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Theaters in 19th Century cities and path dependence on contemporary cultural¹ policies²

Márcio Rogério Olivato Pozzer³

Abstract

This article presents a reflection on the reasons why cities that had theaters in the past show a greater degree of institutionality of their cultural policies in relation to other cities. Therefore, through a case study of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, a survey of historical data was carried out on the presence of theaters in cities and on the institutionality of cultural policies. The analysis of the results was based in two theoretical-methodological approaches: the concept of path dependence and the concept of civic community. Thus, the existence of certain central institutions for current cultural policies was compared with the existence of theater buildings in the 19th century. The study found that the cities that had theatrical movements that enabled the construction of these buildings on the 19th century, left a political and social legacy. On average, these cities have cultural policies with a higher degree of institutionality than others cities.

Keywords: Theater building. Cultural policy. Path dependence. Civic community.

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O teatro nas cidades século XIX e a dependência da trajetória nas políticas culturais contemporâneas

Resumo

Este artigo apresentou uma reflexão acerca dos motivos pelos quais cidades que possuíam teatros no passado manifestam hoje maior grau de institucionalidade de suas políticas culturais em relação às demais cidades. Para tanto, mediante estudo de caso do estado do Rio Grande do Sul, realizou-se um levantamento de dados históricos quanto à presença do teatro nas cidades e à institucionalidade das políticas culturais. A análise dos resultados se deu a partir de duas abordagens teórico-metodológicas: o conceito de *path dependence* e a concepção de comunidade cívica. Assim, confrontou-se a existência de certas institucionalidades centrais para as políticas culturais da atualidade com a existência de edifícios teatrais no século XIX. Verificou-se que as cidades que, no século XIX, possuíam movimentos teatrais a ponto de viabilizarem a construção desses edifícios, deixaram um legado político e social. Em média, tais cidades apresentam políticas culturais com maior grau de institucionalidade do que as demais.

Palavras-chave: Edifício teatral. Política cultural. Dependência da trajetória. Comunidade cívica.

Los teatros en las ciudades del siglo XIX y la dependencia del camino de las políticas culturales contemporáneas

Resumen

Este artículo presenta una reflexión sobre las razones por las cuales ciudades que contaron con teatro en el pasado muestran un mayor grado de institucionalidad de sus políticas culturales en relación a otras ciudades. Por lo tanto, a través de un estudio de caso del estado de Rio Grande do Sul, se realizó un levantamiento de datos históricos sobre la presencia del teatro en las ciudades y sobre la institucionalidad de las políticas culturales. El análisis de los resultados se basó en dos enfoques teórico-metodológicos: el concepto de dependencia de trayectoria y el concepto de comunidad cívica. Así, la existencia de ciertas instituciones centrales de las políticas culturales actuales se confrontaba con la existencia de edificios teatrales en el siglo XIX. Se encontró que las ciudades que en el siglo XIX tuvieron movimientos teatrales al punto de posibilitar la construcción de estos edificios, dejaron un legado político y social. En promedio, estas ciudades tienen políticas culturales con mayor grado de institucionalidad que las demás.

Palabras clave: Edificio de teatro. Política cultural. Dependencia de la trayectoria. Comunidad cívica.



Introduction

Political and academic sectors are interested in the reasons why cities in the same region, with similarities in terms of their occupation processes, access to public policies, and political and economic dynamics, present different results in terms of their development processes.

What are the factors that lead public policies to become perennial, becoming State policies that permeate governments and gain institutionality? In general, this process tends to be more difficult in the cultural segment than in others, since it is an area that is not usually among the main government policy priorities (Chedid, Capella, 2018), usually facing precarious administrative structures, with reduced budgets, shortages of personnel, in addition to infrastructure problems.

This article advances the reflection on the processes of development of contemporary cultural policies from the observation of historical evidence that emphasizes theatrical movements. Therefore, despite the fact that the theoretical lines that address the topic are broad and multifaceted, it emphasizes institutional legacies, with two strands of literature as determinant for the results: on the one hand are the elements of path dependence, and on the other, civic engagement, a theory based on the social and political dynamics of societies.

Thus, from an extensive survey of data and information about the cities of Rio Grande do Sul and the cultural movements that occurred there, especially the theatrical ones, the existence of theater buildings during the 19th century, was confronted with the existence of certain essential institutionalities for contemporary cultural policies.

In order to interpret the evidence and search for possible causal relationships, points of convergence were drawn between the theories, enunciating the experience of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, through the identification of analytical elements useful to the understanding of the political and social trajectory based on the constitution of an institutional matrix of municipal cultural policies.

From the above, a key question emerges: did the cities that had theatrical



movements to the point of “enabling” the construction of theater buildings in the 19th century leave a kind of political and social “legacy” that, to some extent, impacts the actions, projects and programs currently developed, especially regarding the institutionality of the cultural policies? The analysis of this finding is the main contribution of the article, not only to the theatrical and cultural field, but also to public administration and urban and regional studies.

Methodological notes

Based on research about the economics of culture in amateur theater festivals in small Brazilian cities, theories and hypotheses were discovered that led to an investigation regarding the presence of theaters in Brazilian cities throughout the 19th century. Thus, a case study about the state of Rio Grande do Sul began. This choice was made due to the abundant availability of historical documentation and bibliographic material about the existence of theater buildings and theater groups in the territory throughout history.

The objective was to prove the veracity of the hypothesis that the localities that had the existence of cultural movements in the 19th century with political, economic and social vitality, to the point of being able to erect theater buildings, have greater institutionality of their cultural policies at the beginning of the 21st century, when compared to other locations that did not have movements that resulted in such a feat. And, when confirmed, provide a theoretical reflection about this factor.

In the survey carried out, we sought to identify which cities in the state had a theater building built between 1801 and 1900, as well as data about how they were formed, such as the participation of public authorities, private entrepreneurs and associations with artistic and cultural purposes.

