

## Cultural Diplomacy on International Film Festivals, during the unprecedented year of 2020

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### ABSTRACT

Against the countless cancellations of cultural events around the globe, the dynamics of the film festival circuit and its representations took on new courses and different perspectives. About these symbolic power relations, the article dives into a brief data record, on the performance and possible adaptations upon the organization of film festivals, during the year 2020, and throughout the global pandemic, that exponentiated the digitization of some structuring processes on international cinematographic circulation. Ultimately, it adds notions of cultural diplomacy to international film festivals. In order to transpose theoretical concepts to contemporary practice and verify, in this way, the influences and consequences of virtualization to the subjectivities and significance of diplomacy and otherness upon interconnected identities in the current global community.

### KEYWORDS

Cultural Diplomacy; Film Festivals; Cinema Circulation; Otherness and Cultural Trades.

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## **Diplomacia cultural em festivais internacionais de cinema, durante o ano inédito de 2020**

### RESUMO

Diante dos inúmeros cancelamentos de eventos culturais ao redor do globo, a dinâmica do circuito dos festivais de cinema e suas representações assumiram novos rumos e diferentes perspectivas. Sobre essas relações simbólicas de poder, o artigo mergulha em um breve registro de dados, sobre a performance e possíveis adaptações sobre a organização de festivais de cinema, durante o ano de 2020, e ao longo da pandemia global, que exponencializou a digitalização de alguns processos estruturantes na circulação internacional de cinema. Em última análise, acrescenta noções de diplomacia cultural aos festivais internacionais de cinema. Isso posto, o artigo objetiva transpor conceitos teóricos para a prática contemporânea e assim, verificar as influências e consequências da virtualização para as subjetividades e significados da diplomacia cultural, no que tange o conceito de alteridade sobre as identidades interconectadas na atual comunidade global.

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Diplomacia Cultural; Festivais de cinema; Circulação de Cinema; Alteridade e Trocas Culturais.

## **Diplomacia Cultural en festivales Internacionales de cinema, durante el inédito año 2020**

### RESUMEN

Dadas las numerosas anulaciones de eventos culturales en todo el mundo, la dinámica del circuito de festivales de cine y sus representaciones tomó nuevas direcciones y diferentes perspectivas. Sobre estas relaciones simbólicas de poder, el artículo profundiza en un breve registro de datos, sobre el desempeño y posibles adaptaciones sobre la organización de festivales de cine, durante el año 2020, y a lo largo de la pandemia global, que exponencializó la digitalización de algunos procesos estructurantes en el ámbito internacional de circulación del cine. En última instancia, agrega nociones de diplomacia cultural a los festivales de cine internacionales. Así puesto, el artículo tiene como objetivo trasponer conceptos teóricos a la práctica contemporánea y pronto verificar las influencias y consecuencias de la virtualización para las subjetividades y significados de la diplomacia cultural, a respecto del concepto de alteridad sobre las identidades interconectadas en la comunidad global actual.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Diplomacia cultural; Festivales de cinema; Circulación de cinema; Alteridad y Intercambios culturales.

## **Introduction**

Given the international context established in the first decades of the 21st century, hyperconnected and interdependent, it is possible to identify a multicultural and complex imaginary sphere, where the relationship between countries becomes increasingly symbolic and subjective. In this environment, an instituting movement resurfaces to organic notions and understandings about national identities, through core cultural policies and practices.

Nuclearly, wrapped in this complexity, the expression of cinematographic works is evident as a powerful manifestation capable of integrating a mosaic of cultural essences in a single representative element. This allows us to observe cinema as a possible foundation for history and for our own cultural transposition as a society. Therefore, cinema could be seen as a tool capable of reflecting and following the behaviors and orientations of a collective expression (RIBEIRO, 2011).

We are all witnessing a crisis in the multilateral and interconnected system in which we live until 2020, the pandemic caused by Sars-coV-2, the new coronavirus, has nuanced cracks for reflection in absolutely every beam of light of thoughts in our society. The impacts of the pandemic in each country showed paradoxes of political ideology already latent in the past but now, the concepts taken to extremes are proving harmful to the collective well-being. However, in quick response to the crisis, cultural goods and services migrated their presence to the virtual space of digital consumption, some with greater ease of adaptation as is the case of music streaming and live shows, others with shrewd authenticity and innovation by offering us to attend theater plays and art exhibitions through the screen window.

