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## Brazilian approach to the creative city: potential for socially sustainable development

### *Cidade criativa à brasileira: potencial para o desenvolvimento sustentável*

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#### ABSTRACT

Since the end of the 20th century, the use of the city's cultural resources has been expanding and expressed in various discourses. Among which, the idea of a creative city stands out, that focuses on the strengthening and development of creative industries as a strategy for urban development. The objective of this article is to analyze the appropriation of the term creative city in Brazil, regarding its potential to design a more socially sustainable city model that incorporates creative individuals and groups. To achieve this, a bibliographic review of the creative city concept was conducted and the proposals for the implementation suggested by the northeastern Brazilian cities that are members of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network were examined. The results indicate that these cities present a greatly reduced version of the concept; however, the proposed strategies for the implementation of a creative city consider social groups within the creative sector and aim to promote social development, which can contribute to outlining a more inclusive concept of a creative city.

**Keywords:** Creative cities. Unesco Creative Cities Network. Social movements. Sustainable development. Brazil.

#### RESUMO

Desde o final do século XX, a utilização dos recursos culturais da cidade vem sendo ampliada e expressa em vários discursos, destacando-se, entre eles, a ideia de cidade criativa, que foca no fortalecimento das indústrias criativas como estratégia para o desenvolvimento sustentável. O objetivo deste artigo foi analisar a apropriação do termo "cidade criativa" no Brasil, quanto ao seu potencial para construir um modelo de cidade socialmente mais sustentável, que incorpore os sujeitos e os grupos criativos. Para isso, fez-se revisão bibliográfica sobre o conceito de cidade criativa e verificaram-se as propostas de implementação indicadas pelas cidades brasileiras nordestinas integrantes da Rede de Cidades Criativas da United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco). Os resultados apontam que essas cidades apresentam uma versão bastante recortada do conceito; entretanto, apontam estratégias para a implementação de cidade criativa que consideram os grupos sociais do setor criativo e visam à promoção do desenvolvimento social, o que pode contribuir para delinear um conceito de cidade criativa mais inclusivo.

**Palavras-chave:** Cidade criativa. Rede de Cidades Criativas da Unesco. Movimentos sociais. Desenvolvimento sustentável. Brasil.

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## INTRODUCTION

At the end of the 20th century, economic restructuring resulting from the deindustrialization of countries, the urban decline of large parts of cities, fiscal austerity, and the rise of neoliberal governments were observed (Harvey, 1996; Vivant, 2012; Grodach, 2017). In parallel and related to this, the crisis of modernist urban planning (Maricato, 2015) intensified and, as a consequence, culture began to be used as a means to promote urban development (Arantes, 2002; Yúdice, 2004; Grodach, 2017; Couto, 2023), which can be referred to as “urban entrepreneurialism” (Harvey, 2014).

Since then, the use of the city’s cultural resources has been expanded and expressed in various discourses, proving to be a long-lasting influence on urban and cultural policies (Grodach, 2017; Segovia; Hervé, 2022). Among these discourses, the idea of the creative city has recently stood out (Duxbury et al., 2012; Grodach, 2017; Segovia; Hervé, 2022), which focuses on strengthening and developing creative industries as a strategy for the city to reinvent itself from urban and economic perspectives (Segovia; Hervé, 2022). The emergence of this term is situated within a context of economic change, where creativity is established as an important resource (Vivant, 2012), along with the rise of creative activities that make up the field of the creative economy (Unctad, 2012).

The term “creative city”, although initially met with severe criticism in academic circles (Peck, 2005; Scott, 2006; Grodach, 2017), has been adopted by politicians and urban planners worldwide and is now widely circulated (Duxbury et al., 2012; Vivant, 2012; Pratt, 2017). It has been developed both empirically and conceptually through applications in different contexts (Duxbury et al., 2012; Segovia; Hervé, 2022).

But what exactly is a creative city? Various authors unanimously highlight the vagueness of the term (Peck, 2005; Scott, 2006; O’Connor; Shaw, 2014; Grodach, 2017; Matovic; Del Valle, 2020/1), as well as the multiple meanings and ways the concept is applied (Reis; Urani, 2011; Vivant, 2012; Segovia; Hervé, 2022). At times, it is associated with attracting the creative class and fostering the creative economy (Florida, 2011; Landry, 2012a); in others, with what a good city should be, emphasizing diversity and urbanity (Landry; Bianchini, 1995; O’Connor; Shaw, 2014). There is also the perspective that focuses on the transformative potential of artists for urban cultural life (Miles, 2012; Grodach, 2017), and, finally, the idea of using creativity for sustainable social and economic development (Vivant, 2012; Unesco, 2020; Segovia; Hervé, 2022).