Although the performing arts are not exclusively performed in theater buildings, and the use of unconventional spaces for the performance of actors is increasingly common (Lima, 2020), such materiality, especially in the 19th century, shows a high degree of political, economic and social organization that is capable



of providing substantial financial amounts, that are added to other artistic and cultural issues, pointing out the relevance of the theater in these locations.

Although Lothar Hessel (1999, p.9) points out the existence of scenic manifestations documented since 1773, demonstrating that the artistic and cultural life had a certain relevance with several organized groups throughout Rio Grande do Sul, a methodological time frame was selected for the cities that built a theater building in the 19th century, since a considerable part of the municipalities and/or urban centers in the state had not been created until the 19th century.

Thus, between 2020 and 2021, a vast bibliographic and documentary survey was carried out in different databases: academic productions, local periodicals, municipal historical collections and municipal websites, with the objective of verifying the existence of theater building in the cities of Rio Grande do Sul. This research found 20 cities from Rio Grande do Sul that had a theater building in the 19th century.

With this, it is possible to establish a comparative analysis between such cities, with an average of other cities in Rio Grande do Sul, and an average of Brazilian cities regarding some characteristics of contemporary cultural policies. For this purpose, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) (Brazil, 2014) database of basic municipal information research was used, using an analytical matrix defined for this purpose as the parameters.

This matrix was elaborated with a view to reflecting the scenario of precariousness and discontinuity of cultural public policies, establishing the institutionality of cultural policies as quality attributes of local governments, more specifically of cultural policies. Thus, we sought to use one of the most important legal frameworks for the Brazilian artistic and cultural segment, which is Law No. 12,343, of December 2, 2010, which instituted the National Culture Plan and created the National System of Cultural Information and Indicators to build an analytical institutional matrix.

In order to define parameters for the institutionalization of cultural policies, which began to compose an objective analytical matrix, the first goal of the



National Culture Plan was used, as it deals with this issue. This goal defines what would be the constitutive elements of such institutionalization: a) having a department of culture or equivalent body; b) have a cultural policy council; c) hold a culture conference; d) have a culture plan; and e) have a culture fund (Brasil, 2013).

In other words, the existence of these elements, according to this goal of the National Culture Plan, would prove greater institutionalization of cultural policies in the various localities, making public cultural management more effective, planned, and participatory, while making better use of public resources (Brazil, 2013).

Table 1 - Institutional matrix analyzed

I. The existence of an exclusive administrative structure for cultural policies
II. Existence of a municipal fund for culture
III. Have held a municipal culture conference
IV. Have or be developing a municipal culture plan
V. Existence of a municipal cultural council

The theoretical framework used to advance the understanding of these causalities sought in the historical aspects regarding political, economic and social decisions, the link between present institutionalities and previous decisions or experiences carried out in the past. Thus, the concept of path dependence was used (Baláz, Williams, 2007; North, 2005; Pierson, 2000). In addition, the idea of a civic community (Putnam, 2006) was used to establish the relationship between the institutional quality of public cultural policies and the existence of social participation and a democratic culture. This was an attempt to interpret the possible factors that led some cities to erect theater buildings while others did not.

The development of the cultural scene of Rio Grande do Sul in the 19th century

The interviews that culminated in this research with public managers, artists,



cultural producers, and community leaders, as a rule, suggested that “successful” cultural practices, especially those that resulted in some degree of institutionalization of cultural policies, were directly related to the process of European colonization in Rio Grande do Sul, especially those experienced by communities of German origin and which, according to a significant portion of the interviewees, enjoyed great cultural capital and a consolidated culture of associations.

It is a fact that the political and economic transformations carried out by Rio Grande do Sul throughout the 18th century, and especially during the 19th century, significantly changed the social profile of its population, thus impacting its cultural dynamics and, to some extent, on the characteristics of its cities. Under this perspective, the role of Brazilian government initiatives to promote the colonization processes is undeniable (Pérez, 2014).

During the 18th century, still in the colonial period, Rio Grande do Sul received Azorean settlers, who concentrated in regions close to Porto Alegre and on the isthmus of Lagoa dos Patos; however, without managing to establish themselves economically, mainly due to war demands made by the government that were rarely paid, in addition to the recurrent incidence of a fungus type in crops, popularly called rust, which led to the loss of 90% of the crops (Machado, 1999, p.17-18).

But it was in the 19th century, starting in 1824, that the now Brazilian government, sought to demographically densify the south of the country through European colonization, giving new meaning to manual labor. A class of rural producers was formed, independent of the “traditional” landowners present in the region, bringing more dynamic supply of local cities and thus strengthening the defense forces in the territory, without forgetting to mention the intention to “whiten” the Brazilian population. mostly black or of mixed race (Bueno, 2003, p.267). According to Machado (1999, p. 20), between 1824 and 1830, 5,350 Germans entered the place that was then called the Province of Rio Grande.

This policy was temporarily interrupted in 1830 due to the political disputes in Brazil that would lead to the abdication of Dom Pedro in 1831. Even so, in 1832



the naturalization law was enacted that aimed to assimilate settled immigrants, fulfilling another important role in the region: ensuring the supply of soldiers to the National Guard, established a year earlier (Pérez, 2014). The resumption of the colonization policy took place between 1848 and 1874, under the direction of the provincial government of Rio Grande do Sul, a period in which 22,407 immigrants entered, 19,607 of whom were German citizens (Machado, 1999, p.20-24).

Now, did the presence of these settlers actually significantly alter the cultural scene in the region, impacting the process of artistic and cultural development in Rio Grande do Sul, more specifically in theatrical manifestations? The German presence led, as can be seen, to the establishment of new local cultural associations that contributed to the political and social dynamics of the region. In these organizations, music and dance were practiced and plays were performed. However, they were added to many other organizations that already occupied the public arena and people's daily lives.

According to Bittencourt (1999), the newspaper *Diário do Rio Grande*, of May 15, 1864, makes reference to a German association that held a theatrical presentation in a private soiree in the city of Rio Grande itself:

At night, at Mr. Michaelis farm on Rua da Alfândega, was the first representation of a particular German dramatic society that established its theater there. The show was very popular, with more than 150 guests attending, all from foreign trade with their families. After the drama there was singing and a small concert accompanied on the piano by our skillful provincial citizen, Joaquim S. Santos Paiva with his fiddle. This beautiful and very particular fun was repeated once a month during the winter (apud Bittencourt, 1999, p. 66).