Specifically, regarding cinema, which in Brazil represents an industry that reached a growth rate of 7% per year between 2013 and 2019, moving more than R\$20 billion annually, equivalent to 1.67%<sup>3</sup> of the national GDP. In this sense, even though the adaptations and new models of online consumption were already structured pre-pandemic on subscription platforms, audiovisual collections and for the flow of premieres and awards, no virtual path had been traced so far. With movie theaters closed and festivals suspended, the film value chain was at a standstill.

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<sup>3</sup> Source: RIO2C. Available in: <http://rio2c.meioemensagem.com.br/noticias2019/2019/04/25/a-forca-economica-do-audiovisual/> Access on: July 1st, 2020.

In addition to the exhibition sector, in the audiovisual production segment the impact is not smaller and affects even more extensively, not only companies but also workers. According to ANESP – National Association of Specialists in Public Policies and Government Management, on 2019 in São Paulo alone, the segment handled more than 500 million R\$ and generated more than 25 thousand jobs. With the suspension of filming, it is estimated that, per month, more than 404 million R\$ will no longer be in circulation in the city.

Much is at risk as, on the one hand, producers with unpublished works to be presented to the market and on the other, the consumer-spectator receiving an intense offer of online content. Faced with this pendulum between supply and demand, an opportunity for curated democratization is revealed and film festivals realize that their legitimizing role acquires a new meaning. At the moment, we can check the launching of a series of new streaming channels and collections open to the public on the market. The demand for consumption of audiovisual products on streaming platforms has increased exponentially, in addition to also rising the number and format of channels offered.

In the global scenario of entertainment consumption during the pandemic, the MPA (Motion Pictures Association) report shows that there was a 26% increase in platform subscriptions, which corresponds to 232 million new accounts. Total global subscriptions reached 1.1 billion in 2020. The increase in revenue was 34%, with proceeds of approximately U\$14.3 billion. As a strong consumer of digital content, Brazil reaches the second spot in the ranking of Netflix subscribers worldwide. The platform, which attained the mark of 200 million subscriptions at the end of 2020 - with a record growth of 37 million new users during the last year; has 17.9 million active users in Brazil according to the company's estimate of Comparitech virtual private networks. The estimated revenue for the second quarter of 2020 in the country was US\$ 432 million<sup>5</sup>.

Following the same flow, film festivals around the world have also restructured into the virtual environment in an attempt to maintain their activating role in the cinematographic value chain and even finding new ways to obtain and offer a greater reach among the works exchanged and presented internationally. At the beginning of 2019, the festival sector faced a

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<sup>4</sup> Source: ANESP. Available in: <http://anesp.org.br/todas-as-noticias/2020/5/22/politica-audiovisual-em-tempos-de-covid-19-arte-e-industria-em-confinamento> Access on: July 1st, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Source: FORBES Magazine. Available in: <https://forbes.com.br/forbes-money/2021/03/um-ano-depois-do-inicio-da-pandemia-plataformas-de-streaming-contabilizam-ganhos/> Access on June 13, 2021.

series of postponements and cancellations due to the uncertainties and unpredictability of the pandemic. Once the situation was recognized, understood and somehow organized around the world, festivals began to invest in transposing their in-person and offline experiences to the virtualities of online spaces.

It is noted that film festivals generate a long-term impact in the communities that they take place. More than half of the film festivals happens in small and medium-sized towns, over one third in economically underdeveloped regions. The festivals are seen as a useful strategy in building a city's image and fostering its attractiveness and thus its economic development. The film festivals were also felt to have a notable social impact in that they disseminated cultural expression, provided educational and training opportunities, often created a focus on minority or underprivileged segments of society, and for those in rural areas in a state of decline, combated disintegration of the social fabric (European Coordination of Film Festivals, 1999).

If we observe the movement of film festivals, as a political space for decoding cultural messages to be assimilated by the popular layers of our society, we find elements of cultural democratization. This process of translating media content by the "popular means of information on facts and expression of ideas", Beltrão (2004) named Folkcommunication. His theory was dedicated to elucidating the strategies and mechanisms adopted by folk communication agents in order to make facts (information), ideas (opinions) and entertainment (entertainment) intelligible (BELTRÃO, 2004, p.18).

In this sense, we begin to briefly observe how the film festival market behaved in the virtual environment during the year 2020. Then, after this brief overview, we analyze these activities and their institutions involved from the perspective of cultural diplomacy concepts. Looking for intersections and relating nuances of the universe of international relations and the space of symbolic exchanges in the film cultural industry, in this case, film festival environments around the world, or better said, globally online.

