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Municipal Culture Incentive Law: what are their inclusive and democratic effects on local cultural production?

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the inclusive and democratic effects of municipal cultural incentives law in Cataguases, Minas Gerais, fundamentally considering the promotion of citizenship and identity preservation based on cultural production. Data were collected through non-structured interviews with Cataguases cultural producers and analyzed according to a Marxist notion of discourse. Our findings revealed that approved purposes lead to a form of centralization on cultural production at the local level, characterized by the concentration of resources on established groups and the detachment from historically marginalized groups. Moreover, this scenario is aggravated when complementary cultural actions are transferred to the city's cultural foundations, reinforcing the distinctive character of culture.

Keywords: organization studies; cultural production; cultural democratization.

Introduction

Management as a discipline has been increasingly open to incorporating topics beyond the search for efficiency, typical of capitalist organizations. This opening, in turn, has increasingly consolidated a position because it has allowed the incorporation of historically forgotten organizational formats and themes that go beyond the productive sphere. Organizational and public

administration studies dealing with elements that resonate directly in society have shown how transversal the field has become. Furthermore, there have been more and more points of intersection with other areas of knowledge, such as sociology, philosophy, anthropology, economics, among others.

Among the various possibilities, it is worth highlighting research adopting space as an object of study and, in particular, its set of practices and political disputes (Brulon & Peci, 2018; Saraiva & Carrieri, 2012; Vaara, Sorsa & Pälli, 2010). Similarly, various works have been grounded on organizational approaches to understanding phenomena that have historically remained on the margins of administration, as is the case of totalitarian organizations (Meneguetti, 2018) and military corporations (Alcadipani & Medeiros, 2016).

In this context, culture has proved to be a particularly fruitful topic, as it is situated in a cross-sectional area while bringing up different possibilities for studies. From a mercantilist perspective, studies addressing the circulation of cultural products as commodities and the possibility of economic insertion through this very production stand out. In this context, it is possible to observe the primacy for certain productions that meet the interests of groups that dominate and exercise greater power in the cultural sector. Due to the asymmetry of power, these groups define not only what should circulate as a commodity but also to whom a cultural product should serve (Williams, 2011b). An example is the treatment given to major audiovisual productions, theatrical and dance companies, and music.

An alternative to this mercantilist character would be elaborating culture-targeted public policies that may allow the insertion of historically marginalized groups into the cultural sphere. Regarding what is crystallized as a form of access to public resources, it is worth mentioning the culture incentive laws. However, these preserve the private character in terms of selecting projects that are to receive investments. The participation of private groups in cultural production can be seen as an addendum to the relations established between companies and the State in the face of social matters, as the recognized inability of the government to respond to all society demands allows companies to expand their activities beyond the production of goods and services. As an example, we can highlight corporate actions of a social nature that benefit from tax incentives while generating reputation gains for companies (Borger, 2001).

The recognized participation of these companies in the cultural sector has increased since the 1990s with the institutional apparatus of cultural foundations and the creation of incentive laws to support and stimulate culture, particularly at the federal and state levels. Indeed, the relationship between the State and private organizations has produced contradictory effects. If, on the one hand, it ensures the allocation of investments in culture, on the other, it also allows the allocation of resources to projects that are of interest to these companies and/or cultural foundations (Xavier & Maranhão, 2010). Another critical point of this relationship is the necessary institutionalization of the projects' applicants, considering that part of the resources derives from tax exemption policies. Indeed, this is the case of the culture incentive law of the state of Minas Gerais, which allows allocating up to 4% of the amounts collected through the State Tax on Circulation of Goods and Services (ICSM) into cultural projects.

From this perspective, the predominance of a utilitarian perspective among the corporations that use these resources has been repeatedly observed, as they allocate their funds in cultural

projects that can bring visibility and consequently reputation gains for themselves. Therefore, a significant share of artistic manifestations is neglected to the detriment of other ones that meet the interests of companies and/or cultural foundations. This results in a process that not only casts out individuals who produce non-appreciated forms of culture but inevitably leads to the crystallization of what should or should not be considered a cultural elaboration, or in other words, what art is or is not (Chauí, 1987).

The consolidation of this trend is reputed in state and federal culture support policies, as they favor cinematographic productions, renowned dance and theater groups, concerts by artists with high media exposure, music festivals acknowledged by the general public, among others. In contrast, the municipal culture incentive laws emerge as an alternative for those who develop historically deprived artistic activities, as most of the funds that finance these projects are provided by the budget of the culture secretariats themselves and are not converted into tax exemption or benefits. Hence, municipal laws allow the submission of projects by individuals and groupings that are not commonly considered under federal and state laws, which are almost invariably targeted at institutional financing.

By enabling the democratization of the resources allocated in the cultural sector, municipal laws not only have the potential to insert these groups or individuals culturally but also contribute to the exercise of civic consciousness since cultural manifestations are mostly identity externalities that help affirm historically subjugated social substrates. Indeed, this is the case of black people and rural dwellers, whose examples of cultural production include the Folia de Reis (“Three Kings Day Festivities”), the bate-pau, the atabaque percussion, Afro dances, and chants. Another positive aspect of accessing resources at the municipal level is the inclusive potential that the decentralization of cultural productions provokes, particularly by promoting local cultural manifestations of inferior market appeal, which have been historically excluded at the federal and state levels.

Given the potential of municipal laws to support culture, this paper analyzes their inclusive and democratic effect, fundamentally considering the promotion of civic consciousness and preserving identity through cultural production, represented herein by the artistic elaborations supported and stimulated by the laws mentioned above. We adopted the city of Cataguases, Minas Gerais, Brazil, as the object of study, as it brings together elements of avant-garde culture established from the modernist heritage of the twentieth century and the cultural productions that have remained on the margins of public investments in culture.

