

Paraphrasing Jorge Amado, a famous Brazilian literary writer of the twentieth century, in his popular novel 'The country of carnival':

"... Sometimes we understand that something is missing in our lives. What is missing? We don't know."

Today, what we do know is that the C-19 event has destabilized the world in a multi-dimensional way. Everything is upside-down. In every corner, we have experienced a shift in human behaviour and daily attitudes.

Suddenly, the world has moved from globalization to isolation. From hugs and kisses to social distancing. From physical touch to virtual chats. From high-consumerism towards a world with a greater environmental conscience. From egocentrism towards a human-centred approach. Against this controversial background - culture, creativity and connectivity have become the backbone of society - keeping people who are physically apart, tied together.

One example of the importance of culture to Brazilian identity is [Carnival](#), which creates not just joy but revenue, tourism and jobs. Carnival 2020 was held in February, just before the start of the pandemic, which hit Brazil in mid-March. During Carnival, the country explodes with creativity and dancing for three consecutive days. This year it [injected R\\$8 billion](#) into the national economy and offered 25 thousand temporary jobs. This income has helped to partially mitigate the cumulative losses so far estimated to be R\$62 billion resulting from COVID-19 crisis, which is [deeply affecting culture and the creative industries](#), destroying over a million jobs in these sectors. In contrast to the celebrations just a few months ago, tourism, culture and the creative economy, now integrated into the same Ministry, are having to join forces to overcome the current difficulties, trying to preserve jobs and anxiously preparing for post-crisis.

The economic, social and cultural consequences of this pandemic are far-reaching. The COVID-19 crisis has not only robbed us of over half million lives around the world but it is exacerbating inequality, knocking-down the global economy, re-shaping global governance and free trade, destroying national health systems and urban life and aggravating social instability. Nevertheless, probably the most profound positive legacy of this chaotic situation is the growing sense of solidarity and citizenship that is encouraging people to do better, to engage and to act.

In Brazil, the pandemic has made inequality more visible. Creative and digital industries, in particular the audiovisual sector, social media, online news and press and communications services, have been powerful in showing the cruel reality of poverty at the current time. For the most vulnerable, social isolation is considered a luxury. It is difficult to be at home to avoid contagion when there is no money to be able to afford to eat. It is difficult to be confined in social isolation when a big family lives in a small room in a shanty town. It is difficult to wash your hands several times a day and have hygienic practices when there is no water and proper sanitary conditions at home. Under these circumstances, the Brazilian government has allocated 4.6 per cent of national public budget to implement the [COVID-19 emergency package](#) that also includes fiscal and monetary measures to assist small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), micro businesses and the self-employed. The COVID-19 voucher scheme has wide coverage; 65 million beneficiaries have followed instructions for digital eligibility and are receiving financial assistance for three months as compensation for their revenue losses. At the end of June, the government decided to [extend the emergency salary](#) for two additional months until August 2020, bringing total governmental expenditures to mitigate the continuous spread of the pandemic during the first semester to nearly R\$1 trillion.

It is noteworthy that digitalization and creative services (in the form of an official mobile app) have made it possible for the government of a continental-sized country to put in place in a relatively short time a massive outreach programme. It not only captures nearly 13 million unemployed people, plus 3.7 million informal workers, but also the self-employed who are left with no income and those who were previously completely invisible (even from the family poverty reduction scheme which covers 15 million families). Hopefully, in the future this big data will be used to design appropriate public policies and more effective educational, training and cultural programmes to address the lack of economic and social inclusion. In this context, creative activities, especially those associated with arts and cultural festivities, are conducive to the inclusion of usually excluded minorities and marginalized youth.



Image source: Independent

Solidarity and citizenship

In parallel to digital innovation, a feeling of solidarity has emerged and civil society has been mobilized. Citizens have started to act in a collective manner in response to the needs of vulnerable communities. Private sector companies of all sizes have become more engaged with social responsibility. Enterprises are more committed not only to meet customers' demand but also to be more sensitive to the socio-economic impact of their activities locally. Aid packages including basic food baskets, hygiene products and masks are being widely distributed by firms, non-profit organisations and individuals.

