

7.14 Current cultural observatories

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The cultural sector has been consolidated as a central area in society development. Since the fifties, it has been gradually included in governmental policies, in the political and communication agenda, and in the academy, among others. However, it is a young sector which requires to strengthen the bases on which it is building up. Its development implies a progressive complexity which requires greater clarities with respect to how it is constituted.

It is more and more necessary to have quality information, more analysis and studies, and own concepts and definitions to understand our field and its phenomena, to improve policies affecting it, and to disseminate its importance. For this reason, spaces which centralise, systematise, analyse, discuss, and inform about cultural policies and management have emerged in many countries. At the beginning of the century, the specialist Mark Schuster identified several entities participating in this need and called them “cultural information infrastructures”. several categories were distinguished:

- Research divisions of ministries
- National and international statistical agencies
- Non-profit independent institutes
- Research centre assigned by the government in a university
- Private consultancies
- Cultural observatories Networks
- Model programmes
- Periodic journals and publications

For Schuster, the challenge was to promote the ecology of the cultural information infrastructure, that is, to encourage the division of work and a greater definition of the functions in each entity within a system, thus encouraging in turn the support among them and avoiding the duplication of such efforts.

Despite that the most usual diagnosis in this issue is the lack of data on culture, the author said that the most urgent function was not the generation of more data, but the need to take from them the most advantage as possible because, in most countries, a vast amount of information about arts and culture was obtained without being sufficiently analysed, explored, understood and discussed. He said that the volume of sources of available data will only tend to increase, and consequently there will be a need to mediate data. The impetus behind cultural observatories and behind the same culture and communication programme of the UNESCO’s Statistical Institute seems to be based on such need to mediate data.

In his times, Schuster was already surprised by how fast this type of institutions have been proliferated, an

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expansion which seems to continue. What was visualised more than a decade ago seems to be appropriate to the prevalence and diversity of this type of institutions, particularly in Europe and Latin America.

For Cristina Ortega and Roberto San Salvador, the few authors researching the phenomenon of cultural observatories, institutions should be understood in the context of a society in which information and knowledge are established as the main drivers of the political, social, cultural and economic development of a country, and the observatories acquire an essential role in the decision-making to design and to assess policies.

This article is aimed to characterise the entities whose role seems to be more and more central for cultural policies, and their more evident challenges will be researched. For this purpose, a search was carried out via the Internet, with the result of 42 cultural observatories. The search was focused on Europe and Latin America to better limit the observed territory. The obtained data were in turn compared with other lists, such as that included in the article by Cristina Ortega and Roberto San Salvador del Valle (2010), that which is available thanks to the [Digital Journal for Cultural Management] from Mexico, and that found in the OEI's website.

Table 1: Cultural observatories per continent

Continente	Cantidad	Porcentaje
América Latina	18	42,9%
Europa	24	57,1%
Total	42	100,0%

Source: Made by authors.

Cultural observatories: provisional definitions

Schuster said that an observatory is full of surprises with any type of expectations. It is a malleable expression which gives great flexibility and includes different types of projects. The ductility of the concept includes a vast amount of services and instruments in such format and, in turn, different identities with the same name are made up. This could be understood if the complexity of the sector intended to be observed is considered, as well as the huge variety of existing situations according to each territory or country.

Although the definition is diffuse and there is a great variety in this type of information infrastructure, it is possible to establish, as a common point of observatories, its emphasis on the monitoring, on the information centralisation and dissemination, without any intention to control or to judge the sector. It is a less traditional space conditioned by the rules of study centres, thus leading to negotiation and interactivity. Another point could be the intention to include the decision-making process in the cultural development.

As previously indicated, cultural observatories are generally mediators in the process to give important data and information to generate policies. They are not necessarily spaces in which data are produced, and their clearest contribution is to encourage discussion and to disseminate information. Most of them work as positioning and diffusion agents of cultural subjects. This fact is also important, as cultural policies are still marginally present with respect to other scopes of social development.

For Cristina Ortega and Roberto San Salvador, the observatories' main task is to facilitate the transfer and access to information and knowledge in culture to encourage discussion, to promote dialogue, to contribute to reflection and to estimate the creation of thought, to facilitate research, to improve the decision-making process, and to be

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supportive for cultural policies. For the authors, these entities could also fulfil other more active functions in relation to the cultural sector: for example, with actions including the presentation of proposals or recommendations, the development of consultancy studies, and the making of intervention strategies and programmes.