Culture as an aspect of imprisonment and emancipation

The notion of culture as a result of man’s productive capacity goes far beyond cultural products. Etymologically, the word culture originates from the Latin verb *colere*. Culture referred to the cultivation and care of plants, animals, and everything pertaining to the land (agriculture) (Chauí, 1987; Eagleton, 2005; Gomes, 1999). Also, the word culture was used to refer to the care of children, their education, and the development of their natural virtues (childcare). Differently, Arendt (2009) points out that care of education referred to the cultivation of the spirit so that culture was also linked to the care of the gods, ancestors, and monuments and was supposed to be recollected through memory.

Since the eighteenth century, the word culture has yet incorporated new meanings. As faith was replaced with reason, the Enlightenment ideals were consolidated, and the positivist bases for science development and the liberation of humans from the dark ages were laid out. Progressive ideas resonate with the population's living conditions, particularly in Europe, and find in the city its locus of manifestation, so that it is perceived as the product of reason and the field of empiricism (Lefebvre, 1999).

A crucial point must be established here to allow the elaboration of culture from a rational, reflective basis. According to Raymond Williams (2011a), the word culture articulates, sometimes positively, sometimes negatively, with the word **civilization**. Derived from the Latin words *cives* and *civitas*, civilization "referred to the civilian as an educated, polite man, and to the social order" – that is, civil society. However, the meaning of civilization goes beyond the civil sense, representing a state of perfection or an evolved stage of social-historical development that, in turn, referred to the notion of progress (Chauí, 1987; Gomes, 1999).

The idea of culture as a product has been historically immersed in a mechanism of distinction, inclusion, and exclusion. The historical process of artistic – and scientific – production has been placed as a distinctive spectrum throughout history. The quest for the distinction of dominant classes and the advocacy of the activities carried out by this class, according to an order that embeds an element of naturalness, ultimately defines who should employ their efforts in the process of classical productive transformation and who shall devote their time to the development of scientific and artistic formulations. This is the actual division of labor, which separates physical from intellectual work, and constitutes the founding autonomy of all spirituality that represents something that is not real, as an exercise in the emancipation of material life for abstract theorization, or consciousness without praxis (Marx & Engels, 2007). On the one hand, such distinction would be fostered by preserving the legitimacy granted to some groups to produce and dictate what should be perceived as an artistic-cultural production; on the other hand, by the existence of a population mass that would allocate their time to conventional work.

The freedom required from reality can be explained by the fact that the mode of production of material life creates the conditions for the development of social, political, and intellectual life (Marx, 2008). It is in reality that the development of the base that represents the entire economic structure of society takes place, grounded on the totality of the production relations. According to Marx (2008), from this base, the political and legal superstructure rises (as well as art, religion, and science), corresponding to specific social forms of consciousness that can be explained in their connection with the economic and social conditions arranged at its base (Lefebvre, 2001; 2006).

The possibility of human liberation and overcoming the contradictions printed in the class divisions – that is, the overcoming of the class relationship itself – becomes effectively objective through material relations. However, the material character of class domination occurs in the base, in the superstructure, and in its ideological formulations as well. Marx and Engels (2007) stated that the ruling class's ideas are, at a given time, the dominant ideas themselves. In this sense, dominant ideas are configured as the ideal expression of dominant material relations, thus operationalizing the correspondence of a superstructural apparatus that reflects the base (the material form) and subsidizes it ideologically. By assuming the centrality of economic relations as the preponderant moment of the base, the analysis of the existing conditions of social classes becomes irrevocable to understand the ideological formations, particularly the aesthetic conceptions (Lefebvre, 2001).

Ideology must be considered a fundamental social complex, without which neither the development of conflicts nor the use of violence could occur, thus hindering the continuity of the reproduction of class societies. In short, ideology is the set of ideas that humans use to interfere in the conflicts of daily life, exercising an ontological function of social reproduction that stems from reality, from the human activity in the world, and from what it is possible to capture (Vaisman, 2010), regardless of whether that is closer to or further from reality.

In culture, artistic elaboration as a constituent of the superstructure cannot be detached from the concrete relationships between human beings. Their object, the product of their work, must raise awareness about the problems existing in social relations. Therefore, we can consider artistic and cultural production more broadly as an artifact that a form of expression is in itself, in the face of the conflicts and struggles that mark society, stemming from the material issues of life, and, therefore, representing the taking of a position (Williams, 2011b).

The artistic elaboration must necessarily originate and restart from society, where the relations of exploitation of man by man are manifested. In summary, art takes all its substance from everyday life; it is a work that manifests itself in a specific form – that is, the artistic form. It constitutes a superstructure that inexorably maintains its roots in work and practical life, at the level of the productive forces (Lefebvre, 2001).

Nonetheless, the very dialectic of culture confers to this exclusion another associated inclusion, whereas cultural elements that do not fit the aforementioned intellectual order are redeemed. This contradiction excludes manifestations lacking a specific elaboration and leads to an ontological one. The operating mechanism of the cultural forms produced by the disadvantaged classes has nuances that can oscillate between emancipation and imprisonment (Montias, 1981). Williams (2011b) points out that the quest for **popular culture** can be a plunge into the past, to explore the true or repressed native culture obliterated by elitist academic and institutional forms. Williams (2011b) also highlights the emphasis placed on the **people** in **popular culture**, biased by a repressed tradition that would move towards revolutionary trends. This idea is closely related to the materialist concept of aesthetics, which focuses on the individual's relationship with material life and its contradictions and the possibility of taking a particular position from art (Lukács, 1970).

Notwithstanding this imprisoning character, the importance of cultural insertion through specific artistic productions allows certain excluded cultural manifestations to operate resistance to the production of culture mediated by capital, the State, that is, by the groups that exercise hegemony. Hegemony is constituted through relations of activities that can be affixed and can govern and produce social changes. Its dynamic character occurs through modifications according to the historical conditions, whose transformations, in turn, help maintain domination. Nevertheless, the notion of hegemony is not based on determinism but a dialectical relation towards counter-hegemonic resistance practices (Gramsci, 1970).