But, apart from cultural capital, there is no evidence to prove that, during this period, German communities already enjoyed enough social capital to help make the construction of equipment as expensive as a theater feasible. In other words, the political, economic and social dynamics that provided this feasibility in some cases were already established during the colonization period, and may have been driven by it, but not established by these people.

This is evident with the finding that the construction “movement” for these theaters started in the 1830s, a period in which only 5,350 Germans had arrived in



the state of Rio Grande do Sul. In Cachoeira do Sul the Theater was opened in 1830, the same year that the Sete de Setembro Theater opened in Piratini. In 1832 another Sete de Setembro Theater was opened, but this time in the municipality of Rio Grande. In 1833 it was the turn of the Sete de Abril Theater in Pelotas. And, in 1833, the process of building the São Pedro Theater in Porto Alegre began, which was momentarily paralyzed by the Farroupilha Revolution (1835-1845) and only opened 25 years later.

The 19th century was marked by a series of military conflicts that caused immense human and material losses, but that, to a certain extent, opened space for new political, economic, and social arrangements that allowed the state's recovery to take place quickly while modernizing it. Thus, the transport system, historically marked by cargo mule troops, began to be abandoned in 1832 with the first steamboat that made the 'Rio Grande - Pelotas - Porto Alegre' route, and especially after the Farroupilha Revolution, with the connection of Rio Grande do Sul to the other Brazilian provinces. Added to this was the implementation of a banking system, started in 1858 with the creation of the Banco da Província and promoted by the installation of Caixa Econômica in the city of Porto Alegre in 1875. In addition, a small but important railway system started to be built in 1871, the same year in which the cities of Porto Alegre, Rio Grande, and Pelotas began using gas lighting on their main roads (Flores, 2013, p. 137- -138).

This modernizing impetus was catalyzed by the political ambitions of a local agrarian elite that was not made up of the recent immigrant settlers, allowing the artistic production of the region. Most of the time, through private initiatives, cultural groups, or political associations, a series of cultural facilities, primarily focused on the theater, started to be built in the territory of Rio Grande do Sul.

The São Pedro Theater, in Porto Alegre, was completed and opened in 1858. In Rio Pardo, the Theater was opened a few years earlier, in 1845, the same year that a small Theater was built in Bagé, as well as the Teatro União in Triunfo, which was built and opened in 1848.

From the 1860s onwards, there was an increase in theater buildings. In the municipality of Santana do Livramento the Sete de Setembro Theater opened in



1860. In Alegrete the inauguration of Independência Theater took place in 1862 and had its name changed some years later to São Luís Theater. In Bagé there were three important initiatives: the first, as already mentioned, in 1845, which gave rise to the Sete de Setembro Theater in 1863, in addition to the 28 de Setembro Theater, which began construction in 1872 and opened in 1883. In Osório the Theater opened in 1875. In the case of Uruguaiana, the Carlos Gomes Theater opened its doors in 1884, two years before the Itaquí Theater, which opened in 1886. The Esperança Theater in Jaguarão went through mishaps, having begun construction 1887, but only opened in 1898. In Taquari, the Theater was founded in 1893, in Dom Pedrito in 1886, and in Cruz Alta in 1899.

The systematization of the 20 cities in Rio Grande do Sul that had a theater building in the 19th century, with their names and year of foundation, can be seen in Table 2:

Table 2 - Municipalities in Rio Grande do Sul with Theater presence in the 19th Century

Cities	Theater Name	Year founded
Alegrete	Independência/São Luís	1862
Bagé	Sete de Setembro	1863
Cachoeira do Sul	----	1830
Cruz Alta	Carlos Gomes	1899
Dom Pedrito	Provisório	1896
Itaquí	Prezewodowski	1886
Jaguarão	Esperança	1898
Osório	Harmonia Arroioense	1875
Pelotas	Sete de Abril	1833
Piratini	Sete de Abril	1830*
Porto Alegre	São Pedro	1858
Quaraí	João Caetano	1897
Rio Grande	Sete de Setembro	1832
Rio Pardo	Sete de Setembro	1845
Santa Maria	Treze de Maio	1890
Santana do Livramento	Sete de Setembro	1860
São Gabriel	Teatro Harmonia	1876
Taquari	São João	1893
Triunfo	Unity	1848
Uruguaiana	Carlos Gomes	1884

Source: Self prepared (2022)



The role played by the State in the 19th century was a long way from what was later called a Social Welfare State, or just the Welfare State. Thus, the public policies that were developed were scarce and rarely addressed artistic and cultural needs. It is worth noting that this did not even become an organized demand from any sector of the population.

In this sense, a significant portion of the initiatives identified in Rio Grande do Sul to build theaters was done through private initiatives. Part of them through for-profit companies, as in Alegrete, which became viable through the constitution of a Corporation, with the sale of shares in the company, or through small entrepreneurs, such as in Bagé, where a local trader spent almost a decade building the Sete de Setembro Theater.

The other part took place through the non-profit private institutions with strictly theatrical purposes, such as in Cruz Alta, Santa Maria, Osório and Uruguaiana, called dramatic societies or theatrical associations. Also, through recreational associations, such as in Dom Pedrito with the Sociedade Recreio Familiar Pedritense, São Gabriel with the Sociedade Harmonia Gabrielense, and Triunfo with the Sociedade União. There were also initiatives such as in Santana do Livramento, through informal associations, without bylaws, and thus not a legally constituted entity.

Although the initiatives took place privately, a portion of them had the support of the local government, even for profit initiatives. The donation of land, or even support for the construction of buildings, demonstrated that there was an important degree of collaboration between the public and private sectors. If, on the one hand, it is not possible to currently attest to the repercussion of this mobilization regarding government quality, on the other hand, the dynamic patterns and systems of civic engagement are evident, where citizens imbued with public spirit acted to build cultural equipment for community use, through associative structures established in relationships of trust and collaboration, most of them non-profit and without evidence of non-egalitarian political relations.