As it is expected, each observatory fulfils a different function according to the density of the infrastructure of the existing information in its country. The instruments and resources available for each entity are different depending on whether there are entities responsible for the generation of data, for the relationships with publics or for the existing media. For example, if a country has enough public, periodic and reliable data about the sector, which are provided by a state agency (its name in most countries is “National Institute of Statistics”), observatories could be focused on analysing such data and disseminate them.

General analysis of the observatories identified

As mentioned above, there is a great diversity of cultural observatories whose main differences are related to their territory, the issues they deal with, the tools they use and, specially, the institutional dependence.

A total of 42 observatories were studied, from those delimiting their action in a country (most of them) or in a province to those with a broader territory, thus covering several countries.

For example, many entities in Spain focus their work on autonomous regions, such as the Aragonese Observatory of Art in the Public Sphere, the Cultural Policies Observatory of the University of Castile and La Mancha, and Vigía, the Cultural Observatory of the province of Cadiz, among others. Also, the Osservatorio Culturale del Piemonte in Italy, and the Creative industries Observatory (CIO) in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Another type of observatories is limited to an area or discipline of the cultural sector, although its territory is greater. This is the case of the European Audiovisual Observatory which, as its names indicates, is aimed to analyse the audiovisual industry, but the territory is extended to all countries of Europe. Something similar happens with the Ibero-American Observatory of Copyright. Meanwhile, in Chile, the Book and Reading Observatory has been recently created, which is focused on such specific scope.

Another evident group is made up of the institutions limited to a national territory and are cross-sectoral in relation to the areas of the cultural sector they look at. For example, L’Observatoire del Politiques Culturelles, in France; the Observatorio das actividades culturais, in Portugal, and the Cultural Policies Observatory, in Chile.

There is an interesting distinction when the dependence of these entities is considered, which generally determines or, at least, influences its financing. We discuss this aspect in detail as it could determine the function of monitoring, analysis, and discussion, which is the characteristic of observatories.

The table included below shows that most of the observatories are divided into 6 types according to their dependence, but majority groups are 3. On the one hand, we have governmental observatories, which are created inside a state agency, whether national or regional, so its financing is public. Those initiatives with intergovernmental nature could be included in this category.

Another main group are those created under a university, whether public or private. The last set is constituted by private observatories, dependent or not of a greater institution. The last ones, independent observatories, represent the greatest percentage (26,2%).

The table below details the categories according to the dependence.

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Table 2: Observatories per institutional dependence.

Dependencia (tipo)	Cantidad	%
Gubernamental	9	21,4%
Intergubernamental	3	7,1%
Público - universitario	10	23,8%
Público – privado	2	4,8%
Privado - dependiente	7	16,7%
Privado - independiente	11	26,2%
Total	42	100,0%

Source: Made by authors.

Governmental Observatories

The governmental observatories are in total 9 and correspond to 21.4% of the total observatories registered. Together with “public university” observatories, this is the most numerous second category, after private-independent observatories.

There are two main subcategories in this scope: those who emerge under cultural institutions of a country, such a Ministry of Culture or a Culture Council, and those belonging to local governments (provincial, autonomous, regional, etc.) and are focused on the study of a specific territory’s culture.

The first category includes the Culture and Economy Observatory of the Ministry of Culture in Colombia, the Cultural Observatory of the Culture and Arts Council in Chile, the Observatorio das Actividades Culturais in Portugal, the Observatory for Conservation Research of the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sport in Spain, and the Russian Institute for Cultural Research.

In general, these entities process, give value and disseminate the data generated by the National Institute of Statistics of each government. Due to the nature of their dependence, they do not tend to fulfil a control or assessment function of public cultural policies.

The second subcategory includes the Observatory for Cultures dependent of the Secretary for Culture, Leisure and Sport of Bogota, the Creative Industries Observatory of the Government of the City of Buenos Aires, the Basque Observatory of Culture of the Basque Government, and the Observatorio da Cultura Galega of the Galician Culture Council.

Each observatory is described below:

Creative Industries Observatory, CIO

<http://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/oic>

The CIO is a study unit dependent on the Ministry for Economic Development of the Government of the City of Buenos Aires and leads to obtaining, writing, and disseminating information on the city’s creative industries.

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Basque Observatory of Culture (Spanish initials: OVC)

http://www.kultura.ejgv.euskadi.eus/r46-19123/es/contenidos/informacion/keb_behatokia/es_behatoki/aurkezpena.html

A body aimed to reorganise, to validate, and to generate information on Basque culture.

