In his work that bears the suggestive title *Cultural Action for Freedom*, Paulo Freire confirms his puzzlement towards why culture is attributed with such trivial importance. Culture is what generates the world that we live in; it forges the reality of which is the product of human action, which the author calls natural reality. This world of culture and history, created by men, ended up conditioning the very ways that they see and be in the world. Freire’s statement brings us to the question of the significant status culture holds in society; contributing to the idea that dialogue, exchanges and cooperation between societies through culture plays a main role in the contemporary world.

The historical knowledge of the relationship, the heritage and mutual influence process between Latin American and European countries have contributed significantly to clarify, establish and strengthen current cultural cooperation. The origin of local cultural ties with Europe commenced since the process of the conquest of America, which for a long time contributed to a kind of naturalization of what would have been called the Euro-American cultural cooperation. Culture was the synonym of knowledge and practices that are refined and European.

The cultural paradigms that Latin American countries adopted even after the process of decolonization were still closely linked to those of the former metropolis. The cultural relations established in the new countries formed a centralization of European influence; or more specifically, French influence. This influence was present mainly in the educated social strata, which restricted the notion of culture to only a limited forms of knowledge; sophisticated, cultivated practices and civilized callings. As for other types of local knowledge and practices, most of them were considered as folks. This can be observed clearly in the case of Brazil and the reality in other Latin American countries is not far from it.

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It is true that the issue of cultural cooperation should not be confined within the limits of State actions, it is also important not to forget that for a long time, States have been the main actor in this field. There has always been autonomous dialogue and exchange in the private sector, independent from the governments’ will. It was proven that even in the epoch of the most authoritative regimes; interactions took place in the face of established powers. However, the role of States is still essential in all situations. The main objective of this article is to look at the historical process of cultural cooperation in Latin America, with States and cultural diplomacy as the principle political actors. From the beginning of the 20th century until now, one can perceive the increasing complexity of different actors interacting within the field of cultural cooperation; some networks even obtained a more prominent role than their own more restrictive governments. What we cannot neglect is that in the field of cultural cooperation, governments have always relied on the support and participation of diverse social actors (institutions, companies, artists, students, producers and etc.)

In an article written in 1990 on cultural policies included in the Mercosur agreement, Hugo Achugar asserted that the construction of these nation states at the end of the 19th century in Latin America had established the basis of a homogenous model of education and culture (Achugar, 1994, p. 217). This model is based on an elitist and europeanized vision of education and culture associated with ideal civilization. At the transition of 19th century and 20th century, the international politics of the continent was dominated by disputes over defining national borders, which generated an unfavourable environment for diplomatic actions in the field of culture.

Achugar also highlighted a dispute between the cultural homogenization projects initiated by the governments and the heterogeneous reality of distinctive countries, where official programs prevail cultivating a refined vision of education and culture. This can be embodied in the beginning of the 20th century, in countries such as Brazil and its low education level induced a great part of the population excluded from any possibility of cultural dialogue or exchange. It was a period when governments practiced international cultural relations at a very incipient stage.

According to Eduardo Cruz Vázquez, in the 1920s one can identify that in Mexico, with the establishment of the Secretariat of Public Education, international cultural diffusion activities were carried out in the field of culture. In the case of Mexico- Brazil relation, the commemoration of the Brazilian centennial independence
in 1922 served as the basis to construct new forms of diplomacy. The country was visited by the Mexican delegation led by the then Minister of Public Education José Vasconcelos. On the side of Mexico, the visit was a first commitment served as a significant symbolic move; on circulation of information in the country with the dissemination of books, photos, movies and radio programs through ambassadors and consulates (Vázquez, p. 19).

Then arises a fundamental question in the field of cultural cooperation: the presence of mass media and its respective products. The field of artistic production is the excellent place for dialogue and exchanges. Still in the first half of the 20th century, the diffusion of cinema and radio introduced new elements into the issue of cultural exchange and cooperation; which previously focused simply on the circulation of persons, books, and also language learning. The commercial characteristic of film productions (with certain exceptions), radio and television brought up the issue of contents diffused through these communication media. Throughout the century, these new media have grown into powerful elements of cultural diffusion and products of an growing entertainment industry. Radios in the 1930s and the 1940s, for example, was transmitted through short waves and could be picked up in other countries, escaped the States’ control. This debate is split on the issue of whether or not cultural characters of the contents are diffused through mass media; especially with the presence of powerful business groups that dominate the market and the designing of cultural policies for the region. On the Latin American scene, all these questions have been well developed by Néstor García Canclini, José Martín-Barbero; other authors are not subject to further analysis, but it does not mean that they have little importance in the cultural cooperation context.

