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A Brazilian Hollywood in the making? Film, tourism and creative city discourse in the hinterland of Paraíba

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Abstract

Originating in metropolises in the Global North, the creative cities model has increasingly been replicated in locations around the globe. However, betting on the creative industries to reinvigorate stagnant economies might not be a solution compatible with every context. To analyse this issue, this article presents the case of the small Brazilian city of Cabaceiras, which was the target of a project aimed at revitalizing its economy through film and tourism in 2007. Based on 25 interviews with residents and policy makers, we examine whether the initiative was, in their view, successful in stimulating a creative hub. We argue that the creative cities model has not yet proven feasible in Cabaceiras due to financial and infrastructural challenges that the city experiences, its positioning outside of Brazil's cultural and creative centres and the uncertainties of investing in the audiovisual sector in the country.

Keywords

Brazilian creative industries, Brazilian film industry, creative city, creative industries, creative policy making

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From October 2017 to April 2018, Cabaceiras, a city of about 5000 inhabitants in the hinterland of the state of Paraíba, Brazil, was swamped with actors, directors and cameramen. The reason was the making of the television series *Onde Nascem os Fortes* (2018), produced by Rede Globo, the country's largest television network. For seven months, about 200 production workers circulated in Cabaceiras, occupying virtually all available accommodation in town (Lira, 2017).

Welcoming film and television crews is certainly not new to Cabaceiras. The city has already hosted more than thirty Brazilian productions (Silva, 2014), most of them released in the last two decades, including *A Dog's Will* (2000) and *Cinema, Aspirins and Vultures* (2005). Filmmakers are mainly drawn to Cabaceiras because of its climate: the city is known to have the lowest rainfall levels in Brazil and to offer ideal light conditions for filming (Caetano, 2017). These reasons – comparable to the ones that drew filmmakers to Hollywood in the 1920s – make Cabaceiras a “safe bet” for Brazilian crews: the promise of relentless sun means that they can shoot every day, making the filming schedule cost-effective. The same characteristics that are beneficial for film producers, however, are also markers of the hardships that the people from Cabaceiras face. The dry weather results in difficult drought periods and the local economy is fragile, with the main sources of income being agriculture, farming and government jobs. In 2017, the city's GDP per capita was R\$8668.44 (approximately US \$1679),¹ nearly seven times lower than São Paulo's, Brazil's richest city (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, n.d.).

In an attempt to create a new path of economic development for Cabaceiras, in 2007 the local government launched the project Roliúde Nordestina (“north-eastern Hollywood”, free translation) – a playful title that mimics how the word “Hollywood” is pronounced in Brazilian Portuguese. The idea was to develop an adequate infrastructure to attract film productions and consequently generate job opportunities for the local population. Another goal was to promote tourism through the city's cinematic vocation. In order to achieve this, film-related icons were created in town, the most remarkable being the 80-metre long and 5-metre high sign that reads “Roliúde Nordestina”, clearly alluding to the famous Hollywood sign (Tavares et al., 2019). In short, the municipality of Cabaceiras tried to invest in the city's creative potential by transforming it into an open-air studio and harnessing the tourist flows that would hopefully follow. However, more than ten years since its creation, the question remains whether the initiative has really stimulated a local creative hub.

Roliúde Nordestina offers an interesting example of a government – in this case a Brazilian municipality – seeking to reinvigorate the local economy by promoting the creative cities model. The creative industries have been praised in the policy-making arena for their potential to revitalize stagnant economies, although such high expectations have often not been supported by much evidence (Oakley, 2004). Moreover, most of the academic discussion regarding creative cities is restricted to metropolises in the Global North, even though countries of the Global South (Booyens, 2012), as well as smaller and rural cities (Bell and Jayne, 2010; Waitt and Gibson, 2009), have also increasingly invested in the creative industries. Therefore, this article offers three contributions to this debate. First, it critically assesses the celebratory discourse of the creative industries by way of an original case study. Second, it adds to the still scarce literature on the development and presumed success of the so-called “creative-cities script” (Peck,

2005: 742) in small, rural areas in the Global South. Third, it brings to the fore the perceptions of a local community directly affected by this script.

In tandem with the focus on creative policy making, this article also engages with localized issues regarding the development of the creative industries. We zoom in on the Brazilian film industry, which has historically experienced “periodical births and rebirths” (Nagib, 2003: 157), partly because of unsteady governmental support and the dominance of North American films in the domestic market (Rêgo, 2005). Furthermore, audiovisual production has been mainly organized around the Rio de Janeiro–São Paulo axis (Marsh, 2016). By analysing the project Roliúde Nordestina, this article decentres academic and industrial conversations from these south-eastern capitals and demonstrates how attempts to follow the global creative cities model can only be carried out in combination with a contextualized understanding of the already existing creative industries, especially in locations that have been largely overlooked in cultural policy making.