## **International Film Festivals throughout online spaces in 2020**

As noticed already, a growing number of festivals, different in size and scope, are reacting to the emergency by going virtual. Unfortunately, we don't know when the pandemic will come to an end and going online might be the only available option for many future

events. It also provides an occasion to explore interesting perspectives on festival digitalization. Therefore, perhaps the industry can absorb useful improvements from this provisional defense strategy and consider new opportunities.

In Brazil, specifically, according to the report published by researcher Paulo Corrêa, entitled *Panorama dos Festivais/Mostras Audiovisuais - Edição 2020*, "It is worth noting that such an unusual year was also the occasion for festivals and exhibitions, but at the level of continuity when considering the maintenance of the film-spectator approximation, which in the case of 2020, happened deterritorialized or territorialized different from the place-festival association" (CORRÊA, 2020, p.3).

Furthermore, according to the report in 2020, we registered the holding of 239 Brazilian festivals and exhibitions, the smallest amount in the historical series of the sector's yearbooks, with about 100 fewer events compared to 2017, 2018 and 2019. In the analysis, we found some pillars that explain this retraction. Evidently, in first place is the pandemic and the consequent impossibility of in-person events. Secondly, the budget insufficiencies, resulting from the systematic dismantling of the cultural development structure at the state and federal level. Finally, fears and uncertainties about the transfer of the online exhibition application as a viable alternative for their respective schedules, due to lack of adequacy to the event profiles.

In this regard, in Brazil, it is also worth noting that there is great uncertainty and insecurity in the online environment in terms of protecting the intellectual property of films. Therefore, the market also immediately resisted in transposing its operations to the digital world due to the lack of regulation and legislation that provides security for the films in online registrations, transactions and exhibitions.

In the last four years (2016-2020) the Brazilian audiovisual circuit registered at least 300 annual events that opened registrations and were held, configuring a diverse and dynamic environment. Within this relationship are festivals and online exhibitions, experiences that were until then timid in the internal scene. In these four years, there were just over 20 festivals or exhibitions that took place virtually, in 2016, only three, in 2017 there were five, in 2018 the largest number of online events was registered with eight festivals and in 2019, 6 events appeared. The rest of the events cataloged by the report refer to face-to-face meetings, which allows us to state that the composition of Brazilian online exhibition festivals

represented a small portion of the entire circuit, peaking in 2018 when it reached 2.2% of the total events carried out in the national environment (CORRÊA, 2020).

In 2020, this was transformed. Out of the 239 events held in Brazil, more than 190 took place exclusively virtually, representing 81% of the total composition. Just under 20 festivals and shows took place in person, reaching only 7% of the circuit's configuration. More than 25 events worked in a hybrid manner, offering in-person, public-controlled, open-air or drive-in exhibitions, and online screening rooms simultaneously, which represent 12% of events in the year. In this way, 220 events (93%) were held in 2020, which opened registrations for works that joined the online film exhibition at some point.

In qualitative terms, we can analyze the Brazilian scenario of exhibitions and festivals in 2020, based on the categorization of the events that made it up, observing the behavior of cultural diplomacy in the internal environment and then considering it in the external space. The events were therefore configured as follows, primarily for continuity, events that already held their respective exhibitions online in 2020, kept their structures just improving this service. Then, by adaptation, events that were previously held in person and which, due to the pandemic, resorted to online exhibition as a way to continue their tradition, even if in an exceptional format. Finally, events were born and presented their first editions in this context, initiatives already thought out and designed specifically for the virtual environment, with structures and platforms dedicated to the online experience.

By expanding the observation lens to the international map, we based the scope on the Film Festival Alliance report, entitled 2020 Festival Operations Survey, published in January 2021, as the main source of information and data, where we obtain notions about the movements of the festival circuit around the world to also consider in the present reflection.

The report is the result of a survey carried out by an Alliance of Festival Organizers from around the world, audiovisual directors and a sample of festival-going audiences. Among the festival organizers, the configuration of respondents was as follows: 51% Executive Directors, 51% Programmers, Curators or Artistic Directors and 15% Other Festival Managers, in this category there were 61 respondents. In the category of audiovisual producers, there were 71% Directors, 70% Producers and 56% Scriptwriters, with a total of 46 interviews. Finally, with regards to the regular public, they were 94%. people who attended some kind of festival, online or in person. In the last 2 years, there have been 2,200 interviews conducted.