With this in mind, the main objective of this study was to analyze the incorporation of the term “creative city” in the Brazilian context as a potential contribution to building a socially more sustainable city model that includes creative individuals and groups. To achieve this, the study first describes the emergence of the term, its dissemination, and attempts at operationalization, as well as the current framework and possibilities stemming from this concept. Next, it presents the trajectory of the “creative city” concept in Brazil, addressing the conflicts surrounding the term and

analyzing the proposals made by six creative cities located in the Northeast of Brazil<sup>1</sup>. Finally, the concluding remarks based on the research conducted are presented.

## **CREATIVE CITY: EMERGENCE AND EVOLUTION**

### **Brief history of creative cities**

The term “creative economy” was first used in 2001 in the works of economists John Howkins and David Throsby (Reis, 2006). From that decade onward, the term “creative economy” became consolidated and popularized, particularly through its adoption by international agencies such as UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) (Miguez, 2007).

In Brazil, the Ministry of Culture (Minc) sought to solidify a national understanding in the Plan of the Secretariat of Creative Economy (2011) by stating that: “Creative sectors are all those whose productive activities have as their main process a creative act that generates symbolic value, a central element in the formation of price, and results in the production of cultural and economic wealth” (Brasil, 2011, p. 22).

The understanding of creative economy, in addition to revealing the place that culture has come to occupy in the contemporary world, helps to understand how much it has come to dictate public policies. As Yúdice puts it, “culture is being increasingly directed as a resource for sociopolitical and economic improvement” (2004, p. 25), or more specifically, “as a resource to achieve an end” (2004, p. 52). Therefore, we observe the use of culture as a “cure for all ills”: improving social conditions, stimulating economic growth, creating jobs, and promoting sustainable urban development.

This centrality of culture and the rise of creativity as a resource to be incorporated into various fields, when related to urban planning, will underpin new propositions about interventions in urban space (Arantes, 2000; Fernandes, 2006; Seldin, 2016). Thus, alongside the first propositions about the term “creative industries” in Australia and the United Kingdom in the 1990s, the idea of the creative city will emerge. Therefore, an intimate relationship between economy, city, and culture began to establish itself in both academic and empirical spheres.

The first records of the term “creative city” occurred at two events held in 1988, one in the United Kingdom and another in Australia (Matovic; Del Valle, 2020/1). The term “creative city” also appeared in a study developed by the English urban planner Charles Landry for Glasgow (1991), which aimed to foster the economy by considering cultural aspects. This same idea was revisited by the author, in partnership with Franco Bianchini, in the book *The Creative City* (1995). In 2002, the American economist Richard Florida released *The Rise of the Creative Class*, in which

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1 This article is part of an ongoing thesis on urban planning based on the concept of creative cities, in Brazilian cities that are part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, located in the Northeast of Brazil (Salvador/BA, João Pessoa/PB, Fortaleza/CE, Recife/PE, Campina Grande/PB, and Penedo/AL).

he introduced the idea that economic development is promoted when cities attract the creative class (Florida, 2011). The ideas of Landry and Florida were disseminated and put into practice through lectures and consultancy in cities by the authors, being built upon in both theoretical and practical perspectives (Peck, 2005; Vivant, 2012; Matovic; Del Valle, 2020/1).

However, this initial moment was also accompanied by criticisms, which pointed to gentrification; economic competitiveness; the instrumentalization of culture and art; an elitist view of the creative class; neglect of inequality and poverty; exclusion of minority cultures; theoretical inconsistencies of the concept; and the use of the term “creative city” as marketing (Peck, 2005; Scott, 2006; Duxbury *et al.*, 2012; Vivant, 2012; Grodach, 2017; Pratt, 2017; Matovic; Del Valle, 2020/1).

