Research collaborations Brazil
UK and Brazilian research in the arts and humanities
Introduction

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) is part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), a non-departmental public body funded by a grant-in-aid from the UK government. The AHRC funds world-class, independent researchers in a wide range of subjects: history, archaeology, digital content, philosophy, languages, design, heritage, area studies, the creative and performing arts, and much more. It invests in research at universities across the UK as well as in the country’s world-leading museums, galleries and libraries.

The arts and humanities research communities of the United Kingdom and Brazil benefit from a long standing and mutually beneficial relationship. Together they have collaborated with policy makers, third sector organisations, communities and businesses and worked closely with a range of other disciplines. Researchers in the UK have been working in partnership with their Brazilian counterparts since the creation of the Arts and Humanities Research Council in 2005 and subsequently both the AHRC and Brazilian research funding agencies have taken steps to foster and formalise these academic partnerships. In 2009 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between UK Research and Innovation (formerly Research Councils UK), and the State of São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP). Since 2014 UK’s seven Research Councils have been working closely with a range of Brazilian funders through the Newton Fund Brazil while the launch of the UK’s Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) in 2016 has created new opportunities to strengthen the links between the two countries.

This booklet draws together projects which showcase the achievements and contributions of UK-Brazil collaborative working across a variety of sectors, topics and disciplines within the arts and humanities. Areas of common interest that have emerged include how to harness creativity for social and economic growth, and new ways for marginalised groups and individuals to make their voices heard confidently. Similarly, a desire to understand the environments around us, whether ‘natural’ or built, and the use and production of space has resonated strongly within our two research communities.

Brazil has been a distinctive presence within the development of AHRC’s international strategy and continues to be so. We hope that we can continue to strengthen and expand the cross-pollination of ideas and practice between our two nations, drawing on their respective rich cultural and academic heritages.

Footnotes

[1] The Newton Fund aims to promote the economic development and social welfare of either the partner countries or, through working with the partner country, to address the wellbeing of communities. It will do so through strengthening partner country science and innovation capacity and unlocking further funding to support this work.

[2] The Global Challenges Research Fund is a 5-year £1.5Bn fund that forms a key component in the delivery of the UK Aid Strategy and tackles global challenges in the national interest. The fund aims to ensure that UK research takes a leading role in addressing the problems faced by developing countries through challenge-led disciplinary and interdisciplinary research, by strengthening capacity for research and innovation within both the UK and developing countries and by providing an agile response to emergencies where there is an urgent research need.
Harnessing creativity for economic and social growth

The global academic community recognises that investing in an inclusive creative economy can bring about lasting economic growth and contribute to social wellbeing and cohesion. The rich heritage and diverse and vibrant contemporary cultures of both Brazil and the UK are built on long legacies of creativity and artistic practice. Yet, both countries face a wide range of social issues and consistently high levels of inequalities. They have much to learn from each other, not least regarding the role of artists and cultural organisations in fostering social and economic development. Whether it is in the approaches to resolving social and economic contestations, renewal of the urban landscape, reversal of economic decline, re-signification of lives and territories, the promotion of health and wellbeing, innovation in sustainable development, or testing the boundaries of design and new technologies, the UK and Brazil continue to invent, imagine and inspire new ways of thinking about the arts and creativity in contemporary society.

Creative entrepreneurship

New approaches to university-creative industry collaborations and new, more effective ways to support entrepreneurial initiatives have been established through AHRC-funded projects involving academic, government and industry partners from the UK and Brazil. The Creative Hubs and Urban Development Goals (UK/Brazil) project informed the design and operation of new publicly funded creative hubs in the state of Sao Paulo. These hubs are physical or virtual hotspots that bring enterprising people together who work in the creative and cultural industries. The project was a partnership between Queen Mary, University of London, the University of Sao Paulo (USP) the Brazilian Government and the Sao Paulo State Government.