Returning to the historical narratives, in the case of Brazil, under the presidency of Getúlio Vargas (1930-1945), the work of Itamaraty (the Ministry of External Relations) suffered several changes. One of the new lines of action implemented was the dissemination of cultural products and that the image of Brazil should be important elements in the framework of a nationalistic governmental project. According to the historian Raquel Santos, this was the beginning of the construction of a new ideology of Americanism, articulating a different aesthetic proposal in which the mixture of Latin American people were not exclusively considered to be inferior, but has become a fundamental element in constructing a new cultural identity. In this context, further cultural cooperation, artistic and intellectual exchange between countries was then
regarded as an important element in the process of common development (Santos, pp. 358-359).

In the 1930s, several Latin American countries still maintained traces of mutual rivalries from the time of defining national borders, such as in the case of Brazil-Argentina relation. One of the actions of President Getúlio Vargas was to seek to establish new relations with neighbouring countries, including using methods like cultural cooperation agreements. He signed several agreements and conventions with Argentina, beginning with the Cultural Exchange Agreement in October 10, 1933, which had an important role in the region and gained support from other countries such as Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay. One strategy that was often used during this period was the creation of institutions, such as in the case of Brazil-Argentina Cultural Institute,\(^2\) created in Buenos Aires and Río de Janeiro with the support of the embassies. These institutes, which would later be spread to Córdoba, Porto Alegre, Rosario and São Paulo; aim at promoting language and literature courses, literary competitions, publications, seminars and other activities. In the case of Brazil and Argentina, other initiatives were also implemented, such as translations of literatures and historical works, artistic exchange scholarship, circulation of exhibitions, university exchanges (students and teachers) and also scientific exchanges.

Supporting cultural institutions is still a policy present today in the Ministry of External Relations (MRE) of Brazil. On the website of the MRE, the institutions, which are presented as non-profit organizations protected by private laws and despite its independence, “perform a cultural mission in coordination with diplomatic missions and consular jurisdiction where they situate in.” Brazil still maintains the following organizations: Brazil-Colombia Cultural Institute (Bogotá), Brazilian Studies Centre Foundation (Buenos Aires), Brazilian Studies Centre Foundation (San José), Brazil-Venezuela Cultural Institute (Caracas), Brazil-Italy Institute (Milan), Uruguay-Brazil Cultural Institute (Montevideo) and Brazil-Ecuador Cultural Institute (Quito) (MRE, 2010).

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2 These institutes have changed their profiles along the way. In the case of the one founded in Río de Janeiro, until today, it still plays a major role in the cultural actions of the Embassy of Argentina.
Cooperation established between Brazil and Argentina follows the same historical pattern of those adopted by other Latin American countries. In the case of Mexico, cultural activities are intense through exchanges between universities with scholarship offers, support (or commitment) by the embassies in international or inter-American conferences in the artistic and cultural field as diverse as film, literature, anthropology, history or archaeology among others. The creation of cultural institutes is also a strategy adopted by the Mexican government; hence the Brazil-Mexico Institute was established in 1941.

In the 1930s, various agreements were signed among different groups of countries; such as the agreement that deals with facilities for artistic exhibitions was signed by Mexico, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Peru, United States, Uruguay and Venezuela; the agreement on historical pedagogy was signed by Mexico, Honduras, United States, El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Venezuela, Uruguay, Paraguay, Panama, Guatemala, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Peru and Cuba. During this period the Inter-American Radio Communication Conference was held in Cuba, which sought to ensure that governments take the necessary steps for broadcasting and exchanging international radio programs on cultural, educational and historical themes. (Vázquez, pp. 210-213). In Brazil, the government retained a radio program conducted in Spanish, mixing music programs with information on agricultural production, broadcasting to the whole Latin America.

Since 1945, several inter-governmental organizations emerged onto the international scene that play an important role in politics in general and grew to have a strong importance in the field of cultural cooperation. Among which are the establishment of the United Nations (UN), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Organization of American States (OEA) and the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI).

