

The Lost Creativity: Creative Economy according to Brazil's Culture Ministers (2015-2017)

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Abstract

The aim is to examine how Brazilian Culture Ministers have positioned themselves on issues related to creative economy from the end of the Secretariat of Creative Economy (SEC, its acronym in Portuguese) at the country's Ministry of Culture in 2015 to the end of 2017. The central argument points out that, since the end of SEC, the economic relevance of culture – recognized in the notion of creative economy – was still conceived as fundamental to national development by the Culture Ministers. However, they did not emphasize the institutionalization of a new specific body for creative economy, so that strategic decisions related to such economy – presented in the 2011-2014 SEC Plan – were abandoned, relegated to the background or diluted and emptied into other concepts, such as “economy of culture”, which is a priority for most ministers and is sometimes considered as synonymous with “creative economy”.

Keywords: Creative economy; Economy of Culture; Brazilian Ministry of Culture; Culture Ministers; Secretariat of Creative Economy

1. Introduction

The notion of creative economy is still imprecise in the political debates in Brazil, and its treatment in terms of the formulation and implementation of public policies suffers from the discontinuities and inconsistencies of governments in dealing with the issue. At the national level, creative economy has often been linked to multiple-size business initiatives, characterized by innovation, sustainability and / or respect for socio cultural diversity. The placement of multiple sectors that characterize creative economy – from crafts to software design and games – as fundamental for wealth generation and the creation of alternatives to the Brazilian vocation as a commodity exporter gave birth to the Secretariat of Creative Economy (SEC, its acronym in Portuguese), an agency linked to the Brazilian Ministry of Culture (MinC, its acronym in Portuguese) in 2011. In early 2015, SEC was terminated by then-Minister of Culture Juca Ferreira, who replaced it with the Secretariat for the Formation of Artistic Languages. After the impeachment of Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff in 2016, the new Culture Minister Marcelo Calero established the Secretariat of the Economy of Culture, which had functions close to, but not totally congruent with those of SEC (Leitão2017).

The aim is to examine how Brazilian Culture Ministers have positioned themselves on issues related to creative economy from the end of SEC at the Brazilian Ministry of Culture in 2015 to the end of 2017. The analysis was based on the investigation of their official statements, articles, speeches and interviews to press agencies. The central argument points out that, since the end of SEC, the economic relevance of culture – recognized in the notion of creative economy – was still conceived as fundamental to national development by the Culture Ministers. However, they did not emphasize the institutionalization of a new specific body for creative economy, so that strategic decisions related to such economy – presented in the 2011-2014 SEC Plan – were abandoned, relegated to the background or diluted and emptied into other concepts, such as “economy of culture”, which is a priority for most ministers and is sometimes considered as synonymous with “creative economy”.

1. Theoretical framework

The term “creative economy” can have multiple definitions in academic debates and political discussions. In academic debates, it often refers to a set of activities, goods, and services that are based on creativity, talent or individual and collective skills and encompasses industries such as advertising, architecture, crafts, design, fashion, cinema, software, music, performing arts, radio, TV, museums and galleries, as well as activities related to cultural traditions (Bendassolli et al. 2009, 11).

According to Miguez (2007,02), industries that are important parts of creative economy are based on individuals with creative and artistic capacities in alliance with managers and professionals of the technological area, who conceive saleable cultural products and services. The economic value of these products and services lies in their cultural or intellectual properties. According to Howkins (2001), originality and creativity are the main aspects of creative economy, as well as changes, ruptures and innovation. He says that people are moving away from traditional behaviours, such as the consumption of standardized goods and the submission to authority, and identifying themselves more with the desire for full control over their own lives. For authors such as Florida (2002) and Landry (2011), creativity can be applied to fields that transcend creative industries or the presence of professionals of a “creative class”. It may be mobilized for the socioeconomic development of a given territory and bring social innovation in areas such as health, urban mobility, public security and education. Conceptually, “creative economy” is sometimes conceived as synonymous with “economy of culture”. However, most scholars point out that the economy of culture generally refer to activities with symbolic value, while the creative economy encompasses cultural activities – filled with symbolic value – and entertainment, as well as functional creative activities (Benhamou2007; Throsby2001).