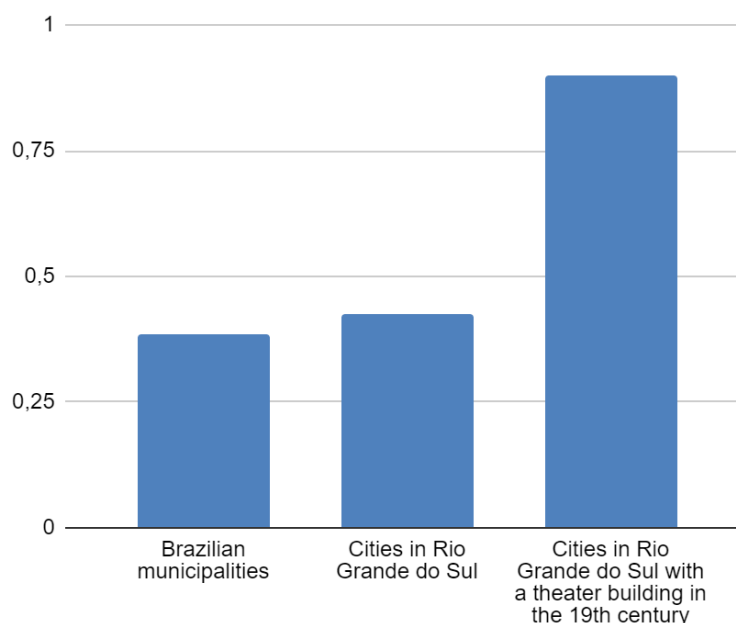
The presence of theaters and theater buildings in the 21st century

Although the roles played by theater within social dynamics have undergone profound changes since the 19th century, the existence of the theater building still serves as an important indication of cultural and social values present in a given community. The existence and functioning of the theater building ensure communities have access to cultural enjoyment, as well as adequate space for the city's scenic groups, especially theater groups, when they exist, to do research, carry out their rehearsals, and perform with minimally suitable conditions. In addition to, as a rule, being made available for other artistic presentations. In other words, the existence of these facilities suggests that the population of such a city tends to experience more theatrical performances than those who do not have the facilities.

The existence of active theater groups, in this sense, represents an important cultural indicator. And, as can be seen, it is expressive in cities that had a theater building in the 19th century and stands out from the average of other municipalities. Of the 5,570 Brazilian municipalities, 2,151 (38.61%) had theater groups in 2014. Of this total, 212 were from Rio Grande do Sul, representing 42.65% of the 497 municipalities in Rio Grande do Sul. In terms of the 20 cities in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, it was observed that 18 of them had theater groups: 90% of the total.



GRAPH 1 - Percentage of cities that had a Theater Group operating in 2014 in Brazil, Rio Grande do Sul, and cities in the state with theaters in the 19th century



Source: Author (2022) from Brazil (2014)

Regarding the presence of theater buildings in 2014, the IBGE (Brasil, 2014) carried out the survey and found that, in Brazil, 1,303 cities had such facilities, out of a total of 5,570 cities, that is, 23.4% of Brazilian municipalities, with 1,170 of these municipalities with theater buildings maintained by the municipal government (21% of the total number of municipalities in Brazil). In Rio Grande do Sul, a state with 497 municipalities, 111 had the presence of a theater building, 22.33% of the total of Rio Grande do Sul cities, and 95 of these locations had their equipment maintained by the local city hall (19.11%).

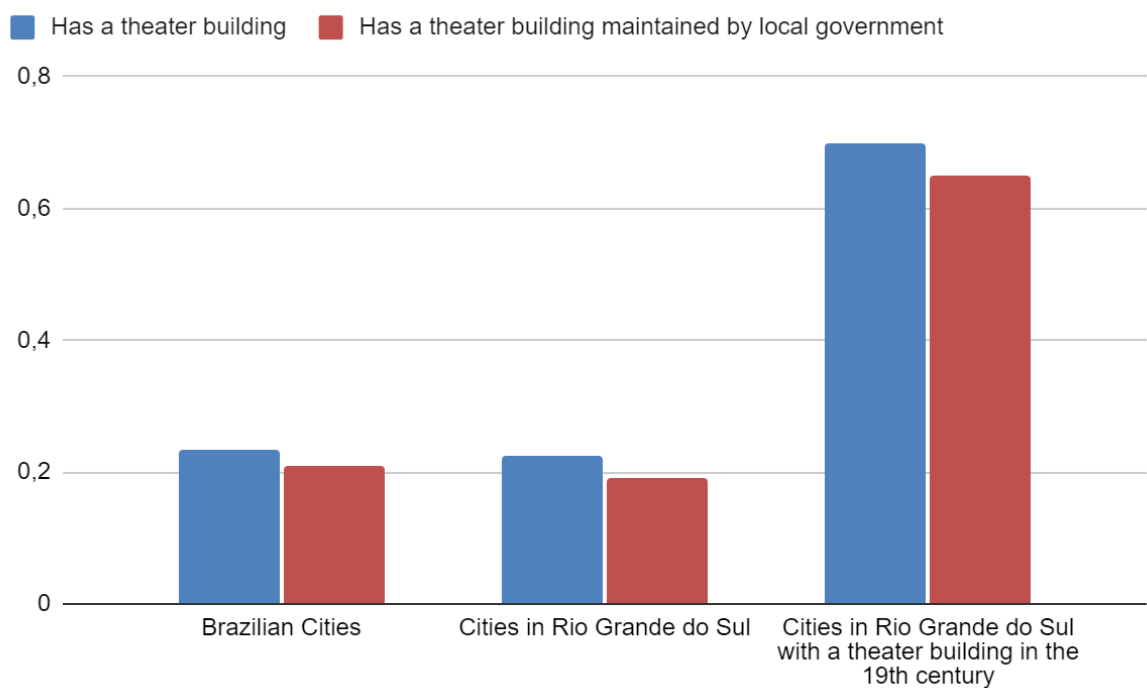
By observing only the 20 municipalities in Rio Grande do Sul that had a theater building in the 19th century, it was found that 70% of them, a total of 14, had a theater building in 2014, and 13 of these locations were facilities maintained by the local government (65%).

