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## Original Article

# Cultural entrepreneur articulating animation in a cultural production company: a case study in the light of Stuart Hall reception theory

O empreendedor cultural articulando a animação numa produtora cultural: um estudo de caso à luz da teoria da recepção de Stuart Hall

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This study aims to understand how cultural entrepreneurs articulate animation production in a cultural company based in Pernambuco, Brazil, using Stuart Hall's Reception Theory as the analytical framework.

**Design/methodology/approach:** A qualitative, inductive case study was conducted at Mr. Plot, an animation production company. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis and were processed using content analysis and Atlas Ti software.

**Findings:** The findings reveal that cultural entrepreneurs strategically encode discourses to meet audience demands, leveraging technological infrastructure and human resources. Public policy support was critical to the company's consolidation in the national audiovisual market, with "Mundo Bitá" emerging as a cultural product of notable impact.

**Practical implications:** The study highlights the importance of aligning creativity, innovation, and management practices to strengthen cultural enterprises. It also underscores the role of public policies in promoting the sustainability and expansion of the creative sector, illustrating the potential of animation as a tool for preserving cultural heritage and engaging contemporary audiences.

**Originality/value:** By applying Reception Theory to the context of animation production, the study offers new insights into how cultural practices are strategically articulated with business strategies, contributing to the advancement of research in cultural entrepreneurship within the creative economy.

**Keywords:** Cultural Entrepreneurship; Cultural studies; Reception Theory; Animation

## RESUMO

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**Objetivo:** Este estudo visa compreender como empreendedores culturais articulam a produção de animação em uma produtora cultural sediada em Pernambuco, Brasil, utilizando a Teoria da Recepção de Stuart Hall como referencial analítico.

**Desenho/metodologia/abordagem:** Um estudo de caso qualitativo e indutivo foi conduzido na Mr. Plot, uma produtora de animação. Os dados foram coletados por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas e análise documental, e processados por meio de análise de conteúdo e do software Atlas Ti.

**Constatações:** Os resultados revelam que empreendedores culturais codificam discursos estrategicamente para atender às demandas do público, alavancando infraestrutura tecnológica e recursos humanos. O apoio de políticas públicas foi fundamental para a consolidação da empresa no mercado audiovisual nacional, com “Mundo Bitá” emergindo como um produto cultural de notável impacto.

**Implicações práticas:** O estudo destaca a importância de alinhar criatividade, inovação e práticas de gestão para o fortalecimento de empreendimentos culturais. Também destaca o papel das políticas públicas na promoção da sustentabilidade e expansão do setor criativo, ilustrando o potencial da animação como ferramenta para a preservação do patrimônio cultural e o engajamento do público contemporâneo.

**Originalidade/valor:** Ao aplicar a Teoria da Recepção ao contexto da produção de animação, o estudo oferece novos insights sobre como as práticas culturais se articulam estrategicamente com as estratégias de negócios, contribuindo para o avanço da pesquisa em empreendedorismo cultural na economia criativa.

**Palavras-chave:** Empreendedorismo Cultural; Estudos culturais; Teoria da Recepção; Animação

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization, cultural entrepreneurs began using information and communication technologies to encourage interaction between different cultural traditions (hybridism), leading to the rise of hybrid cultures. Although often seen as a threat to national identity, this process can also be interpreted as a mechanism for cultural updating, social reorganization, and the diffusion of innovations (Medeiros & Medeiros, 2019; Ferreira, Teixeira, & Piqué, 2023; Santos, 2021). Thus, cultural hybridism must be analyzed under the aegis of a dynamic, relational perspective (Silva et al., 2020; Ávila & Davel, 2023).

Proponents of cultural studies criticize the focus on communication as mere message exchange and the lack of a structured conception of social relations. Accordingly, Hall (2003) proposes Reception Theory, emphasizing that the meaning of cultural messages is constructed through interactive processes of coding and decoding, revealing symbolic disputes and power asymmetries that permeate communication.

Recent research in cultural studies enables investigations into communication and the establishment of emerging businesses, such as animation production (Gaba, 2020). Animation, derived from the Latin *animus/anima* denotes giving life to the inanimate (Mussara, 2022), and represents a complex cultural practice that combines art, technique, and production management.

Studies on animation production reveal the rise of new entrepreneurial activities, where cultural producers act as agents of innovation, articulating symbolic, technological, and human resources to create cultural products. In this context, cultural entrepreneurship is understood as the ability to transform artistic manifestations into sustainable initiatives capable of boosting markets and strengthening local identities (Ávila & Davel, 2023).