In the political discussions about creative economy, the United Kingdom has taken the lead in conceiving creative economy as a way of recovering degraded spaces since the decline of traditional economic activities and facing international competition from Asian countries in the world economy. In the late 1990s, the British government defined creative economy as a set of activities that had their origin in creativity and individual talent and skills, with the potential to create jobs and wealth through the generation of intellectual property (DCMS 1998). After the drastic decline in international trade caused by the 2008 financial crisis, developed and emerging states sought to encourage creative economy as a means of boosting trade. They faced difficulties such as limited resources for business funding, unsatisfactory investment in the training of creative professionals and deficiencies in the infrastructure of distribution and diffusion of creative goods and services (Leitão2015).

In Brazil, creative economy was defined by the Ministry of Culture as the resultant economy of cultural and social dynamics built from the cycle of creation, production, distribution / circulation / diffusion and consumption / fruition of goods and services from the creative sectors, characterized by the prevalence of their symbolic dimension (SEC2012). MinC pointed out that creative economy included existing social, cultural, economic and territorial dynamics related to sectors that encompassed tangible and intangible cultural heritage; cultural expressions; performing arts; audiovisual and publishing sectors; and functional creations (Figueiredo2015, 30). In this context, cultural diversity could be treated as a strategic input for development (Furtado 1984) and an amplifying element of human freedoms (Sen 2000).

The insertion of creative economy as a strategic axis of development during the administration of Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2010) and the creation of the SEC at the beginning of Dilma Rousseff’s administration (2011-2016) reflected the idea that knowledge and creativity could enable social transformations by their productive and innovative potential. In that perspective, creative economy had as its pillars the promotion of cultural diversity, the guarantee of social inclusion, the stimulus for sustainability and the promotion of innovation (Leitão2015). The greatest relevance of cultural sectors in contemporary Brazilian society lied, in Lula’s and Rousseff’s administrations, in the promotion of social insertion and the generation of income through cultural activities, such as artistic productions and folkloric manifestations. The greater economic centrality of culture imposed on the local, regional, national and international authorities, concerned with development, a new agenda that would go beyond traditional policies of heritage conservation, audience formation or incentive to cultural events (Silva 2012, 112-115). The 2011-2014 SEC Plan aimed to reposition MinC within the Brazilian Federal Government so that the Ministry could effectively contribute to the qualification of a new development project for Brazil. This project interconnected the formulation, implementation and monitoring of public policies that would overcome barriers to the transformation of Brazilian creativity into innovation and turn innovation into cultural and socioeconomic wealth for the Brazilian population (SEC2012).

The centrality of creative economy seemed to assume a strategic character in the light of the gradual loss of importance of commodity exports and the greater commercialization of goods and services with high added value, which would lead to changes in work, the service sector and the constitution of funds for the financing of creative sectors (Leitão2015). As a development strategy, creative economy recognized the importance of human capital to foster the integration of socio-cultural and economic goals.

In the light of changing links between culture and economy, it opened up a range of creative entrepreneurial opportunities, allowed the formalization of small businesses, generated income and employment and increased the welfare of population by stimulating the expression and participation of citizens in political life. The intangibility of creativity could generate additional value by incorporating cultural characteristics, inimitable by excellence, and creating synergies between lifestyles and the environment in which they flourish (Reis 2008, 27-32).