Thus, it is noteworthy in the study that 15% of the festival organizers interviewed claim that the greatest difficulty faced by them during the pandemic was related to funding and revenue from festivals. Because, according to them, adapting to online in practical terms is not the main challenge, but rather the restructuring of the festival's business model as a whole.

However, most of the organizations in which the interviewees provided services, in this case, festivals with a history of at least 5 editions, claim to have received extraordinary resources from special funds from their respective government structure, in order to remain active. Of these government departments, 67% were related to the political administration of culture and education; and 39% institutions associated in some way with foreign policy or supranational cultural entities, resulting from agreements or regional development blocs.

Faced with these investments, 73% of the festivals involved in the research presented online events and virtual exhibitions during the year 2020, and yet, only 23% promoted personal meetings. These organizers created a variety of face-to-face and virtual formats, combined with experiences for their audiences in 2020. They were qualitatively cited in the survey such as: drive-in exhibition models, launch of new VOD platforms, organization of collections and cinema libraries, promotion of special screenings and screenings in retrospect and also celebrating the festivals' circulation history. A significant number of the 90% of them claim to have expanded access, democratizing the participation of more spectators in their festivals and expanding contact opportunities and, consequently, connections and business, via virtual meetings, live shows and sector-specific interactions.

In structural terms of the market, there is an important fact regarding the dynamics of the circuit and the changing roles in the value system of the sector's interactions. With the perspective of the online initiatives, the festival organizers in question noticed a transfer of responsibility that grants more autonomy to the film director, noting that in the virtual format, whoever submits the work to the festival is mostly the director himself, to the detriment of the distribution companies. That's because, in both 2019 and 2020, the majority of festival films came from filmmaker online submissions 59%, with only 29% coming from distributors applications.

Another different configuration that appeared in the research draws attention to the format of the exhibitions and to a potential trend that could become institutionalized ad



continuum on the festivals market. Of the 23% events that promoted face-to-face meetings, 71% consisted of exhibitions in the drive-in format and 57% were configured as outdoor screenings, with 87% of the festival organizers interviewed hope to maintain this format for the coming years, as they obtained satisfactory return and believe to offer, in this way, an experience of high added value for their invited spectators.

Regarding the inter-regional and international issue specifically observed in this Article, the report presents in a given extreme importance and relevance, so therefore the amount of 73% of festivals that hosted events online, 100% said they had reached a wider audience and were more diverse than its latest editions. The median result reported by festivals was 36 states and 4 countries (outside their own) reached by virtual festivals.

In this sense, we can verify also that on average, the festivals interviewed streamed their content to 21,000 spectators and from these, they reached spectators located in, on average, 14 countries beyond their home country. This information shows us an interesting international alternate scenario if we consider the ideas of cultural diplomacy, however, we continue reporting the research data, because, in qualitative terms, the interviewees, of these 73% who transposed their operations to online, list advantages of the hybrid or purely virtual format of 2020. Among these advantages, the most mentioned, 87%, was precisely: "Expanding our audience across the country and overseas". As well as the expectation was exceeded by 61% regarding attendance by people outside of your usual geographic area. In other words, as much as it was expected that the virtual format would expand the festival's access and geographic reach, the presence and validation of foreign participation was even better than expected.

Overall, and adding the perceptions of the spectator public also interviewed by the report, it can be concluded that the year 2020 was definitely a challenge for film festivals, however, it also opened up opportunities for innovation and application of new concepts, formats and approaches for the marketplace. After all, the festival environment has always been configured in a strictly traditional, formal and inflexible way, which in a given instance, limited and restricted access to events only for the active industry, that is, with few interaction from the general public and via a system of predefined and unchanging relationships over time. Given the challenges of the pandemic, it is possible to consider that there were some changes in the value chain of the festival's legitimizing circuit, which made

possible a certain expansion and renewal of the film festival's concepts and its articulating agents.

Specifically, regarding Brazil, some contrast can also be noted in the report under analysis. First, regarding the notion of spatiality, that is, the spatiality of the online event is represented in itself. As there is no physical association that an event is limited to the location where it takes place, the spatial dimension is the online festival's own virtual structure: its access URL, navigation between pages, available video and user experience in general.

This relationship of space and territory, that is, the territorialization of festivals is a basic premise for the definitions of cultural diplomacy that directly associate festivals with the spaces in which they take place and also define them as spaces of international otherness. What happens when this space no longer has a reference territory? A source space delineated on the map? Did the festivals remain opening spaces and opportunities for international otherness between the national identities of the states?