This study aims to understand the way cultural entrepreneurs articulate the production of animation in an animation production company located in the state of Pernambuco, using Stuart Hall's Reception Theory as analytical support. Based on this objective, the following research question was formulated: How do cultural entrepreneurs articulate animation production within a cultural producer in the city of Recife, Pernambuco?

The study is justified by the need to review conceptions of cultural entrepreneurship in light of innovative dynamics in audiovisual production, particularly in strategic local contexts for the creative economy. Beyond strengthening the understanding of independent cultural production, the research highlights the impact of public policies and entrepreneurial practices on preserving cultural identities and reinforcing the Brazilian audiovisual sector (Silva et al., 2020).

## 2 THEORICAL FRAMEWORK

The advent of the new times foregrounds productive processes arising from enterprise models based on creativity, knowledge, and information processing (Santos, 2021; Hurzhyi, 2022; Furtado, 2022). Thus, the use of specific knowledge in producing cultural artifacts re-signifies cultural identities and social relations (Kumar; Jena, 2020; Śledziewska et al., 2020; Włoch, 2021).

Cultural production results from symbolic creation processes permeated by perceptions, in which this work is inseparably intertwined with the way of life (Santana et al., 2023). Accordingly, culture is also conceived as a mechanism of economic and social development, rendering increasingly profitable and competitive cultural enterprises (Maranhão et al., 2023). The authors further state that cultural entrepreneurship is characterized as a continuous process, associated with the ability to identify new opportunities absorbed by individuals who explore them, breaking with the idea of an existing separation between the artist/creator and the structures of art and culture production, especially as artists increasingly need to develop their entrepreneurial skills to meet new contemporary demands.

Santana et al (2023) state that, in the context of creative production, cultural entrepreneurship incorporates personal traits and characteristics into management skills aimed at accessing and remaining in a culture-centered market. From this perspective, cultural entrepreneurs are described as agents of resource mobilization – creatively and innovatively - promoting social change and collective emancipation (Maranhão et al.; 2023).

Cultural entrepreneurs are responsible for transforming the production and flow of small-business cultural artefacts, owing to creative resources that were once the privilege of large media companies (Santos, 2021). This economic perspective of today's society opens opportunities for investigative expansion in new directions, such as questioning the structural characteristics of organizations operating within the creative economy (Castells, 2010; Joseph; Gaba, 2020).

Entrepreneurs in organizations operating within the creative economy follow the dynamics of contemporary production systems, as they have become leading actors in culture and technology (Bennett, War, & Oliveira, 2021). Within these dynamics, the cultural entrepreneur is positioned as a key agent who navigates the trade-off between mass culture and the valorization of local identity, and whose action is necessary to dynamizing cultural production (Neves & Davel, 2022).

The cultural entrepreneur, as defined by Chen et al. (2018) and Nambisan (2017), is characterized not only by setting up and managing a company in the cultural sector but also by acting as a creative agent, enabling investigation into new combinations in entrepreneurial practice focused on the symbolic value of cultural goods (Nambisan, 2017).

The actions of cultural entrepreneurs can be understood through the lens of Reception Theory, for these agents not only produce cultural artifacts but also encode discourses that will be decoded by target audiences. This perspective clarifies the symbolic flow of cultural production, highlighting entrepreneurs' role as mediators between artistic creation and the social and economic structures that permeate the cultural market (Reis & Paiva Júnior, 2017; Hall, 2003).

Reception Theory is situated within the Cultural Studies tradition, led by the scholar Stuart Hall, who urges us to recognize this approach as an institutional project from which an academic-intellectual movement of international reach emerges (Hall, 2003).

Cultural studies consolidated in the period between 1968 and 1979 emerged from a political concern and aimed at placing the most solid theoretical bases on cultural texts ranging from photojournalism to television programs, to "British romances consumed by women and the youth subcultures" (Hall, 2003 p. 11)

Such theoretical contributions enable to analyze animation production as a strategic cultural practice, mediated by entrepreneurial agents operating at the intersection of culture and market. The lens of Cultural Studies enables dialogue with the demands of social segments through complex and sophisticated theorization (Hall, 1997; Zubaran et al., 2016). Today, culture should be understood as part of the production of national, regional, ethnic, gender, and social-class identities, as identity production permeates social life, even if its greatest expansion occurs in the economic dimension (Albuquerque Júnior, 2007; Carvalho & Brito, 2024).