These figures, when compared to the situation in Brazil and Rio Grande do Sul, are impressive, representing a three times greater presence of Theater



buildings in the locations that already had a Theater in the 19th century. It is worth mentioning that in some cases, they are not the same theater buildings, which were sometimes demolished during the 20th century or repurposed due to economic, urban, and even cultural dynamics, since facilities erected 200 years ago years may no longer meet current needs.

Graph 2 - Percentage of cities that had a theater building in 2014 and the percentage of buildings maintained by the local government in Brazil, Rio Grande do Sul and in Rio Grande do Sul cities that already had a theater building in the 19th century



Source: Author (2022) from Brazil (2014)

Thus, the case study of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, advances understanding regarding the importance of political organization, social mobilization and public policies, resolving the ideological disputes that colonize everyday life, where comparative analysis provides indirect verification about current government quality. These aspects stem from the capacity with which municipal public administrations were able to implement the structural policy agenda for culture, which were agreed upon in the participatory processes that culminated in the approval of the National Culture Plan (PNC) in 2010. The PNC resulted from a series



of municipal conferences, state conferences, national conferences, and numerous seminars and public debates, in addition to the consultation and participation mechanisms characteristic of the Brazilian legislature (Carvalho, Silva & Guimarães, 2009).

The institutionalities of Brazilian cultural policies in the 21st century

Public policies can be exclusively part of the action of a specific government or compose more perennial actions, which permeate different governments, characterized as State policies. Government policies are related to projects developed by the Executive Branch and reflect the political agenda that was elected, in general, in the short term – which does not guarantee its continuity. State policies, on the other hand, tend to have greater institutionality, with administrative, budgetary structures and legal support, developed through discussion and approval by the Legislative Powers (Souza, 2020), ensuring greater political sustainability, thus committing to medium and long term plans.

The institutionalization of public policies seek to promote a certain set of actions, with the purpose of articulating practices that catalyze change processes based on the allocation of public resources, definition of rights and duties of the parties involved, in addition to standards, regulations and responsibilities. Therefore, it is worth recognizing that this statute reflects consensuses that can be reached at certain historical moments, but which are representative of values that tend to be reproduced.

The idea of institutions concerns the ideas, values and norms that guide social life. The State has a privileged, though not exclusive, position in changing or reproducing these institutions. And public policies, insofar as they define government guidelines that consolidate or change the state's position in relation to collective problems, contribute to this process. Public policies are, therefore, an important part of the institutionalization of values and rules of collective life. They guide conceptions, define strategies, allocate resources and distribute values to society that can contribute to consolidate a new institutional framework in relation to different themes (Lobato, 2009, p.722).



Thus, the political processes that resulted in the approval of Law nº 12.343, which established the PNC in 2010, and the attempt to advance with the establishment of a National System of Culture can be considered a milestone in the perspective of the institutionalization of cultural policies, insofar as they involve, not only important political, social and cultural actors in the national political scenario, but above all, various artistic and cultural segments, through decentralized participation strategies in Brazilian states and municipalities.

However, it is worth noting that the institutionalization of Brazilian cultural policies is a long-standing process and has some important historical milestones. Two moments can be cited as the foundations of such institutionality. The first was the creation, in 1937, of the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Service (SPHAN), the future National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute (IPHAN), which was the first body responsible for formulating and implementing cultural policies at the national level, and which had, and still maintains, a strong influence on public cultural policies throughout the country. The second, and more important moment, was the creation of the Ministry of Culture⁴ in 1985, which was the first time that cultural policies started to enjoy an exclusive administrative structure at the federal level to act in the face of artistic and cultural production, circulation and fruition for the entire country.

However, it was as of 2003 that the discussion of the National Culture System, and thus the role of federative entities in cultural policies, entered the national political agenda with a certain centrality. The logic of the system was such that its construction and establishment could only be executed through the national mobilization of state and municipal culture leaders, culture makers, and organized civil society. It involves organizational and institutionalized systems at the three federal levels in an institutional articulation regulated by regulations, instruments, apparatus, and negotiations. (Carvalho, Silva, Guimarães, 2009)

Therefore, since the PNC was approved in 2010, the survey carried out with

⁴ The Ministry of Culture was extinguished in 2019 by Brazilian President Jair Messias Bolsonaro, who transformed it into a secretariat of the Ministry of Citizenship.



Brazilian municipalities in 2014 by the IBGE (Brasil, 2014) already captures, to some extent, the priorities contained therein. Among them are the five topics present in the analyzed institutional matrix: a) have an exclusive administrative structure for cultural policies; b) have a municipal fund for culture; c) have held a municipal culture conference; d) have or in the midst of developing a municipal culture plan; and e) have a municipal culture council.

Among the topics analyzed comparatively, one of the most significant for the management of cultural policies is the existence of administrative structures capable of formulating, implementing, and evaluating cultural policies. The creation of these bodies is a demand from various artistic and cultural sectors, since they would at least ensure a minimal existence of an annual public budget, some presence of human resources, and especially the occupation of a place on the local political agenda. Therefore, the existence of bodies of this nature, exclusively for such purposes, demonstrates a certain degree of commitment to cultural guidelines, and especially the political, technical and financial capacity to provide solutions for these guidelines. This importance is expressed in the PNC, by presenting as one of its action guidelines “ensuring federal technical support and encouraging the installation of municipal and state departments of culture throughout the country, establishing communication channels between these bodies and the citizenry” (Brasil, 2010).

The second topic that underwent a comparative analysis was the existence of municipal cultural funds to finance local artistic and cultural activities. The establishment of these mechanisms was a way that was sought to guarantee the existence of perennial funding for artistic and cultural production, and also to minimize the discretionary nature of the selection processes for cultural goods and services, as well as the artists that were selected to access public resources, making public spending on culture more republican. In other words, they represent an important institutional advance for local cultural management.