The SEC assumed a key leadership role in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of public policies in the creative economy area, but faced problems such as the lack of systematic information on creative sectors in Brazil, the inadequacy and precariousness of business models, the low availability of credit lines for project funding, the lack of qualification for creative professionals, the absence / insufficiency of legal frameworks for creative sectors and the reduced institutionalization of creative economy at the municipal and federal state levels (Leitão 2015; Ribeiro 2016). Since its establishment, the Secretariat has had no structure nor budget to deal with the demands of different creative sectors, which exceeded its administrative and financial capacities. The funds allocated to SEC in a Ministry that already had a small budget were insufficient even for fundamental functions, such as the promotion of cultural activities (Marchi 2014, 206-213; Jesus and Kamlot 2017, 150). In addition to the financial constraints, SEC suffered from the lack of continuity of policies related to creative sectors, the problems in the technical staff and the accentuation of clientelistic relations that resulted in dependence of creative professionals in relation to members of Brazilian federal administration (Barbalho 2015, 50; Jesus and Kamlot 2016, 51). Reduced cooperation with other government agencies – because of budget constraints from ministries, institutional rivalries and a lack of political will to cooperate with numerous federal, state, and municipal agencies – limited the scope for implementing numerous decisions under the 2011-2014 SEC Plan. Although SEC did not last long, it gave strength to a development model based on creative economy because of the institutionalization it had promoted in relation to the issues connected to this field. The Secretariat showed the professional character and the economic potential of creative sectors, which were against traditional perspectives of Brazil as a commodity exporter and valued the role of small and medium entrepreneurs in the generation of income (Leitão 2017). However, the growing limitation of resources for projects in the cultural area in the light of the economic crisis – which set other sectors as priorities, such as education, health and public security –, leadership changes in the Executive Branch in the light of corruption and money mismanagement denunciations and the high turnover of occupiers in the position of Culture Minister since 2015 have led to the discontinuity of measures that would have at their core creative economy as an engine for development.

2. Methodology

This exploratory research is developed from a qualitative approach to the analysis of the content of official declarations, articles, speeches and interviews to press agencies by the Ministers of Culture after the end of SEC. In the data collection, I sought to identify the position of such ministers in relation to creative economy and creative sectors and categorize the information by each minister in the presentation of the results. In the analysis, I aimed to interpret the collected data considering the theoretical-conceptual discussion, which operates as a support in capturing the subjective characteristics of declarations and texts of the ministers.

3. Results

3.1. Juca Ferreira (January 1, 2015 – May 12, 2016)

Ferreira abolished the SEC in 2015. He argued that, in theory, creative economy should “be in all ministries” and could not be based exclusively on MinC. In the view of experts, Ferreira’s decision to dismantle the SEC brought a major setback, since the Ministry of Culture had already begun talks with federal state and municipal governments to expand the network of creative initiatives and generate knowledge about them (Leitão 2017). Despite having abolished the SEC, Ferreira did not completely abandon the creative economy agenda. For example, in September 2015, he encouraged creative entrepreneurs to develop partnerships and make contacts with neighbouring countries. In response to the invitation made by the Cultural Industries Market of Argentina, Ferreira sought to bring such entrepreneurs closer to international buyers and create an institutional reference point to strengthen South American cultural industries (MinC 2015). However, in the scope of MinC’s actions, Ferreira preferred to focus on the concept of “economy of culture”, which, in his view, incorporated more specifically the economic dimension of cultural manifestations and even symbolic productions without commercial purposes or that did not present strategies of mass reproducibility or scale of insertion in the market.

Even though he said that the focus on the “economy of culture” did not presuppose the devaluation of “other meaning environments” such as creative economy, MinC’s focus should be, according to his perception, in the articulation of a strategic vision of the “economy of culture”, which would promote the internalization of development and the federalization of production capacity, as well as focus on the specificities of local and regional cultural productions (Ferreira 2015, 1-9). Functional creative activities – which are often included as parts of “creative economy” in academic and political definitions – did not appear to be fully contemplated in Ferreira’s position on the “economy of culture”.

3.2. Marcelo Calero (May 24, 2016 – November 18, 2016)

Calero, who had been Rio de Janeiro’s Secretary of Culture, was first invited to be the National Secretary of Culture of the interim government of president Michel Temer. With Rousseff’s impeachment in 2016, the merger of the Ministries of Culture and Education proposed by Temer prompted deep criticism from the arts and culture sectors and civil society. In the light of popular pressure, MinC was re-established, and Calero became the Culture Minister. The re-creation of the MinC demonstrated, in his view, the sensitivity of Temer to the “symbolism of the cultural sector” in the country. Calero said that he and his team could not be “encapsulated in Brasilia (Brazil’s capital)”. He sought to know closely the complexity and particularities of national cultural production, as well as reformulate the Federal Law for the Promotion of Culture (Law 8.313/91), known as the Rouanet Law, which establishes a tax incentive policy that enables companies and citizens to apply a portion of their income tax in cultural activities (Jesus and Kamlot 2017, 147). Calero also promised to improve MinC’s management and transparency and eliminate the Ministry’s debt of 1.34 billion reais (almost US\$ 420 million). He said that, if the debt were not eliminated, it would lead to the closing of museums and the non-payment of public notice agreements. Calero sought the valorization of public officers and fired people in commissioned positions in MinC (JC Online 2016).