The search for the operationalization of the concept marks the second phase of the creative city. A key point was the adoption of the term by UNESCO in 2004, when it established the Creative Cities Network (UCCN), now composed of 350 cities, which applied in the fields of Craft and Folk Art, Design, Cinema, Gastronomy, Literature, Media Arts, and Music (Unesco, 2023). Defines creative cities as “[...] those that recognize creativity as a strategy for sustainable development [...] and place creativity and cultural industries at the center of their development plans at the local level while actively cooperating at the international level” (Unesco, 2020, p. 2).

This institution played a central role in promoting the tourism-cultural renewal model across Europe and other continents, presenting an agenda that advocates the alliance between culture and development (Couto, 2023). Thus “the creative city policy proposal managed to connect with the perspective of sustainable development and, from there, transitioned towards international urban and cultural agendas” (Segovia; Hervé, 2022, p. 8, our translation). The concept was also adopted by other international agencies, such as Unctad and the World Bank Group (Yúdice, 2004; Reis; Urani, 2011; Couto, 2023).

In this article, while acknowledging the debate surrounding the term “sustainable development” (Ratiu, 2013; Segovia; Hervé, 2022), we adopt UNESCO’s perspective, which understands it as growth that occurs across spatial, economic, and social dimensions; promotes social inclusion and poverty reduction; is concerned with environmental preservation; and seeks to create a vibrant urban environment that fosters well-being (Unesco; World Bank, 2021).

Regarding contributions to the concept of the creative city, it is important to highlight Landry’s extensive work (Landry, 2000; Landry & Hyams, 2012; Landry, 2012b) and various research analyses based on empirical studies (Evans *et al.*, 2006; Hartley *et al.*, 2012; UNESCO; World Bank, 2021; Montalto *et al.*, 2023), which sought to operationalize the concept, proposing strategies for its application and identifying indices for measuring and evaluating urban creativity.

### **Creative city: a contested term**

The analysis of the term “creative city” from a chronological perspective allows us to assert that it was gradually adopted by urban managers and government

agencies, particularly in Western Europe and North America (Miles, 2012; Pratt, 2017; Montalto et al., 2023). This sparked intense academic debate (Miles, 2012; Pratt, 2017; Montalto et al., 2023), including the establishment of the field of cultural and creative economy studies. It has since been researched in universities and research centers, which have established undergraduate and postgraduate programs (Pratt, 2017).

Thus, it is evident that the concept has been in circulation for more than two decades and that: "Far from being a passing trend, the concept of the creative city has been embraced by various types of cities, despite seemingly fatal academic criticism, a policy with vague goals, and questionable political outcomes." (Grodach, 2017, p. 82, our translation).

However, over time, the criticisms have made the negative aspects related to the creative city increasingly evident, highlighting the need for "more multidimensional, nuanced, and participatory strategies that are sensitive to local cultures and differences and pay greater attention to the redistribution of benefits, which are growing demands" (Duxbury et al., 2012, p. 6). Several authors point out that the concept of the creative city is evolving and carries the potential for a different approach to art and culture in the urban context (Grodach, 2017; Vivant, 2012), or even for discussing a post-creative city, where artistic and everyday productions establish new foundations for urban existence (Miles, 2012).

Thus, after more than two decades of circulation, it is possible to observe that the imprecision of the term has evolved (and been transformed) into different visions of the creative city, with the term still being contested (O'Connor; Shaw, 2014; Grodach, 2017; Segovia; Hervé, 2022). Therefore, "in recent years, there has been a silent shift in the discourse of the creative city" (Grodach, 2017, p. 86, our translation). From the 2010s onwards, the criticisms pointing to the negative effects of implementing the creative city began to receive more attention (Matovic; Del Valle, 2020/1; Duxbury et al., 2012), and the strategy of applying the same model, focused on the international market and global flows, was no longer seen as the only possible approach (Duxbury et al., 2012).

More recently, there has been an attempt to reposition the creative city (O'Connor; Shaw, 2014; Grodach, 2017; Segovia; Hervé, 2022), as the term "largely functions as an empty signifier that depends on who assigns meaning to it. Therefore, the positive use of its political potential is a contested issue". (Segovia; Hervé, 2022, p. 11, our translation).