Before going into these questions, let's look at another shift in perception that 2020 introduced us to. It was possible to diagnose that the temporal notion of the online audiovisual festival respected an agreed periodicity and exhibition. In other words, just like the in-person event, the gathering takes place within a certain time, showing the works available for spectator viewing, with different approaches in the amount of that period. In full-time festivals, the works are available during any time within the period of days of the festival, whereas in other festival formats, the exhibitions were scheduled in screening rooms, with times defined as sessions.

Given these formats, it can be said that the temporal association also takes on new configurations, because, when the online event ends, the videos and live streams can remain available for access, as a memory of the event and representation of its realization, in this case this format means a break from the physical exhibition festival; or events can simply be excluded and erased from time and space, creating a sense of ephemerality and ostracism.

Finally, it is extremely important to address the issue of changes in the scope of spectatorship, in which in the physical exhibition, in face-to-face events, the spectator moves to the location where the session will take place within a scope of defined elements (environment, times, order in which the films are shown, tickets and varied spaces). In online exhibition, the spectator assumes certain liberties: in which he is the one who defines where -

in his physical conception, as the virtual configuration is determined by the festival, such as, platform or transmission player - he will watch the films, how, with what equipment, in what order and when - on the day and time he chooses. This notion grants the spectator a certain autonomy over their own consumption, taking the festival's organization away from the role of determiner of the center of values.

In this sense, let us explore the concepts of cultural diplomacy that can be implemented in this debate. Starting with the term itself, since in Brazil, the scope of definitions and interpretations of the role and autonomy of cultural diplomacy are relatively recent and are naturally under debate to this day. That is, there is no single definition and academic debate about the field of study is scarce, especially when cultural diplomacy is related to cinema.

## **Cultural Diplomacy Dimensions on International Film Festivals**

The first studies to understand the academic relevance of this work started through a research on Capes/Sucupira and Academic Google platforms on the current state of the art regarding works on national cinema inserted in the context of diplomacy and internationalization. Between the material available by Brazilian researchers, only one addresses the theme of cultural diplomacy as an academic term, considering that none of them specifically presents the issue of cinema in dialogue, and neither is the theme of festival circuits addressed. The only one mentioned, by Maria Susana Arrosa Soares, is an article published in 2008 in Revista Brasileira de Política, vol. 51, from the Center for Global Studies of the University of Brasília, entitled Cultural Diplomacy in Mercosul. This text proposes to present how the bloc's cultural issues are not used as instruments for building bonds of trust and cooperation among its peoples. The author's results reveal data on Brazilian diplomatic action in relation to culture, analyzing information from the Meeting of Ministers of Culture of Mercosul. With this, the researcher's contribution interacts very well with this article, as she already places festivals as cultural diplomacy activities for Brazil, and expanded to Mercosur as a whole. Soares (2008) concludes in his work that, even if cultural diplomacy has a subordinate position in the cultural affairs departments or directorates of the organization chart of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and that this reveals the reduced importance given to culture in the foreign policy of countries and cultural activities identified in some cases, such

as in Brazil, to cultural diplomacy are presented as exhibitions, fairs, congresses, festivals and other occasional short-term cultural events. Where countries attend, identify and exchange, without thought or planned structures for participation, that is, randomly and on a case-by-case basis. Thus, cultural diplomacy in reverse, opposite to what is proposed, for example, by La Porte (2006):

In the diplomatic actions of long-term success depends on the ability to listen to others, recognizing the value of other cultures, to show a sincere desire to learn and to implement programs that actually facilitate the equitable communication in both directions (LA PORTE, 2006).

In this sense, we introduce to the dialogue the Belgian researcher and professor Antonios Vlassis, responsible for the studies of international relations at the University of Liege, published in 2016 in the periodical Cuadernos de Información y Comunicación<sup>6</sup>, organized by the Universidade Complutense de Madrid. In his text entitled Organizaciones regionales y diversidad cultural: la diplomacia de la Unión Europea com el Mercosur entra la sombra de Hollywood y la acción intergubernamental<sup>7</sup> and proposes a dual objective, on the one hand, to analyze the specific policy of the European Union to promote the norms of the Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions in Mercosul and others, to measure the impact of the cultural policy model of the European Union in the development of audiovisual cooperation with Mercosul.

For the professor, the first notes of cultural diplomacy for cinema always start through film festivals. According to Vlassis (2016), film festivals function as political forums dedicated to the audiovisual sector, which facilitate relations between audiovisual professionals, improving exchanges, circulation and distribution of cultural products between nations. These spaces develop networks of international cooperation and collaboration and create the perfect atmosphere for the meeting between governments and their representatives under the aura of cinema and art.