Despite its revolutionary potential, the dialectical character confers response to potentially liberating cultural practices, as hegemonic practices relate to resistance practices, aim to understand them, offer answers to their questions, and forge a process of insertion of those who are marginalized, which can, in turn, lead to the reconstitution of hegemonic practices and domination. Based on the idea of hegemony and counter-hegemony, Chauí (1987) highlights

popular culture as the expression of the dominated, constituted both by processes of acceptance, interiorization, reproduction, and transformation, and processes of refusal, denial, and withdrawal.

Moura, Zucchetti and Menezes (2011) assert that culture can become a form of resistance when it assumes its creative capacity and reshapes itself, remaining intact to the onslaughts of hegemonic groups, or even appropriating them in order to become a collective movement for its own sake. This, in turn, can potentiate alternatives. This battlefield clearly opposes the academic notion of culture, whose assumption is anchored by formal knowledge, the concept of **beauty**, and conformity or rupture with the establishment, but constructed against the same background.

For Freire and Nogueira (2007), resistance through culture emanates from the movement opposite to this duality, which is established with formal aspects; instead, it establishes itself based on empirically and historically constructed knowledge or the very struggle for life. Ferilli, Sacco, Blessi, and Forbici (2017) highlight the transformative potential of culture when used as a catalyst for community potential. According to the authors, collective action generates reciprocity of citizens with space, modifying it, along with the social fabric itself (Ferilli et al., 2017; Sasaki, 2010).

The distancing and approximation of the public authority in culture funding and support

As we analyze the formation of culture in Brazil, we realize that its operationalization imputes both the maintenance of power and the denial of resistance, removing the possibility of taking a position and leveraging class distinction through culture (Chauí, 1987). This web, in turn, has historically developed according to the interests of the State and private companies.

We must highlight that the market character of culture is not an exclusively Brazilian phenomenon and has intensified due to the reduction of industrial activities in the second half of the twentieth century (Zukin, 2010). Navarro and Clarck (2012) identified at least two types of cultural policies coined from market perspectives. The first is the notion of creative cities, that is, those seeking economic development through culture and the creative industry. In this case, the prevailing activities are the production and distribution of culture and the establishment of a workforce to perform this kind of activity. The second approach refers to the city as a cultural scene, which basically concerns the possibility of selling cultural goods while having consumption as its crucial element. Finally, the educational city is that where culture is perceived as a way of breaking with its elitist character, which separates high culture from popular culture, thus establishing cultural segregation among its citizens (Navarro & Clarck, 2012).

When discussing who should be in charge of the culture sector, at least three different perspectives emerge. The first perceives the State as a provider, establishing a scenario in which it seeks to add certain purposes to culture, to fill the gaps left by other sectors, with different interests and values such as economic and social. In contrast, when the market is perceived as the party in charge, the contradiction of imposing an administrative logic ensues; that is, rationality that withdraws from the etymological and even historical-social sense of culture.

Coelho (1997) proposes an analysis according to three modalities concerning the ideological formation of cultural policies: the first is cultural dirigisme, or how the State appropriates culture; the second is cultural liberalism, based on the idea of freedom and individual autonomy, without

State interference; finally, the cultural democratization aims to expand the public character of culture.

Cultural dirigism presupposes the appropriation of culture by the State to establish a concept of national identity. Thus, culture becomes a form of promoting the State, which subordinates it to its ends. In this case, the role of culture understood as “popular” is appreciated as a means to establish a type of “national-popular” State. In Brazil, the culture of the period known as Estado Novo is a clear example of dirigisme in the scope of culture control (Rodrigues & Castro, 2012).

Roughly speaking, the logic established in the Brazilian Revolution of 1930 has solely maintained the strongly elitist character, this time intimately linked to the progressive ideas fostered during the Estado Novo, which, as far as culture is concerned, were distinguished by the development of Brazilian cultural unity at the expense of a European legacy associated with the country’s dependence on the old continent (Cavalcanti, 2006). This clearly characterizes a superstructural dialectical movement taking place between culture, politics, and the production model created in the Estado Novo. It can be observed mainly in the wake of the prospective avant-garde country, when modernist productions, especially literature and architecture, were intimately supported. These, in turn, were detached from the European artistic heritage (Xavier, 2018), at the same time that the country accommodated the interests of the old agrarian oligarchy and put an end to the march of urbanization, in what Marini (2014) understands as the basic premises of a bourgeois revolution.

Likewise, in its dialectical relationship, the second modality can be clearly connected with the State and the ideological character present in the capitalist mode of production. This is where cultural liberalism is situated, as a consequence of liberal policies, under the idea of the individual’s freedom and autonomy, without any State interference. This conception opposes cultural dirigisme, as it refers to the notion of minimum state (Rodrigues & Castro, 2012). From this point onwards, we can infer that culture incentive laws bring cultural liberalism, as the market becomes responsible for financing the sector. As a result, what has been observed in recent years has been the disengagement or even the absence of State regulation through culture incentives carried out by the private sector. This requires a reflection on cultural policies that can minimally guarantee the development of historically forgotten artistic and cultural manifestations (Rodrigues & Castro, 2012).

Given the scenario of cultural liberalism, the participation of large institutions investing in art and culture has grown, as they are concerned about their reputation in the eyes of their consumers. Furthermore, art becomes a strategic means of advertising, used to strengthen the brand image of such institutions in the face of fierce market competition. This can also be understood as a way of appropriating the symbolic value of culture and art as a means of domination by those who bear it (Wu, 2006).

The third and last modality refers to cultural democratization, grounded on the principle of culture as a collective interest and therefore understood as a social force that cannot be subordinated to market interests. Along these lines, it becomes necessary to create conditions to achieve equal access to culture for everyone, both groups and individuals, and encourage popular participation in the cultural creation process (Rodrigues & Castro, 2012).

This approach has a dual character. Firstly, it allows the construction of the political subject, who, through the participatory process and social mobilization, not only exercises governance but also puts the exercise of democracy into effect (Morais, 2018). Furthermore, it allows the judgment of culture itself to shift from the hands of bureaucrats to the groups that produce and transmit culture in the country, such as relying on the anthropological character to understand cultural heritage (Moreira, 2018).

