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## THE RISK OF IRREVERSIBLE DAMAGES: BRAZILIAN CREATIVE ECONOMY IN THE FIRST YEAR OF JAIR BOLSONARO'S ADMINISTRATION

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### ABSTRACT

The aim is to analyse how Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro's administration dealt with issues related to creative economy during the first year of the president's term (2019). The main argument indicates that the gradual weakening of specific bodies dedicated to culture and creative economy since 2015 has reached the top in the first year of Bolsonaro's administration. Strategic decisions related to such economy were emptied and abandoned with the end of the Ministry of Culture, and cultural issues were relegated to the background or diluted into other federal government bodies, such as the Ministry of Citizenship and, more recently, the Ministry of Tourism, which lack the specific knowledge of the particularities of cultural and creative demands.

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### INTRODUCTION

The expression "creative economy" usually refers to a set of activities, goods and services based on individual and collective talent or skills. It incorporates industries such as advertising, architecture, the art markets, crafts, design, fashion, film, software, music, performance arts, publishing, radio, TV, museums and activities related to cultural traditions (Bendassolli *et al.*, 2009; Jesus, 2019; Miguez, 2007). In the political debates in Brazil, the centrality of creative economy as the engine of income and employment generation and social inclusion gained strength with the creation of the Secretariat of Creative Economy (SEC, its acronym in Portuguese) in the now-defunct Ministry of Culture (MinC, its acronym in Portuguese), in 2011. Creative economy seemed to assume a strategic role, given the gradual loss of importance of commodity exports, as well as the commercialization of high value-added goods and services, which would lead to changes in labour and specific funds for creative sector financing (Jesus, 2018). However, since the mid-2010s, the discussions about culture and creative economy have seemed to have no clear direction in the national political debates,

especially after the beginning of Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro's administration in 2019. The aim of the article is to analyse how Bolsonaro's administration dealt with issues related to creative economy during the first year of the president's term (2019). The main argument indicates that the gradual weakening of specific bodies dedicated to culture and creative economy since 2015 has reached the top in the first year of Bolsonaro's administration. Strategic decisions related to such economy were emptied and abandoned with the end of the Ministry of Culture, and cultural issues were relegated to the background or diluted into other federal government bodies, such as the Ministry of Citizenship and, more recently, the Ministry of Tourism, which lack the specific knowledge of the particularities of cultural and creative demands.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

Regarding data collection, a document research was initially carried out to detect the relevance of cultural and creative sectors to Brazilian economy. It considered a 2019 document produced by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics

(IBGE, its acronym in Portuguese) about the status of these sectors from 2007 to 2018, as well as speeches and documents produced by the heads of culture and creative economy in the federal government between 2015 and 2019. In the data collection, I considered, in the IBGE document, the demographic profile of professionals working in the cultural and creative sectors, the income generated by these sectors, the level of formalization of cultural and creative activities, the average population spending on these activities and the public spending on culture and creative economy in the period. The aim was to bring an overview of these sectors until the beginning of Jair Bolsonaro's government, identifying their main challenges for the administration in the beginning of its first year. The collection and analysis of speeches and documents produced by the heads of culture and creative economy in the federal government between 2015 and 2019 were intended to identify the main decisions related to culture and creative economy at the national level and evaluate whether such decisions contributed for a greater institutionalization and the consequent centralization and continuity in the formulation of policies that would favour the development of these areas. Finally, a bibliographic research sought not only to enrich the understanding of the causes and consequences of these decisions, but also to deal with the particularity of these actions and their repercussions for culture and creative professionals and entrepreneurs in Brazil.

