discuss, highlight and remember that tragic moment in the history of Chile, as an urgent exercise in the face of the enormous challenges of the present.

Organized by the Universidad Abierta de Recoleta together with 23 social organizations and academic institutions, both Chilean and foreign, the congress was attended by 136 speakers from Chile and the world, and was held in person and online on September 5 and 6, 2023.

The Congress took place as part of the International Summit for Memory and Human Rights: Allende 50 years, which was held in Recoleta between September 2 and 9, a meeting that also included an International Book Fair and an International Political Seminar.

<sup>12.</sup> https://www.uar.cl/noticias/memoria-y-miradas-de-futuro-asi-fue-el-congreso-academico-abierto-de-la-uar/



### Final words

In only five years since its creation, the Universidad Abierta de Recoleta has achieved a level of development and impact that, without a doubt, allows us to qualify it as a successful project. Surprisingly, it is an initiative that arose in a poor district of the Chilean capital. What are, then, the factors that explain this success? A first factor to highlight is the vision and political will of the mayor of Recoleta, who dared to go beyond the merely administrative role that characterizes the actions of municipalities in Chile to give way to a local government committed to a program of radical and innovative transformations in critical areas for the welfare of people and communities. A second success factor is the training of a large number of volunteers willing to share their knowledge and know-how free of charge, in addition to the cultivation of a growing network of institutional alliances with academic, social and non-governmental organizations. Likewise, the early incorporation of the beneficiaries in the design and implementation of training, research and outreach activities has contributed powerfully to the pertinence and timely nature of the University's work. No less important, it is worth mentioning the creation of a technical and professional team with broad capabilities and strong commitment, which has had total autonomy to carry out its tasks. Finally, the UAR's involvement with the permanent structures of local government has been key to legitimize and support a project that is absolutely atypical at this level of Chilean public administration. To the above must be added the concurrence of two extraordinary exogenous phenomena. On the one hand, the so-called social outburst ("estallido social") that shook Chile in 2019 demanding greater social justice, which was an endorsement of the critical vision of the UAR; on the other hand, the Covid-19 global pandemic stimulated the adoption of digital training modalities that made possible the irradiation of the project to the rest of the country and the world. In short, these are the main factors that explain the rapid development of the Universidad Abierta de Recoleta, from which, paradoxically, also come its main threats and weaknesses. Consequently, the key strategic objective for the future will be to avert the dangers that threaten the survival of the UAR, where the most important issues are those related to financing, scope and adequate institutionalism and governance of an initiative that went far beyond the limits and possibilities of the territory where it was born.