In this sense, the decentralizing character of public policies aimed at culture can help a more democratic process. Particularly regarding the culture incentive laws, in general, the grants can be allocated directly or indirectly. In the first case, the funds are transferred from the local Secretariat or the Ministry of Culture to the approved projects, as happens in Cataguases. The indirect way takes place through tax incentives and benefits granted to companies that support the projects. In both cases, recent studies have revealed that the mercantilist character prevails, especially in indirect financing. Furthermore, funding is characterized by a predilection for historically established cultural productions, such as music, and is concentrated in regions or cities that already hold a significant share of the cultural production (Teixeira & Xavier, 2019).

Despite the need to maintain cultural productions that can represent identities, especially those allowing a process of awareness among the historically marginalized strata of society – something adopted as a starting point in this paper, it is necessary to highlight that this articulation also permeates private companies. Incidentally, this relationship is also established from the support through municipal Culture Incentive Laws.

Historically linked to the federal and state levels, incentive laws have become part of the cities' agendas following the decrease of federal initiatives in the sector (Botelho, 2001). According to Bronstein and Calabre (2017), the first law providing for tax incentives for the cultural sector was the "Mendonça Law," enacted by the city of São Paulo in 1990. Similar to the Mendonça Law, in 1992, the then-mayor of Rio de Janeiro Marcello Alencar sanctioned Bill No. 1.223, which granted tax incentives for projects targeted at the sports and culture sectors (Bronstein & Calabre, 2017).

When investigating the financing of cultural activities in the city of Itabira, Minas Gerais, Saraiva, and Frias (2009) identified motivations such as tax benefits and opportunities for institutional rewards and external pressures for companies to commit further with activities beyond the scope of productivity. Another recurring aspect of indirect cultural financing concerns the low percentage of resources raised by cultural producers, as seen in the study by Sousa, Costa, and Pessoa (2018). According to the authors, between 2002 and 2015, the percentage of funds raised by cultural projects through the Municipal Culture Incentive Law in the city of Natal ranged between 13% and 44% of the total amount laid out by the municipal government for that purpose (Sousa, Costa & Pessoa (2018).

Similar results were found by Teixeira, Xavier, Gava, and Faria (2017), in a study on the Minas Gerais State Culture Incentive Law, in the period between 2010 and 2014, when the total funding raised accounted for 18.7% of the amount of the total incentive (that is, the amount raised from supporting companies). Besides, the authors also pointed out that more than 70% of the total funding raised was concentrated in the metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte, which is the state.

Methodological Remarks

This article analyzes the potential inclusive and democratic effects of municipal Culture Incentive Laws, fundamentally considering the promotion of civic consciousness and the preservation of identity through cultural production. The research is strictly qualitative and includes cultural projects approved and executed between 2011 and 2014 and interviews conducted between 2012 and 2015. From a total of 26 cultural producers interviewed, fragments of 11 interviews were selected for this work. Respondents were found through snowball sampling, in which the subjects recommend other acquaintances that could potentially take part in the study (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Finally, we must highlight that the interviews were terminated as soon as the categories and information became recurrent (Seidman, 1991).

These were based on an unstructured script so that the conversation with the respondents addressed generic themes. According to Fontana and Frey (1994), unstructured interviews are quite helpful, as they allow researchers to achieve greater depth when collecting relevant data and information, especially when compared to structured ones.

Hence, given the unstructured character of the interview, we went to the field without a questionnaire in our hands. However, we outlined certain topics that we regarded as important to understand the dynamics existing in cultural production and its direct relationship with social issues. As a method, we sought to combine the three-stage interviews recommended by Seidman (1991), which allowed us to explore the respondents' history concerning the research topic, the details of their experiences with artistic elaborations, and their ponderations about social productions, reverberations, and culture in the city.

Given this objective, a list of topics to be addressed was prepared, considering three groups of respondents: individuals linked to cultural productions working independently from the government and cultural foundations (4 interviews); respondents who are or have been linked to those foundations (4 interviews); and individuals linked to the municipal government (3 interviews). We must emphasize that the outlining of topics did not result in a linear questionnaire, as the respondents constantly changed subjects without us interfering. On the contrary, in these cases, we attempted to explore the respondents' content and later returned to the outlined topics to address aspects that had been left out or not made clear.

Based on the elements of this study, we prepared research topics for each group of respondents to support the interviews and the incorporation of emerging categories into the analysis. In general, the elements investigated in each group of respondents can be categorized as follows:

Respondents linked to independent cultural productions

History of the research subjects: the life history of those involved with cultural productions that are not considered by the foundations or the public authorities; the reasons why these people dedicated to specific cultural events, relating them to their life history and those of their ancestors.

Meaning of cultural productions: the meaning attributed by the respondents to their work, as well as the resonance of their productions with the city residents; how the cultural elaborations reverberated social contradictions in their consciousness, along with the process of exclusion they suffer and consequently the possibilities for transforming this scenario.

Relationships established with capital and the Municipal Government: the relationship of approximation or distancing between the Municipal Government and capital through the cultural foundations; the support and financing initiatives developed directly by companies and potentially incorporated as public policies; the position taken in the face of the Municipal Culture Incentive Law, both inclusively and exclusively.

Respondents linked to cultural foundations

History of the research subjects: this category aims to understand how the respondents were inserted in cultural foundations, considering a brief history of their lives and their relationship with art elaborations in general.

Projects developed by the foundations: the projects developed by the cultural foundations and their funding sources, and the audiences assisted by them.

Relationship between cultural foundations and public authorities: the relationship between the cultural foundations, the development of joint projects, the purposes and consequences of shared actions; the relationship between the cultural production established by the foundations with the Municipal Government, and its points of convergence and divergence, approximation and distancing.

Respondents linked to the municipal government

Projects developed by the government: the projects developed by the government; the way by which cultural policies were aimed at preserving a *modernist cultural heritage* and at cultural manifestations not considered by cultural foundations.

Municipal Culture Incentive Law: the role of the incentive law in the local cultural support law; the criteria established for the approval of projects; and the relationship between the existence of the law and the need for the development of complementary actions by the government.