On a daily basis, the TV news presents a list of projects, campaigns and new creative initiatives to assist those who need them. An example is the [Table Brazil SESC-RJ project](#) (SESC) which is engaged in fighting hunger and reducing food waste. The project collects food donations for the poorest while educating them on how to prepare healthier food.

There is also a link here between these efforts and cultural institutions, public audiences for theatrical performances and shows presented in SESC's theatres (before and after social isolation) can get cheaper ticket prices if they bring food for donation. This project, which already existed, was [expanded on](#) during the COVID-19 period. Another SESC project is [#MesaSemFome](#) through which well-known personalities donate their time, knowledge and experience to support solidarity in many different ways; by calling elderly people for storytelling and shopping for them, by giving musical instrument lessons, and by improving bakery skills. Every week many activities are offered through Instagram's [Lives Solidarias](#).

Artificial intelligence and robotics are also playing a role in fighting the pandemic. With a population of 217 million people, Brazil does not have an adequate number of COVID-19 medical tests for all of its inhabitants. In order to cope with this deficit situation, the Health Ministry is [using robots to call elderly people](#) with a high risk of contagion for a brief diagnosis by phone. The TeleSUS platform started in early April monitoring the flux of contagion with the aim to reach millions of people through an active search by phone and consultations by telemedicine. Though this initiative has not been sufficient, it has been positive for enhancing a feeling of citizenship.



Image source: Getty

Cultural policy responses

In terms of culture, all cultural spaces such as cinemas, theatres and museums have been closed and events including artistic shows, festivals and exhibitions were suspended in mid-March 2020, to [comply with social distance measurese](#). Art and culture bring about [R\\$170 billion annually](#) to the Brazilian economy providing jobs to five million people accounting for nearly six per cent of the national workforce. Artists, cultural producers, technicians and creative professionals were the first to stop their activities as a consequence of the pandemic and will probably be the last to restart, making them one of the most affected categories. Thus, a [Law for Cultural Emergency](#) (Lei Aldir Blanc) was finally approved by Congress allowing the use of resources from the Federal Cultural Fund (R\$3 billion) to provide emergency aid for three months to help compensate for the loss of revenue and to provide tax exemption for up to six months for the cultural industry and creative businesses.

[Guidelines](#) for implementation of cultural projects during the COVID-19 pandemic have now been revisited. Projects should be well documented and producers should provide evidence for every action taken, in particular for projects financed by the Law for Stimulating Culture (Lei Roanet). Three measures were designed to alleviate the pandemic's impact and guide the execution of projects:

1. Projects will be allowed to use up to 20 per cent of the estimated capital
2. The project can now be modified at any time (previously, there was a limit)
3. Project evaluation will be more flexible in the form and use of resources.

Furthermore, [special measures](#) were adopted related to the cancellation of services and events in the areas of tourism and culture during the pandemic. The measures cover cinemas, theatres, digital platforms, artists and all professionals contracted to work in cultural events and shows. Those affected by the lock-down who were unable to perform will have up to one year to provide the services already contracted.

For the State of São Paulo, cultural and creative industries account for 4 per cent of GDP. This year, the loss in the state caused by COVID-19 is estimated at R\$34.5 billion and over 650 thousand people have been left with no revenue. A credit line of R\$500 million for SMEs and R\$150 million for microcredit was [offered](#) with special conditions for micro, small and medium business in the cultural and creative sectors. In addition, [Festival #CulturaemCasa](#) is a platform launched by the Secretary of Culture and Creative Economy of São Paulo to stimulate social distancing while improving the access to virtual cultural contents from public cultural institutions. Through the platform, the public can visit shows, concerts, museums, talks, conferences, read books, see films, watch theatre and plays. There are many different options for a range of ages and interests, and content is freely available and updated daily. This streaming platform was [successful](#) in reaching 850 thousand views in two months from 107 countries. All cultural content will remain [available](#) for the extent of the COVID-19 lock-down.

