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Julie Cupples, Marcela Palomino-Schalscha, Manuel Prieto

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Introduction

Since the independence of the Latin American nations, the idea of development among intellectuals has fluctuated between two tendencies. On the one hand, the creation of institutions following the lead of England, France, or the United States under positivist premises regarding education, science, material progress, industrialization, with the understanding that most fellow citizens, particularly indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, mixed-race peoples, and rural folk were not apt learners. On the other hand, a few intellectuals, like José Martí, placed great emphasis on deepening knowledge of home-grown ways of doing things. This fluctuation continues to this day, with neoliberals and globalizers, on the one hand, promoting a liberal cosmopolitanism, and on the other hand, decolonial activists seeking to work from indigenous ways of knowing. A third position is that of those who seek to network across differences, advancing local, national, and regional projects. With regard to the definition of culture, this chapter takes as its point of departure the so-called anthropological view adopted by UNESCO: the representations, symbols, values, and practices by which a community reproduces itself. In the 1980s and 1990s there emerged an economic understanding of culture, in large part oriented toward the cultural and creative industries (CCI), especially those that exploit copyright. A major challenge has been to mediate between these two tendencies. As thin as these thumbnail sketches of culture and development are, it should already be evident that they relate to each other, as in the developmentalist view that traditional cultures hold back development, or as in the contrary view that culture, like the environment, is a necessary factor in achieving a sustainable development that does not exhaust resources or endanger cultural and natural ecologies. There are positions as well that see sustainable development as an alibi for a kinder and gentler despoliation of culture and nature. And finally, the Internet, social media, and OTT streaming platforms are transforming what we understand by culture and development. We shall comment on all of these positions in the course of this essay.

Another point to keep in mind is that there are many cultural matrices among the 20 or more countries that constitute the region, and significant variety within each nation. What all these countries have in common is colonialism, a legacy that to this day has not been eradicated, despite the independent status of most of them. Moreover, as decolonial scholars argue, it is not possible to speak of modernity or modernization, the lynchpin of development, without the...
other side of the coin: coloniality. Its continued legacy is what accounts for the subordination of native peoples and Afro-descendants, as well as many mixed-race people, and the relegation of their epistemologies to inferiority or superstition. Until very recently, the cultures of these subordinated peoples were considered to account for Latin America’s underdevelopment. Indeed, many Europeans and North Americans had condescending views of Latin Americans even into the late 20th century.

From a developmentalist perspective, there certainly were advances to be lauded. In the wake of the Great Depression, populist governments – Lázaro Cárdenas (Mexico, 1934–1940), Getúlio Vargas (Brazil, 1930–1945 and 1951–1954), and Juan Domingo Perón (Argentina, 1946–1955) – turned to import-substitution industrialization as economic crisis and then World War II created favourable circumstances for this new economic model. As we will see, this model goes hand in glove with a series of cultural changes. On the one hand, as increasing numbers of the popular classes entered the workforce, the populist governments fomented nationalist expressions of culture, evident in the promotion of samba in Brazil (Raphael, 1980) or Mexican Golden Age cinema (1933–1964) with its focus on the Mexican Revolution, rural themes featuring mariachis and ranchera songs, and urban problems with the onset of modernization.

Having ushered in rapid economic growth in the 1940s and 1950s, the import-substitution industrialization model began to show its weaknesses by the 1960s. Commodity prices fell after the Korean War of 1953, exports could not keep up with imports thus leading to a balance of payments crisis. Inflation made exports even less competitive, and an increased workforce sought salary increases and labour protections, which were met by state repression (Ward, 2004). Indeed, in Brazil the military staged a coup d’état in 1964 to brake the rise of worker activism. State-led industrialization actually deepened inequality inherited from the unequal distribution of land during colonial times by concentrating industrial and financial capital (Bulmer-Thomas, 2003: 10). The 1973 coup d’état against Salvador Allende was another expression of economic elites seeking to suppress labour activism and socialist policies.

The failures of industrialization and economic development, which looked so promising in the 1940s and 1950s, were attributed in large part by modernization theorists such as W.W. Rostow (1960) to the inertia of traditional values and institutions: prevalence of primary economic activities, undifferentiated social roles and political structure, little social mobility, traditional and hierarchical sources of authority. According to development theorists, these features slowed the process of moving toward a modern society characterized by differentiated social roles and political structures, high social mobility, high productivity and individual capacities for achievement, rational sources of authority (Valenzuela and Valenzuela, 1978). While it is not the purpose of this chapter to delve into the economic analyses of development, it is nonetheless necessary to understand the relations that social scientists of development established between the cultural matrix of a society (traditions, values, etc.) and its capacity to generate economic growth. This point is clearly brought home in Seymour Martin Lipset’s 1963 analysis of Latin American elites, whom he faults for their lack of entrepreneurship, due in large part to their Catholicism, as opposed to the Weberian causal connection between the Protestant ethic of northern Europeans and economic development and modernization. For Lipset, culture clearly plays an important role in underdevelopment: “the comparative evidence from the various nations of the Americas sustains the generalization that cultural values are among the major factors which affect the potentiality for economic development” (Lipset, 1963, 30; cit. in Valenzuela and Valenzuela, 1978: 541).