## RESULTS

**The relevance of cultural and creative sectors to Brazilian economy:** According to IBGE, the cultural and creative sectors occupied 5.2 million people in 2018 and totalled R\$ 226 billion (US\$ 55 billion, according to money exchange data available at December, 20<sup>th</sup> 2019) in 2017. In 2018, the cultural sectors occupied more than 5 million people, which represented 5.7% of the total people employed in Brazil. More than a half were women (50.5%), who earned 67.8% of men's salary in cultural activities. The majority is also composed of white people (52.6%) and people under 40 years old (54.9%). In addition, compared to total occupations, the percentage of those with higher education in cultural sectors was higher (26.9% in cultural sectors, compared to 19.9% in the total of employed people). The average monthly income from the main job of the population engaged in cultural activities was estimated at R\$ 2,391 (US\$ 584) in 2014 and R\$ 2,193 (US\$ 535) in 2018, which represents a decrease of 8.3%. These values were slightly above the income received by the employed population in the total of productive activities, R\$ 2,218 (US\$ 541) in 2014 and R\$ 2,163 (US\$ 528) in 2018, a 2.5% reduction. Between 2014 and 2018, there was a reduction in the proportion of employees with a formal contract (from 45% to 34.6%) and an increase in the proportion of self-employed people (from 32.5% to 44%) in cultural activities. As a result, informality – which is represented by informal domestic workers, self-employed people and auxiliary family workers – increased in the cultural sectors from 38.3% in 2014 to 45.2% in 2018. Although the number of workers in the cultural and creative sectors remained stable, there was a shift from formal to informal workers (IBGE, 2019). In 2018, black or brown workers in culture were still underrepresented in relation to the total of black or brown people in the employed population (51.3%). The black or brown population was also more vulnerable to potential access to cultural facilities and the media: 44% lived in cities with no movie theatres in 2018, while among white people the percentage was 34.8%. The

difference occurred regarding access to museums (37.5% compared to 25.4%), theatres or concert halls (35.2% compared to 25.8%), local radios (20.5% compared to 16.5%) and internet providers (15.3% compared to 14.3%). Inequality is also visible in the average monthly family spending on cultural activities, which reached R\$ 282.86 (US\$ 69) in 2017-2018 in Brazil and was below other groups, such as housing (R\$ 1,215 / US\$ 296), transportation (R\$ 678.99 / US\$ 165), food (R\$ 658.23 / US\$ 161) and health care (R\$ 302.06 / US\$ 74). However, families with income up to R\$ 1,908 (US\$ 465) committed only 5.9% of their spending on cultural activities (R\$ 82.15 / US\$ 20), below the national average of 7.5%, while those with incomes higher than R\$ 23,850 (US\$ 5,820) allocated 7.9% of their expenses to culture (R\$ 1,443.41 / US\$ 352) (IBGE, 2019). The total public spending allocated in cultural sectors increased from approximately R\$ 7.1 billion (US\$ 1.8 billion) in 2011 to R\$ 9.1 billion (US\$ 2.2 billion) in 2018. However, the federal, state and municipal levels of government presented negative variations in the share of culture in total spending (from 0.08% in 2011 to 0.07% in 2018 in the federal government; from 0.42% in 2011 to 0.28% in 2018 in state governments; 1.12% in 2011 to 0.79% in 2018 in the municipalities). The federal government kept being the one that allocated less resources in the cultural sector (21.1% of its resources in 2018). In 2011, the Institute of National Historical and Artistic Heritage (Iphan, its acronym in Portuguese) was the most representative institute in the federal government's spending on culture. In 2018, the National Film Agency (Ancine, its acronym in Portuguese), which is responsible for financing the audio-visual sector, tripled its participation and was the most representative in the total federal level. The increase in Ancine's budget came from the tax collection of telecom companies, which began in 2012, and the consequent growth of the Audio-Visual Sector Fund, intended for investment in this area. The total raised by the Rouanet Law – the Federal Law for the Promotion of Culture, which establishes a tax incentive policy that enables companies and citizens to apply a portion of their income tax in cultural activities (Jesus & Kamlot, 2017) – decreased by 2.3% (excluding inflation) between 2011 and 2018. The analysis of the value raised by cultural projects in large regions shows a centralization of resources in the Brazil's Southeastern region, which accounted for 79.8% of the total raised in 2011 and reduced its share to 77.3% in 2018, due to the economic and financial crisis in the state of Rio de Janeiro (IBGE, 2019).