Based on the literature on the topic, it is understood that the initial focus of the creative city is still present, but the term continues to evolve and is currently being placed in a broader perspective, encompassing aspects previously not considered and exploring alternative ways of developing urban cultural policy (Grodach, 2017; Segovia; Hervé, 2022). Therefore, some points of contention of the term can be identified, which have the potential to lead the creative city down paths different from those it has followed so far, more aligned with the promotion of sustainable development. These are:

- The need to outline strategies open to participation and valuing local cultural diversity, benefiting those economically disadvantaged (Duxbury *et al.*, 2012);
- Development of studies that address aspects related to the negative impacts of the creative city (Duxbury *et al.*, 2012; Matovic; Del Valle, 2020/1);
- The emergence of the maker movement, linked to the production of cultural goods on a small scale and creative placemaking (localized urban interventions made by the community) (O'Connor; Shaw, 2014; Grodach, 2017; Segovia; Hervé, 2022);
- A broader view of culture, beyond its instrumentalization, considering the actors involved and their way of existence in the city (O'Connor; Shaw, 2014; Segovia; Hervé, 2022);
- The search for a new form of governance (Duxbury *et al.*, 2012), combining short-term targeted actions with long-term initiatives (Segovia; Hervé, 2022);
- Strengthening the premise of the right to the city: whether related to urban creativity (Segovia; Hervé, 2022); or focused on the community and inclusion (O'Connor; Shaw, 2014);
- Alignment of the creative city discourse with the concept of sustainable development (Segovia; Hervé, 2022).

These points of contention of the term enable the emergence of new, more comprehensive and multidimensional perspectives (Duxbury *et al.*, 2012; Grodach, 2017; Matovic; Del Valle, 2020/1), which allow a return to the roots of the creative city (in terms of urban diversity), without forgetting the operational strategies built to make a city creative, while assimilating the criticisms made.

In summary, the literature on the topic suggests that to respond to the criticisms and reposition itself, the concept of the creative city should: encompass the entire urban space, without neglecting aspects such as social and economic inequality; align with the principles of sustainability; respect local cultural aspects, valuing individuals and groups that are truly creative (artists, artistic groups, and local cultural producers); establish a new form of governance, open to community participation; consider the inherent aspects of creativity; and, in short, ensure the right to the city (Duxbury *et al.*, 2012; O'Connor; Shaw, 2014; Grodach, 2017; Matovic; Del Valle, 2020/1; Segovia; Hervé, 2022). From this scenario, a question arises: what, then, would be the future of the creative city?

### **Possible paths for a creative city**

Initially, when formulated by its pioneers (Florida [2002]; 2011; Landry; Bianchini, 1995), the concept was closely linked to the strategy of making a city attractive to the creative class, through the creation of an appealing and diverse urban space. The application of this idea around the world was, for the most part, aligned with the thinking of neoliberal urban development, rather than policies aimed at supporting creative and artistic activities (Duxbury *et al.*, 2012; Grodach, 2017). On the other hand, the appropriation of the term by international agencies reshaped

the concept into a more objective definition aligned with sustainable development, enabling its dissemination worldwide (Couto, 2023; Unesco, 2020).

In this sense, Vivant (2012) emphasizes the contribution of the creative city concept to thinking about urban space, highlighting the role of the city as a space of diversity and contradiction. Meanwhile, Miles points to the emergence of “[...] a new alliance between artistic production and everyday cultures,” which could be “a starting point for the post-creative city. [...] There is, therefore, an alternative to the current state of affairs”. (Miles, 2012, p. 26). Thus, there would be space for urban project proposals more connected to cultural diversity and to local, environmental, social, and economically sustainable needs, which do not aim for the mere appropriation of cultural resources within the neoliberal logic, but rather seek social equity (Miles, 2012).

Harvey (1996) argues that neoliberal approaches to urban planning (to which the creative city is often aligned) can lead to a result that produces true urban development, stating that “[...] it remains an open question whether urban entrepreneurialism and intercity competition will or will not lead to socialist and progressive transitions in the future” (Harvey, 1996, p. 50).

This possibility arises from the fact that, despite all attempts to turn art and culture into products to be sold, urban creativity does not remain confined to predetermined locations and, due to its nature, operates in its own way (Vivant, 2012). To explain how creativity establishes itself in the city, the author uses the concept of serendipity, which “expresses the role of chance in discoveries” (Vivant, 2012, p. 82). “Creativity feeds on serendipity, [...] on unprecedented associations and fortuitous encounters [...],” thus, “A formatted and planned scenario does not allow for this space of the unexpected” (Vivant, 2012, p. 83-84).

