CONNECTING SPACES: GOVERNMENT, SCHOLARS, MUSICS, AND MUSICIANS IN BRAZIL

Leo Cardoso
University of Texas at Austin

In this paper I present some institutional attitudes surrounding the notion of cultural diversity and intangible heritage, as well as their possible implications. I briefly follow this notion as promoted by an international agency [UNESCO], incorporated by a government [Brazil], applied by certain institutions [Ministry of Culture and Petrobras] through specific cultural policies [Petrobras Cultural Program], which finally confer cultural, economic, and political capitals to specific groups.

In its last projects, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) has been trying to link culture with social equity. An example of this attempt is the 2003 ‘Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage,’ a project that places national cultures within a pluralistic political sphere able to empower minorities and to bring socioeconomic development to the countries.

UNESCO defines Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) as “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups, and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.”1 This ICH can be found in five domains: (1) oral traditions and expressions (including language); (2) the

---

performing arts; (3) social practices, rituals and festive events; (4) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and (5) traditional craftsmanship.

One of the UNESCO’s founding members, Brazil is one of the few countries that has contributed annually with more than 1% of UNESCO’s regular budget. Whereas Brazil is considered the tenth largest economy in the world, it ranks one of the lowest positions regarding economic equity – a social reality that, along with soccer, samba, caipirinha, and favela, marks the global imagination of the country. According to the 2001 issue released by UNESCO Brazil, while the 20% poorest people were receiving 2.6% of the total national income, the 20% richest were getting 63% of it. In other words, the richest were gaining 24 times more than the poorest.

Currently, the key aspects of cultural policies in Brazil are (1) the legislative measures to encourage investments in culture (e.g. the Rouanet Law), (2) the public-private collaborative projects, (3) the interaction between the government and international organizations such as UNESCO, (4) and the Ministry of Culture’s public calls for grants (editais in Portuguese). These elements should not be understood as isolated initiatives, but as part of the same political continuum that gradually unfolds as the interactions between public opinion, media, governmental responsibility, economic development, and cultural perspectives are reshaped in the country.

Currently the major investor in culture in Brazil is Petrobras (Petróleo Brasileiro S.A.). Founded in 1953, the company is today a semi-public giant: the eighth biggest oil exploring company in the world (and the most sustainable one), and South America’s brand management leader, operating in over 27 countries. Petrobras’ assets amount to roughly 130 billion dollars.
In 2003 the company inaugurated, in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, the Programa Petrobras Cultural (PPC). The program offers grants for cultural projects annually and has the following objectives:² (a) to stimulate the implementation of projects of public interest outside the mainstream markets, entailing Brazilian culture in all its ethnic and regional diversity; (b) to foster cultural production, encouraging not only artistry, but also the expansion of circulation of cultural goods; (c) to consolidate the recovering, rescuing, and cataloguing of tangible and intangible cultural goods, giving priority to those considered endangered; (d) to contribute to the formation of audiences, talents and technicians; (e) to stimulate reflection on Brazilian culture; and (f) to contribute to the enhancement of the national culture and to the assertion of culture as a basic social right.

Acknowledging that to be more egalitarian the PPC’s editais should be communicative across geographical and economic spaces, the organizers have been trying to offer relatively straightforward and uncomplicated information about the selective process, the required material and the program’s objectives. The criteria for selection include the project’s ‘relevance,’ ‘qualitative merit’ and ‘viability.’ Additionally, according to the information available online, the PPC seeks to “contemplate the ethnic and regional diversity of the Brazilian culture, without, however, defining any regional or ethnic quotas.”³ The editais awards projects in five domains: Performing arts (theater, dance, and circus), Audiovisual, Digital Culture, Literature, and Music.

³ Ibid.
In the case of music, the current version invites local communities to submit their projects (1) to record and circulate music through CDs; (2) to record and circulate music through the Internet; (3) to perform shows/concerts of Brazilian music; and (4) to organize music festivals. These categories differ considerably from the earlier version, in which the proponent should choose between *Música Erudita* (Classical Music) and *Música Popular*.