Based on in-depth interviews with 25 residents and policy makers, we argue that, in spite of the local government betting on the creative industries to propose new sources of economic development to Cabaceiras, many of the involved stakeholders are critical of the implementation and long-term effects of these policies. In the end, the creative cities model has not yet proven feasible in Cabaceiras due to several challenges that the city faces: at the local level, its infrastructural characteristics and scarcity of financial resources; at the national level, its positioning outside of Brazil’s cultural and creative centres and the uncertainties inherent in investing in the audiovisual sector in the country.

The creative cities model

Since the 2000s, creativity has become not only a buzzword but also a formal strategy to revitalize economically depressed cities (Bell and Jayne, 2010). In economic policy making, attracting and retaining the so-called creative industries have been considered paramount in making cities distinctive in an increasingly competitive market (Richards, 2011). Creative clusters such as advertising, architecture, arts, design and media have been heralded as “saviours of cities” (Bell and Jayne, 2010: 210) and significant tools of economic and spatial growth (Durmaz et al., 2010; Krätke, 2015).

Included in the creative cities model are the audiovisual and tourism industries. Richards (2011) shows that the focus on creativity in policy making coincided with the development of the experience economy, and tourism, having itself been repackaged as an experience, would fuel the creative potential of cities. In turn, the film industry is considered one of the main creative industries, contributing to the economic development of places through direct and indirect benefits, including tourism (Durmaz et al., 2010). In fact, audiovisual productions generate tourism not only *after* their releases – as revealed by the growing phenomenon of film tourism (Beeton, 2016) – but also *during* their production. Ward and O’Regan (2009) demonstrate the shared needs of filmmaking and tourism in terms of infrastructure, local expertise and service provision, arguing that film producers should be seen as long-stay business tourists.

Among other issues, the creative cities narrative has been criticized for its tendency to create a blueprint to be adopted in any context (Oakley, 2004). Although based on experiences of creative industries in urban metropolises in the Global North, like Birmingham

and Detroit, this blueprint started to be adopted by policy makers in the Global South (Booyens, 2012), rural regions (Bell and Jayne, 2010) and small cities (Waitt and Gibson, 2009). Yet, as policy makers replicate the same formula applied to urban centres, they might ignore the singularities and specific needs of these locations, for example limited monetary resources and an ageing population (Duxbury and Campbell, 2011). The result is that, besides inheriting issues similar to urban creative areas, these communities will also have to deal with problems arising from the incompatibility of such a model with their specific context (Bell and Jayne, 2010).

Creative policy making and the film industry in Brazil

Brazil is an example of the transferability of the creative cities model to countries in the Global South. From the early 2000s, the Brazilian government started to approach cultural production as part of the creative economy (Machado et al., 2018), with the inclusion of creative economy principles into its 2010 National Plan for Culture and the creation of a Secretariat of the Creative Economy in 2011, both under the federal Ministry of Culture (De Marchi, 2014). In this new framework, culture would gain a central role in fostering both economic growth and social inclusion – an ambitious undertaking that was seemingly not “a mere cultural policy” but rather “a development policy based on culture” (De Marchi, 2014: 208). The efforts to develop the creative industries in Brazil, however, met with various shortcomings, from the Ministry of Culture’s lack of funds to political discontinuity, which rendered initiatives in this direction “unstable and random” (Morrone and Valiati, 2019: 1177). Moreover, these initiatives remained centralized in Rio de Janeiro, a city that has long been “a cultural center for Brazil given the historic concentration of government agencies and financial investment in cultural activities” (Marsh, 2016: 3028). The strategy also largely focused on the audiovisual sector, with the local distributor RioFilme and the Rio Film Commission working towards positioning the city as a global audiovisual hub. Interestingly, one of the rebranding strategies implemented for this purpose was a marketing campaign featuring the name “Rio de Janeiro” placed on the Corcovado hills, in a clear reference to the Hollywood sign (Marsh, 2016).