Through a ‘creative voucher’ scheme the hubs enabled co-created research on new business models between small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the creative economy and researchers from USP, with a particular focus on developing business models to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth. The project provided evidence of the governance and management models that would be most appropriate for publicly funded creative hubs. By promoting creativity, digital inclusion, and the beneficial social impacts of a growing creative economy, it addressed some of the key development goals of the state of Sao Paulo.

One of the SMEs to benefit from this initiative and the opportunities that it offered to collaborate with the University of Sao Paulo was Maternativa, a company created in 2015 by two female entrepreneurs which provides a marketplace for entrepreneurial mothers. The collaboration enabled Maternativa to build beyond its initial intentions to develop online learning materials. Instead, acting upon creative economy business models research, it launched a successful online e-commerce platform as a marketplace for entrepreneurs. As the co-founders of the company said, ‘if this project had not happened ... we would have gone in the opposite direction, and we would have failed’.

Entrepreneurial mothers network to discuss motherhood, labour market for women and feminism.
Creativity for social engagement

A series of projects have brought to life the ways in which museum and galleries studies, performing arts and design research, and digital technologies can help to shape and strengthen socially engaged communities. Projects such as the Newton Fund’s Social Change through Creativity and Culture Programme, and The Currency of Cultural Exchange: re-thinking models of indigenous development project, funded by GCRF, explored issues such as urban violence and human rights, violence against women, the rights and visibility of excluded groups in society, the transformative potential of human imagination, and how creativity and creative economy skills can be used to empower communities. The projects explored issues such as urban violence and human rights, violence against women, the rights and visibility of excluded groups in society, the transformative potential of human imagination and how creativity and creative economy skills can be used to empower communities.

Another project created the ‘Other Registers’ a sound installation about past, present and future police-related violence in Rio de Janeiro. A composer, a computer scientist, a performance artist, and arts and humanities academics from Brazil, Great Britain, and Northern Ireland worked together to create an immersive audio installation based on police homicide data which was opened in late November 2016 in Complexo da Maré, the largest favela complex in Rio de Janeiro. They based their work on the statistics for civilian deaths by the Military Police, as compiled and published by Rio de Janeiro State Public Security Department. The purpose of the sound installation was to raise awareness of the scale of the issue.

These initiatives have highlighted the ways in which creative practitioners can work with indigenous communities to make people aware of the richness of the culture and heritage of these communities. Clelio de Paula, a creative coder and founder of technology business WeSense developed a virtual reality experience based on oral history testimonies from the Kuikuro, the indigenous people of the Mato Grosso region of Brazil. Working in collaboration with young Kuikuro individuals, Clelio re-staged some of the myths that form part of the community’s cosmology while documenting the work using 360 degrees cameras and scanning apps. The data was then transformed into an immersive experience and launched at Rio’s Multiplicidade Festival in October 2017. This success of this project has opened new opportunities for research collaboration based around immersive experiences.
Viewing indigenous cultures through immersive technologies

New technologies are changing the way in which we learn and experience the lives of others. The Challenge of the Xingu: indigenous cultures in the museum of the future project brings together UK and Brazilian researchers in performance practice, artists, curators and education practitioners and Kuikuro community leaders. It combines the digital data capture associated with world-leading cultural conservation practice (such as photogrammetry and 3D scanning/printing) with motion-capture, Virtual and Mixed Reality technologies, and traditional Kuikuro objects and artefacts.

The result is an intense immersive experience aimed at UK museum audiences. Launched at the Tate Modern in May 2018, visitors were able to experience the day-to-day life, environment, myths and storytelling, dance, decorative painting, crafts and other cultural practices of an indigenous Brazilian village in the Upper Xingu region. The Kuikuro people will benefit from increased public understanding of their culture, which they hope will act as an advocacy tool for the articulation of their heritage, culture and rights. Most importantly, through these projects Brazilian and UK researchers have been able to co-create a model that enables the Kuikuro to be agents in the process of exchange rather than passive consumers of external influences or victims of cultural invasions.
Representing marginalised voices

Evidence developed by arts and humanities researchers can contribute to the debates regarding the inclusion of voices of marginalised communities in political spaces with respect to policies that affect them. These disciplines and researchers provide vital political, cultural and philosophical perspectives on authority and power, they uncover new ways to engage and empower these communities.