Relationship between cultural foundations and governments: the government's initiatives in the face of the projects developed by the foundations; the forms of effective support and collaboration, and the possible division established between the role of the cultural foundations and the role of the Municipal Secretariat of Culture.

The interviews were analyzed in the light of historical materialism with a Marxist orientation. The materialist conception of history must be seen as the basis for the historical explanation but not the historical explanation itself (Hobsbawm, 1998). In historical materialism, the multiple determinations between base and superstructure are apprehended through dialectics. Likewise, the development of human productive forces, the base, is paramount without implying any deterministic or mechanical relationship. We must reinforce the dynamic character evoked by the dialectical movement of base and superstructure so that historical materialism does not incur in a sort of deterministic function, but rather a dialectical one, which may confer dynamism as a result. Therefore, it is necessary to consider, in each reality, the apprehension of its own contradictions, (internal) dynamics, and transformations (Lefebvre, 2006).

Still regarding data analysis, this study has resorted to strictly qualitative research based on the Marxist conception of language and discourse developed by Mikhail Bakhtin. The importance of discourse is present due to the development of bourgeois philosophy through words (Bakhtin, 2009). Ideology in the discourse must be perceived as part of a specific reality but also as a way of reflecting or refracting that very reality. The ideological component brings with it a meaning that refers to something located outside, so that the signs present in the discourse are fundamental for the apprehension of ideology, given the intersubjective character of discourse (Barros, 2005). We must emphasize that this ideological process that manifests itself through signs only becomes an ideological creation in consciousness from its connection with reality, both in the production by the dominant class and in the apprehension or resistance by the dominated class. According to Bakhtin (2009, p. 35), what is ideological can only be explained by the “specific social material of signs.”

Discursive fragments and analyses may be seen as similar to other discourse analysis currents. As an example, we borrowed the idea of explicit and implicit content to elucidate contradictions. Likewise, the legitimation required in certain arguments that rely on other discourses or contexts, in an allusion to the idea of interdiscourse addressed by Fiorin (1988), Faria (2005), Carrieri, Leite da Silva, Souza, and Pimentel (2006), among other authors.

The idea of ideology operating at the discursive level is not limited to language. When a contradiction occurs, it is not exclusively established at the ideological level but in its direct relation to social conflicts (Brait, 2005). Bakhtin (2009) highlights that such operationalization is paramount, as the sciences dealing with ideology tend to attribute a character of mechanistic causality to it or adopt a positivist conception of empiricism in which discourses appear as facts.

This material character attributed to discursive ideology can only be understood in the relationship between base and superstructure, as Bakhtin (2009) stated. For the author, explaining a relationship between the base and any isolated phenomenon can only achieve cognitive value if its ideological context accompanies this phenomenon. Similarly, the dialectical content of the superstructure only allows the understanding of an ideological transformation based on an immediate relationship with the transformations taking place at the base. This dynamism does not ensure a deterministic character, but rather the transformations operationalized in the ideology itself, through its internal dialectic and contradictions, in line but not necessarily synchronized with the material relations through external dialectics.

Based on this dialectical relationship, Bakhtin (2009, p.42) emphasizes that the words present in the discourse bring with them “the ideological *threads* that serve as a fabric for all social relations, even those that have just emerged or have yet to take shape or pave the way for structured and well-formed ideological systems” (emphasis added). Such representation of words fundamentally permeates the understanding of signs, as they operate the dialectical relationship between the ideological content of words and the material relations, given that what is pronounced effectively expresses a judgment about reality (Bakhtin, 1993).

Based on the relationship between sign and ideology, Bakhtin (2009) came up with indispensable rules to understand forms of domination through signs, namely (a) *the non-separation between the ideology of material reality and the sign*; (b) *the non-dissociation between the sign and the concrete forms of social communication* (as the sign is part of an organized social communication system); and (c) *the non-dissociation between communication and its materially based forms*. Based

on this system of relations, Bakhtin (2009) emphasizes that the ideological apparatus will only affect if it is directly linked to the socio-economic conditions essential to its presented form.

Presentation and Discussion of Results

Cataguases is a city with approximately 80,000 inhabitants in Minas Gerais, 260 km away from Rio de Janeiro and 304 km away from Belo Horizonte. However, what makes Cataguases different from many other small Brazilian cities? The first aspect is economic in nature and has to do with the city's early industrialization, particularly in the textile sector, made possible by access to power since the first decade of the twentieth century. Another factor concerns the city's relationship with culture, reverberated by the first cinematographic productions of filmmaker Humberto Mauro and the modernist incursions in literature, particularly by the poets of *Revista Verde*, both of which were produced in the 1920s. Furthermore, Cataguases is known for its modern architectural collection, which features works by Niemeyer and brothers Roberto and Francisco Bolonha, the landscape designs of Roberto Burle Marx, among others.

Modern architecture consolidates not only an aesthetic and ideological project but also a political one. At the national level, both cultural manifestations served the project of a progressive nation initiated by the Getúlio Vargas administration in the 1930s. At the local level, modern architecture was particularly appropriated as a form of political proposal. In the mid-1940s, as a strategy to win the elections, one of the local political groups, consisting of industrialists, proposed the creation of an avant-garde town, based on modern architecture, in opposition to the proposals of the rival political group, which aimed to discuss the terrible working conditions in the city's companies. In the view of the former group, industries would bring progress to Cataguases, and any discussion on labor relations was expendable.

After the elections, with the victory of the group of industrialists, several works of modernist architecture were started, solidifying the avant-garde city as imagined by the group that came to control not only the city's economic activities but also the political and cultural spheres. Here begins the first central turning point in the dialectical relationship between the base (economic) and superstructure (political and cultural), present in the work of Marx (2007) and so skillfully addressed by Williams (2011b). Therefore, as it happened in Brazil after 1930, the cultural facet of the city was assumed as part of an ideological component that reinforced the progressive character present in the industrial activity. Moreover, the city's political control greatly supports the convergence between the two spheres mentioned above.