In response to modernization theory, a generation of quite heterogenous dependency theorists (see Kay, this volume) countered that development in core countries and underdevelopment in peripheral ones are determined by the latter’s historical insertion into what Wallerstein
(1974) called the world system, such that the former set the terms of labour, extraction of raw materials, and trade in the latter. Synthesizing this copious literature, Valenzuela and Valenzuela (1978) state that it isn’t values or attitudes that contribute to underdevelopment but, rather, dependency “produces an opportunity structure such that personal gain for dominant groups and entrepreneurial elements is not conducive to the collective gain of balanced development” (Ibid.: 545). This does not mean that external factors exclusively shape the economy but that dependency entails a particular fit between the external factors of the world system and “internal variables [that] may very well reinforce the pattern of external linkages” (Ibid., 546). That fit varies so that there are different instantiations of dependency. The most recent opportunity structure at the time that dependency theory emerged was transnational capitalism, made possible by innovations in communications, transportation, and technology, which reset the conditions for insertion into the world economy.

Modernization and dependency were also categories in the cultural sphere, particularly in literature, the visual arts, and media. In this regard, as Jean Franco (1975: 66) argues regarding Latin American literature, its difference cannot be seen simply as a “continuous and unresolved opposition between the universal and the regional.” What dependency theory established for the economy, i.e., the specific conditions that account for the fit into the world system, also makes sense, mutatis mutandis, in the cultural sphere. Rather than see the cultural differences of Latin American literature as aberrant or as versions of the Western canon (e.g., as has been done with writers like Borges, Vargas Llosa, or García Márquez), Franco suggests that these differences make visible the “hidden ideological assumptions which are seen as natural and normative in the metropolis” (Ibid., 67). Literature, especially fiction, played a major role in discussions of modernization among Latin American intellectuals, already evident in the debate regarding modernismo, which will be reprised in the 1960s and 1970s regarding the Latin American New Novel and the concept of transculturation, both of which are discussed below.

More importantly, the relation to the world system affects the conditions of cultural production, orienting critical attention and sales in the cultural market to those genres and forms of representation that can have greater uptake internationally. Writing in 1975, Franco focuses on US technological influence, particularly in communications, which established, with few exceptions, the norms according to which the media sphere – including genres, styles, and forms of circulation – was shaped. Dependency in this area was addressed in the 1960s by the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), which followed from a set of critiques of Western mainstream media made by intellectuals and activists from developing nations. But Franco’s major focus is on literature, hence we shall deal with this first.

In the 1970s, there emerged a debate over the subservience or autonomy of modernista literature in Spanish America. In the above quoted essay, Franco dismisses the poetry of Rubén Darío and other modernistas (with the exception of José Martí) – who crowded their poetry and stories with princesses, luxury commodities, chinoiseries, classical references, and other refinements – as the expression of a will to belong to the brotherhood of metropolitan writers (Ibid.: 73). A decade and a half earlier, Juan Marinello (1959: 26), an important Cuban critic, had cast Darío as an alienated writer: “The movement captained by Rubén Darío was an American phenomenon but not in the service of our peoples. . . . It was the dazzling vehicle of a repudiable evasion, the brilliant mining of a malnourishing vein.” Françoise Perus (1976: 117), in turn, characterizes Darío and the modernistas as ideologically connected to the oligarchies who, “in the absence of a bourgeois-democratic revolution that would eliminate them in a radical way, stubbornly persist.” Angel Rama (1970, 1985) and Noé Jitrik (1978), on the contrary, argue that far from reproducing a backward-looking perspective, Darío’s style established a literary autonomy that achieved on the symbolic level what was not possible on the economic or social levels.
It is not surprising that the notion of a Latin American cultural autonomy would emerge at the same time as dependency theory. In the very same period, one can also find claims for cultural autonomy in reflections on the “New Latin American Novel,” also known as the “Boom,” with its radical experimentalism. In his 1969 book on the new novel, Carlos Fuentes writes that literature expresses “our own model of progress” (98). The Boom novelists and their boosters felt that Latin America had finally come into its own, overcoming dependency by naming it in their newly invented (literary) language. There was also the sense that Castro’s revolutionary triumph in 1959 had brought liberatory possibilities that spread out to other spheres. Roberto Fernández Retamar, director of Cuba’s premier cultural institution, Casa de las Américas, saw in the new novel a reprise of the achievements of Darío and the modernistas; the novelists “seem to do for the novel what the Hispanoamerican modernistas did for the poetry of their region” (1972: 322). Indeed, in his best known work, “Caliban: Notes Toward a Discussion of Culture in Our America,” written in 1971, Fernández Retamar begins by countering the colonialis assumption that Latin American culture is derivative and argues for ending Latin America’s “irremediable colonial condition” (1989: 3).