In its 2006-2007 edition, PPC distributed roughly 25 million dollars among 285 projects selected out of 7,455. As it should be expected, there was a disparity in the number of submissions among regions, partly related with demographic and economic disparities, and with the irregular flow of information throughout the country.

The aligned strategies of UNESCO and the Brazilian Government discussed above try to lessen economical disparities by engaging cultural practices in the logic of economic development. In a way, programs such as the ‘Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage’ or the *Programa Petrobras Cultural* promote culture through an institutional conversion that makes tangible what was intangible.

I now present some aspects of this notion of culture that we, as scholars who are requested to act as mediators and legitimizing authorities, should take into account. I combine these aspects with more contextual situations in my area of study, offering some examples from the musical scenes in Brazil. Given the time that I have to present these aspects, I ask you to connect spaces yourselves – to link the theoretical aspects that I will read with the concrete examples that I will show.

*TRANSMISSION OF ICH 1*: It seems reasonable to expect a shift in the transmission of local knowledge. There might be a reconfiguration in terms of the
authority, as local face-to-face transmission will tend to coexist with tangible products coming from external communities. Most of these communities currently know how to deal with mainstream information and cultural products as receivers. But to take part in the growing cultural business, they will increasingly have to interact with technologies as producers.

**TRANSMITION OF ICH 2:** There might be an intergenerational shift as well. Whereas older members of the community may be the legitimized bearers of intangible cultural capital, it seems that in many communities it is the younger generation who is better prepared and willing to manage their ICH by manage new technologies. Moreover, the empowerment of these social groups to handle ‘equipments of culture’ (as some call these technologies) that have enormous potential to project identities might bring forward a subtle process of self-fetishisation.

**CULTURAL BUSINESS 1:** Communities may have to re-evaluate what and how they want to materialize their ICH. The insertion of cultural practices into a cultural business implies a change in agency, since culture bearers will need different strategies for situating their cultural products within a field of exchange value and market competition. Here too there might occur a change in authority, since certain groups inside a given tradition will have greater visibility than others. This process might also stimulate the personalization of traditional practices. For instance, as ethnomusicologists have shown, the process of staging and recording ICH in form of musical practices may transform elements such as performance’s length, musical structure, and spatial and choreographic configuration. If this has been occurring at least since the invention of phonograms, it is now proliferating as an instrument for social inclusion.
CULTURAL BUSINESS 2: Perhaps one of the most controversial aspects in linking ICH with economic development – especially when seen from a transnational perspective – is that, so far, the insertion of local ICHs into cultural digital business is happening faster than the creation of international laws for intellectual property.

CULTURAL BUSINESS 2.1: On the one hand, there is the cultural flow local ICH → cross-cultural pivot → mainstream global media, in which a cross-cultural pivot may ‘use’ a cultural expression without giving credit to its original producers. The issue gets complicated mainly because (1) it is extremely hard to keep track of the flow of ICH in our age digital interconnectedness; (2) there is no straightforward method to stipulate where ‘inauthentic’ distortion ends and ‘authentic’ creative borrowing starts; (3) it is controversial whether or not certain individuals or groups should obtain intellectual property over things that are still considered collective and open by other members of the community; and (4) the mainstream media do not seem willing to permit governmental interference in their business, especially if that seems to threaten the concentration of economic capital. This aspect partly explains the reluctance of some Governments in dealing with the issue, as well as the communities’ lack of information about their own rights.

CULTURAL BUSINESS 2.2: On the other hand, there is the cultural flow mainstream cultural products → informal marked → consumers. Not surprisingly, this flow receives much more attention both from press and governments. According to UNESCO, in 2005 piracy caused around 120,000 job losses in the U.S. and 100,000 in the European Union. In 2003 the cost of pirated music exceeded 4,5 billion dollars, and

4 “‘Distortion’ is a technical term of intellectual property law and, essentially, refers to the parodying of a performance OR style that is inauthentic does not respect the original.” (Janet Blake, Commentary on the UNESCO 2003 Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage, 37.)
the U.S. film industry lost alone around 3 billion dollars. Interestingly, in the issue UNESCO does not address the very concept of copyright.