The Secretary for Culture and Creative Economy of Brasilia formalized a financing scheme of R\$750,000 to assist local artists and cultural creative professionals affected by the cancellation of festivals and cultural shows. The scheme provides three differentiated credit lines for micro-business, self-employed artists, as well as loans and investments to support cultural and creative SMEs. The Secretary of Culture and Creative Economy in the State of Rio de Janeiro launched an official bid for online cultural production projects. [#culturapresente](#) will receive [R\\$3.7 million from the State Fund for Culture](#). It will cover

music, literature, visual arts, audiovisual, dance, theatre, circus, fashion, museums, typical cultural food and new cultural popular expressions. Another project “Story-telling by phone” called volunteers to contact the elderly and people who live alone to tell stories, as a way to minimize the feeling of solitude. This allows poets, musicians and story-tellers to be engaged by [offering hope and solidarity](#) to lonely people.

Cultural experiences in the digital age

Creative initiatives by artists and institutions have also emerged, and some are likely to remain post-COVID-19. Two strong trends from these initiatives have been solidarity and live streaming media. These two trends may end up dominating culture in the “new normal” – the combination of live streaming and solidarity has already resulted in the “Lives Solidarias”. In Brazil, more than 120 shows online [raised R\\$17.6 million in donations](#) to fight COVID-19 in poor communities. The mobilization of artists brought about innovation and is a way to engage celebrities and individuals in social causes.

Livestreaming concerts like [#tamojunto](#) became the Saturday night fever during the pandemic. Top Brazilian singers (particularly country music singers), are performing at home, attracting a huge virtual audience and millions of ‘likes’ on YouTube and Instagram. Among the top 10 most attended live concerts worldwide, seven are from Brazilian artists. Marilia Mendonça, who received 3,31 million ‘likes’, was ranked number one globally, followed by Jorge & Mateus with 3,24 million. This is partially explained by the fact that 70 per cent of the music consumed in Brazil is locally produced. Moreover, the country ranks third among the major producers of creative digital content and as consumers of digital services.

During confinement, online festivals like [Festival EuFicoEmCasa](#) are bringing entertainment to people through social networks. As shows and concerts have been cancelled, musicians and visual artists are working virtually to provide entertainment and expand their audience and network via Instagram and YouTube. The first festival gathered 78 artists, providing over 40 hours of music during the first weekend at home. Thanks to its success, the same format is being used for festivals which now take place every weekend.

In summary, after more than 100 days of social distancing, the cultural sector and creative industries without day-to-day activity are re-inventing themselves in their struggle for survival. Paradoxically, online cultural consumption and creative production are escalating. Music is leading innovative models with live concerts but theatre companies are also producing plays for web performances with no public audience. Drive-in cinemas are back. Virtual short-film festivals are attracting newcomers. E-books and a new generation of smart

video games are in high demand. Auctions of visual and street art are attracting culture lovers, and TV audiences have increased with re-runs of older broadcasts and small format productions.

Web channels, podcasts, live streaming, film series, conscious donations, hybrid collaborative creative productions, crowdfunding and the virtual public are emerging alternatives. Certainly, there are more questions than answers. As live streamers are using social platforms that were designed to be ephemera, will live cultural experiences survive? How do we ensure that online cultural productions will resist the continuous search for novelty? If a social platform closes, will its whole cultural content disappear? Famous artists are finding big sponsors but a great majority of artists are offering their services for free or small fees. How do we ensure that artists and cultural institutions will be able to survive in the long-run?

More than ever, creativity is needed to optimize digitalization and find feasible monetization and sustainable solutions. The present circumstances are a challenge and the future is uncertain but art and culture will always find its way in contemporary society.

CERTIFICATE COURSE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

SIX-WEEK ONLINE COURSE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS BY THE KOOTNEETI

JOIN TODAY!

team@thekootneeti.com
courses.thekootneeti.in
(+91) 120 4565994

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Kootneeti Team

Facebook Comments