In the 1970s, the Non-Aligned Movement, comprised of what World Systems theory labelled peripheral nations, sought autonomy from the two superpowers of the Cold War, and to that end led a global campaign under the auspices of UNESCO for a New World Information and Communication Order. NWICO was the cultural arm of the New International Economic Order that Third World countries espoused at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). NWICO sought to counter biases in reporting on developing nations, filtered by Western news agencies, and to establish a balance in the flow of TV programs. It demanded technology transfer so that these countries could develop robust communications systems. It also sought to counter the manufacture of desire for consumer goods through advertising (MacBride and Roach, 1994). Latin American anti-imperialist intellectuals were quite active in this movement: Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart (1991[1971]) in Chile; Héctor Schmucler (1975) in Argentina; José Marques de Melo (1971) in Brazil; Antonio Pasquali (1963) in Venezuela.

Most emblematic is Dorfman and Mattelart’s 1971 How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic, in which they deconstruct the apparently innocent entertainment value of Disney comics and other US entertainment products, demonstrating that there are political objectives and consequences in their dissemination. In their preface to the English language edition, Dorfman and Mattelart point out that two items were not subject to the US embargo on the socialist government of Salvador Allende: “planes, tanks, ships and technical assistance for the Chilean armed forces; and magazines, TV serials, advertising, and public opinion polls for the Chilean mass media, which continued, for the most part, to be in the hands of the small group which was losing its privileges” (1991: 9). David Kunzle’s introduction to the 1991 English language edition makes the important point that “culture,” which in this case means primarily the media and content industries protected by copyright, is the United States’ second net export, and cites a 1990 Time magazine article that claims: “Today culture may be the country’s most important product, the real source of economic power and its political influence in the world” (Ibid: 11). Indeed, this aspect of culture, as export, will constitute an important part of what I argue below; but before elaborating on this issue, it is important to consider other arguments regarding what Dorfman and Mattelart call cultural imperialism, for they also make a claim to, if not autonomy, certainly innovations in Latin American culture.

Dorfman and Mattelart deploy a “hypodermic needle” theory of media influence, whereby audiences are brainwashed by what they see and hear. The assumption is that if audiences read comics or view TV series in which characters are individualistic and only interested in profit,
they will acquire those values and ways of being. Audience reception is, of course, much more complex, which is not an argument for privileging US or European media over local production. As we will see below, what is at stake is not only a negative media trade balance or that audiences are brainwashed but that the media sphere can be monopolized by stories and other expressions that refer to realities from elsewhere, thus providing the grist of what people discuss in daily conversations: “Did you see the latest episode of xxx, did you hear the latest song by yyy?” This jury is still out on whether OTT services like Netflix, Apple TV, and Amazon prime or music streaming services like Spotify, Pandora, and Apple Music or video sharing sites like YouTube effectively circulate the diversity of local media and stories along with international fare. Today, cultural policies aim for diversity rather than an exclusive focus on national culture; increasingly, this also seems to be the goal of the new media: to foster a greater heterogeneity in conversations that take place in social media as well as face-to-face encounters. In the conclusion, I shall discuss how the development of media and cultural delivery platforms has changed and how that change factors into understandings of cultural development in Latin America. But before doing so, it is important to examine a line of argument about cultural development that does not see the penetration by foreign media and cultures as producing a backwardness in Latin American cultures, but rather a reality that since the conquest of America has resulted in the emergence of creative hybridities.

This line of argument can be illustrated by briefly considering the work of José María Arguedas, Peruvian writer, linguist, and ethnologist. In the 1950s, he was Chief of the Folklore Section of the Ministry of Education of Peru, and in that capacity he operated as a mediator between local Andean musics and the new technologies that came with US music. García Liendo (2017: 146) writes that Arguedas did “not seek to freeze traditional culture within technology, but encouraged its metamorphosis and recognized the possibilities offered by mass culture.” Moreover, this influence was not limited to cosmopolitan coastal cities like Lima but travelled in both directions with the migrants from the predominantly indigenous highlands of Peru, encouraging greater exchange between the capital and the provinces, between migrants and their places of origin (Ibid.: 145; Arguedas, 1996[1971]). According to García Liendo, Arguedas did not reject mass culture in favour of an idealized popular culture; instead, he saw in it the possibility of using the communicative potential of the then new technologies for the development of Peruvian culture, while minimizing the contents that come packaged in North American technology (Idem). In other words, traditional culture could survive and indeed increase its scope as it circulated nationally, transformed via the appropriation of new technologies. Arguedas did not seek to disalienate the popular classes because he did not see them as alienated. Instead, he sought to help them create and legitimize a cultural counter-hegemonic space.