If Soares' text is built from the perspective of internal policies and presents us with data and information about cultural practices and policies in progress in the Mercosur environment, Vlassis' text complements it. Well, it provides us with an external view,

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<sup>6</sup> Notebooks on Information and Communication.

<sup>7</sup> Regional Organizations and Cultural Diversity: European Union and Mercosul diplomacy between Hollywood's Shadows and the intergovernmental action.

introducing the perspective of reference cultural plans and programs, revealing in numbers their interactions with the market and calculating their impacts on the cinematographic environment. As circumstantial evidence, the presence of economic blocs in the discussion on cultural diplomacy is noted, which leads us to add another layer of observation to the present work. After all, thinking about states and their cultures, grouped in regional programs, adds a mesh of interactivity, which expands our analysis to a more open perspective of supranational information.

However, before opening the scope of observation, we need to assertively delimit the term cultural diplomacy, Gomes (2015) brings us as a starting point for reflection on international cultural relations and how they are inserted in a dynamic of national/local and global interdependence, reflecting tensions and conflicts between global identity (or global culture) and national identity. Within the aforementioned context of growing relevance of cultural aspects in the international scenario and recurrent clashes between national culture and global culture, the states themselves use culture to promote their foreign policy interests and gain advantages in the international system.

[...] The process of globalization and the intensification of contacts and the sense that the world is a unique place, all of this also brings nations closer together in competitions of cultural prestige. A world of competing national cultures that seek to improve the quality of their states offers the prospect of global 'cultural battles' with little foundation for global integration projects, and of ecumenical or cosmopolitan notions of 'unity in diversity' despite the existence of the necessary technical communications infrastructure. (FEATHERSTONE, 1994: 16)

Among the authors who highlight the crucial role that culture and political values can play in a country's international performance, one of the most emblematic in the field is the intellectual Joseph Nye (1990), who coined the term Soft Power. This concept can be understood as a third way used by countries (in addition to the military and economic way) to achieve their foreign policy objectives. Soft Power is identified by Nye as a means for a nation to achieve what it wants in the international arena not through coercion but through attraction. It's a kind of immaterial power. In this sense, the charm, the prestige, the admiration that one country exerts over another can impact the place that that country occupies and its relations in the international scenario. The way in which a country is

perceived is placed by Nye (2012) as relevant to facilitate the achievement of strategic, commercial, economic needs, among others.

In world politics, it is possible for a country to get the results it wants because others want to accompany it, admiring its values, imitating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and freedom. In this sense, it is equally as important to set the agenda in world politics and attract others as it is to force them to change through the threat or use of military or economic weapons. This aspect of power – getting others to want what you want – I call Soft Power. He co-opts people instead of coercing them (NYE, 2012: 36).

It is in this context that emerges the concept of cultural diplomacy to refer to the aspect of foreign policy crafted by States with the prospect of diffused culture of the country abroad, as well as developing international cultural policies with a view to cultural exchange and cooperation between different actors international (NOVAIS, 2013: 60).

Cultural diplomacy is a Soft Power mechanism, in the sense attributed by Nye (1990), but not all Soft Power will constitute cultural diplomacy, as the latter, in Mitchell's (1986) conception, should only be performed in the sphere of the State and its agencies, as it is intended to facilitate the achievement of other foreign policy objectives. According to Simon Mark, it is possible to define cultural diplomacy as follows:

[...] cultural diplomacy is the deployment of a state's culture in support of its foreign policy goals or diplomacy, and the practice includes the negotiation and promulgation of cultural agreements. Cultural diplomacy is a diplomatic practice of governments. Because of its connection to foreign policy or diplomacy, cultural diplomacy usually involves directly or indirectly the government's foreign ministry (MARK, 2008: 43).

Alongside this reflection, I found writings by contemporary authors in books, such as Edgard Telles Ribeiro (Cultural Diplomacy: your role in Brazilian Foreign Policy, 2011), and I have in this author's text the main theoretical contribution to the research. Edgard Telles Ribeiro is a pioneer in Brazil for publishing the first edition of his book on cultural diplomacy in 1991. Bearing in mind that national studies on the subject are recent, Ribeiro conceptualized it as a result of his thesis, in the High Studies Course Instituto Rio Branco, as a qualification for the diplomatic career. The book provides us with the entire repertoire on the subject in the highest academic instances, contrasting the different definitions of the term in theory and in practice.