With the consolidation of political and economic powers, the following decades were marked by a slowdown in cultural activities supported by industrial groups, which were resumed only in the 1980s due to the emergence of cultural foundations linked to the local companies. As for the municipal government, the process of enlisting private modernist buildings and certain public goods triggered a uniformity of initiatives targeted at culture, particularly in the 1990s. Therefore, the only way of action was to crystallize a past that distinguished the city from the others through policies enforced to protect cultural heritage.

Despite the city's recognized cultural vocation, we can verify in Cataguases the existence of a city of the *unsuspecting*, that is, the local people who are born, raised, and often pass away without knowing about their modernist background. Likewise, there is another city of an avant-garde nature,

which presents itself to the *informed*, that is, those who not only attended and but also engaged in cultural events and artistic elaborations taking place in the city (Xavier, 2013).

The legacy of modernism is present in the local public policy for the culture sector, particularly in terms of the initiatives to preserve the immovable heritage of Cataguases. This, in turn, reverberates in the continuity of the idea of an avant-garde city, thus eclipsing popular cultural manifestations. Indeed, they provide what Graham (2002) has defined as an economic resource in its external aspect, whereas the internal aspect refers to the spheres of construction of daily practices.

The results indicate that cultural hegemony in the city is reinforced by the legal, bureaucratic apparatus of the Municipal Culture Incentive Law No. 3,746/2009¹, which assigns legitimacy to the historically established hegemony and forges the idea of a democratic process regarding access to the financial resources available for the production of cultural projects.

I think we have to remember something very important (...) To value the culture in this city because it's very strong. We created the Ascânio Lopes Law, which is supposed to foster culture using its own resources. The councilors passed the bill, and the mayor signed it, and it's been around for two years now. Last year, for example, 17 projects were approved. It is something that the mayor wants to expand because it worked very well. [R10, 2012]

Applicants must have lived in the municipality for more than a year. Each project can be granted up to R\$ 12.000,00, and it must include the whole city of Cataguases in terms of culture. For instance, public spaces. As for book launches, we have a percentage given away to the Secretariat of Culture, and the secretariat forwards them to the library. We had a project that was a children's book, and it was later adopted in all local and state school districts in town. So, these are the criteria for getting grants through the law. [R10, 2012]

The first fragment above reinforces the importance given by the government to the law. In its simplest form, the second fragment sets out the criteria established to have a project approved by reducing them to the need for the applicant to reside in the municipality and for the project to provide some form of counterpart to the local population. These elements, in principle, would denote the public function of the approved project. However, the Municipal Culture Incentive Law not only reveals many contradictions regarding its democratic character but also restricts the commitment of the municipal government to culture.

The criteria established for the approval of projects work as mechanisms for maintaining cultural activities in the hands of a dominant and white cultural elite. Although it is not possible to infer anything as to intentionality, the materialist character impregnated in the analysis reveals a clearly exclusive character in the law as an instrument established in the political sphere, which directly stimulates the maintenance of cultural elitism. Firstly, the obligation to prepare a project fosters the establishment of certain requirements that neglect a significant part of the excluded classes from the very start, as it presupposes access to the formal education necessary to structure a project based on a rationally established, linear form of knowledge. Furthermore, it considers the suitability and experience of those involved in the project based on their resumes and background to ensure that the proposal is feasible.

The other criteria consider the impact of the proposals on the city. Despite the socializing character that these criteria may exercise, the very requirement to present a project limits the possibilities of participation in the public notices, thus configuring a falsely democratic process.

We [the members of the Black Movement], as we are registered correctly, we have to check the government issues, that is, to prepare the project, under the Ascânio Lopes Law, understand? To submit the project. But it's also pretty hard to elaborate the project and be successful, you know? [R4, 2012]

This excerpt reflects the challenges faced by members of historically excluded cultural movements in obtaining funding for their projects, as they have little affinity with this type of document and the formalism inherent in the process. The analysis of the results of the public notices issued between 2011 and 2014 indicates that the requirement to formalize a proposal withdraws a significant part of those involved in cultural events, which are not supported by the cultural foundations or the public authorities. Between 2011 and 2014, 226 projects were submitted for appreciation, of which 89 received financial support of up to R\$ 12,000.00. Among the projects approved in the period in question, 73% of the approved projects were related to music (recording albums or hosting shows and festivals) and 42% to books and publishing.

The coldness of figures and statistics reveals that almost half of the projects funded involve publishing books written by writers most of whom are renowned on the local scene. This finding corroborates the excessive formality required to preparing projects as an entry barrier for the cultural productions idealized by members of the disadvantaged classes. This happens because it is legitimate to consider that the high rate of approval of book projects is fundamentally due to the applicant's ability to outline and structure their proposals according to a rationale attributed to the project by the selection criteria. Another evidence of the restrictive character of the law concerns the fact that the musical projects are often directly or indirectly linked to the cultural foundations of the city, thus preserving the elitist continuity bias already embedded in the notion of culture cultivated by these very foundations.

Who did that Ascânio Lopes Law benefit? You saw many books, didn't you? Did you see any stage plays, though? How many people applied? Who's in the panel that reviews the projects? Do you know them? [R11, 2012]

The Ascânio Lopes law has helped a lot. **But I think the fix is in, too.** I think that... Here's what I think about these projects: **if you have got grants twice, you shouldn't get one a third time.** I think that, if it doesn't come from the person himself, I think the person must understand that it's no longer... **If a person makes a living from writing, why would he want to submit his project?** (...) Leave it to the guy who is beginning his writing career, like Rodrigo from our school. He wrote a book, and he's trying to publish it. It's his first book. Let him in, you know? So, we have to compete against the *renowned ones*². (...) It's like those guys of the *Marchinhas de Carnaval* contest. **One year, they submitted [a project], but they didn't get the grant. In the second year, they applied via the State law. And they got the grant! Now they've been given a thumbs up.** And later, they got a grant via the municipal law too. I mean, come on! [R7, 2012]

The first fragment above reinforces the negative aspect of the considerable number of book projects approved by the panel that reviews the submitted proposals. The lack of clarity about the panel members and the criteria adopted by them is also mentioned in other fragments. This casts doubts on the selected projects, as they fully represent the continuity and maintenance of cultural

production in the hands of the culturally established class, being a possible alternative to the impossibility of recurring the financing of the same applicant or proposal.