Observatorio das Actividades Culturais in Portugal, OAC

<http://www.oac.pt/>

Its main task is to produce and disseminate information on current issues in a systematic and regular way within the area of cultural activities.

Culture and Economy Observatory of the Ministry of Culture of Colombia (Spanish initials: OCE)

<http://www.culturarecreacionydeporte.gov.co/observatorio/index.html>

A supportive office for the Secretary for Culture, Leisure and Sport. Its main objective is to generate knowledge on the city, which could be useful to formulate, to monitor, and to design public policies.

Cultural Observatory of the Culture and Arts Council (Spanish initials: CNCA) in Chile.

<http://observatoriocultural.gob.cl/>

It belongs to the Department for Studies of the Chilean cultural institutionality. It is represented by a virtual journal which analyses the data produced by the CNCA and are discussed.

Culture and Economy Observatory (Spanish initials: OCE).

<http://culturayeconomia.org/>

OCE is an entity dependent of the Ministry of Culture of Colombia, which generates, designs, and disseminates information and analysis tools so that public and private actors of the cultural sector could improve the decision-making.

Observatory for Conservation Research of the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sport in Spain

<http://www.investigacionenconservacion.es/>

Its main objective is to encourage researchers to participate together in projects of the national and European plans, as well as to promote the knowledge transfer between institutions and researchers.

Observatorio da cultura galega

<http://observatorio.consellodacultura.org/temas>

It is dependent of the Consello da Cultura Galega and its main aim is to process the information on culture.

The Russian institute for Cultural Research (RICR)

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<http://www.riku.ru/>

A public institution focused on documentation, research, discussion, and information dealing with European, national, regional and urban cultural research in cultural studies.

Intergovernmental Observatories

A total of 3 observatories were identified and classified as intergovernmental in the sense that they emerge under an organisation bringing together different States or countries which tries to deal with all of them. Such 3 observatories are as follows:

Inter-American Cultural Policy Observatory, ICPO

http://www.oas.org/oipc/espanol/cpo_obse_bienvenida.asp

An intergovernmental entity between American countries. To facilitate the interchange of information on cultural policies, the establishment of networks, the creation of indicators, and the research on cultural sector are among its main functions.

European Audiovisual Observatory, EAO

<http://www.obs.coe.int/>

An intergovernmental entity made up of 36 European states headquartered in France. Its main mission is the transmission of information and the promotion of transparency in the audiovisual market.

Ibero-American Observatory of Culture, (Spanish initials: OIBC)

<http://www.oibcult.org/web/index.php>

An entity headquartered in Argentina whose main function is to make progress in the construction of a shared system of cultural measurement and assessment.

Public - University Observatories

Many of the existing cultural observatories emerge within universities, particularly in public universities. In fact, one of the first and oldest observatories, Grenoble, emerged inside a study house. Belonging to a university could be a good combination of economic stability to be part of a greater institution and independent of the State, which theoretically would imply a more autonomous vision of public policies.

A total of 10 centres of this type were identified, representing 23,8% of the total observatories registered. The observatories here included are as follows:

L'Observatoire del Politiques Culturelles, OPC

<http://www.observatoire-culture.net/>

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A French body headquartered in the Pierre Mendès France University, in Grenoble. Its mission is to favour the decentralisation of cultural policies and to think about the cultural development and planning of the territory.

Cultural Observatory in the Faculty of Economics of the University of Buenos Aires (Spanish initials: OC)

<http://web.econ.uba.ar/WAppFCE01/CrudBoxContainer01?Function=getXhtml&boxContainerPOID=2342>

It is described as a specialised research centre whose mission is to contribute to professionalise culture by promoting research. It belongs to the Faculty of Economics of the University of Buenos Aires.

Cultural Observatory of the Atalaya Project

<http://www.observatorioatalaya.es/es/>

Unlike the others, this observatory includes several universities. It is an initiative emerging from the Atalaya Project and joining a network of Andalusian universities.

Book and Reading Observatory

<http://www.uchile.cl/observatorio-libro>

This is an initiative of the University of Chile and the Chilean Book Chamber. Its objective is to promote the study, assessment, analysis, systematisation, and socialisation of the book and reading situation in Chile.

Cultural Policies Observatory of the Faculty of Anthropology of the UV (University of Veracruz)

<http://www.uv.mx/opc/>

A space focused on the reflection, the study and proposals to intervene in cultural policies.