The comparison between Rio and Hollywood is unsurprising. The Brazilian film industry has endured “a complicated relationship with Hollywood as an influence chronically looming over the audiovisual space and serving as a cultural point of reference” (Marsh, 2016: 3033). The influence of Hollywood, both as a production model to be followed and as a competitor in the national market, has historically been a hindrance for the sector. Between the 1920s and the 1960s, for example, Brazilian entrepreneurs tried to copy Hollywood’s standards of content and production by investing in large, costly and ultimately unsuccessful film studios (Taño and Torkomian, 2020). Although it has been suggested that the Brazilian film industry seems to be adapting, rather than simply replicating, the North American mode of production nowadays (Brannon Donoghue, 2014), Hollywood’s presence is still strongly felt in the Brazilian film market. Due to a systematic deficit of investments in distribution and exhibition, domestic productions are obliterated by the persistent dominance of Hollywood films on cinema screens (Johnson, 1987; Rêgo, 2005), with Brazilian films often failing to widely reach the public (Gimenez and da Rocha, 2018).

Although the influence of Hollywood has been one of the main causes for the “sadly consistent pattern of birth, death and silence” (Rêgo, 2005: 85) of the Brazilian film industry, another difficulty has been the wavering governmental support for filmmakers. Highly dependent on the whims of the political groups in power, governmental initiatives to strengthen the sector tend to be swift responses to crises rather than a carefully devised plan (Johnson, 1987). Between 1995 and 2003, however, the Brazilian film industry had a significant upturn, due to the creation of legal mechanisms and tax incentives that facilitated film production (Rêgo, 2005). Aptly named *Retomada* (“Resurgence”), this period was also marked by the entrance of the Brazilian media conglomerate Globo, the largest media group in Latin America, into the film arena through its new subdivision Globo Filmes. Globo brought financial and technological resources to the film business, at the same time helping national productions to attract larger audiences and becoming a threat to other film professionals due to its production power (Rêgo, 2005). In spite of these developments, more recently the Brazilian audiovisual sector has suffered yet another blow. Under Bolsonaro’s presidency, the Audiovisual Sectoral Fund, currently the main source of funding for audiovisual productions in the country, was cut by 43%, resulting in its lowest budget in seven years (Brand and Uribe, 2019). The national film agency, Ancine, has also been under attack, with its operations compromised due to changes in leadership, accusations of censorship and even paralysis due to a federal investigation of its accounting procedures (Guerini, 2020).

Considering these dynamics of the Brazilian film industry, as well as the governmental orientation of promoting the creative economy framework, this article offers a critical investigation of the convergence of these two phenomena in the city of Cabaceiras, materialized in the project Roliúde Nordestina. We assess the attempt to transform Cabaceiras into a creative hub through investment in the audiovisual and tourism industries, focusing on how this initiative has been perceived and evaluated by its residents and policy makers. Our focus answers an academic need for further research on local communities affected by creative city policy, considering that communities “provide the creative city with the inner local mechanisms and devices that are needed to explain, validate and disseminate the creative ideas” (Cohendet et al., 2010: 94). Therefore, creative policy making should “be examined, challenged and revised . . . through communication with diverse communities and stakeholders” (Lin and Chiu, 2019: 328) – and that is precisely what this article aims to accomplish.

Methods

Fieldwork for this study was conducted in the city of Cabaceiras, in the state of Paraíba, Brazil. The first author visited the location twice, first in 2018 and again in 2019, for a total of three weeks. The two visits allowed her to be based in different parts of the city, namely its urban centre and rural area, each having different experiences with film and tourism. In total, 25 semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted, averaging one hour per interview. The first author talked to stakeholders involved in media and tourism activities in Cabaceiras: tour guides; hotel and bed and breakfast owners and employees; locals who worked as extras for film and TV productions; people who participated in the creation of Roliúde Nordestina, and (former) government members from the Tourism and Culture divisions at both local and state level. Most of the interviews were conducted

one-on-one, and a few were done in small groups of two to four persons. We opted for a multi-actor approach in order to provide a varied picture of the attempt to revitalize the economy of Cabaceiras through investments in the creative industries. By understanding the different perceptions regarding the practices and effects of these policies, we could identify the dynamics and tensions between different stakeholders. Only one interviewee requested to be anonymized; this person is referred to as Participant 1 throughout the article.

The analysis of the interviews is divided into three sections. The first traces the origins of Roliúde Nordestina and how it was incorporated in the locals' imaginaries about themselves and Cabaceiras. The second analyses how the project took shape in practice and how residents and policy makers of Cabaceiras evaluate the current state of cinema and tourism in the city. Finally, the last section deals with the ongoing challenges that Cabaceiras faces in its attempt to become a creative city.