Empowering the marginalised through the performing arts

The three-year Favela to the World project experimented with embedding favela-based transformational arts practices within UK communities. This project has helped to strengthen the reciprocal relationship between charities based in the UK and Brazil: People’s Palace Project (PPP), a UK-based independent arts charity that advances the practice and understanding of art for social justice, and Group Cultural Afro-Reggae (GCAR) a favela-based organisation which promotes social transformation through culture and art. In particular, the Favela to the World programme enabled PPP to develop programmes supporting people with learning disabilities in organisations such as the Lawnmowers Independent Theatre Company, Gateshead in the north of England. This in turn led to the development of a new youth leadership programme known as Cultural Warriors in the UK. Cultural Warriors has used GCAR’s techniques and training to develop the skills and resilience of young creative practitioners from excluded communities in the UK as cultural leaders within those communities and has established a participatory arts festival for young people from marginalised communities in Liverpool which is run with the Liverpool Everyman Theatre.

Performance-focused research was also the cornerstone of the Staging Human Rights project. Funded by AHRC’s predecessor (the Arts and Humanities Research Board), the British Council and the National Lottery Charities Board, the project created a partnership with Brazilian public agencies such as the Boal’s Centre of the Theatre of the Oppressed (Rio de Janeiro) and the Latin American UN Agency for the Study of Crime and Delinquency. The initiative included research linking performance, drama workshops, human rights dialogues and public forums. This performance-based human rights project was awarded first prize in the Prêmio Betinho de Cidanania e Democracia, an annual award made by the city of São Paulo for work that promotes human rights, citizenship and democracy. It subsequently had additional funding from Brazil’s federal Ministry of Justice (2002-2005) along with the AHRC and the British Council for further phases of research and activity and reached over 10,000 adult prisoners, guards and their families over its six years.
Inclusive approaches for sustainability

The United Nations Indigenous Peoples Major Group (UNIPMG) has expressed concerns that indigenous people’s voices are likely to be overlooked in the Sustainable Development Agenda, despite its aspirations to be inclusive (UNIPMG, 2015). The aim of the AHRC-funded Sumak Kawsay and the Sustainable Development Agenda: Critical Debates and Creative Responses from a Latin American Indigenous Perspective research network is to challenge these tendencies by exploring indigenous perspectives on sustainability and to use cultural approaches to articulate alternatives in Brazil and Colombia. ‘Sumak kawsay’ is a Kichwa word meaning ‘good living’. Its basic principles include concern for the environment, peaceful communal living and the reduction of inequalities, both economic and social. These principles might seem to align well with how sustainable development is expressed in the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals. However, from the perspective of indigenous communities, sumak kawsay is not easily equated with the concept of ‘development’ and can have varying meanings for different indigenous groups. Project partners, Thydêwá, a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) based in Bahia, North-Eastern Brazil – and – a Pueblos en Camino ‘communication-action initiative’ based in Cauca, South-Western Colombia are supporting workshops to bring together researchers, practitioners and indigenous communities in order to study and facilitate community-based responses.