By following the example of what he had already did in Rio de Janeiro, Calero said that he intended to continue the actions of territorialization of culture to increase the population’s access to cultural production, in partnership with federal state and municipal governments. One of Calero’s priorities, according to himself, was the focus on creative economy, “in all aspects related to its productive chain”, and the internationalization of Brazilian culture (Blog do Planalto 2016). The international agenda included the promotion of cultural diversity, the stimulation of cultural production chains, the broad access to culture and the guarantee of full exercise of cultural rights and freedom of expression. Calero highlighted the economic and commercial potentials of culture and its placement as a “strategic axis for the development of our nations”, referring to Southern Cone countries. He claimed to have made the decision to recreate the Secretariat of Creative Economy, but, in fact, he had created the Secretariat of the Economy of Culture, head by Cláudio Lins de Vasconcelos, a lawyer specialized in copyrights. For Calero, intellectual property was an abandoned issue in Rousseff’s administration and needed to be better addressed. According to him, the creation of regulatory frameworks would be one of the guidelines for repositioning the economic and commercial potentials of culture in national agendas, as well as guaranteeing labour and social security rights for culture professionals, deepening the intersectoral relationship, generating economic indicators of culture for planning actions and facilitating the circulation and commercialization of cultural goods and services (Calero 2016). Calero left office due to the pressure of minister Geddel Vieira Lima to allow the construction of luxury apartments on a heritage site in a historic district of Salvador, in the Brazilian state of Bahia.

3.3. Roberto Freire (November 18, 2016 – May 22, 2017)

Freire focused predominantly on the concept of “economy of culture” and indicated the importance of the Economic Atlas of Brazilian Culture Collection, which pointed out the need for MinC to work to build a tool for valuing the cultural sectors and understanding their importance in the composition of the Brazilian GDP. Freire’s primary concern was the dimensioning of the impact of culture on the Brazilian economy through the establishment of unified methodologies and benchmarking criteria. The Culture Minister indicated that culture played an important and growing role in the Brazilian economy, as the Atlas showed. He said that, when the government became aware of the wealth produced by the cultural area, it would invest in culture to foment the economy and would not take away resources in a crisis context (Freire 2017).

In the context of the elaboration of the Atlas, Freire indicated plans for sectoral papers with specific information on the productive chain of sectors that were part of what he called the “economy of culture”. The sectors set as priorities were the audiovisual, games, publishing, music and museums / heritage (Freire 2017).

While such sectors are central to creative economy, others were left out, so that the focus of the minister's actions seemed far more focused on specific sectors than on the diversity of industries that compose creative economy in Brazil. Freire even mentioned creative economy when he pointed out that creative workers use culture as an input for manufacturing functional products, such as in architecture and design (Freire 2017). However, such definition of "creative economy" reflects a far less comprehensive position on the issue than that adopted in much of the academic debates or even in previous administrations, which incorporated not only functional activities, but culture and entertainment activities.

3.4. João Batista de Andrade (May 22, 2017 – July 24, 2017)

Andrade temporarily assumed the position of Minister of Culture after the announcement of Freire's departure and subsequently resigned, claiming that MinC had become "unfeasible", with the cutting of 43% of the Ministry's resources and its transformation into a "fertile territory for political interference". Andrade indicated his lack of hope in making members of the Executive and the Legislative branches of the government more interested in culture, but he would take advantage of loopholes in the system to "strengthen the MinC", despite his criticism to many Temer's government positions. He recognized the need for problem-solving measures on issues related to creative economy, such as the deterioration of the National Library and the Cinemateca, the questioning of the Rouanet Law and the intimidation of cultural producers, under threat of high charges due to accountability problems. However, Andrade was limited in terms of acting for more effective modifications. He classified MinC's budget as "ridiculous" and managed to carry out only punctual actions, such as preventing the eviction of the Darcy Ribeiro Film School by the Post Office Company from its building, but he could do little regarding programs such as Pontos de Cultura ("Culture Points"), a capillarized social base of cultural institutions with the power to penetrate in communities and territories. This program was paralyzed by uncertainties related to delays in financial allocations and inefficient agreements (Medeiros 2017). Faced with the crisis in MinC and the resignation of Andrade, federal states' Secretaries of Culture published a no political-partisan open letter in which they pressured MinC to honour the contracts signed with bilateral programs, among which it is possible to mention the Pontos de Cultura projects and the Creative Economy public notices (Andrade 2017).