Roliúde as discourse: hope and trust in the creative industries

Prior to being known as Roliúde Nordestina, Cabaceiras carried the stigmatizing title of Brazil's "driest city". When recalling their first memories of Cabaceiras, the interviewees often mention that the city was "forgotten" for a long time, as if it "didn't exist on the map".² The lack of prospects and jobs in the city made residents of Cabaceiras frequently move to big urban centres. Silva (2014) notes that the population of Cabaceiras has decreased since the 1970s, especially during the years between 1991 and 2000.³ Some interviewees indicated that this scenario apparently harmed the locals' confidence, with some residents even feeling ashamed to say they were *cabaceirenses*.

Cabaceiras' predicament seemingly started to change by the end of the 1990s, when both tourist and cinematic activities started to take place in the city. By that time, the Lajedo de Pai Mateus, a geological formation of over one hundred major granite rocks, became a much sought-after spot for tourists, turning into Cabaceiras' main tourist attraction. Soon, what is currently the most popular hotel of the region, Hotel Fazenda Pai Mateus, opened its doors. From that moment onwards, the touristic potential of Cabaceiras became one of the priorities of the local government and, in 1998, the city was recognized as a touristic municipality by the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Tourism, and the Brazilian Tourist Board (Sales, 2012). Two years later, the movie *A Dog's Will*, filmed in Cabaceiras, was released. Based on the quasi-homonymous play by celebrated Brazilian author Ariano Suassuna, this top-grossing comedy – one of the first cinematic productions by Globo Filmes⁴ – tells the adventures of two friends, Chicó and João Grilo, who get by through resourcefulness and trickery in a poor town in north-east Brazil. Twenty years after its release, the movie is still regarded as a watershed for Cabaceiras' visibility by most of the interviewees.

In the respondents' perception, after *A Dog's Will*, more tourists and filmmakers were attracted to Cabaceiras. In light of this interest, in 2007, writer-journalist Wills Leal created the project Roliúde Nordestina and proposed it to the local government. The project consisted of an attempt to professionalize Cabaceiras as a hub for audiovisual production. With a budget of R\$400,000 (around US \$77,485), the initiative, among other goals, aimed to give locals

the professional skills to work in the audiovisual industry; implement a centre for studies of north-eastern cinema and tourism; enhance the local tourism industry by organizing regular cinematic events, and improve the local economy with the consequent job and income generation (Nóbrega et al., 2008). The idea was to establish a lasting influx of filmmakers and tourists to Cabaceiras, betting on the creative industries for the city's economic growth.

It is important to note that Cabaceiras did not intend to market itself as a modern city, but as a good place to live and visit, where the local history, architecture and culture are preserved and cherished (Sales, 2012). Besides, in contrast to the campaign by RioFilme that compared Rio de Janeiro to Hollywood, the intention of the project was not to suggest that Cabaceiras had Hollywood as a parameter for development. On the contrary, its creators wanted to make cinema with a local accent – hence the spelling of Hollywood as “Roliúde”. In fact, the reference to Hollywood indicated the project's spirit of resistance, as stated in its manifesto: “The model to be pursued is the anti-Hollywoodian approach, that is, the denial of its ideological postulates. . . . We intend to produce cinema with . . . the colors and values of the Northeast” (Leal, 2016: para. 1).

The idea of becoming Roliúde Nordestina resonated with many locals, who saw both in the new nickname and in the interest of tourists and filmmakers a much-welcomed change of narrative. In the opinion of most residents and policy makers interviewed, with the emergence of cinema and tourism at the end of the 1990s, there seemed to be a new sense of pride and self-esteem among the population of Cabaceiras, as tour guide Gerson Lima explains: “[Cabaceiras was] a completely forgotten city of Paraíba, a benchmark only when it was associated with disgrace and poverty. . . . [This image] changed to Roliúde Nordestina . . . land of cinema, land of actors.”

However, this positive reception was not unanimous. Respondents mentioned that some residents saw the new nickname as a threat to the identity of Cabaceiras and complained about the comparison with the North American film industry. Some of these feelings reverberate until today, as video editor Anderson Bruce expresses: “Basically no one remembers the name Cabaceiras anymore, [people] just say “the Roliúde”.” Local policy makers, however, insist that the project has inspired a new sense of belonging. Tiago Castro, current mayor of Cabaceiras, goes even further in this argument, saying that nowadays people see the otherwise derogatory aspects associated with Cabaceiras as a symbol of strength:

We talk [about these aspects] as a proof of our overcoming [the difficulties]. How come there's tourism in the city where it rains the least in the country? How come there's investment? How come there's cinema? It's not something that embarrasses us [any more], being the driest city in Brazil.

Roliúde Nordestina reportedly gave Cabaceiras a new purpose. For some residents, the new policy orientation towards the creative industries represented new hope. However, although cinema and tourism might have improved the self-esteem of some *cabaceirenses*, the concrete achievements of the initiative are, nowadays, highly contested.