In summary, as Fernandes (2006) suggests, in general, two relationships are possible between city and culture: one of rupture, based on a hegemonic process of urban space production, which views the cultural attributes of the city as marketable objects; and one of promise, focused on anti-hegemonic actions in the production of the city, tied to the premise of the right to the city. These spheres intermingle, at times presenting themselves as overlapping. The promises come from the constant tension resulting from urban dynamics, with particular emphasis on the relationship of certain cultural groups with the territory they occupy and build; the actions of traditional communities in the face of the discussion of heritage preservation of places; and what the author refers to as “mobile urbanism,” derived from commercial activities such as fairs and similar events. We move from this perspective of the dual relationship between “city and culture” to “city and creativity”. It can be understood that the concept of the creative city, if it has so far been used from a market-oriented perspective, carries with it the possibility of a different understanding, “for creativity cannot be planned or programmed [...], it arises from the friction between otherness and unexpected encounters” (Vivant, 2012, p. 87). Therefore, the relationship between city and creativity could oscillate from rupture (of the urban fabric) to promise (concerning the exercise of the right to the city).

Therefore, regarding the future of the creative city, “reaching a new horizon or the progressive encirclement until its disappearance are two plausible possibilities that will be determined over time” (Segovia; Hervé, 2022, p. 12). In this sense, let us now analyze the concept of the creative city in the Brazilian context.

## **CREATIVE CITY IN BRAZIL: FROM STRATEGIC PLANNING TO CREATIVE CLUSTERS**

### **Path of the creative city in Brazil**

Based on the literature on creative cities in Brazil (Reis, 2006; Brasil, 2011; Reis, 2012; Teixeira, 2013; Barreto, 2016; Leitão, 2016; Barreto, 2018), it is evident that the topic reached the country alongside the concept of the creative economy and subsequently to it. The debate on the creative economy in Brazil began in the 2000s (Miguez, 2007; Reis, 2008; Barreto, 2016). In 2011, the Ministry of Culture (MinC) created the Secretariat for the Creative Economy and published the Plan for the Secretariat of the Creative Economy (Barreto, 2018). Additionally, it is worth noting the emergence and the progressive increase of university courses in Brazil related to the cultural sector. (Costa; Pessoa, 2016). This overview indicated the recognition of the importance of Brazil’s creative economy and the effort to strengthen its creative sector (Reis, 2012; Barreto, 2018), but it did not progress as expected. Furthermore, in 2016, with the dissolution of the Ministry of Culture (MinC) and the dismantling of Brazilian cultural policies, there was a weakening of the cultural agenda in general, including the creative economy (Rubim, 2017).

Alongside the Ministry of Culture, the term ‘creative city’ faced challenges, and when researching within the Ministry of Cities, it becomes evident that the term ‘creative city’ remains absent from its programs. It seems that the discussion about creative cities within the Brazilian Federal Government, which initially emerged under the sphere of the Ministry of Culture (MinC) (Reis, 2012; Barreto, 2016), was transferred to the Ministry of Tourism (Mintur) in 2019, when the MinC was downgraded to a secretariat within Mintur. Thus, in some way, the instability of the MinC is reflected in the lack of definition regarding the field of the creative economy and, consequently, the concept of creative cities. Today, it is dispersed across the portfolios of culture and tourism (Brasil, 2011; Brasil, 2013; Brasil, 2022) and does not align with UNESCO’s concept and objectives related to sustainable development.

The dissemination of the term in Brazil occurred slowly, with the need for adaptation to the Brazilian context being highlighted (Barreto, 2018; Emmendoerfer, 2018). Thus, ‘[...] we will not only produce a different concept but also create policies that value Brazilian culture in its various aspects and, most importantly, in its original characteristics, which are the Indigenous and African peoples” (Barreto, 2018, p. 32).

Based on the studies analyzed regarding Brazil, it is evident that when addressing creative cities, there are three possible pathways for recognizing a city as creative. The first is through municipal management, using the designation as



propaganda, based on criteria related to the creative sector or not. It can also occur when scholars of the subject attribute the label to cities, considering the concept of a creative city or the presence of a strong creative economy, or even through the city's trajectory, regarding the use of its creative and cultural assets in urban restructuring, even if the city does not label or recognize itself as such. Finally, there is the designation granted by UNESCO through the inclusion of cities in the UCCN.