We must note that our criticism on the significant number of approved book projects should not be confused with the lack of transformation potential through reading, present in the works of Williams (2011a; 2011b), Eagleton (2005), Lukács (1965), and other authors. However, it must be emphasized that the Culture Incentive Law operates the maintenance of class division with privileged and disadvantaged classes. Finally, the second fragment above explains a distortion in the financing of the project entitled *Festival de Marchinhas*, which was approved by both the municipal and state laws, doubling the allocation of financial resources in the same proposal.

The element of continuity embedded in the alleged democratization of access to public resources through the Municipal Culture Incentive Law can also be identified in the analysis of the submitted projects, which reinforce the restrictions imposed in terms of the requirements established to access the funding, from the very beginning of the process. The process of exclusion from public resources targeted at the cultural sector is manifested both by the entry barriers imposed by the public notice requirements and the selection of proposals. In the 2012 public notice, among the 22 approved projects, six had already been awarded in the year before.

More specifically, the critical position adopted in this paper regarding the approval of projects involving the publishing of books is motivated by our belief that individually a book has less potential as a mechanism for transformation through art. We believe in reading as a mechanism for transformation. However, we credit this transformation to a continuous and long-term process, which is not limited to acquiring a book produced through the social contribution required by the Municipal Culture Incentive Law. Consequently, this is another component of the law's restrictive nature, which aims to serve the project proponents more often than the citizens, as the following fragment attests.

There are books. Sometimes even a [musical] show. But it's like two or three people; it's pretty individual. It's not a social initiative. The projects are fairly individual. [R7, 2012]

In addition to the barrier created under the guise of false democratization, the incentive laws have yet another harmful effect. Along with the policies for preserving the modernist heritage, the totality of the government's commitment to culture is conferred to creating and enforcing the law. The following fragment highlights the importance of the law but reinforces its contradictory character as it ends up exhausting the possibilities for initiatives on the part of the public authorities. Therefore, as the government concentrates its efforts on enforcing the law, it becomes unable to meet the existing cultural demands, especially of the lower classes, who do not have access to the formal education necessary to elaborate proposals aligned with the requirements set forth by the law.

I think that the public authorities focused on the Ascânio Lopes law. It's been a great addition that has helped a lot. But I think they only focused on that, you know? And it shouldn't be like that. OK, so that's the Ascânio Lopes Law, fine! **But then what? What else is there? There should be a partnership with the Secretariat of Culture, a Secretariat that can meet the demands of Cataguases, which are not few, you know?** [R9, 2012]

The capacity of the public authorities to establish policies targeted at the population has proved innocuous so that the development of cultural activities depends on the approval of

projects. Therefore, the government finds in the legal apparatus the assurance to empty any possibility of artistic production idealized by the disadvantaged classes, and consequently – retrieving the scope of the idea of aesthetics in the works of Lukács (1970) – the possibility of seeing not only the contradictions of reality reflected in art, but also taking a stand in the face of the conflicts concerning not only economic issues, the base, but also political, in a dialectical relationship. Besides, it transfers the responsibility for the failure of the projects to the poorly elaboration of the proposals. The alleged democratization of culture has not only symbolic effects when it serves disadvantaged social substrates but also conceals the notion of class division and conflict in the forged social planning, whose escapement lies in the meritocracy of each of its members.

This [the Culture Incentive Law] is what there is. It goes like this... As the foundations already produce culture in Cataguases, they think: “Let’s give them what they want, right?” At least in the last [municipal administrations], it was like that, you know? In that last one... I remember that a mayor said... I witnessed that. “Foundations know how to handle culture in Cataguases, and we don’t need to do anything, do we?” (...) So, in the last thirty years in Cataguases, there’s been no interest in the process of acculturation of the city by public administrations, you know? [R6, 2012]

The municipal government’s decision is supported by the cultural foundations based in the city. The fragment above clarifies that the participation gap on the part of the local government is caused by the transference of responsibility to cultural foundations, which, in turn, are supposed to fill such gap, as they *already handle culture*. The initiatives are dependent on the demands of the cultural foundations. At the same time, the public authorities are entirely removed from the discussions about culture in the city, as the following fragment reveals.

I think it even [has to do] with the leaders’ vision because the institutions have their own will. But in the last ten years, no politician has agreed with this idea. [...] in one of the initiatives I got in touch with the elected councilmen, we tried to set up a meeting with the new leaders for the next year [2013]... But of the 15 [councilors], only two attended, and they weren’t the representatives of the elected mayor, nor the one who left the office. The public authorities didn’t embrace [the idea of] creating a public policy aimed at the cultural industry or cultural development. I believe that as it was restricted to the private sector, so this created some limitations. [R5, 2012]

They are there [the government], and we are here [the representative of the institutions]. The institutions have become self-sufficient. Maybe I’m wrong about that, but that’s how I feel, you know? [R9, 2012]

I think the government perceives [culture] as a minor thing. In Cataguases, I think there’s an aggravating factor, as culture is left aside because of the private foundations that the city maintains. So, the mayor has the Ascânio Lopes Law, and he can cross his arms [...] They leave it to the foundations. The foundations drive the cultural movement. “So it’s great, they are doing it, and I can advertise in every event, so it’s all cool” [...] And the law works a lot like that, they passed the bill and they are doing a lot for culture already, you know? [They think] it’s enough! [R2, 2014]

The second and third fragments above refer to the self-sufficiency of the cultural foundations due to the government’s absence and undoubtedly triggered by the convenience that the appropriation of cultural demands by the foundations allows. Therefore, the municipal government

grounds on capital the construction of a cultural policy for the city, asserting again the relationship between base and superstructure, in which culture becomes more of a service of public interest under the tutelage of private organizations (Wu, 2006). If in the past the interest of capital on the local culture was triggered by a political interest – obviously accompanied by the maintenance of the economic order –, the contemporary facet of cultural appropriation exempts the interest in political power. However, it also influences the order that capital holds over the city. Furthermore, the scenario worsens when we observe the restrictive nature of the investments made in the sector by the city's cultural foundations.