With support from Cultural Studies, we can analyze the editing of an animated film as a set of complex activities involving creativity and aesthetic knowledge within a production chain that is expanding in Brazilian society and worldwide. Meanwhile, the production and consumption of audiovisual content have increased in recent years due to the popularization of digital technologies (Costa & Rocha, 2022).

The growth of audiovisual consumption in Brazil is linked to technological diffusion and to symbolic struggles over the valorization of identity shaped by the adoption of globalized values (Mattelart & Neveu, 2004; Furtado, 2022). Accordingly, cultural entrepreneurs must understand the sector as leading companies, such as Disney, continually pursue strategies for product and service innovation, while others, such as Pixar and DreamWorks, focus on technology management (Ma et al., 2018).

In the audiovisual sector, animation has gained ground in today's society—whether in corporate product communication, government information campaigns, or entertainment. Animation is advantageous for advertising companies and constitutes a niche entertainment market with a broad business landscape. Accordingly, for Borges (2019), cartoon production is not limited to 2D and 3D, as there are other ways to animate, including the stop-motion format.

In this regard, animation can be understood as a cultural artifact, the result of a social construction shaped by power discourses that dominate the productive sector. From a Foucauldian perspective, animation functions as an instrument of discipline and the regulation of human life (Silva et al., 2020). Accordingly, understanding animation production as a cultural entrepreneurial practice broadens analysis of the symbolic and economic impacts of this activity in the contemporary creative economy.

### **3 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

This study aims to understand how cultural entrepreneurs articulate animation production in an animation production company in the Brazilian city of Recife,

Pernambuco. To this end, three delimitations were considered: chronological, geographical, and material. The chronological cut off considers only the current production of the company Mr. Plot—an enterprise of great representativeness for the sector—covering the period from its foundation to its current phase. In turn, the geographical delimitation concerns examining animation production practices by this producer in Recife, the capital of Pernambuco. Finally, the material delimitation consists of investigating its production in time and space (Medeiros & Medeiros, 2019).

This is a qualitative, descriptive study, justified by the need to capture the complexity of cultural phenomena in their natural context, as proposed by Creswell (2010) and Stake (1995) in case study design. The choice of a single case study of the company Mr. Plot is due to its relevance in the national animation market, with emphasis on the cultural product “Mundo Bitá,” recognized for innovation in articulating cultural creation and media reception strategies.

The research procedures are qualitative, inductive, interpretive, and naturalistic, aiming to elucidate, in descriptive terms, a set of meanings (Creswell, 2010; Simione, 2020). As for the method, the study consists of describing a single case characterized by an in depth understanding of the context of the producer Mr. Plot, which creates the animation Mundo Bitá (Simione, 2020; Strong & Teixeira, 2022).

The study's corpus comprised secondary and primary data. For secondary data, we analyzed articles, theses, and dissertations with information on cultural entrepreneurs and the Pernambuco production company Mr. Plot. Besides, we also examined mass communication documents such as newspapers, radio programs, television, and interviews with producers on YouTube, including the interview with Chaps Melo for EL PAÍS TV.

Interviews were conducted between August and October 2024, each lasting on average 45 to 60 minutes, being recorded and fully transcribed for analysis. We used a semi structured interview guide based on the research protocol, composed of open questions about production practices, market strategies, and public perception.



Precautions such as confidentiality in the use and presentation of collected data, triangulation, objectivity and clarity in questionnaire items, and the quality of respondents' answers were also observed (Varshosaz et al., 2005; Cárdenas et al., 2018).

Methodological triangulation involved cross checking information from three sources—company institutional documents, interviews with cultural agents, and media content analysis—thereby strengthening the validity of the results (Yin, 2015).

### **3.1 Data analysis and interpretation**

The corpus of the study was examined using the method of content analysis, following Bardin (1977) and the process of structuring units of meaning. The contents were organized into three phases: (i) pre analysis, in which the data were systematized to support subsequent analytic operations and to select the documents submitted to analysis; (ii) exploration of the material, during which readings were conducted to obtain a general perception of the data and to reflect on their overall meanings; and (iii) treatment of the results, at which time the results were interpreted (Bardin, 2011).