By signing the 1946 International Convention created by UNESCO, Brazil (along with all other signatory countries) committed to establish commissions and institutions in dialogue with which they were created under the new international organization. As late as in 1946, Brazil created within its Ministry of External Relations (MRE) the Brazilian Institute of Education, Science and Culture (IBECC), of which the first general secretary was Renato de Almeida, a leading folklorist assigned to the MRE. At the beginning of its creation, several commissions were created. Among which is the
National Folklores Commission (CNFL), which despite without financial resources or considerable autonomy, was responsible for the creation of different state commissions of folklores situated in the capital cities of the states, which would sometimes related to folklorists of inner cities (Vilhena, pp. 94-97). In addition to folklore, actions that are more consolidated in the field of IBECC were scientific and university exchanges.

As late as the 1940s, United Status introduced a consolidation project for its products to enter the consumer market in Latin America more effectively and widely with political alliances. It was the moment of the creation of the Office for the Coordinator of Commercial and Cultural Relations between the American Republics, an agency created in 1940, which belonged to the National Defense Program and was more commonly known as OCIAA. Among the divisions of the agency was the communication and cultural relations, subdivided into sections of radio, film, press, arts, music and literature. It was one of the actions taken by the U.S. government with the intention to consolidate an external cultural policy, acting in the political and economic field that appears to be non-coercive. These strategies were successful and Latin American countries witnessed in the subsequent decades a massive import of North American cultural products through media of mass communication. What is important here is to stress that this action is a limited view of cultural diplomacy whereby a country uses cultural products to general a positive lifestyle and adopting certain daily practices, opening a local consumer market for its exporting products.

Returning to the founding of UNESCO, OEA and OEI in the 1940s, we find out that these organizations opened up new possibilities of cultural cooperation in the Latin American panorama. The dialogue promoted by UNESCO is closely linked to the ministries of education and culture, while not so much with the ministries of external relations. In its first two decades of presence, most of the actions carried out by UNESCO focused on education. In the founding charter of the OEA previewed the establishment of a Inter-American Cultural Council, which held its first meeting in Mexico City in 1950.

The first most effective framework of actions of UNESCO in the field of culture is the Declaration of the Principles of International Cultural Co-operation in 1966, which defines cultural cooperation as a right and duty of all peoples; and that it is obligatory to establish stable and lasting private links, which are protected from the tensions that may arise in international relations. At the same time, the declaration also supports peoples’ culture as a value that should be respected and guaranteed. The
Declaration of the Principles of International Cultural Cooperation can be defined as the recognition of cultural diversity, respect for peace and encouragement of cooperation in Latin America, at a time when the region was embroiled by an ambiance of coups and dictatorship.

In the second half of the 1970s, UNESCO launched a series of publications on cultural policies in which several countries analyzed its situation, defining its particular cultural policy without imposing a cultural model of analysis: the publications belong to a series called “Cultural policies: studies and documents”. The issues of cultural cooperation were the subject of attention and detailed description in the volume produced by Argentina. The country affirmed its support of bilateral agreements that promote exchange programs between professors, artists, intellectuals as well as cultural products in general through the Department of Culture of the Ministry of External Relations; guaranteeing Argentinean presence in international events. The agreement also affirms a policy that preserves special spaces for cultural dissemination in other countries, as the aforementioned Casa Argentina in Mexico and Venezuela. The publication contains references to the existence of a Regional Program of Cultural Development coordinated by the Inter-American Council of Education, Science and Culture of the OEA. Its three main lines of actions are: cultural renovation and integration, cultural heritage conservation and promotion, cultural values advancement (Harvey, pp. 30-31).

In the same series is the volume of Venezuela, a country that experienced the process of cultural reforms with the creation of National Council of Culture in 1975. In the field of international relations, it planned an extensive reform of all the existing official structures with the objective of “replacing the passive-receptive attitude of international cultural relations with a policy initiative oriented towards priority necessities and interests” (Massiani, p. 46). The publication presents a project to collect all the agreements that cultural cooperation signed by Venezuela with the foresight to set new goals, priorities and effective enforcement of the accords. The part of the publication relating to cultural cooperation affirms the government’s desire to create

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3 In Latin America the publication includes the following countries: Cuba, Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru, Bolivia, Honduras, Venezuela, Panama, Guyana, Argentina and Mexico.
new international projects that attend to the interests of the construction of a new political-cultural image of the country. The Venezuelan document manifested the limited effectiveness these agreements have produced to date.