Community engagement through digital tools

Digital media offers new avenues for marginalised groups to promote social inclusion and to make their voices heard within and beyond the borders of their communities. The e-Voices: Redressing Marginality project offers a transnational comparative perspective on strategies to combat marginalisation in Brazil, Kenya and Syria focusing on slum residents, the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) community, people with disabilities, and refugees/displaced people. In Brazil, this partnership between the University of Bournemouth and Universidade Federal Fluminense and NGOs, will explore how residents of Favela da Maré in Rio de Janeiro use digital media to push for active citizenship and participation in the country’s political system and foster broader community engagement. This will complement work on the use of digital tools to promote dialogue on power structures and human rights in Kenya and work on how development organisations are using digital technologies to foster reconciliation initiatives amongst displaced populations in Syria. The project which began in January 2018 aims to produce transferable good practice guidelines to support the activities of other groups in those three countries and beyond. To do this, they are working with TCF/Sparklab, the world’s largest association of internet access and internet training facilities. TCF/Sparklab have over 750,000 centres around the globe, and a global network of more than 2,600 non-profit and community-based and technical organisations specialised in digital empowerment.
Understanding, preserving and inhabiting natural and built environments

Whether through design, archaeology, cultural and linguistic perspectives or literary and visual production, the arts and humanities help us to understand the world around us. Our shared environments, whether urban or rural, natural or built and their effect on wellbeing, policy developments, social cohesion and the articulation of identity and heritage have been an area of active interest for UK and Brazilian scholars alike.

Human societies and landscapes

The AHRC/FAPESP funded Jê Landscapes of southern Brazil: Ecology, History and Power in a transitional landscape during the Late Holocene project investigated the creation and transformation of southern Jê landscapes in Brazil and their relationship with the communities inhabiting these areas during the past two millennia. The project brought together research in archaeology, ethnography and palaeoecology (the ecology of fossil animals and plants). The interdisciplinary team from Exeter, Reading and São Paulo Universities have shared their findings with mathematicians, climatologists, physical geographers, anthropologists and ecologists. In 2014 through their collaboration with the São Joaquim National Park, Urubici in the State of Santa Catarina, Brazil, the project provided archaeological and palaeoecological reconstructions to inform the conservation policies of the National Park São Joaquim. And in 2015, they provided over 50 herbarium materials for creating a pollen reference collection for the Araucaria forest at the Botanical Museum of Curitiba. One of the objectives of this collaborative project was to support the creation of an open working group called PEOPLE 3000 (PaLEOclimate and the PeopLing of the Earth). The PEOPLE 3000 group combines archaeological and palaeoecological case studies with mathematical modelling to investigate how co-evolving human societies and ecosystems can successfully cope with the interrelated forces of population growth, increasing social complexity and climate change, and why societies might also fail to cope with these interrelated forces. This four-year project has attracted further funding for doctoral studentships and research projects from the Brazilian Ministry of Education, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the Foundation for Research Support of the State of Rio Grande do Sul and the British Academy.

Urban spaces

Another AHRC/FAPESP funded project, Public Spaces and the Role of the Architect took a comparative approach to analysing the role of Modernist and contemporary architecture and design in London and São Paolo. There are marked similarities between the two cities: they are both world class financial capitals, with multicultural populations. They also face the same challenges: economic disparities and chronic housing shortages. Most importantly, both think about of their public space defensively, sometimes mirroring social segregation with spatial segregation. This Anglo-Brazilian research project took advantage of the complex and often spectacular legacy of architectural Modernism in both cities, to examine the public spaces in and around seminal examples of large scale Modernist architecture. The project has identified some key principles about the role of the architect as a mediator between private clients, policy makers and local authority planners. The project team have already been approached by prominent architectural practitioners to help them build a historical case for their planned interventions in existing public spaces.

A new international research network was launched in the summer of 2018 to examine the Future of the City Centre through a partnership between Northumbria University, the University of Newcastle Australia, the University of Paraiba, Brazil and the University of South Africa. The network will examine how city centres are being transformed by a number of internal and external factors and the implications of these changes for the future of the City Centre. The theoretical perspectives will involve past, present and future with an emphasis upon creating a vision of the post-industrial, post-commercial and post-retail city. This will include considering provision for creative industries, cultural events and different forms of entertainment that might offer vitality, and attract responsible tourism. Their aim is that the network’s outputs should inform and influence researchers, practitioners, policy makers and community groups in creating their proposals for innovative uses of city space.