When analyzing this concept in Brazil, without limiting it to the cities that are part of the UCCN, Barreto (2018) suggests that Brazilian creative cities may be linked to:

- Historical and heritage aspect: they feature creative territories and cultural elements that can be leveraged for tourism, such as the city of Paraty, with the International Literary Festival (FLIP);
- Economic aspect: the city uses culture and creativity as economic assets. However, regarding traditional cultural elements, such as dance and music, state subsidies would be necessary; whereas creative goods and services (such as fashion and video games) would constitute profitable creative sectors;
- Urban aspect: related to what is called "creative urban planning," derived from urban transformation actions, marked by the renovation of facades and streets, new centralities, followed by gentrification processes (Barreto, 2018).

That being said, it is considered that, both in terms of the conceptual dimension and the empirical object of study, a field is emerging in Brazil marked by imprecision and confusion of terms and concrete examples regarding the creative city.

### **Creative cities in Brazil: conflict and fragmentation**

In the Creative Economy Secretariat's Plan, there is no mention of the term "creative cities," which only appears in a complementary text written by Fonseca (2011). When addressing the goals, the plan refers to creative territories, defined as "neighborhoods, productive hubs, cities, and creative basins," on which actions will be developed to "enhance job creation, employment, and income Generation" (Brasil, 2011, p. 42). The National Culture Plan defines creative territory as "neighborhoods, cities, or regions that present creative cultural potential capable of promoting integrated and sustainable development, combining the preservation and promotion of their cultural and environmental values" (Brazil, 2013, p. 38). It also emphasizes that creative territories encompass both traditional cultural industries (artistic activities) and new sectors (creative activities such as advertising and architecture). For his part, Fonseca (2011) points out that creative territory refers both to a specific creative space and to a city.

This concept is related to creative clusters, defined as areas within cities where the production and consumption of cultural products occur (Reis, 2011). These locations would serve as both living and working spaces, always open for work and leisure; they feature an environment with local cultural diversity, but are also connected to the world. Considering the economic cycle of the creative economy, composed

of production, distribution, and consumption, creative clusters would be the space where this flow begins to occur more intensely, facilitating the establishment of a creative sector (Reis, 2006). In this understanding, “clusters can be seen as a first step towards what the authors characterize as a creative city” (Teixeira, 2013, p. 37).

Similar to the concept of creative clusters, the term “creative districts” appears in national literature, presented as “urban spaces where there is a significant concentration of creative businesses and activities [...]. The location of such districts typically occurs in areas that were previously degraded or abandoned” (Testoni; Wittmann, 2019, p. 21). These spaces can be spontaneous or created; they are characterized by mixed-use for living, leisure, and work; and diversity is a fundamental characteristic. The authors point out the existence of some of these spaces in Brazil, such as Distrito C and Vila Flores in Porto Alegre (RS), and Centro Sapiens in Florianópolis (SC).

At the governmental level, the reorganization of the cultural sector and the actions derived from it, such as the announced creation of the National Creative Economy Development Policy (PNDEC), may foster the revival of creative economy support in Brazil and, consequently, progress regarding creative cities through the Ministry of Culture (Brasil, 2024). On the other hand, alongside the Ministry of Tourism (Mintur), there is currently an incentive for cities to join the UCCN, with the creation of the Brazilian Network of Creative Cities (RBCC) in 2023 (Brasil, 2022).

Today, Brazil is the third country with the most creative cities (Brasil, 2023), and joining the network is one of the goals of the National Culture Plan. However, it is important to highlight that “[...] it is possible to perceive that the management of some Brazilian creative cities is enabling reductionist actions, prioritizing the economic dimension over an expanded and multidimensional approach to creativity, that is, deviating from their purpose of becoming a creative city.” (Silva; Muzzio, 2023, p. 214).

This and other studies conducted on Brazilian cities that are part of the UCCN conclude that they exhibit negative effects, such as: failing to respect local cultural identity; promoting gentrification; experiencing failures in implementing good governance; and not achieving the sustainable development goals advocated by UNESCO (Cardoso *et al.*, 2016; Barreto, 2018; Pinheiro; Ipiranga; Lopes, 2023; Siqueira; Lucas, 2023).

These impacts ultimately affect creative individuals and groups. This is because urban creativity draws from intangible urban aspects, such as cultural practices, artistic expressions, and lifestyle. And it is the creative individual who plays a fundamental role in the creative environment of urban spaces, as they, “through their own body, revitalizes neighborhoods and the local economy [...] A body that clusters in specific urban centers and that, precisely because of this, and without fully realizing it, triggers processes of gentrification, exclusion, and sanitization” (Barreto, 2018, p. 33).