It is possible to bring together several approaches to development discussed thus far: Rama’s discussion of Darío’s compensatory symbolic modernization and dependency theory’s premise that capitalism underdevelops the periphery, generating a dual social structure whereby elites are joined at the hip with the metropolis and the popular classes hold to traditional values. Both approaches reflect a situation of combined and uneven development, that is, of the “amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms” (Trotsky, 1967: 432; cit. in WReC, 2015: 6). During the heyday of dependency theory in the 1960s and 1970s, the possible options for breaking free from dependency seemed to be the full integration of popular sectors via industrial labour, although that option foundered with the failure of import industrialization, or revolution, which became more difficult after the Chilean coup in 1973, the US embargo on Cuba, and the US-backed counter-insurgency strategies that brought the Central American national liberation civil wars in the 1980s to the negotiating table without any gains for popular groups. While the international success of the Boom novelists – Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García
Márquez, and Mario Vargas Llosa – made it possible to argue along with Fernández Retamar that Latin America did indeed not only have culture but a highly developed one, that success did not translate to recognition of the subaltern popular classes, who, it was argued, held to traditional values.

In 1974, Angel Rama published an essay on the transcultural processes in Latin American narrative, subsequently augmented in a 1982 book, in which he argued that a generation of regional writers – José María Arguedas in the Andean Highlands and coastal shantytowns of Peru, Juan Rulfo in Jalisco, Mexico, João Guimarães Rosa in Minas Gerais, Brazil, Gabriel García Márquez in the Caribbean region of Colombia – elaborated creative formal solutions for giving renewed vigour to local traditions that had been reduced by critics to conservative folklore in reaction to the cosmopolitan technical urban prowess of urban vanguards and the Latin American New Novel. Rama characterized these solutions as “formulations that enable the external influence to be absorbed and dissolved as a simple ferment within broader artistic structures in which the problematic [i.e., the centre/periphery dialectic] and the peculiar flavours that they have been guarding can be translated” (1974: 14). Rama adopted the term transculturation from Fernando Ortiz’s 1940 classic study Cuban Counterpoint: Sugar and Tobacco, for whom the term captures better than the Anglo-American “acculturation” (acquisition of a new culture), the various processes (loss and acquisition) at play, but most importantly “the creation of new cultural phenomena, which might be called ‘neoculturation’” (Ortiz, 1995: 103).

It is clear that Rama discerns in the regional novelists an original solution to the conundrums of combined and uneven development that social scientists had not seen. He argues that at the same time as this solution registers the idiosyncratic values of a nation’s past, it also harnesses “a creative energy that self-confidently acts on its particular inheritance as well as on external influences and in that capacity confirms an original elaboration, … it finds proof of the existence of a specific, living, creative, distinct society, which dwells … in the most secluded layers of the interior” (Rama, 1974: 17).

Rama found the basis of that “specific, living, creative, distinct society” in the ways in which the regional transcultural novelists were able to “recover [] the structures of oral and popular narrative” in contrast to the modernizing tendencies that drove the contemporary novel and in particular the Latin American New Novel. García Márquez, the most celebrated of the Boom writers, is included by Rama in this study because his great innovation, magical realism, enables him to “stylistically resolve the articulation of the verisimilitude and historicity of the events and the marvellous, from whose perspective the characters see those real events” (2008: 53).

Rama sees these transculturators as mediators between different cultures found within the boundaries of the nation-state, who are sensitive to the ways in which their societies are modernized (Ibid., 118). Indeed, he seems to attribute to them something akin to the Romantic visionary genius who could see the spiritual meaning in nature, with the difference that culture replaces nature and the nation replaces spirit in transculturation. Rama writes: “beyond their personal skills, there acts upon them quite strongly the specific situation in which the culture to which they belong is located as well as the patterns according to which it is modernized” (Idem.). But as we see in the case of Arguedas, the mediator, protagonist of Rama’s book, is not necessarily a transcendentalist Romantic, but someone who understands cultural diversity and seeks to promote, without folklorizing, the practices of those who have a different vision of the world, whether they are indigenous or migrants whose culture is undergoing change.

This mediating role is even more evident in Arguedas’ work with music precisely when migrants from the Andean highlands settled in the coastal cities where mass culture was transforming the cultural landscape, exercising an influence that literature would never have. Far from seeking to protect a pristine Andean culture, Arguedas sought to facilitate the massification of
Andean musics. In a society already shaped by mass culture, the counter-hegemonic sonorities of massified Andean fusion musics could provide alternatives to the invasion of “TV, radio, film and frivolous literature,” particularly for the middle classes “who do not have other cultural anchors” (cit. in García Liendo, 2017: 394–395). Already in the 1960s, Arguedas was working to provide a space in which Peruvians could develop a cultural resilience with inputs from within any of their regional cultures as well as from abroad.