Roliúde as practice: a promise yet unfulfilled

Fourteen years after its creation, the implementation of the project Roliúde Nordestina is met with mixed feelings. Most interviewees consider it a partially failed but overall

positive initiative, as it did not achieve many of its goals yet raised the tourist profile of the city. In fact, the project ended up being limited to the road sign and the Cinema Memorial, a museum where the municipality stores material about the movies shot there, such as posters and newspaper articles. Tour guide Robéria Mendes expresses how little the project has accomplished: “What did they do? The sign. And a memorial, whose building already existed, right? They just embellished it.” The original idea, that is, to offer audiovisual workshops for the local population, was put into practice only at the beginning – between 2008 and 2011 – but stopped once governmental grants of the Ministry of Culture were cut off (Silva, 2014). Other steps of the project, like building a production centre to encourage the local production of films, never materialized.

In the end, Roliúde Nordestina became more of a marketing asset for the city than a concrete development plan. This outcome is mainly confirmed by government officials, such as Arnaldo Júnior, the former mayor responsible for the implementation of the project: “Roliúde Nordestina was a project more [related to] marketing appeal in the touristic perspective than in the cinematographic one. Because in reality you don’t have direct initiatives for the exploitation of this potential of the film industry.” This is reflected in how other policy makers are unfamiliar with the original approach of the project, like the president of the Tourism Company of Paraíba (PBTur), Ruth Avelino:

We promote . . . Roliúde Nordestina because there [are] . . . these movies, there is the sign. . . . The name “Hollywood” written with an R is a very typical thing from the north-east [of Brazil]. . . . But if there is an actual project with goals . . . then I really don’t know.

The limited accomplishments of Roliúde Nordestina are translated into the underachieving scenarios of tourism and cinema in Cabaceiras. Tourism is perceived as a regular activity: since its start in the late 1990s, there have always been domestic and international tourists visiting Cabaceiras, according to the respondents. However, the level of development of this industry in the city is still considered below expectations, particularly in the urban area. As stated by the local Tourism Department, urban Cabaceiras receives up to 5000 visitors per year.⁵ In the rural region of Tapera, where Lajedo de Pai Mateus and Hotel Fazenda Pai Mateus are situated, tourism seems to be more robust – in 2019, the hotel received 12,000 visitors. All in all, the tourist flows are modest and unevenly spread across the city, as Participant 1 states: “At Tapera . . . some people manage to make money [working] at the hotel. . . . But because we think of . . . the municipality as a whole, I think tourism is still below what we can have.”

The audiovisual industry is not operating at its full capacity, either. Concerning major productions, filmmaking is an occasional activity that only takes place in Cabaceiras about once every two years. *A Dog’s Will*, the film that propelled Cabaceiras to national fame, was released in 2000. Then, *Madame Satã* (2002), *Cinema, Aspirins and Vultures* (2005), *Canta Maria* (2006) and *Romance* (2008) were released, and the telenovela *Aquele Beijo* aired in 2011. More recently, the films *Beijo de Estrada* (2016), *Por Trás do Céu* (2017) and *O Mágico Di Ó* (2020), and the series *Onde Nascem os Fortes* (2018) were filmed in the city. In between, Cabaceiras hosts smaller audiovisual projects, such as fashion catalogues, TV commercials, music videos or news reports. In spite of its irregularity, the local government understands the influx of productions as consistent with the size of Cabaceiras, as Mariana Castro, the city’s former Director of Tourism (2017–19), indicates: “[Cabaceiras] is a small

hub, it's not even a hub per se, it's [a combination of] favourable scenarios, favourable climate. . . . It's not like . . . Hollywood, but compared to our resources a lot [of productions] come here." Residents of Cabaceiras interviewed for this study, however, said they wished productions would come more regularly to the city. Agriculturist and freelance extra Inês Lima, for instance, stated: "If, once a production is over, another one came shortly after . . . [that] would be very good. . . . It takes a long time. . . . It's already been one year since the shooting of the series [*Onde Nascem os Fortes*] ended."

One difference in how the cinema and tourism industries operate in Cabaceiras is that, while tourism consistently employs locals (e.g. as tour guides and hotel owners), cinema is largely an external phenomenon. There is not a single film production company in the city. Not even film events are hosted there, which, according to the former State Secretary of Culture, Lau Siqueira, makes it hard to justify the title "Roliúde Nordestina":

You arrive there and you don't find so much reason for it to be called Roliúde Nordestina. Maybe it's only an affectionate look towards the city, but it would only be an actual Roliúde Nordestina if it was a local production hub, if there was a cinema festival to present what is produced there.