As we saw earlier, the cultural factor can be an important differential for states on the international stage. Even though the actors who participate in international relations have multiplied in recent times, the State continues to play a key role in the processes of international approximation, so it has also been trying to take advantage of communication channels, cultural exchanges between peoples to check a cultural dimension to the relationships they maintain among themselves (RIBEIRO, 2011) and, in this way, favor the acquisition of their goals of other natures, such as political, economic and commercial. It is interesting for states to project their values in the international arena as values are elements of approximation and openness between peoples. According to Ribeiro (2011, p.25): “cultural relations enable, with singular effectiveness, other types of State objectives, in political, economic or commercial terms”.

Given that states are not the only actors to use cultural aspects to promote their interests on the international stage, it is important to distinguish the terms of international cultural relations and cultural diplomacy. When thinking about exchanges between different non-governmental and civil society actors around the world, such as artists, scientists, intellectuals, teachers, musicians, among others, one must speak of international cultural relations. International cultural relations extend beyond the actions of governments and their agencies, and can be carried out by civil society actors (GOMES, 2015). In this type of exchange and cooperation, culture is an end in itself and the actors seek mutual benefit. In other words, these relationships aim to develop over time greater understanding and rapprochement between peoples and institutions for mutual benefit (RIBEIRO, 2011). One of the main differences between international cultural relations and cultural diplomacy is that the former is aimed at mutual benefit and cultural exchanges exist for an end in themselves.

On the other hand, cultural diffusion in the case of cultural diplomacy aims at achieving national objectives, objectives not only of a cultural nature, but also political, economic and commercial. Therefore, it can be said that cultural diplomacy, contrary to international cultural relations – which tend to have a spontaneous and spurious character – has pretensions of alignment with other topics of foreign policy and fosters actions aimed at long-term goals. Cultural diplomacy uses cultural relations in a specific way to achieve national objectives that are not only cultural in nature.

Cultural exchange enables the transfer of ideas, experiences, values, from one person to another. Thus, it creates or consolidates an atmosphere that favors understanding. Furthermore, cultural initiatives can minimize judgments based on stereotypes, reinforce peaceful feelings and bring people and cultures closer together. For all these reasons, it can be said that the cultural factor is important in international relations and awakens the interest of states in the search for their worldwide projection and insertion. The universe of cultural diplomacy involves State actions that deal directly with individuals, their perceptions and values, such as the exchange of people; the promotion of art and artists, language teaching as a vehicle of values, the integrated distribution of promotional material, support for intellectual cooperation projects, support for technical cooperation initiatives, among others (RIBEIRO, 2011).

The function of cultural diplomacy is to gain prestige and trust, contribute to dialogue and cooperation and favor the achievement of other interests - economic, commercial, development - of a country's foreign policy, through the construction of an identity or an image favorable international market, whose substrate is the country's cultural capital. (RIBEIRO, 2011, p.19)

From then onwards, the view is adjusted to the role of cinema as a central asset, with regard to diplomatic cultural exchanges, and who contrasts the subject is Melo (2002) who places discourse in cinema as the conceptual space in which identities are permanently constructed, reconstructed and translated, with the influence of contexts determined by social, cultural, geographic, spatial, material and linguistic conditions. In this same reasoning, the author names film festivals as spaces for reciprocal intercultural dialogue and states that film co-production initiatives, for example, are practical evidence of cultural diplomacy fulfilling its great purpose of interdependent cooperation. (MELO, 2002)

The relationship between films and diplomacy has been marketed and politically explored for a long time, but only nowadays, the theoretical bridge it is based on academia, through research that argues that films contribute to the reproduction of ideological discourses in the most subjective filigree of the collective imagination. Consequently, the confluence of these fields of study touches on theories of intercultural communication, especially Hecht (1993), who mentions cinema as the main tool for translating a nation's identity.



Hecht (1993) argues that identity is the communicative process that must be studied in the context of message exchange. According to the author, identities are created in the interaction with others, that is, they are negotiated together. In spite of collective identities, again, the concept of film festivals appears as the nucleus of mutual and organic development of the cultural identities of the countries that participate in them, with their works on display. Following the author's reasoning is in environments against audiovisual products, especially independent films, the projects developed by government subsidies, that cultural identities are mirrored in otherness and thus exist and naturally profuse themselves (HECHT, 1993, p. 79).