We did not restrict ourselves to content analysis, in line with Hall's admonition (2003) that researchers should go beyond clues emerging from content analysis to recognize that the discursive form of the message, from the standpoint of circulation, holds a privileged position in communicative exchange, and that the moments of 'coding' and 'decoding' are determined yet 'relatively autonomous' within the communicative process as a whole. Following Hall (2003), discourse analysis was used as an inspiration for interpreting the data. According to Pereira and Lages (2023), discourse analysis is premised on making sense of the world through language, encompassing both free speech and as subjected saying—fundamental aspects for understanding the discursive dynamics present in the object of study.

Atlas.ti 9 software was used to support data coding by organizing units of meaning into thematic categories. Co occurrence reports of codes, term frequency analyses, and networks of relationships between categories were produced, which



avored the systematic analysis of discourses and the visualization of connections among the findings (Souza Neto et al., 2019).

### **3.2 The universe of Mr. Plot Productions Ltd**

Mr. Plot Produções Ltda. has four partner administrators who pursue a diverse set of business activities. Prior to setting up Mr. Plot, the entrepreneurs ran a technology company called Fourth Dimension, which emerged at the Porto Digital incubator with the aim of providing systems and web development services (Mota, 2016).

In 2010, the entrepreneurs identified a promising opportunity with the emergence of tablets: the initial idea was to create an interactive children's e book starring Bitá—a drawing inspired by circus presenters, designed by one of the partners for his daughter. Leveraging the synergy children were showing with the device and the absence of captivating characters to lead the stories, the partners decided to create Mr. Plot as a business unit. In Mr. Plot's studios, the children's entertainment franchise of musical content, "Mundo Bitá," was born.

The Recife based ("Recifense") animated series "Mundo Bitá" has consolidated itself in the children's market, despite competition in the children's audiovisual market from series such as "Peppa Pig" and "the Powerpuff Girls" (Mota, 2016; Saint & Brito, 2018). The series depicts themes for children—nature preservation, social inclusion, equal rights, family, feelings, and hygiene. Through educational and playful journeys, the series engages its audience's imagination with musical stories full of colors and rhythms.

The main characters are Bitá, who loves traveling, exploring new planets, meeting new people, and stimulating everyone's imagination so that the universe is always more interesting. Dan, a questioner who is always unraveling mysteries, stands out in mathematics and science at school, likes studying insects and understanding how they live, loves football, and plays drums. Tito, who is passionate about dinosaurs, brave and affectionate, and has companions such as the dog Potato and the doll Billy, in addition to his guitar. Finally, Lila is the class prefect, who likes playing with her doll,

loves music, and plays the tambourine (Santo & Brito, 2018). The animation is present on several streaming platforms and also reaches the public through product licensing.

The company seeks to engage its fans, strengthening relationships and growth (Mundo Bitá, 2022). Mr. Plot works more specifically with cultural values historically built by society and expressed through children's play in its compositions, addressing social relationships by teaching children to fulfill their obligations (Perezini & Meireles, 2022). It is present on channels such as HBO Max, Cartoonito, PlayKids, Netflix, Amazon Prime, Sky Play, Net Now, Spotify, and Deezer. The company performs live shows and has more than 30 licensed partners, surpassing 4 million products sold—among toys, accessories, food, clothing, and books—with an active schedule of releases such as Grendene sandals, C&A clothing, Argo dinosaur plush toys, and hygiene products from Fun and View Cosmetics (Bitá, 2022).

"Mundo Bitá" has clips recorded in Spanish and European Portuguese, showing that the production overcomes communication barriers beyond the country of origin. Children can also listen to Brazilian songs on Rádio Bitá, a project created in 2022, when "Mundo Bitá" was invited to join the celebrations of Caetano Veloso's 80th birthday. Thus, "Rádio Bitá, Especial Caetano Veloso 80 years old" emerged, bringing together four songs by the artist (Bitá, 2022).

In 2023, at the 30th Prize for Brazilian Music, dedicated to celebrating the country's musical production, Mr. Plot won the Brazilian music award in the special category, Children's Release, with the production "Mundo Bitá é Joy," produced by composers Chaps Melo, Vinicius Guerra, and Walman Filho (Forbes, 2023). The award recognized traditional artists and industry newcomers. Thus, the company appeared among winners alongside names such as Erasmo Carlos, Martinho da Vila, Marília Mendonça, and other artists awarded in other categories.

## **4 ARTICULATION OF THE CULTURAL PRODUCTION PROCESS IN AN ANIMATION PRODUCTION COMPANY IN PERNAMBUCO**

Below, we present the main results of the research, organized into four thematic categories: (i) public policies and market expansion; (ii) challenges of animation production in Brazil; (iii) market strategies and partnerships; and (iv) the role of the cultural entrepreneur.