Cultural Policies Observatory UAM (Autonomous University of Mexico)

<http://www.uv.mx/opc/> (website under construction)

Its function is to generate information and knowledge to affect the decision-making and the analysis of cultural policies of Mexico City.

Centre for Cultural Policy Research, CCPR

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/cca/research/ccpr/>

It is dependent of the University of Glasgow and its mission is to research and contribute to the public debate on the scope of cultural policies and the communication in Scotland, UK, EU, and at a global level.

SweCult Swedish Cultural Policy Research Observatory

<http://www.eenc.info/fr/organisation/swecult-swedish-cultural-policy-research-observatory-2/>

Observatory of the Linköping University in Sweden. Its main function is to research cultural policies, to be the link for the research and information related to them, to promote the cooperation between researchers and other actors of the Swedish cultural framework, and to act as a counterpart to establish international networks.

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Vigía. Cultural Observatory of the Province of Cadiz

<https://tavira.uca.es/tavira/vigia/informacion.do>

The Observatory of the University of Cadiz is a supportive project for the territorial cultural development.

Cultural Policies Observatory University of Castile-La Mancha

<http://www.observatoriocultural.org/>

It was created by the University of Castile-La Mancha and the County Council of Cuenca. Its functions are the analysis, research, training, and information to understand the tendencies in cultural policies.

Public-Private Observatories

In some cases, observatories emerge from the alliances between the public and the private sector, although it is not very usual. Only 2 observatories of this type were identified:

Osservatorio Culturale del Piemonte, OCP

<http://www.ocp.piemonte.it/>

An entity of public and private capital which is aimed to systematise the main variables of the cultural sector and to go more deeply into the qualitative aspects of cultural phenomena.

Foundation for Cultural Policy Research, CUPORE

http://www.cupore.fi/index_en.php

A discussion forum on cultural policies both in Finland and in the rest of the world. Research, systematisation, and dissemination of information of the cultural sector are among its objectives.

Private - Dependent Observatories

Also, observatories emerge from entities belonging to the private sector or to the civil society, on which its administration or finance depend. A total of 7 institutions are found in this category, which correspond to 16,7% of the total. In this case, it could be supposed that what is observed is within the interests and the needs of the institutions on which they depend.

For example, in Latin America, the Colombian Caribbean Observatory which belongs to the Chamber of Commerce of Cartagena; the Itaú Cultural observatory of the Itaú Cultural Institute in Brazil, and the Ibero-American Observatory of Copyright (Spanish initials: ODAI), which emerged from a joint between CERLALC and SGAE.

In Europa, there are also 5 observatories of this type: the Lab for Culture of the European Cultural Foundation, the

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Budapest Observatory of the Foundation, the East-Central European Cultural Observatory, the Culture Observatory for the Contemporaneous Foundation in Spain, and the Culture and Communication Observatory of the Alternativas Foundation (Spain).

Colombian Caribbean Observatory (Spanish initials: OCC)

<http://www.ocaribe.org/>

An entity headquartered in Colombia and dependent of the Chamber of Commerce of Cartagena. Its aim is the study, the reflection, and the dissemination of knowledge on the reality of the Colombian Caribbean area.

Labforculture

<http://www.labforculture.org/es>

A European organisation of the European Cultural Foundation, which is headquartered in Holland and is mainly aimed to guarantee the access to an updated information of the cultural sector, as well as to facilitate the co-operation and to favour an experimentation with online technologies.

The Budapest Observatory, BO

<http://www.budobs.org/>

A non-profit entity dependent of the Foundation for the Cultural Observatory of the Countries for Central and Eastern Europe. Their main objectives are to collect and to facilitate information related to the financial, legislative, political and governmental conditions of cultural life and cultural activities, products, and organisations in the countries located between the Baltic and the Adriatic Sea.

Itaú Cultural Observatory

<http://novo.itaucultural.org.br/>

Observatory created in 2006 and dependent of Itaú Cultural. Its programme includes the study and discussion of cultural issues, as well as the stimulation of reflection and the analysis of national indicators.

Ibero-American Observatory of Copyright (Spanish initials: ODAI)

<http://odai.org/>

The ODAI, a body dependent of CERLAC SGAE, monitors the legal situation and the economic impact of copyrights, as well as the rights related to the Ibero-american region.