Despite being able to find a series of bilateral and multilateral agreements among Latin American countries themselves and with European Countries, it is clear that there has been little effective progress made in the field of cultural cooperation aside from diplomacy. For some governments, cultural diplomacy was an instrument that allows one culture to superimpose over another, exporting a lifestyle that creates cultural hegemony and opening doors to broader economic transactions. However, as stated Maria Susana Arrosa Soares, cultural diplomacy should not set its main objective as promoting the country; but at creating an image or branding of one’s own country. Cultural diplomacy should not aspire to achieve only short-term cultural, economic or political results; nor expect direct revenues from investments made. The challenge is to construct a positive and attractive image of the countries (Soares, p. 58). For others, the same diplomacy is only a peripheral area that serves to organize some cultural events and occupying a place on the diplomatic agenda rather than dedicating to the core issues such as political and economic relations.

When analyzing these cultural agreements between countries established over the 20th century, we found out that they have achieved little when it comes to strategic implementation of the contents of the agreements. These agreements, as well as the cultural policies in respective countries, have demonstrated an extremely fragile and conditioning logic upon the change of local governments. The presence of these intergovernmental organizations in the field of culture proposed recommendations, held conferences and established agreements. These organizations have contributed to broadening the horizon of cultural cooperation and the concept of culture in which governments operate; however, they have created meagre results regarding guaranteeing an effective sustainability of these actions.

The construction of specific negotiation spaces such as Mercosur pays little attention to culture. The meetings of Ministers of culture that took place since 1995 has a minor role in this scenario and eventually reproduce the same protocols that were signed since decades ago yet without any more effective implementation. Certain questions such as the circulation of cultural goods and tariffs for the sector have marked the guidelines of certain meetings but without producing significant changes in the field of diffusion and consuming of cultural products.
From an analysis of the political history of the region, we can identify the problems that still exist in the field of cultural cooperation. The first thing that we can point out and which affects almost all Latin American countries is the constant discontinuity of political actions that occurs whenever there is a change of governments; the incoherence influences all public policies and causes harmful effects. Take Brazil for example, we notice that the Vargas government has made a great effort on cultural cooperation, which could not be seen in the succeeding governments.

Another important point is to note that international cultural cooperation activities have mostly been carried out by diplomatic bodies of each country. In the process of training diplomatic professionals, culture is given little attention. The appointment of intellectuals or artists as cultural attaché, which is a widely used strategy, does not guarantee the professionalization of the actions nor the transformation of these themes into effective programs of cooperation and exchanges. The programs should be based on the alliance with public organizations responsible for the cultural, political management of distinctive countries. Furthermore, the difficulty of guaranteeing financial resources for the effective maintenance of the cooperation programs was left helpless upon a fluctuating budget that makes the consistency even more impossible.

Speaking of cultural cooperation, today it involves a much more extensive number of stakeholders. In this first decade of the 21st century, we live within the scenario of creation and supranational cultural network expansion; mainly through the internet, of which contribute to migration flows and the deterritorialization process. On the other hand, the relation between governments, which should play an important role in the process, still carried on with cultural diplomacy models that are less dynamic, insisting on maintaining partnership that have demonstrated ineffective, creating only specific results. As stated Garcia Canclini, “it is disappointing to reread the discourses and documents of regional summits and years later, to confront with statistics of successful and failed programs”, whether the subject is the circulation of knowledge, goods, students or studies (García Canclini, p. 1).

Continuing with the exercise that started earlier –pointing out some reasons that explain the ineffectiveness of the achievements of these cultural cooperation agreements– there is the question of the distinctive position of culture within the public policies in Latin American countries. Is culture at a place that appears to be important in rhetorical discourse, but in practice not so much so? When placed within the framework
of budget overviews, culture is subject to one of the lowest percentage and can always expect possible cuts. Within the public structures, the cultural sector usually has very few staffs and is often subordinated to other sectors. Another major element is the very absence of systematic information that allows a more profound analysis of the problems occurred in this area; so as to elaborate a diagnosis that will improve the effectiveness. If the framework of these cultural diplomatic agreements in Latin America has proven to be ineffective in practice, the potentiality and diversity of dialogue cooperation forms has become increasingly useful.

**Bibliography**