Another topic present in the analyzed institutional matrix was the holding of municipal culture conferences. These represent important instruments for the institutionalization of social participation in the management of public policies regarding culture. Through them, the perspectives on the problems and



potentialities of the cultural sectors are broadened, configuring themselves as spaces of social control that can be used as planning tools. In addition, they indicate the existence of a certain contemporary civic engagement, insofar as they demand the participation of society.

The next topic in the institutional matrix that underwent comparative analysis was the existence of municipal culture plans. These are planning instruments that represent that culture is part of the political agenda of the municipality, and most of all, that the government has, to some extent, short, medium, and long term planning. Evidently, the quality of these instruments varies greatly from location to location, according to the efforts that are put into their preparation. In their favor is the existence of data, information, and statistics about the artistic and cultural practices developed in the municipality, the existence of qualified personnel to assist in the process to discuss and prepare the plan, as well as the effective participation of the population throughout its stages of development.

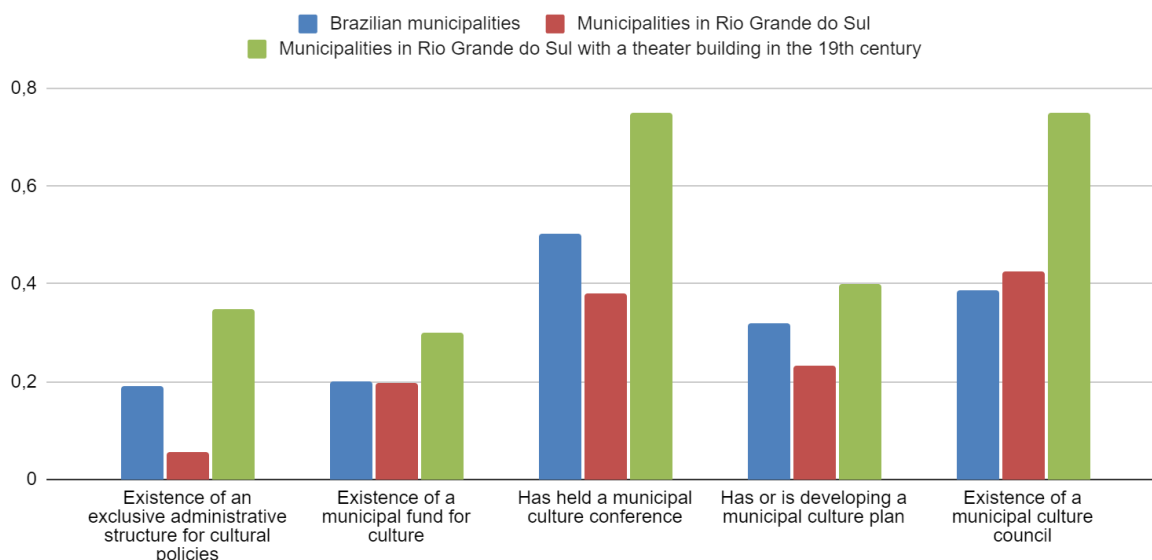
Finally, the municipal councils, also called “public policy councils,” are spaces formed by representatives from government and civil society, whose make-up varies from case to case. They act as tools that enable active participation on the part of citizens, and may affect the processes of formulation, implementation and evaluation of public policies. In other words, they constitute a privileged space for citizens' contact with the public sphere, in all its realms, bringing them closer to the processes, actions and public policies that concern their lives and that, in some way, will impact in their daily life.

The comparative analysis of the institutionality of cultural policies

From the collection of data regarding the defined institutional matrix, a comparative analysis was done between the cities of Rio Grande do Sul that had a theater building in the 19th century and the average of the cities of Rio Grande do Sul and Brazil (Graph 3).



Graph 3 - Percentage of Brazilian cities, cities in Rio Grande do Sul, and cities in Rio Grande do Sul that had a theater building in the 19th century with the elements defined in the analyzed institutional matrix



Source: Author (2022) from Brazil (2014)

According to a survey carried out by IBGE in 2014, of the 5,570 Brazilian municipalities, 1,073 (19.26%) had an exclusive culture secretariat or department. In Rio Grande do Sul, of the 497 municipalities, only 28 had a culture secretariat established exclusively for this purpose.

By highlighting only the municipalities in Rio Grande do Sul that had a theater building in the 19th century, it can be seen that, of the 20 cities, seven of them had secretariats dedicated exclusively to cultural policies, that is, 35%, a number significantly higher than that found in the rest of the country, especially in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, as can be seen in Graph 1, which presents this comparison.

When comparing the data regarding the existence of municipal culture funds, among the 5,570 Brazilian municipalities, only 1,111 (19.94%) had municipal culture funds in 2014. Of these, 99 were in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, or 19.91% of the 497 cities in the state.

When we analyze the existence of municipal funds for culture only in the



locations highlighted with the presence of theaters in the 19th century, it appears that 30% of them had municipal funds in 2014 and that all were exclusive to culture. Although this number is not very large, still lacking several municipalities, it is 50% greater than the average found in Brazil and Rio Grande do Sul. Of these, 189 were from Rio Grande do Sul, which represented 38.03% of the total of cities in Rio Grande do Sul.

When only examining the data regarding the 20 cities that had a theater building in the 19th century, 15 of them had already held, at least once, a municipal culture conference, representing a significant 75% of these locations. This percentage was practically double that of the state of Rio Grande do Sul.

With regard to municipal cultural plans, although there may be a qualitative difference between the plans prepared by the cities, this aspect cannot be verified by the data provided by the IBGE. Thus, only its existence is used as proof of the institutionalization of cultural policies. And, in this sense, it was possible to verify that, of the 5,570 Brazilian municipalities, 468 (8.4%) had municipal cultural plans, and 33 of these locations were in Rio Grande do Sul. Therefore, 6.64% of the municipalities in Rio Grande do Sul had municipal plans, a figure slightly lower than that observed nationally. Among the municipalities with theater buildings in the 19th century, none of them had a municipal cultural plan, according to the IBGE.