### **Main considerations**

For the first layer of the conclusion, it is considered that the adaptation and restructuring movements of the main processes in the cinematographic value chain, in general, resulted in positive advances for the sector and its wide range of relationships in profusion. After all, historically, film festivals are a product of the analogue age, where they constituted politically endorsed solutions to the growing power of globally operating film oligopolies (DE VALCK 2006). Film festivals were strategically positioned outside existing distribution and exhibition markets to create visibility for national cinemas and support their circulation. As the number of film festivals worldwide increased the global network that was formed displayed strict hierarchical stratification, with a small number of top festivals taking up nodal positions in a global art film economy—combining multiple functions as cultural gatekeepers, market places, media events—and the rest assuming retail functions as aggregators of prime films launched at the wholesale events.

In the contemporary digital age, however, the original access problem has lost part of its urgency. Possibilities to distribute media content and aggregate films have exponentially increased, and festivals have seen platform-based companies enter the market and take on roles as aggregators and producers of content formerly typified as festival products. As a result of the advanced digitized state of the film and media industries, in which digital platforms such as Vimeo or YouTube, also facilitate processes of festival submission, review, and sales, therefore festival programs could be moved online relatively easily from a

technological point of view. Decisions to do so, or rather opt for postponing or cancelling, were not only a matter of crisis management, but involved careful consideration of the strategic interests of the various stakeholders involved, and awareness of possible long-term repercussions on dynamics and power relations in the media industries at large.

Such new incorporations of contemporary needs, in addition to altering some power relations in the value chain intrinsic to the film festival circuit also interfere in the game of cultural powers. On the one hand, due to the different perceptions of time and space related to territoriality and opportunity that the festivals attracted to their denominations of origin, and on the other by the democratization of access that expands in the virtual world beyond the restricted community of the main festivals that regulate the market traditionally.

Regarding to the folkcommunication, mentioned above, researches developed by the disciple authors of Luiz Beltrão demonstrate the persistence of those “marginalized” contingents of the consumer society, which still demand the “popular” decoding of elitist contents conveyed by conventional media. It is evident, however, the emergence of a current in the opposite direction, which is the incidence of popular themes in the mass media, reflecting the sensitivity of its editors to meet the expectations of the segments that are incorporated into its consumer market, especially in the daily press and in audiovisual circulation (BENJAMIN, 2000, p.81).

Thereby, it is also possible to interpret that the change in the balance of power in the traditional value chain between film agents is equalized in a more horizontal way, making film festivals become, in addition to spaces of alterity, spaces of voices in hegemonic counter flows. And yet, when this dynamic is established in the local context of specific cities and regions, there is evidence of folk-community effects in terms of addressing and covering culturally marginalized populations, either through the exhibition of films or by providing access to them (MARQUES DE MELO, 2004).

Under the specific terms of cultural diplomacy, in which film festivals present themselves as spaces of otherness, the geographic issue is essential for the effectiveness of symbolic exchanges between countries and their represented national identities. Geography is a remarkably effective producer of otherness. On one hand, certain spatial patterns are very efficient, as well as in constructing and maintaining alterity.

Although it may be possible to create such spatiality in the online environment, it is still not possible to supply the experience of transferring identities and cultural exchange that the presence itself guarantees. This notion can be acquired if we think about socialization, that is, the informal connections that cultural encounters provide as the core of diplomacy. And it can be said in the case of the cinematographic market, these moments are nuclear for any forwarding and commercial deployment of a film's circulation around the world. The moment of diplomacy that arises in the socialization provided by events, such as in-person film festivals, however subtle and informal, is an essential step for the strategic journey of a film and, of course, for the expression of its culture as well.

Even though festivals have adapted to the least expensive and far-reaching formats that the globalized and hyper digitized world can offer their founders, it is assumed that the effect of COVID-19 on such events is temporary. The longing for “real” contact will not disappear and people are likely to reassume their affective investments in cultural encounters when opportunities arise. It is also clear that developments on the opposite side of the continuum will be couched in a power play of economic, geopolitical, and cultural interests. It is the space in between, the mid-sized festivals that have professionalized their organizations but are devoid of solid financing and depend on incidental sponsoring and funds, that may be most at risk; they need a lot of partnered cultural institutions to make up for a lack of funds. For the moment, this remains speculation.

Ultimately by combining the wealth of diversification in the festival circuit dynamics pointed out during the pandemic, and the notions on cultural diplomacy that sense and describe the long-term influence of the flow provided by film festival gatherings, we can preview different festival landscapes for the future and therefore, cultural institutions may rethink and also refine their presences in such festivalization effects on global interactiveness.

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