Some residents complain that "outsider" filmmakers come to Cabaceiras, film and go away without leaving a concrete legacy to the city. They argue that the local government should demand more compensation from these filmmakers, for example by asking them to leave costumes and props for exhibition at the Cinema Memorial. As the city's former Director of Tourism Gilzane Farias asserts: "These productions . . . take advantage [of the city] and . . . don't leave anything. . . . The city is ready to receive [them], but what do we get in return?" On the other hand, the municipality of Cabaceiras is also criticized by some interviewees for not preserving its association with cinema productions. For instance, some respondents mentioned that tourists cannot find many settings where movies have been shot. Video editor Anderson Bruce gave an example of this situation – and the frustration it might cause to tourists:

We had in *A Dog's Will* the baker's house. And [the production team] created a structure in that environment . . . as if it was a real bakery. . . . It was really cool when the production company made the setting and all. But the municipality didn't preserve it. . . . In no time it became a gym. So . . . some tourists . . . ask, "Where is the baker's house for me to take a picture?" It's not there.

Hence, the potential of encouraging film tourism – one of the goals of Roliúde Nordestina – has not entirely been developed in Cabaceiras. Other than the road sign and the Cinema Memorial, the only clear connection to cinema in the city is the Zé de Cila's crafts and liquor store. Having participated in 16 films, the *cabaceirense* Zé de Cila welcomes visitors dressed as the priest of *A Dog's Will*, a character he impersonated as a body double at the time of the movie's production. In addition, there are a few allusions to the title "Roliúde Nordestina" in the city, such as the concert venue Roliúde Hall and the mall Alameda Roliúde, which show how the brand is being actively used by local businesses. However, as some interviewees argue, more substantial references to cinema are lacking in the city.

Still, despite the critique of the project, most residents regard it as a positive initiative. They mention that the existence of the sign and the name Roliúde Nordestina gave more visibility to Cabaceiras, and that the sign itself became a tourist spot where visitors stop to take pictures. Besides, along with some local policy makers, they argue that the productions filmed in Cabaceiras increase the visibility of the city via its by-products, for example when actors generate free publicity by posting pictures of the city on their social media accounts, which are usually followed by millions of Brazilians.

Film productions also benefit the population of Cabaceiras during the location shootings to some extent. Apart from employing locals as crew and extras,⁶ incoming production teams often rent houses, vehicles, and even animals from *cabaceirenses* to be featured in the films or series. In addition, locals come up with new services to offer the crew, from selling crafts to washing clothes, cooking and cleaning houses. Nevertheless, these are all temporary jobs that do not necessarily add to the locals' expertise; residents of Cabaceiras are hired for basic services, never for highly skilled functions within the production – not even to be trained as interns. In order to ensure that filmmakers create more valuable experiences for residents, before leaving the Tourism Office Mariana Castro wrote a proposal demanding that film productions hire locals as interns to work in some specific capacities in the audiovisual industry. This would allow residents of Cabaceiras to acquire basic expertise in filmmaking and, perhaps, give them new prospects: “Who knows if they might not get along and [the production team] might want to bring them to other places, offer new horizons, new opportunities?” At the time of the interview, however, the proposal still needed to be forwarded to the city council for approval.

Apart from these temporary production-related jobs, the benefits that films and series generate for Cabaceiras mostly coincide with the ones brought by tourism. This echoes Ward and O'Regan's (2009) argument that film crews should be seen as long-stay business tourists that need to be equally catered for by the local tourism industry. Both cinema and tourism generate high occupancy rates in hotels and more profit for bars, restaurants and shops. Besides, while tourists come in small numbers throughout the entire year, the presence of a film crew, even for a limited period of time, can significantly change the daily rhythm of the city and bring a higher income for the residents than tourism – a big production like *Onde Nascem os Fortes*, which “rents” the city for months, can be more profitable than the modest tourism flows that Cabaceiras annually receives.

According to the respondents, the only concrete achievement of Roliúde Nordestina was raising the touristic profile and visibility of Cabaceiras. This reportedly attracted more filmmakers and tourists to the city, but these influxes are still irregular (in the case of audiovisual productions) or below expectations (in the case of tourism). Therefore, there seems to be a discrepancy between the discourse promoted by the project – and the promises it made – and the development of these creative industries in practice. As the interviews revealed, before becoming a creative city, Cabaceiras has other, more urgent challenges that need to be addressed first.