This process does not occur peacefully, and the discourse of the creative city fails to impose itself in a homogeneous way: the clash between urban agents (real

estate developers, landowners, the state, artist groups, citizens) has been ongoing (Cardoso et al., 2016; Barreto, 2018; Pinheiro; Ipiranga; Lopes, 2023). Studies often point to the tensions arising from the implementation of the creative city. It is also observed that these conflicts stem from the opposition between two facets of creative cities, which are particularly evident in Brazilian cities: one that is desired and planned by businesses and the public sector, resulting from significant financial investments and large projects; and another, spontaneous, composed of the creative individuals of the city and arising from their microactions.

Thus, it is possible to understand the Minc decision to work with the idea of creative territories, as well as concepts like creative clusters or districts. Given that this is a concept that is not uniform, the selection of elements to be applied is expected. Therefore, in Brazil, once the impossibility of adopting the idea of a creative city as a whole is recognized, a Brazilian version of the creative city is created, which will be marked by urban, social, and economic inequality. In this way, for a country with deep economic and social conflicts, the gap between the concept and its implementation will be even greater than in Europe and North America, with the choice of what will be implemented or discarded guided by this context.

### Brazilian-style creative city

In Brazil, 14 cities are currently a part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (RCCU), six of which are in the Northeast region (Chart 1).

Chart 1. Brazilian creative cities in the Creative Cities Network (with a focus on those located in the Northeast of Brazil).

| Year of Entry - UCCN | City                       | Field – Creative City     |
|----------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 2014                 | Curitiba (PR)              | Design                    |
| 2014                 | Florianópolis (SC)         | Gastronomy                |
| 2015                 | Santos (SP)                | Cinema                    |
| 2015                 | Belém (PA)                 | Gastronomy                |
| <b>2015</b>          | <b>Salvador (BA)</b>       | <b>Music</b>              |
| 2017                 | Paraty (RJ)                | Gastronomy                |
| 2017                 | Brasília (DF)              | Design                    |
| <b>2017</b>          | <b>João Pessoa (PB)</b>    | <b>Craft and Folk Art</b> |
| 2019                 | Belo Horizonte (MG)        | Gastronomy                |
| <b>2019</b>          | <b>Fortaleza (CE)</b>      | <b>Design</b>             |
| <b>2021</b>          | <b>Recife (PE)</b>         | <b>Music</b>              |
| <b>2021</b>          | <b>Campina Grande (PB)</b> | <b>Media Arts</b>         |
| <b>2023</b>          | <b>Penedo (AL)</b>         | <b>Cinema</b>             |
| 2023                 | Rio de Janeiro (RJ)        | Literature                |

Source: the authors, based on information from the website of Unesco (2024).

The identification of some actions adopted by Brazilian creative cities reinforces our argument that, in Brazil, the appropriation of the creative city concept occurs through the selection and use of specific strategies: hosting events (FLIP, in Paraty/RJ); implementing cultural facilities (Rio de Janeiro/RJ); creating creative districts (Florianópolis/SC); boosting tourism based on cultural assets (Belo Horizonte/MG);

and incorporating as public policy the spontaneous actions of creative individuals and traditional cultural practices (Belém/PA).

However, returning to the possible future paths for the concept of the creative city, whether a new format or its disappearance (Segovia; Hervé, 2022), the urban contradictions present in Brazilian creative cities are often related to the anti-hegemonic actions in the city's production process, more aligned with the right to the city (Fernandes, 2006). For this reason, these cities hold within them the potential to develop another proposal for a creative city, if not completely distinct from the neoliberal urban development models, but one that recognizes these social tensions, incorporating the participation of social movements, especially of the groups and individuals engaged in creative activities, thus enabling sustainable social and urban development.

Focusing on the cities within our spatial scope (northeastern Brazil), we observed the strategies indicated by these creative cities in their application to the UCCN, as their contribution to the network (available on the UNESCO website). Each city outlined between 4 and 7 desired goals, including: the creation of cultural spaces or creative services; hosting exhibitions, fairs, and international events for UCCN member cities; developing strategies to strengthen the RCCU; proposing actions related to urban planning; and conducting assessments to map local creativity.