In fact, every foundation or cultural institution here has, let's say, its own artists. There's training; they train these artists. **So, the Francisca Peixoto institute's theater [consists only of] those who are inside, the teachers, and that same group right there.** [R3, 2014]

An actor outside [the group] has no chance of taking part in that. [R8, 2014]

The cultural foundation in Cataguases is [directed] to a very limited audience. It's always the same audience. For instance, [the singer] João Bosco has been here. The ticket sales were supposed to begin at 8 in the morning. **Some people got there at 7 am to stand in line, but after serving three people, the tickets were sold out. They had already been booked [...]** So the audience is always very restricted. [R1, 2014]

As we address the cultural sector from a dialectic point of view, the fragments above accentuate the existing contradictions even further. The limits of the public policies targeted at the culture sector through the Municipal Culture Incentive Law influence not only the continuity of access to resources by specific producers and productions but also the democratic access to culture and even the critical potential that it can help arise, as the complement of the initiatives by the government – which are limited to the incentive law itself – through cultural foundations only seem to perpetuate the privileges to access and the cultural production of the city.

Final Remarks

This article analyzed the inclusive and democratic effect of the Municipal Culture Incentive Law to support and stimulate culture in Cataguases, Minas Gerais, Brazil, while fundamentally considering the promotion of civic consciousness and identity preservation through cultural production. The unitary sense conferred to the idea of culture stemming from the modernist legacy leads to the inhibition of other forms of cultural manifestations in the city, thus shaping the historical narratives that seek to attribute a unitary meaning to that place (Blokland, 2009). The government uses the seal of artistic and cultural-historical heritage granted by IPHAN in 1994 to justify allocating a significant part of its resources to preserve listed buildings under the argument of leveraging the city's economy through tourism. Investment in the cultural sector ends up restricted to heritage building maintenance, and as a consequence, becomes innocuous in fostering artistic manifestations.

The effective possibility of transformation through art comes across barriers in the instruments of approval adopted by the government, to neglect its role as an agent that fosters cultural manifestations. In addition to the prerogative of listings used to justify investments, the local government also resorts to the legal assurance conferred by the Municipal Culture Incentive

Law to exempt itself from the responsibility of dealing with culture from a social perspective. Public initiatives find in the law the synthesis of their involvement with the city's artistic elaborations through a mechanism that requires the ability to structure and outline a rationally formulated cultural proposal based on formal knowledge. The assumptions established in the public notices and the criteria adopted for project approval represent the maintenance of the privileges established from the idea of *cultural vocation*. This is easily illustrated from the analysis of the projects approved between 2011 and 2014, which privileged book publications and events proposed by individuals with ties with the local cultural foundations.

The counterpart for forgetting the historically excluded cultural manifestations lies in the universalizing tendency to enclose them under the umbrella of folklore. The planning of the elaborations removes the existing specificities and the traits that these have historically borne. Consequently, it denies the possibility of transformation from artistic elaborations when art comes to represent the taking of a position by humans in the face of social conflicts.

In addition to the difficulties in accessing funding through the Culture Incentive Law, direct financing is denied by both the government and the companies. In the case of governments, the contributions are personalized, *benevolent*, and tend to be charged back in the future under the prerogative of exchanging favors, as observed in the fragment about the Black Movement. Furthermore, the local government also undermines the essence of the manifestations from the control they exercise over them, for both the process of outlining a project and the product itself are determined by the promoters of events, as in the case of the *Folia de Reis* festivities.

The possibilities for transformation of the disadvantaged classes are resisted by capital since companies do not contribute financially because they already maintain (largely through tax exemption) their own cultural foundations. These, in turn, already have an agenda that embodies the formation of a privileged circle of culture. This refusal occurs not only in the face of the possibilities that these artistic manifestations can generate but also of the conditions of their production, of the adopted empiricism, and a social or past issue that rationality itself repels. Previously isolated in the context of the establishment of modernist architecture with political characteristics, the approximation of capital with culture is now revealed in its institutional form so that its proposals are manifested in different nuances.

In our view, the way out of this process of cultural elitization at the municipal level involves structural changes. First, the very notion of culture must be redefined regarding its potential to raise awareness about the concrete contradictions of the social fabric. This would necessarily mean incorporating historically marginalized cultural productions so as to transpose the formal and restrictive character embedded in the operationalization of the incentive laws. Another practical possibility would be adopting an interstice of projects contemplated with financial resources from the law. Finally, and more complexly, creating a structure that can reward proposals not for their appearance, which is manifested in the cultural projects, but for what they can offer in terms of their socially transforming capacity, while also operating as a depository of memories about cultural practices.

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1. The Municipal Culture Incentive Law Ascânio Lopes, No. 3,746 /2009 stimulates artistic and cultural training through the granting of scholarships, research and work opportunities to authors, artists and technicians residing in the municipality; conducts artistic-cultural courses aimed at training, specializing and improving human resources; and implements and maintains non-profit activities aimed at artistic and cultural training. In addition, it is a priority to encourage cultural and artistic production through the production of music records, videos, films and other forms of cultural products, of phonographic, video-phonographic and cinematographic nature; to publish works related to the humanities, letters and arts; to organize music festivals, performing arts shows, and folk musicals; and finally, to organize exhibitions of visual arts, graphic arts, crafts and photography. Annually, the municipal government publishes, under the terms of the law, the public notice for the submission of applicable projects. The projects are reviewed by a panel consisting of representatives of the municipal government and civil society. The approved projects can be granted up to R\$ 12,000.00 in funding incentives, which shall be directly transferred by the municipal government. The number of approved projects shall depend on the budget allocated to the culture sectors should be listed here, if any. If there is no note in the text, that section must be deleted.
2. The phrase “renowned ones” replaced the names of the city writers mentioned in the interviews.

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