Roliúde in perspective: challenges and pitfalls of the creative cities model

In spite of its potential to become a creative hub, Cabaceiras has infrastructural and geographical characteristics that complicate the Roliúde Nordestina project coming to

fruition. One of the reasons mentioned by interviewees to explain the city's unsatisfactory touristic performance was the fact that the image of Cabaceiras marketed for tourism does not match the reality of the place. In spite of being promoted as Roliúde Nordestina, a title that might evoke dazzling imaginaries, Cabaceiras faces enduring infrastructural issues that compromise the tourist experience (Papes and Sousa, 2011), such as absence of road signs, difficult access to some touristic spots, and a substandard telecommunication system (mobile internet barely works and most of the city relies on Wi-Fi networks to be connected). The geography of Cabaceiras also creates obstacles for both tourists and filmmakers: the closest airport is almost 65 km away, which means that tourists and film crews still face a one-hour car or bus ride to reach their final destination after landing.

In order to improve the city in terms of basic infrastructural needs and invest in yet unrealized aspects of the project Roliúde Nordestina, Cabaceiras' government would need financial resources that are, however, scarce. A 2019 report points out that from 2013 to 2017 Cabaceiras has had none (or minimal) economic autonomy, meaning the revenue locally generated was barely enough to cover its administrative structure (Firjan, 2018). In this economic scenario, it is difficult to provide courses about filmmaking to the population and more support to productions that come to Cabaceiras, as Roliúde Nordestina envisioned. Usually, the city hall only helps productions with logistical issues, such as adapting the local scenery to the storyline (e.g. removing street lamps, as demanded by *A Dog's Will*) and offering transportation to extras and crew (de Andrade, 2008; Tavares et al., 2019). Even smaller initiatives, such as workshops, might require investments that cannot be taken up by the city hall, as former Director of Tourism Mariana Castro ponders:

What if Globo . . . wants to sponsor a workshop here? . . . For us to do that we need . . . space to host these people . . . we have to guarantee internet access, an available computer, etc. We have to be aware of the structure [we need] to receive these people.

Another issue that complicates the structuring of an audiovisual industry in Cabaceiras is that the city is outside the main audiovisual hubs of Rio and São Paulo. Although an audiovisual culture exists in the north-eastern region, with local production companies, filmmakers and film festivals, these are not comparable to the network of professionals and the infrastructure that the two south-eastern capitals enjoy. The task of building a film industry in Cabaceiras thus becomes even more complex, as this industry would have to be more or less built from scratch. This situation is aggravated by the current funding mechanisms for the cultural sector in Brazil, based on tax incentives. Although they seek to attract private investors to finance cultural production and increase overall funding in the sector, these sponsors tend to invest in the already-booming economies of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, which are more likely to give them financial return. Consequently, these mechanisms end up further concentrating the industry and deepening the inequalities between the south-east and the rest of the country (Guimarães, 2020).⁷

Besides, with basic needs to be catered for, investing in the creative industries is not a priority. In 2017, the mayor Tiago Castro proposed a democratic budget allocation: he would talk to the residents of Cabaceiras and, according to their needs, decide where to invest. Participant 1, who followed the entire process, mentioned there was no demand for

culture, only for infrastructural improvements, such as roads and hospitals. Paradoxically, in spite of these efforts to understand the needs of the population of Cabaceiras, some interviewees, such as the former Director of Tourism of Cabaceiras Gilzane Farias, criticize the local government for not investing enough in culture and tourism:

Since I started working in tourism up until now, unfortunately . . . a different perspective about tourism is still missing. . . . [By now] Cabaceiras should be a highly structured city . . . in the sense of receiving tourists, having a space to showcase the local craftsmanship and culture. . . . And in the sense of [physical] structure, we should already have sign posts. What existed was removed. The public authorities should care more about this.

In the end, there might be creative potential in Cabaceiras, but, as most respondents recognize, this potential is currently not being harnessed to the fullest. At the local level, Cabaceiras does not have enough financial reserves to cover the basic infrastructural needs demanded by its citizens, let alone to invest in a new economic endeavour. At the national level, Cabaceiras is part of a region that has historically been in a disadvantageous position in cultural and creative policy making (Guimarães, 2020), and attempting to build an entire industry from the ground up becomes burdensome. Interestingly, however, the discourse the project promoted became so powerful that, to this day, cinema and tourism are still seen by both locals and policy makers as potential saviours of Cabaceiras. Or, as José Damião de Sousa, a local leather craftsman, says: “Tourism is a source of income, right? Tourism is development.” Likewise, the owner of Hotel Fazenda Pai Mateus, Paulo Eduardo Lucena, praises the presence of audiovisual production in Cabaceiras as “excellent, exceptional”, a sentiment that is shared by former mayor Arnaldo Júnior: “Cabaceiras . . . has various limitations in terms of potential. . . . We don’t have many alternatives. The cinema industry, in my opinion, is a spectacular opportunity.” Even though film and tourism have not entirely taken off in Cabaceiras, the discourse of hope and trust surrounding these creative industries still strongly persists.