Gilberto Gil, Brazilian Minister of Culture from 2003 to 2008, is one of the world leading promoters of more flexible copyright policies, especially those proposed by Lawrence Lessig’s Creative Commons. The organization offers copyrights licenses for 50 countries, allowing creators to register their cultural products within the continuum ‘all rights reserved,’ ‘some rights reserved,’ and ‘no rights reserved.’

CULTURAL MAPPING: For the Brazilian Government, projects such as PPC offer a new and more effective method to map the cultural diversity in the country. According to Ricardo Anair, member of the Ministry of Culture, the Government is trying to transform cultural policies in Brazil by implementing bottom-up projects that allow for more close interactions between Government and ‘popular’ cultures. To him, the next step is to further decenter these policies by working in collaboration with regional administrations, and to institutionalize them as a matter of State instead of ruling Party.

CULTURAL REFASHIONING 1: The promotion of culture as a liberal instrument that further personalizes the responsibility for the well being of society as a whole may alter the mixed felling of disempowerment, disbelief, and dependence of the Brazilian civil society towards the State. This may also increase social tensions if the governmental institutional framework does not refashion itself to replace administrative demagogy with more serious attempts to support social integration.

CULTURAL REFASHIONING 2: Perhaps this perspective of culture and Government offers a more extreme mode of cultural legitimization; one in which even
the smallest groups might feel constrained to materialize and commodify their cultural practices to admire their own customs. This process implies further dependence of an economic system to manifest communal values.

*CULTURAL REFASHIONING 3*: It is still early to know what place cultural expressions that criticize political and economic establishments will have and how the supporters of cultural diversity will deal with that. What impact does the political-economic-ideological juncture of ICH, cultural diversity, market expansion, and social inclusion can have on ‘domesticating’ cultural expressions potentially ‘aggressive,’ ‘subversive,’ or ‘discriminative’? By closely observing how far the cultural projects have improved the life conditions of the awarded cultural bearers of ICH, we might be in better conditions to evaluate whether this criticism-through-culture is more nostalgic agency and identity marker, or an indicative that the implementation of cultural diversity requires rethinking.

According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, in 2006 84.6% of the cities in the country did not have exclusive institutions to tackle culture, and half of the Brazilians economically active were working in the so-called informal sector – hence not paying governmental taxes to manage their business. These are crucial aspects to understand how the concept of intangible cultural heritage may become an important legitimized convertor of cultural, economic, and political capitals. Accordingly, this framework also depends on academic capital to observe and improve its logistics, as well as to increase social integration in order to justify further investments.

There has been a gradual transformation in the relation between political and economical spaces, as notions of inclusion, democracy, and access become merged with
those of property, consumption, and cultural goods. I have shown here some possible outcomes of the promotion of culture as a political and economic developer. In this brief overview I attempted to connect institutional agendas concerning cultural policies that are still in exploratory stage.

I also would like to defend here a more exploratory approach to understand those processes; an attitude of openness, able to consider connected processes such as Brazilian economical growth, political climate, and local musicians’ agency, without condemning or reducing these processes to linear determinisms. Besides that, one crucial topic that I did not touch here, especially significant to understand Brazilian cultural policies, is media as a national binder and cultural mise en scène of culture, in which ‘insiders’ are able to learn about each other and to establish starker distinctions between them and the ‘outsiders.’

To connect spaces is to approach the flow and interaction of persons, objects and thoughts as enmeshed in different and interconnected fields of production: production of scientific knowledge, of artistic creation, of profits, of political influence, of identity, of violence, etc. To connect spaces is also to attempt to balance ethnographic detail and quantitative data, and to consider established and widespread institutions and other forms of social organization in all their pluralistic and interactive potential. The idea is certainly not new, as many scholars – especially those coming from the social sciences – have been attempting to connect localized realities with globalized logics.

From what I have seen so far in conferences and informal conversations, the investment in a more dynamic notion of culture as a potential space for negotiation, currently put forward from influential and legitimate organizations, is a growing area of
investigation. I close this paper both wishing for social improvement through the cultural projects addressed here, and with the conviction that cross-cultural and transnational spaces – especially universities – are increasingly becoming decisive for that improvement.

REFERENCES