3.5. Sérgio Sá Leitão (July 25, 2017 –)

In his inaugural speech, Leitão – who was the director of the National Cinema Agency (Ancine, its acronym in Portuguese) before becoming the Culture Minister – stated that culture contributed to the generation of jobs and income and was at the heart of creative economy (Agência Brasil 2017). However, for the current minister, the differentiation between "creative economy" and "economy of culture" was a purely academic discussion, because, from the MinC perspective, the meaning of the two expressions was the same, as well as their objects: cultural and creative activities, endowed with symbolic and economic value. As creativity was not storable raw material, he saw the need to develop ways of improving vocations so that these activities had a greater participation in the Brazilian GDP, with the stimulus of public authorities and private investors. In his view, the failure of initiatives such as SEC came from the fact that they did not raise the awareness of society and politicians about the economic role of culture and did not formulate a set of efficient policies aimed at creative economy. Leitão said that much of society still valued traditional economic sectors and / or sectors with declining economic weight and did not see creative activities in their economic dimension (Muniz 2017; Na Mira 2017).

Leitão acknowledged that creative economy had been neglected in previous administrations since the Minister of Culture Gilberto Gil's term (2003-2008). Leitão was Gil's chief of staff. However, he emphasized that, at the present time, this issue was back to the fore. The current minister also saw that creative economy was part of MinC, but was not limited to it. Creative economy required MinC's cooperation with other ministries – such as the Industry, Foreign Trade and Services Ministry –, banks such as National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDES, its acronym in Portuguese) and research institutes such as the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, its acronym in Portuguese) for data necessary to entrepreneurs and public policies formulators. In addition, Leitão saw that the promotion of creative economy with a limited budget required the de-bureaucratization of the Rouanet Law, the inclusion of new creative areas that would be covered by projects in the set of policies he intended to formulate – such as gastronomy –, the implementation of legal changes so that cultural investment funds could finally be implemented and the incentive to endowments for museums, orchestras and theatre and dance companies, as well as crowd funding, so that people could use part of the income tax to participate in this type of funding initiative (Agência Brasil 2017; Sá 2017).

4. Analysis and Discussion

The Culture Minister is not the only responsible authority for the formulation of public policies in the cultural area, nor his positions on issues related to such policies are reflected in the final results, in the light of the possible participation or interference of other actors in the decision-making process, with different positions, which bring these results to a point closer to their preferences. However, the privileged position of the minister in the hierarchy of the Executive Branch gives him the ability to establish several general principles for actions in this area and formulate much of the agenda for political discussion. It is possible to see that, regarding their principles of action, all ministers after the end of SEC recognized the economic relevance of culture, which is at the heart of the notion of creative economy. From Ferreira to Leitão, all ministers affirmed that culture was responsible for the generation of income and jobs and was fundamental for national development. As Ribeiro (2016) argues, culture has advanced considerably in size and meaning in the light of the transversalization of cultural policies and its greater interlocution with areas such as science and technology, tourism, labour, communications and commerce. This cross-cutting perspective is one of the main aspects of creative economy, as emphasized by Reis (2008) and Miguez (2007), as well as the valuation of cultural diversity as a strategic input for development, as conceived by Furtado (1984) and Sen (2000).