While Arguedas sought to give Andean culture, albeit a hybridized one, protagonism within the framework of the Peruvian nation-state, subsequently hybridity discourse moved to a more transnational scale. Néstor García Canclini (1993 [1982]) demonstrates how Mexican indigenous cultures reconverted under the impact of capitalism, not closing off possibilities but opening them, despite the subordinate status of indigenous peoples. Like Arguedas, García Canclini is attuned to the technologies and media at the disposal of indigenous peoples and their cultural production, especially crafts and fiestas, but he takes the discussion an extra step by focusing on the range of complex mediations (religious beliefs, bureaucratic agencies, markets, media, and tourism) that provide a range of heterogeneous channellings that make that production hybrid. Also like Arguedas, García Canclini argues that the recovery of cultural identity is a misplaced idea; the encounter of traditional practices with the various forces of capitalist modernity leads not to accommodation but to emergent and contestatory expressions (1993: 84). His later work examines a wealth of examples from art, literature, crafts, and urban cultures to demonstrate that traditions have not been rendered obsolete but that they are in transition (2005 [1990]). “Reconversion prolongs their existence” (155).

It is precisely this focus on the various forces in relation to which culture reconverts, as well as the assimilation of culture to the market rationality of free trade agreements in the 1990s, which leads García Canclini and other cultural analysts to intervene in cultural policy debates. The book that he edited with Guillermo Guevara Niebla (1992) diagnoses the likely impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement on education, cultural industries, technological innovation, intellectual property and copyright, and tourism. This focus on the force field in which culture takes shape, with local as well as international impacts, shows that the relationship between culture and power is much broader and more complex than the representation of traditions, identity groups, or even social movements. These intellectuals understood that the United States intended to get control over culture and nature through the terms of trade, which override national laws. Questions of national cultural identity were no longer enough in order to understand the workings of culture in an era of neoliberal globalization.

Until the 1980s and 1990s, Latin American cultural policy-making institutions (ministries, secretariats, and councils) had largely focused on supporting Eurocentric arts (national theatres, symphony orchestras, museums) that would make them conversant in a league of modern nations, and on folklore and heritage, which would provide ballast for national identity. We have already seen how Dorfman and Mattelart sought to protect national culture from the juggernaut of Western media. García Canclini is one of a handful of Latin American cultural analysts who have sought to guide cultural policy away from national protectionism and towards a recognition of diversity, or more accurately, speaking from many places at once. García Canclini (2001 [1995]) went on to extend the discussion of hybridity in the globalized market setting of the late 20th century to what an effective citizenship might look like. To this end, he makes a series of recommendations for a regional, Latin American media and cultural space, as well as establishes the parameters of a democratic interculturality. This means acknowledging heterogeneity in the design of policies to promote the relation between local traditions and the cultural and creative industries, which largely operate according to international standards. We can see this process at work in a 2002 meeting that García Canclini coordinated of 50 Latin American and
Spanish policy designers, cultural administrators, analysts, and politicians to formulate policies for cultural development. The resulting set of recommendations presages the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, extending the notion of diversity beyond ethnicity and gender to a range of other issues, such as scale: small regions and countries or small and medium enterprises should be granted affirmative action vis-à-vis large countries or corporations (García Canclini, 2002). These recommendations, as well as the 2005 UNESCO Convention, aimed to put a brake on neoliberal free trade.8

This focus on hybridity, heterogeneity, diversity, and interculturality was also interpreted ecologically, in analogy with the need to safeguard biodiversity for the survival of the planet. Indeed, as Arturo Escobar (2012) notes, indigenous and inter-religious movements in Latin America have sought to establish culture as the fourth pillar of development. This proposal is in consonance with United Cities and Local Governments’ Agenda 21, which includes culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development, along with economic growth, social equality, and environmental balance (UCLG, 2010). Agenda 21 defines sustainable development as economic growth with social inclusion, environmental balance, and “the development of the cultural sector itself (i.e. heritage, creativity, cultural industries, crafts, cultural tourism)” and the transversal collaboration of culture with other sectors (UCLG, 2010: 4). Indeed, several Latin American cities have been quite active in UCLG and have made great strides in formulating cultural policy within this ecological framework.