**The debate on culture and creative economy in Brazilian federal political institutions from 2015 to 2018:** The necessity to deal with challenges and inequalities regarding culture and creative economy becomes clear when one analyses the overview of cultural and creative sectors from 2007 to 2018. However, in early 2015, SEC was abolished by then Minister of Culture Juca Ferreira, who created the Secretariat for Artistic Language Formation. The main purpose was to promote the internalization of development and the federalization of national productive capacity, focusing on the specificities of local and regional cultural productions. However, it did not contemplate functional creative activities such as design and advertising (Jesus, 2018). Following the impeachment of Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff in 2016, the merging of the Ministries of Culture and Education led to deep criticism from the artistic and cultural classes and civil society, so that the Ministries were again separated, and Marcelo Calero took the office of Minister of Culture in the beginning of president Michel Temer's administration. With

the creation of the Secretariat of Economy of Culture led by attorney Claudio Lins de Vasconcelos, Calero stimulated the generation of regulatory frameworks as one of the guidelines for repositioning the economic and commercial potential of culture on the national agenda (Calero, 2016), but he had little time in office and left MinC because of the interference of former 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. Given MinC's survival in a hostile environment to national creative production, the primary concern of Calero's successor, Roberto Freire, was the sizing of the impact of culture on Brazilian economy, with unified measurement methodologies and criteria. He unsuccessfully sought to make the government aware of the wealth produced by the cultural area to convince authorities not to withdraw resources from MinC in a context of crisis. After the brief period in which João Batista de Andrade was the Minister of Culture, Sérgio Sá Leitão took office and pointed out that fostering creative economy with a limited budget required the elimination of bureaucracy of the Rouanet Law, legal changes to the implementation of investment funds in culture and the encouragement of endowments and crowd funding (Jesus, 2018). In the 2018 presidential elections, candidates such as Fernando Haddad, Marina Silva, Ciro Gomes and Geraldo Alckmin brought in their government programs references to the potential of creative economy in expanding access to culture and generating income and employment, but such proposals were vague and inaccurate. In some programs, such references did not even exist, such as that of the winner, Jair Bolsonaro (Jesus, 2019).

**Culture and creative economy in the first year of Jair Bolsonaro's Government:** Bolsonaro took office in 2019 and abolished the Ministry of Culture, which became a secretariat under the new Ministry of Citizenship. In addition, he defined new rules for the Rouanet Law – classified by the president as a “disgrace” –, limited funding for cultural and artistic sectors and modified the National Council for Cultural Policy, which is fundamental in the collective construction of cultural policies. The special secretary of Culture, Henrique Pires, left office in August 2019, after the Ministry of Citizenship suspended a public notice dedicated to LGBT series. For Pires, the decision could be classified as censorship. Although Pires said he had a lot of respect for Bolsonaro and the Minister of Citizenship Osmar Terra, he argued that he would not support censorship. The decision to suspend the public notice was taken amid several criticisms by Bolsonaro regarding the allocation of public resources to films and series with themes that displeased the president, such as LGBT issues. In November 2019, Bolsonaro decided to dismiss the special secretary of Culture, Ricardo Braga, two months after Braga took office. Bolsonaro had already stated that, if he could not impose “filters” on the choices of Ancine, he would eliminate the agency (G1, 2019). Regarding creative economy, the former mayor of the city of Santa Maria Cezar Schirmer became, in October 2019, the new Secretary of Creative Economy, linked to the Special Secretariat of Culture of the Ministry of Citizenship. Among the attributions of the new Secretariat of Creative Economy, the articulation of financing lines for cultural enterprises, the promotion of Brazilian cultural goods and services and the implementation of access to reading policies could be cited. Nevertheless, Schirmer does not have experience in matters related to creative economy.

He has worked at the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul's Department of Public Security during the administration of Governor José Ivo Sartori and later as a defence lawyer in legal actions against Sartori (Jesus, 2019). In November 2019, Bolsonaro transferred the Special Secretariat of Culture from the Ministry of Citizenship to the Ministry of Tourism, which is under the command of Marcelo Álvaro Antônio. The transfer took place one day after the government dismissed Braga. In the light of the change, the Ministry of Tourism became responsible for the national culture policy, the regulation of authors' rights, the protection of historical, artistic and cultural heritage, the support to the Ministry of Agriculture for the preservation of the cultural identity of quilombola communities and the development of cultural accessibility and museum sector policies. Bolsonaro also transferred to the Ministry of Tourism the National Culture Incentive Commission, which is responsible for issuing reviews on requests by artists looking for funding through the Rouanet Law. The National Council for Cultural Policy was also transferred to the Ministry of Tourism, as well as the National Culture Fund Commission and six other secretariats. According to the Ministry of Citizenship, the exchange reinforced the role of culture as one of the fundamental axes of the country's economic development (Sorano, 2019). According to the Ministry of Tourism, tourism and culture have “synergistic and naturally integrated activities”. It recognized that culture is one of the main tourist attractions in Brazil, “the 9th country in the world's cultural attractions, according to the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index”. The Ministry of Tourism highlighted the joint projects with the Ministry of Citizenship, through the Special Secretariat of Culture and related bodies, such as the cooperation agreement for the creation of the Brazilian Network of Creative Cities and the shared management of cultural and natural heritage. The success of the joint efforts was also indicated in the titles won by Brazil in the UNESCO World Network of Creative Cities, with the selection of Belo Horizonte in Gastronomy and Fortaleza in Design. Tourism and Culture have also worked together on applications from Brazilian cities for UNESCO heritage titles, such as Ilha Grande and Paraty in the state of Rio de Janeiro; Bumba Meu Boi, in the state of Maranhão; and the Canyons do Sul park, between the states of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina, and Seridó park, in the state of Rio Grande do Norte. In the conclusion of its statement, the Ministry of Tourism indicates that the transferring of the Special Secretariat of Culture from the Ministry of Citizenship could strengthen the actions of each area, “with greater integration and efficiency gains – as president Jair Bolsonaro's government advocates – boosting economic and social development, expanding access to culture and tourism and benefiting the Brazilian population” (Ministério do Turismo, 2019).