Conclusion: Roliúde in the making

This study sought to understand the workings of film and tourism in the small city of Cabaceiras, Brazil. Based on interviews with residents and policy makers, we have shown that, in spite of the hope and trust projected upon these creative industries with the Roliúde Nordestina initiative, the creative cities model has not yet proven feasible in Cabaceiras. While tourism seems to be a regular phenomenon generating year-round employment for some locals, its benefits are below expectations and unevenly spread across the city. Film crews coming to Cabaceiras might have a more substantial impact on job and income generation; however, these benefits are irregular and temporary, lasting only for the production period. Besides, unlike tourism, which is an activity demanding local engagement, filmmaking is mostly an external phenomenon: there are no local film productions or film-related events in town.

According to the interviews, the only significant accomplishment of the project Roliúde Nordestina was to increase the touristic visibility of the city. This limited achievement stems from the challenges that Cabaceiras experiences in terms of

financial means and infrastructure, which hinder governmental efforts to transform it into a creative hub. Roliúde Nordestina promised to be an important incentive for the city's development, but some of the actions proposed were carried out only while governmental grants and subsidies were in place. Once agreements were not renewed, the local government lacked the resources to continue the activities of the project. In the end, the initiative became more a marketing tool for tourism than a concrete developmental plan, as policy makers themselves acknowledge.

Partly in line with previous academic work (Bell and Jayne, 2010; Duxbury and Campbell, 2011), this case study proves that the celebratory discourse regarding the creative industries does not always live up to its promises. Even in locations like Cabaceiras that might have the potential to harness these industries, the creative city blueprint does not offer a solution on its own; a series of localized factors, from connections to other urban centres, to infrastructure, local workforce and economic resources, need to be taken into consideration as well. These factors are intrinsically related to the history and dynamics of the creative industries already in place at a certain location. In Cabaceiras, acknowledging the uncertain and concentrated character of the Brazilian film industry could have highlighted the challenging task of building an audiovisual hub and dampened the expectations regarding Roliúde Nordestina. More importantly, it could have inspired different strategies for starting to set up this audiovisual hub, such as consistently applying for governmental grants, looking for sponsors in the private sector, demanding more collaboration between filmmakers and locals from an earlier stage and, more importantly, pressuring the federal government to follow through with policies to decentralize cultural investments.

Particularly in economically and socially vulnerable contexts such as Cabaceiras, promoting this developmental discourse can be seen as a sign of hope by the local community. However, once the discourse is not put into practice, it might lead to frustration, as some respondents expressed. The example of Cabaceiras shows how particular circumstances of cities and their citizens need to be prioritized and respected in creative policy making, so that future projects can foster more valuable and long-lasting benefits to local communities.

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Notes

1. All currency conversions were done with the rate from 23 July 2020 (US \$1 = 5.16 Brazilian reais).
2. All interviews were conducted in Portuguese. All direct quotes from respondents, as well as passages of texts written in Portuguese, were translated to English by the first author.
3. During this 1991–2000 period, 30% of the total of inhabitants left the city. The 2010 census, however, shows a population increase, albeit not enough to make up for the decrease experienced in previous decades (Silva, 2014).

4. In fact, *A Dog's Will* was first broadcast as a miniseries by Rede Globo in 1999, and later turned into film.
5. These numbers exclude the period in which the Festa do Bode Rei ('King Goat Festival', free translation) takes place in Cabaceiras. Held annually in June, the three-day event is the city's most famous festivity, which celebrates the local goat farming with exhibitions, concerts and cultural performances. The event attracts an average of 50,000 visitors to the city.
6. For example, during the production of the series *Onde Nascem os Fortes*, there were days in which more than 100 people were hired, receiving a daily payment of about R\$60 (US \$11.62).
7. That is not to say that absolutely all cultural investments are concentrated in south-east Brazil. For example, the governmental programme Cultura Viva ('Alive Culture', free translation), implemented in 2004, takes cultural resources to lower income populations, that is, small municipalities and indigenous communities, providing a counterbalance to the market-oriented policy of tax incentives. This programme, thus, acknowledges the deficit that some locations in Brazil experience in cultural policy making, and tries to decentralize cultural investments. However, Cultura Viva has faced financial and logistical difficulties since 2017, and the current political scenario in Brazil does not seem to be favourable for its revitalization (Guimarães, 2020).

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