The best known Latin American cases for the inclusion of culture in integral development policies are the Colombian cities of Bogotá and Medellín. The latter’s Secretariat of Culture was created in 2002 and became a key piece of the government plan of Sergio Fajardo, mayor of Medellín between 1 January 2004 and 31 December 2007, to implement the principles of his Compromiso ciudadano (citizen commitment) platform: make the city more livable by strengthening security, focusing on programs to increase equality and social cohesion through the reform of urban space and transport, especially in the poorer and less accessible areas; improve education; facilitate citizen participation in public management; achieve maximum administrative transparency; and orient culture towards peaceful coexistence (Escobar Arango, 2007). The government of Fajardo was characterized by the transversality of projects for citizen empowerment. The most iconic example are the Library Parks, also part of a broader strategy to integrate the city. They link with schools, day-care centres, sports centres, cultural centres, and gardens that facilitate participation in activities for the poorer sectors of the city because they are located at major transport intersections and provide access to media (Melguizo, 2011). The intersectorial and transversal character of urban revitalization is articulated with aesthetic, cultural, and educational processes. As architect Alejandro Echeverri, who directed the revitalization project as Secretary of Urban Development, explains, a true transformation cannot be achieved by investing only in physical or material infrastructure. Local residents are encouraged to participate actively in the program, orienting its policies (Gerbase, 2013). In Medellín, the fragmented parts of the city are bridged by establishing a shared governance between the state and citizens.

To be sure, there also are urban cultural policies that seek to position certain cities like Buenos Aires or Rio de Janeiro squarely in the international cultural marketplace. From the mid-1990s on, creative cities policies circulated around the globe, encouraging urban policy-makers to invest in the cultural and creative industries, and in particular those industries protected by copyright. There was a double impetus: on the one hand, investment in cultural infrastructure, as in the urban revitalization of Barcelona for the 1992 Olympics (García, 2012) and the so-called “Bilbao effect” of contracting renowned starchitects to attract tourism and business to previously deteriorated deindustrialized cities (Yúdice, 2009). On the other hand, Tony Blair’s
New Labour “Cool Britannia” cultural policy, focused on the creative industries in the context of trade-in-culture (or copyright) in the era of free trade, had a ripple effect throughout the world. Its 1998 Creative Industries Mapping Document (DCMS, 1998) was taken as a reference in other cities (e.g., Bogotá) and in a series of other analyses of this motley cluster of sectors, such as those of UNCTAD (2008) and the Inter-American Development Bank (Buitrago Restrepo and Duque Márquez, 2013). The 2002 Bogotá creative industries mapping document is a virtual clone of the British document in terms of methodology and sectors included: architecture, art, performing arts, crafts, film and video, software design, fashion design, graphic design, industrial design, textile design, photography, books, brochures, newspapers and magazines, music, heritage, advertising, television, and radio (Departamento de Diseño, 2002). The inclusion of advertising and software should raise eyebrows regarding how culture (art, performing arts, film, books, music, heritage) is reconstituted through the notion of creativity, but it is clear that the international trade context encouraged repackaging these heterogeneous sectors as one policy priority. In Latin America we see the creation of creative city clusters in Buenos Aires (Palermo Hollywood, La Boca, Colegiales, and Barracas); Rio de Janeiro (Porto Maravilha); Mexico City (the gathering of small trendsetters enterprises in the Historic Center, revitalized by Carlos Slim Heliu, as well as in Roma and La Condesa) (Olivera Martínez, 2015; García Canclini et al., 2012).

Yet, as one of the strongest advocates of a sui generis Brazilian creative economy – Ana Carla Fonseca Reis – put it, “it is not worth very much to stimulate the growth of sectors that generate astronomical revenues from intellectual property rights, if the creation of that wealth is not accompanied by a better distribution of income, driven by a socioeconomic inclusion that takes advantage of fundamental symbolic benefits, such as those of democratic access, valuing diversity, and the strengthening of national identity” (Reis, 2007: 293). As in the case of Medellín, we see this focus in the Brazilian Ministry of Culture, under the leadership of music megastar Gilberto Gil (2003–2008) and his successor Juca Ferreira (2008–2010). Arguably Latin America’s most innovative cultural policy, the Points of Culture program sought to do exactly as Reis argues: provide democratic access, value diversity, and strengthen a myriad of identities and not one national identity. A community cultural organization is selected by a committee of peers and receives funding, computer equipment, Internet connectivity, and inclusion in a network of other points, enabling communication on common issues that they confront.

It is important to acknowledge, as well, that Gilberto Gil, already a seasoned city councilman in his hometown of Salvador da Bahia, with abundant expertise in cultural policy, drew on human rights activism since the dictatorship years as well as the vibrant cultural activism throughout Brazil when he created the Cultura Viva department, which houses the Points of Culture. The Points of Culture, a priority action of Cultura Viva, are the nodal points of a horizontal network of articulation, reception, and dissemination of cultural initiatives. They do not have a single model, nor do they necessarily have physical facilities, programming, or activities. A common feature among them is the transversality of culture since they necessarily involve actions that cross sectorial boundaries.