However, the autonomy of the cultural area has been compromised since 2015, as seen in the frustrated annexation of MinC as a secretariat in the Ministry of Education and the expansion of the financial constraints on the Ministry of Culture, which, in the view of former minister João Batista de Andrade, was “unfeasible”. Despite its low budget, MinC is complex and assumes a strategic role in the knowledge society, since it has the tasks of formulating, implementing and monitoring policies for the creation, production, circulation and consumption of cultural goods and services. However, the neglecting of cultural policies in Brazil demonstrates the political vulnerability of the cultural field, which leads to a great personalism in its management (Ribeiro 2016). According to Figueiredo (2015), before the end of SEC, Culture ministers such as Gilberto Gil understood that creative economy included existing social, cultural, economic and territorial dynamics from the creation, distribution and consumption of goods and services produced by creative sectors. However, it becomes clear the difficulty of ministers after the end of SEC not only to understand the sophisticated and complex structure of the Ministry of Culture, which suffers from the lack of human, financial and infrastructural resources. They also had difficulty to recover and implement strategic decisions specifically related to creative economy, present in the 2011-2014 SEC Plan. These decisions would have promoted creative economy as an axis of development (Ribeiro 2016).

The option to focus on the “economy of culture” – seen by Sérgio Sá Leitão as identical to “creative economy”, even though many specialists believe it is not the same thing – had direct implications for the development of creative economy in Brazil, considering the way in which the concept was developed by authors such as Howkins (2001), Florida (2002) and Landry (2011) and applied in policy formulation by the SEC itself in previous years (SEC, 2012). The lack of a strong institutionalization of a new specific body for creative economy makes the debate on the subject in MinC close in terms of the creation of permanent structures of decision-making and independence for the implementation of decisions that allow, for example, the stimulus to functional creative activities. These seemed to be relegated to a secondary place in the definition of “economy of culture”, adopted by former minister Juca Ferreira, for example. Although Marcelo Calero attempted at least to recover some institutionalization to attribute greater coherence to policies aimed at creative sectors when creating the Secretariat of the Economy of Culture, strategic decisions set forth in the 2011-2014 SEC Plan were abandoned or neglected, such as the guarantee that the broad spectrum of creative sectors and initiatives was not limited to the scope of cultural sectors or the mere market dimension of their goods, which is very characteristic of pragmatism (Ribeiro 2016). Such pragmatism is evident in the decisions of former Minister Roberto Freire, whose primary concern with the “economy of culture” seemed to be the establishment of criteria to highlight the relevance of culture in the Brazilian economy to convince the government and other socio-political actors about the importance of investing in the economic potential of culture.

In this context, specific decisions and policies aimed at creative economy were diluted or depleted in the concept of “economy of culture”, which made precarious the development of the professional character of several creative sectors. According to Claudia Leitão (2015, 2017), creative economy contrasted with deep-rooted views of Brazil as commodity exporter.

Ribeiro (2016) indicates that SEC has never tried to dogmatize a closed concept of “creative economy”, but to guarantee principles such as cultural diversity, social inclusion, sustainability and innovation. However, the institutional framework of the SEC was annulled by the government that had created it. The vulnerability of creative economy itself is reproduced through unsatisfactory funding policies, unfavourable legal structures to a productive relationship between authorities and creative sectors, the persistence of assistentialist visions and the perpetuation of cultural marketing to the detriment of robust public policies of valorization of creative sectors and professionals. With no specific institutionalization, the transversality of public policies for creative economy is compromised, and Brazilian state gradually loses its capacity for concerted action and integration between social and political actors (Ribeiro 2016). The foundations necessary for the development of creative industries in concerted actions have not been able to overcome the deleterious effects of political and socioeconomic crises.

5. Conclusion

Creative economy suffered from the disincentive represented by the end of SEC in 2015, in the context of the political and the socioeconomic crises in the Brazilian government. With no favourable political and productive system, creative ideas and business often do not even go on in the absence of a more specific legal framework and the facilitation for small entrepreneurs, for example. With no robust institutionalization, the necessary expertise is not obtained to produce market diagnostics to rethink investments, infrastructure and business models, from the production to the consumption of creative goods and services (Leitão 2017). The increasing limitation of resources for creative projects in the light of the economic crisis and the political instability since Rousseff’s impeachment fuelled the discontinuity of more robust measures with a focus on creative economy as the engine of socioeconomic development. In this sense, it would be important to resume MinC’s internal and external connections, which would lead to improved legal frameworks for creative sectors and the expansion of dialogue among the Ministry’s own structures in the treatment of creative economy, aiming at socioeconomic development at local, regional and national levels (Agência Senado 2015).

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