However, it was possible to observe the cities that, in 2014, were in the process of developing their municipal culture plans. And, in this regard, 8 of the 20 municipalities that had a theater building in the 19th century were developing their planning instruments. In other words, 40% of these cities, while 1.317 (23.64%) of Brazilian cities were going through the same process, and only 16.50% of cities in Rio Grande do Sul were dedicating themselves to this, representing a total of 82 municipalities out of 497 in Rio Grande do Sul.

Finally, when comparing the existence of municipal cultural councils, 2,151 of the 5,570 Brazilian cities were found to have such a body (38.61%). Of this total, 212 were located in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, representing 42.65% of the cities in the state. Even so, this percentage is considerably lower than the 75% represented by the 15 cities in Rio Grande do Sul that had a theater building in the 19th century.



The construction of theater buildings in the 19th century and the dependence of the trajectory

The supporters of historical institutionalism believe that the choices made when institutions and policies are formed have a constraint effect on their future development due to an inertial tendency that imposes difficulties on subsequent transformations, due to the performance of these same institutions (Peters 1999 , p. 63 apud Gains, John, Stoker 2005, p.25). In this sense, historical institutionalists are associated with a particular perspective of historical development, defending a model of social causality that called path dependence. In other words, it rejects “the traditional assumption that the same operative forces will generate the same results everywhere in favor of the view that the effect of such forces will be mediated by contextual characteristics of a given situation often inherited from the past” (Hall, Taylor 1996 , p.941).

Thus, considering the premise that historical processes produce consequences, the concept of path dependence emerges as an analytical tool that helps to understand the relevance of certain events and social processes in the development of certain temporal sequences, as noted by Adrian Kay (2005) when reflecting on path dependence:

The legacies of the past condition the future. Historical institutionalism defends the idea that individuals act within institutional arrangements whose current structure and functioning can only be partially understood if the analysis is not integrated into a historical perspective (Kay, 2005, p. 555).

The decision made by the political and social forces of a certain community to make a major investment in a given infrastructure can activate a mechanism of increasing returns in which the increments made to the activities linked to this “improvement” tend to produce greater benefits. As a result, political and social actors are “encouraged” to concentrate, increasingly, on the area in which the investment took place, tracing and deepening a specific trajectory (Pierson, 2004, p.22-23).



From this perspective, the investments made by certain communities, during the 19th century, to erect theater buildings in their cities can be pointed out as examples of decision-making that created infrastructures with the potential to activate these mechanisms of increasing returns. In other words, when building a theater building, the economy of the performing arts cultural scene becomes more dynamic, encouraging the creation and maintenance of theater and dance groups, the setting up of shows, and the development of the entire production chain involved in the production, circulation and enjoyment of the performing arts, and theater in particular.

Evidently, theatrical practice is not restricted to locations that have cultural facilities, in this case a theater building. However, the construction of these facilities, which represents the political, social, and even economic decision-making to make a substantial investment, indicates the existence of a priority given to culture at that moment in history.

Thus, after making large investments in the construction of theater buildings, whether public or private, the theater's production chain gains centrality in the local dynamics, with a trend for its "inputs" to be demanded more frequently and in increasing quantities, encouraging the feedback from this cycle in which there is a tendency to continue investing in the same artistic option. In this sense, the marginal cost of production is decreasing, with each theater play, where each artistic presentation produced becomes relatively cheaper than the previous ones, which means producing "more" with less financial resources and expanding the economic feasibility of the theater enterprises.

In addition, there are two learning outcomes, with implications for the cultural capital of the local population. The first, over the short term, refers to the establishment of a learning effect, as the people who enjoy the theatrical presentation, the "consumers", start to develop the skill and the particular cognitive frameworks to deal with this artistic manifestation, so that the "gains obtained" with such experiences tend to generate incentives for the recurring demand of the same experience. In other words, a public formation process is developed, which will demand theater plays, thus fostering this type of production chain. And the second, of medium and long term, is explained by North (2005),



according to whom the learning of any generation is strongly conditioned by the perceptions derived from the secular collective learning. Thus, learning is a cumulative process filtered by the culture of a society.

As a result, cultural "entrepreneurs", whether public or private, individuals or companies that promote artistic presentations, with the most diverse purposes, also generate a mechanism of increasing returns since they adopt inductive methods of definitions based on past experiences, developing what economists call adaptive expectations. By offering "more of the same" the risks are reduced, maximizing the chances of meeting the public's expectations.

These processes tend to organize the sector, creating demands to a lesser or greater degree on the local government, consequently creating some institutionalities. This organization tends to reverberate, at first, in other artistic languages, increasing the production, circulation and enjoyment of other artistic and cultural goods and services. Later, in other dimensions of the political and social life of the territory.

Thus, the economic and political performance of certain societies over time, ultimately, depend on the trajectory carried out throughout history (North, 2005), "to the extent that individuals, when making their choices, do so under the influence of their beliefs, formed through a cumulative learning process that is culturally transmitted from one generation to another" (Costa, 2019, p.1375).

Civic communities, associations, and the institutional development of society

If the political, social and economic definition of building equipment like a Theater building generates reflexes in development over the years, it is worth reflecting on the reasons why some localities, through some governments or private organizations, managed to develop their artistic and cultural dynamics to the point of deciding to invest in a certain construction, while other localities and communities did not reach the same decision, considering that the presence of theatrical manifestations was widespread throughout the state of Rio Grande do



Sul, and not being limited only to the “big centers” of the time, such as Rio Grande, Pelotas, and Porto Alegre, but could be found in several cities in the interior portion of the state (Hessel, 1999, p. 8).