Célio Turino, who was selected by Gil to direct the Points of Culture program, explains that the selection and renewal of the points of culture at the local level leads to the strengthening of the commitment to the community (Turino, 2010: 36). Turino sees the Points of Culture as nodes that are linked, in contrast to the social divisions that characterize society in terms of class and race. The numerous points of culture make that diversity visible, not only from a symbolic point of view (which in itself is already an important achievement) but also as a process that can generate a new economy (Ibid.: 57). The points of culture make visible the living heritage of
the communities, that’s why the large platform that hosts them was named Cultura Viva (living culture), emphasizing the idea that not only professionals produce culture but also people in their day to day activities. This program revolutionized cultural policy in Brazil, and as we shall see, throughout Latin America.

Brazil’s Points of Culture program, together with innovations in municipal cultural policies in Medellín, was a crucial inspiration for establishing Cultura Viva Comunitaria (CVC), a network of community cultural initiatives throughout Latin America. The immediate prehistory of CVC begins in December 2009 in Mar del Plata, Argentina, where a number of cultural networks and leaders of cultural organizations and movements from half a dozen countries met at the First International Congress of Culture for Social Transformation, organized by the Cultural Institute of the Province of Buenos Aires with the collaboration of the Federal Investment Council. It is not by chance that these actors came together; many got to know each other in the context of the left-turn in Latin America in the new millennium, which prioritized the protagonism of the popular classes and marginalized groups such as Afrodescendants and indigenous peoples. For example, the World Cultural Forum – whose first meeting took place in São Paulo in 2004 under the auspices of then new Minister of Culture Gilberto Gil – was inspired by the World Social Forum, which began in Brazil in 2001 but had its roots in progressive movements that sought alternatives to global hegemony under neoliberal policies whose effects were particularly damaging to the more disadvantaged sectors of the population. The participants in these forums sought to empower the disadvantaged through art and cultural practice, not as spectators but as active participants. Among the best known were Jorge Melguizo, then Secretary of Social Development of Medellín, and that city’s former Secretary of Culture, and Célio Turino.

While CVC is not a government program – it is a network of civil society organizations – the one hundred organizations from most countries of Latin America and the Caribbean that came together in Medellín in October of 2010 formed Plataforma Puente, an umbrella organization that lobbies national and municipal governments to legislate policies on art, culture, education, social transformation, sustainable development, and other goals and to designate at least 0.1% of national budgets to support the processes of living community cultures. These goals are consistent with those of a transnational alter-globalization movement:

- To strengthen and multiply popular cultural organizations in Latin America
- To gain the institutional and legal recognition on the basis of their legitimacy as protagonists in the construction of peoples’ identity
- To obtain economic and institutional support for them from the state
- To promote the “Points of Culture” policy in Latin America
- To build networks of popular cultural organizations in Latin America for sovereignty over natural resources, fair distribution of wealth and democracy

(Cultura Viva Comunitaria, 2013)

Points of culture programs have been created in several Latin American cities and countries: Antofagasta–Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Peru, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Spain. They are members of Iberculturaviva, which is the platform within the Iberoamerican General Secretariat (a UN-like organization of countries from Latin America, Spain, and Portugal), from which the Points of Culture movement continues to lobby governments. Thus far, CVC is a success story of bottom-up efforts of local community cultural organizations that have networked to defend cultural rights, not only through lobbying but also capacity-building initiatives in cultural management and policy and legislation design.
Conclusion

While Latin American countries have made significant headway in democratizing diverse forms of culture, in the past two decades new technologies of information and communication are radically transforming Latin America’s media landscape, promising diverse content, including user-generated content, that presumably will satisfy any preference, and increased digital access to the world’s peoples. These promises are made not by governments as was the case with telephony and the television spectrum or with regard to cultural subventions like those of the Points of Culture. No, the promises are made by rather immodest corporations such as Google and Facebook. Latin American governments are ill-prepared, both legally and financially, to support domestic equivalents, which would contribute to tax revenues. At the same time, the question arises as to who should provide a seemingly public service, such as the Internet, which is nowadays the equivalent of classic utilities of the 20th century, such as water and power, and which increasingly carries all kinds of culture (film, TV shows, theatre, opera, music, books, video-games, etc.). Most states have very little to say in this regard, except for China, which has put up a Great Firewall to Facebook, Google, and other Western platforms.

In Latin America, there is very little resistance to global new media penetration. In fact, governments have made deals to have huge corporations like Facebook provide free service in poor areas, handing over what is most valuable in the new media: data, which enable corporations to formulate predictors of behaviour, not only concerning consumption, but even with regard to voting and security. We might say that Latin American nations are at the mercy of these global conglomerates.