In the following day of the transferring of the Special Secretariat of Culture from the Ministry of Citizenship to the Ministry of Tourism, the Federal Government decided to place in the structure of the Ministry of Tourism seven culture institutions: Ancine, Iphan, the Brazilian Museum Institute (Ibram, its acronym in Portuguese), the National Library Foundation, the Casa de Rui Barbosa Foundation, the Palmares Cultural Foundation and the National Arts Foundation (Funarte, its acronym in Portuguese). The government also indicated the playwright Roberto Alvim to head the Special Secretariat of Culture. Alvim was responsible for the Funarte's Center for the Performing Arts (Ceacen, its acronym in

Portuguese) and replaced Braga, relocated to a secretary in the Ministry of Education. Bolsonaro said that the new secretary had “carte blanche” to form his team with “competent people”. In September 2019, Alvim called Brazilian Oscar-nominated actress Fernanda Montenegro a “liar” and said she was “sordid” in a Facebook post, which provoked the reaction of the artistic class in the defence of the actress (Estadão Conteúdo, 2019).

## DISCUSSION

The autonomy of the cultural area has been gradually compromised since 2015, as seen in the frustrated annexation of MinC as a secretariat in the Ministry of Education, the expansion of the financial constraints on the Ministry of Culture and, finally, its elimination during Bolsonaro's administration. Despite its low budget, MinC assumed a strategic role in the knowledge society, since it included 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 (Jesus, 2018), something that was strengthened in the first year of Bolsonaro's administration, with explicit constraints of human, financial and infrastructural resources to culture and creative economy. Although the Secretariat of Creative Economy had a new life in Bolsonaro's government, it was linked to the Special Secretariat of Culture of the Ministry of Citizenship, which lacked the knowledge of the specificities of cultural and creative sectors. Creative economy lost 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. Strategic decisions related to the greater role of culture in the promotion of income and jobs, the valorisation of heritage and memory and the revitalization of urban areas 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. Such pragmatism was evident in Bolsonaro's administration, when the Special Secretariat of Culture was transferred from the Ministry of Citizenship to the Ministry of Tourism, which seems to conceive that culture is important for national development only if it can bring more tourists to Brazil.

## Conclusion

The vulnerability of creative economy reached the top in the first year of Jair Bolsonaro's administration through more unsatisfactory funding policies than in the past, unfavourable legal structures to a productive relationship between authorities and creative sectors, and the perpetuation of cultural marketing to the detriment of robust public policies of valorisation of creative sectors and professionals. When it happens, Ribeiro (2016) indicates that the transversality of public policies for creative economy is compromised, and the Brazilian state loses its capacity for concerted action and integration between social and political actors. Given the absence of a stimulating political and productive system, creative ideas and businesses do not develop in a context where specific legal frameworks and facilitations for small entrepreneurs are lacking. Through contingencies of research

funding, the expertise required to obtain market diagnostics and rethink creative investments, infrastructure and business models, and even sources of innovation, is not generated. The creative economy seems to be adrift in the national political debates, and the consequences of the damages caused by Bolsonaro's government to cultural and creative sectors may be irreversible if the weakening of specific bodies dedicated to these areas does not stop.

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