After this initial analysis, we focused on proposals that could contribute to the implementation of a creative city that recognizes social movements and uses the creative economy and its networks to promote social development. Thus, we sought to identify proposals whose ultimate goal was: the creation and strengthening of creative individuals and groups; the recognition and appreciation of local uniqueness; or those aimed at sustainable development. The following propositions were identified:

- Campina Grande/PB: share new methodologies for mapping the creative economy and charting cultural uniqueness (Unesco, 2024);
- Fortaleza/CE: share local best practices on the web platform of the Fortaleza Criativa Program (Unesco, 2024);
- João Pessoa/PB: create a Design and Innovation Laboratory for Handicrafts and Small Businesses, to provide technical assistance to communities and artistic groups; map cultural uniqueness through research, with its methodology and results shared with other UCCN cities; generate jobs for marginalized and vulnerable groups in the handicraft market through the Social Handicraft Factory; implement a cross-cutting project to promote traditional gastronomy, design, and handicrafts (Unesco, 2024);
- Penedo/AL: promote and support local artists and filmmakers; provide support to culture through public policies, strengthening engagement and mobilizing local actors, in accordance with the MONDIACULT 2022 declaration (Unesco, 2024);
- Recife/PE: in the long-term plans, highlight creativity as a strategic factor for sustainable urban development; promote professional training to improve the

production, distribution, and diffusion of cultural expressions, especially for professionals from marginalized communities; encourage the development of urban and cultural activities in the city center, aiming at access to and participation in local cultural life (Unesco, 2024);

- Salvador/BA: create the Museum of Music, showcasing the diversity of Brazilian music, serving as an open space for professional musicians; promote access to and participation in cultural life and social cohesion, supporting musical events held in public spaces through public-private cooperation; encourage the mobility of artists within the UCCN, with training programs and artist residencies (Unesco, 2024).

Analyzing the proposals from northeastern cities that are part of the UCCN, it was identified that all the cities proposed strategies with the ultimate goal of strengthening creative individuals and groups, local uniqueness, and sustainable development. Some cities, such as Campina Grande, Fortaleza, and Penedo, did so more modestly, with one or two proposals; while others, like João Pessoa, Recife, and Salvador, took a broader approach, present in most of their proposals. This points to the possibility of a new model for the creative city, where, alongside large cultural and urban projects with high economic value, there is space for supporting and valuing the everyday microactions of creative individuals and groups, related to urban serendipity. In this way, it is believed that there are conditions for urban creativity to be effectively recognized as a strategy for sustainable development, as pointed out by UNESCO (Unesco, 2024).

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Initially, when formulated by its pioneers (Landry; Bianchini, 1995; Florida [2002]; 2011), the concept was closely linked to the strategy of making a city attractive to the creative class, through the creation of an appealing, diverse, and creative urban space. The application of this idea in various cities around the world has, in most cases, been aligned with neoliberal urban development thinking, rather than policies focused on supporting creative and artistic activities (Duxbury *et al.*, 2012; Grodach, 2017). Thus, the authors established parameters, actions, and strategies to make a city creative. Furthermore, the appropriation of the term by UNESCO and other international agencies reshaped the concept into a more objective definition aligned with sustainable development, enabling its global dissemination (Unesco, 2020; Couto, 2023).

What is observed today is that, despite the fruitful academic debate and the impacts suffered by the population, this model of the creative city has ensured its persistence after more than two decades (Duxbury *et al.*, 2012; Grodach, 2017; Pratt, 2017; Matovic; Del Valle, 2020/1). Thus, while some point out the problems of the creative city, such as promoting gentrification and ignoring poverty and urban inequality (Peck, 2005; Scott, 2006), others argue that the term offers the possibility of a different approach to art and culture in

the city, where artistic and everyday production establish new foundations for existence (Miles, 2012; Vivant, 2012; Grodach, 2017; Matovic; Del Valle, 2020/1; Segovia; Hervé, 2022).

In the Brazilian context, studies indicate an extremely fragmented version of the creative city concept. However, the northeastern cities that are part of the UCCN point to various strategies for implementing the creative city, considering the social groups in the creative sector and aiming at promoting social development. If implemented, these proposals could help shape a more inclusive concept of the creative city, one that respects social movements, enables the organization into networks, and ultimately leads to sustainable development.

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