Robert Putnam (2006), in seeking to answer why some democratic governments perform well and others do not, concluded that institutions are shaped by historical processes, highlighting the need to study the origins of each location and establishing a causal relationship between institutional performance and the civic nature of the local population. For him, governmental success is associated, primarily, with dynamic standards and systems of civic engagement, in which its citizens are active and imbued with a public spirit, with egalitarian political relations and social structures based on relationships of trust and collaboration. On the other hand, vertically structured political relations and fragmented social dynamics characterized by isolation and cultural practices dominated by mistrust, tend to form governments with lower levels of performance. In other words, such differences in civic life are fundamental to explain the unique performance of institutions and local governments, as well as their economic performance.

In this sense, the concept of social capital becomes central to understanding the differences in economic and institutional performance of local governments, since it directly impacts the population’s degree of civic participation. That is, the degree of citizens’ interest in public issues and their ability to mobilize in civil organizations that Putnam called “associations” is directly related to social capital. And, according to Putnam, they contribute to the effectiveness and stability of democratic governments:

Associations instill in their members habits of cooperation, solidarity, and public spirit. [...] This is corroborated by data extracted from research on civic culture conducted with citizens from five countries [...] showing that the members of the associations have more political awareness, social trust, political participation, and “subjective civic competence.” Participation in civic organizations develops a spirit of cooperation and a sense of common responsibility towards collective undertakings (Putnam, 2006, p.103-104).

According to Putnam (2006), participation and the resulting internal trust in



associations, in addition to provoking intense civic engagement, helps to normalize public spaces by reproducing and intensifying the promotion of collective initiatives. As a result, a democratic environment is created, inhabited by public and private bodies that expand the transforming potential of actions, projects, and programs, valuing the general well-being of society. To illustrate the profile of these organizations, Robert Putnam (2006, p. 105-106) presented the percentages of local associations, according to their purposes, which mobilized the Italian citizens of the regions he called “developed” in 1985, excluding unions. The absolute majority, with 73% of the total, were sports clubs, 11.3% were recreational associations, 5.7% were associations of cultural and scientific activities and the other 5.1% were associations geared towards music and theater.

In other words, a representative 10.8% of the organizations present in the “developed” Italy analyzed by Putnam had artistic and cultural purposes that were, to some extent, similar to the organizational initiatives that led to the construction of the theaters in Rio Grande do Sul throughout the 19th century, although not sharing the same percentages that these organizations had.

As a result, greater participation and the constitution of organizations tend to contribute to the establishment of civic communities, in which programmatic commitments would tend to impose themselves on public issues to the detriment of clientelistic practices (Putnam, 2006, p. 113), which are quite widespread in the cultural environment, given the discretion with which artistic and cultural actions and projects are chosen that rely on resources from public authorities in all spheres. In the Brazilian case: municipal, state and federal.

Final considerations

Although the importance of the arts and culture, in general, in the lives of human beings is truly recognized, the impact of these processes is difficult to measure. However, the correlational study carried out was able to demonstrate the importance of theater for the development of cities, exploring the difference that the existence of theater throughout history has had in the institutionalization



of cultural policies in these locations.

The analysis of public policies, as well as any social process, is complex and has multiple variables. Therefore, the results and the differences observed between the management of public policies, the quality of public services, and the effectiveness of public actions, projects, and programs in cities have complex and multiple political, economic and social explanations. Despite the difficulties, the theoretical and methodological approximation of the concepts of civic community and path dependence provided a strong theoretical framework to assist in understanding the institutional disparities found in the cultural policies of Brazilian cities, using a comparative analysis matrix.

The tabulation of data from the survey conducted by IBGE crossed with the survey carried out in the cities of Rio Grande do Sul, regarding the presence of political, social, and cultural movements that led to the construction of theaters buildings during the 19th century, provided corroboration for the hypothesis that the cities that had the organizations that made these facilities possible, left a legacy that was reverted into greater institutionality of their cultural policies.

It should be noted, however, that the fact that theater buildings were not built in other locations does not necessarily imply the absence of artistic, theatrical, or associative movements in other locations. However, the existence of the facilities represents the achievement of a degree of organization and mobilization of human and financial capital that point to greater civic engagement, which, on average, left a more virtuous legacy than in other locations, as can be seen in the comparative analyses.

The political and social participation noted in the 19th century did more than lead to the construction of theater buildings, which impacted cultural, social, and therefore, community politics. On the one hand, they contributed to the advancement of the establishment of civic communities, since these are marked by their tendency to overlap with programmatic commitments regarding public issues in relation to the clientelistic practices that are widespread in Brazil. This is especially true with cultural policies that have historically enjoyed low institutionality. On the other hand, they activated a mechanism of increasing returns, pointing to the constitution of a learning effect, which was evident as 90%



of the cities with theaters in the 19th century had operational theater groups in 2014, more than double the average for Brazil and for the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Also, 65% of these cities still have a theater building, a number three times higher than the averages found in Brazil and the state of Rio Grande do Sul.

The relationship between the trajectory followed since the 19th century and the constitution of civic communities at the beginning of the 21st century can be established by the significant differences found in all the surveys based on the adopted analytical matrix. They demonstrate that institutionality has become greater in localities which had theater buildings in the 19th century, which tend to have: a) better conditions for cultural management, through exclusive administrative bodies for cultural policies; b) more republican and democratic criteria regarding the allocation of public resources through cultural funds, which tend to minimize the discretionary nature of public funding for artistic and cultural initiatives; c) greater social participation, with a tendency towards greater social control, institutionalized through cultural conferences and municipal cultural councils; and d) greater planning of government actions, with a view to making public policies more effective and efficient.

Thus, what was demonstrated with this research was the role of theater for the development of cities, through public policies of culture and the centrality occupied by civic participation. It serves as the basis to expand possibilities of an improved public administration, represented in this study by the greater institutionality of a matrix linked to cultural policies. It tends to create a virtuous circle, leaving legacies that will be perceived in the future, in the development of the territory. In other words, as historical processes take place that are immersed in the perception and performance of groups and individuals and based on their belief systems which give shape to institutions, there is a tendency to achieve greater success when these processes are done through civic participation. Finally, it is essential to note that cities and their communities continue to transform, permanently. So as history continues to happen, decisions continue to be made, and the path to the future continues onward.



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