Culture is transversal, necessarily intertwined with technology, media, enterprise, politics, etc. It is also globalized. The United States and its allies in the new turn in neoliberalism – cognitive-experience-and-affect capitalism – seek to establish and strengthen world trade laws through the intergovernmental institutions they dominate (WTO, WIPO, etc.). Latin America is a very unequal region in cultural commerce: according to PriceWaterhouseCoopers (2012), the media and entertainment market for 2015 was estimated at 6% of the world market. But that does not mean that Latin American ventures exported this percentage; that’s the size that dominant companies can take advantage of. The export market would be more similar to the percentage of Latin American companies included in the Forbes list of the world’s largest companies, which is more or less 3% (Wright and Pasquali, 2015). Of course, the most important criteria to be taken into consideration in assessing Latin America’s market share, from a cultural viewpoint, are the cultural offerings, in the broadest sense of what might be meant by culture, and this has not been measured in these reports on cultural industries or media and entertainment. But even when the measure shows that the market is larger, the arguments regarding the power of these new media platforms on which the cultural sector is developed are very important and they have the ability to monitor and guide development. In addition to thinking about safeguarding small local markets in the region, which is fundamental, one must also think about the regional macro-market, since the dominant companies aim to capture it precisely in these terms, as a region. There have been attempts to create regional markets, such as Mercosur or the Central American Common Market, and even cultural markets such as MICSUR, the Cultural Industries Market of South America, but they have not yet devised policies for dealing with the new media. That is the current challenge.

At a more local, yet regionally networked level, 17 media labs sited in cities in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Spain, and Uruguay are working intensively to “solve[] social problems with (digital, social, ancestral) technologies and innovative methodologies, through the involvement of the community affected.”

Networked in Innovación Ciudadana,
like Iberculturaviva, a platform created within the Iberoamerican General Secretariat, the network has mapped another 5,000 citizen innovation initiatives in 32 cities in 16 Iberoamerican countries that are working to create alternatives for more inclusive, ethical, sustainable, participatory, and habitable urban experiences. Aside from working with local communities, the labs also seek to relay new forms of self-organization to municipal governments. A next step will be for this network to mobilize its efforts at the national and regional levels, making common cause with efforts like MICSUR.

Notes

1 This essay does not pretend to provide exhaustive definitions of the terms development and culture. Regarding the former, I refer the reader to Escobar (2011); regarding the latter, see Yúdice (2003, 2007).

2 While I include Puerto Rico as a Latin American country, it is a hybrid “Free Associated State,” with Puerto Ricans recognized as citizens of the United States but disenfranchised at the national level. Moreover, Puerto Rico is a Spanish-speaking nation.

3 See the essays in Mignolo and Escobar (2010).

4 Modernismo is the label given to stylistic innovations in Spanish American literature between 1880 and 1920. The Nicaraguan poet and journalist, Rubén Darío (1867–1916), considered its greatest exponent, embodied most of the characteristics of this style: aesthetic refinement, sensuality, classical mythological references, cosmopolitanism evident in Hellenisms, Gallicisms and settings in far away places, emphasizing the flight from the mundanity of life in Latin America. Cuban poet, journalist, and political activist José Martí (1853–1895) is considered Darío’s contrary, whose writing focuses on Nuestra America’s (i.e., Our [Latin] America’s) coming to maturity vis-à-vis Europe and the United States as well as on narrating the novelties and problems of the modern world of social and technological developments (for an excellent treatment of these issues see Ramos [1989]). Both writers lived in metropolitan centres (Paris and New York, respectively) for many years.

5 For a detailed critique of this debate, and in particular the arguments made by Jitrik, see Yúdice (1984).

6 NWICO declined in effectiveness by the early 1980s, in great part due to the opposition of the United States and Britain, both of which withdrew from UNESCO in 1985 citing anti-Western bias stoked by Soviet influence and radical Third Worldism. Additionally, NWICO’s nationalist focus on cultural protectionism did not jibe with the diversity of media demand by its citizens, something that is finally addressed in the 2005 UNESCO Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, which is addressed below.

7 It is important to distinguish “speaking from many places at once,” or heterogeneity, from the notion of mestizaje or biological and cultural fusion that some critics thought to be at work in García Canclini’s notion of hybridity. In response to a critique by the Peruvian intellectual Antonio Cornejo Polar, García Canclini embraced the former’s identification of hybridization with non-dialectical heterogeneity (2005).

8 This Convention itself could not provide effective restraint on the World Trade Organization’s laws, practices and policies, or place sufficiently strong obligations on signatories to comply with its principles (Neil 2006), but it nevertheless provided an impetus for many countries (and cities) to give access to groups historically excluded from funding and exposure.

9 See http://culturaviva.org.br/programa-cultura-viva/.

10 See http://iberculturaviva.org/?lang=es. I have also been told that Ecuador is negotiating entry into Iberculturaviva.

11 These brief comments draw on Yúdice (2017).

12 www.innovacionciudadana.org/en/#about.

13 www.innovacionciudadana.org/mapeo-de-la-innovacion-ciudadana/.

14 I have described the workings of the MediaLab-Prado, a founding member of this network, in Yúdice (2018).

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