Observatory of Culture. Fundación Contemporánea, FC

<http://www.fundacioncontemporanea.com/>

The Observatory of Culture, headquartered in Spain, is a space to interchange and to recollect information, reflection, and analysis on national and international culture.

Culture and Communication Observatory (Spanish initials: OCC-FA). Fundación Alternativas.

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<http://www.falternativas.org/occ-fa>

A study, debate, and proposal centre concerning current transformations of culture and communication, as well as of the public policies related to both fields.

Private – Independent Observatories

Finally, most observatories emerge from the private scope and are not dependent of any specific institution, particularly in the European scope. According to the land register, there are 11 and represent 26.2% of records.

Five are in Latin America, and the other 6 in Europe:

Andalusian Observatory for the Economy of culture and Development, OIKOS

<http://www.oikos.org.es/>

An entity which emerged to share and to promote an open forum for the expression of ideas, participation, and creativity as a contribution independent of the Andalusia's progress.

Interarts

<http://www.interarts.net/es/>

Its objectives are to give advice on the design of cultural policies, to contribute to development processes from the cultural sector, and to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and information in the cultural field.

Observatoire des Mutations des Industries Culturelles, OMIC

<http://www.observatoire-omic.org/>

An independent entity aimed to favour the interchanges among approaches of different scientific origins with changes in culture and communication industries.

Observatory of Cultural Diversity (Spanish initials: ODC)

<http://www.observatoriodadiversidade.org.br/>

A non-governmental body created to develop cooperation programmes related to cultural management. It produces information and knowledge, generates experiences and experiments to protect and to promote the cultural diversity.

Relais Culture Europe

<http://www.relais-culture-europe.eu/>

It was created in 1998 as a supportive structure for the European information, action, and reflection of cultural and creative actors as well as of mass media.

Cultural Policies Observatory (Spanish initials: OPC)

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<http://www.observatoriopoliticasculturales.cl/>

The OPC, headquartered in Santiago de Chile, is a space to research, to analyse, to train, and to discuss about cultural sector. It is especially focused on the State's action in culture.

Observa Cultura, OC

<http://observacultura.org.mx/>

A civil association focused on culture's right. It is intended to collaborate in the construction of cultural policies.

Ibero-American Observatory of Social Culture and Development (Spanish initials: OICyDS)

http://www.culturaydesarrollo.org.ar/1.ob_nosotros_a.html

Located in Argentina, this entity aims to promote the research, the documentation, and the dissemination of specialised information in the cultural sector.

The österreichische kulturdokumentation - internationales archiv für kulturanalysen

<http://www.kulturdokumentation.org/eversion/indexframe.html>

A cultural research and documentation centre headquartered in Austria. The institution documents, analyses, and publishes national, European and international information on cultural development, cultural policies, and research works based on the sector.

Aragonese Observatory of Art in the Public Sphere (Spanish initials: OAAEP)

<http://www.unizar.es/oaep/>

The Aragonese Observatory of Art in the Public Sphere is an interdisciplinary group of researchers who study the public impact of a wide variety of artistic demonstrations.

Ecuadoran Observatory of Cultural Management and Policies (Spanish initials: OEGPC)

<http://oegpc.flacsoandes.org/>

Its objective is the monitoring and assessment of cultural management, of the application of the legislation in force, and of the exercise of cultural rights in Ecuador. It also acts as an adviser and organises spaces of intercultural reflection and dialogue.

The proliferation of observatories distinguished by Schuster still exists. They are playing an outstanding role in the development of cultural policies and are consolidated as a privileged figure, both by States and the civil society, in the creation of a space which studies and promotes the discussion on the sector.

The diversity of observatories with respect to the places on which they depend, the area they observe, the tools they used, and their territory seems to be an advantage of the flexibility rather than the concept of observatory itself. The common point is found in the mediator role shared in some way. As said above, they generally tend to not provide data, but to process and to analyse them, and most observatories have their own means, either virtual or physical, to promote and to discuss the issues analysed.

However, this diversity is an advantage which is not sufficiently shared. Combined projects or links between

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observatories were not found in the analysis. An interesting challenge could be the promotion of a greater interchange of monitoring methodologies and instruments, which could be very positive, particularly those models successfully contributing to cultural policies. For this purpose, the standardisation and comparability of data is crucial. The standardisation of the information provided, or at least some of its instruments, could be a fundamental contribution for the public cultural policy, as compared studies could be generated and the good practices of cultural developing states could be better identified.

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