The animation industry has undergone changes in recent years as a reflection of the global market (Gatti Junior et al., 2014; Costa, 2022). In Brazil, cultural entrepreneurs' access to the means of production for animated films has been promoted by technology diffusion and the expansion of government incentives in the audiovisual segment since the resumption of production in the mid 1990s (Machado & Fischer, 2017).

The second thematic category addresses the challenges of animation production in Brazil, especially those of a technological, economic, and institutional nature, as reported by the interviewees.

The use of computers in animation diversified production and led to productive innovations, such as the two dimensional (2D) production system, which predominated until the release of Pixar's Toy Story in 1995. At that point, the industry shifted toward intensive use of computer generated images, resulting in 3D animations that provide a sense of depth but carry high production costs (Gatti Junior et al., 2014).

To understand the specific challenges of animation production in Pernambuco, it is necessary to consider the sector's history in the state. Buccini (2021) states that the first animation produced there may have been made in the late 1960s, with *A Luta* (1968) by director Sérgio Bezerra Pinheiro. However, as there is no record of this production, the author considers the beginning of animated cinema in the state to have occurred in the early 1970s, with the emergence of the Super 8 Cycle of Recife (PE), which resulted in 14 animations. To the present day, cultural and technological transformations—such as the popularization of closed (subscription) TV—have impacted animation production, as reported by interviewees E2 and E1:

So, globalization has hurt and has long hurt weaker countries that can no longer support their cultural identity. I'm not saying that you need to have money for this, because there are small countries that can value their artistic production, cinema, theater and music much more. Countries like Uruguay, Cuba, small countries in Europe, they manage to stand up to this great dragon, called the Hollywood industry, and now they have new technologies, Netflix that has also been invading. It had something very interesting in the years 2006, if I'm not mistaken, is that it began to have legislation obliging it to have quota for national production. That was very important. So you're going to have Netflix, you're going to have a pay-per-subscription TV, fine, but you're going to have to let 30% of the national production show up here on your channel, so you can somehow encourage it. And this stimulates not only us consumers, but producers as well, producers of animation and live action in general [E2, p. 6].

Following a logic different from the feature length production sector, the pay TV law introduced a market reserve through national public policy at a time when domestic production could not meet the government generated demand. During this period, animation companies in Recife began to take shape and develop, 'surfing the wave' of a rising market, as E1's account illustrates and E2 reports below.

We realized that it entered the South of positive waves, because Brazil was turning to culture, giving importance to this segment and making investments for it to mature in Brazil in general. So, we were benefited by some things of this, because it entered Discovery Kids in 2013, I forgot to comment, also because the government had sanctioned a law that required international closed companies a minimum quota to display Brazilian content, it was like a quota system, which said you have 24 hours of programming, but you need to display at least an hour and a half of Brazilian content. And 10 years ago, 11 years ago, incredible as it may seem, the production of animation in Brazil was even smaller than it is today, although today it is not so strong worldwide, it is already beginning to be, and Mundo Bita is contributing to this, but 10, 11 years ago had very little quality thing for children made in Brazil. So, when I showed the animation clips, the guy did it I want.

You have how many. I said, boy, we're going to do 10. He said: I want everyone, everyone you have, I want. It was a very positive surprise for us, because for him it was also necessary (E1, p. 4).

Interviewees E2 and E1 report that challenges related to animation production in Brazil and Pernambuco were minimized by a public policy that created a market reserve and guaranteed exhibition for animation producers holding a certain amount of production. To achieve this, it was necessary to sell local productions to international distributors, reinforcing the status quo of the big players, who still decide what should be shown to the national public.

Gatti Junior et al. (2014) seek to understand how national producers can create, produce, and display their content on pay TV in a market historically dominated by international players. The authors note that, in 2008, there were only 38 Brazilian companies competing with 1,211 foreign animation studios—illustrating the extent to which the national market had been dominated by foreign cultural productions and helping explain the rationale for such public policy.

In the previous account, interviewee E2 reports perceiving this disparity in the competition to which audiovisual production companies are subject. E1, however, claims that in the animation production sector there is effectively no competition, as the market provides enough audience for any type of content—so a fan will not fail to watch one animation because another exists, as his account also notes.

In this market of creative economy, culture, cartoon or even music, I do not consider an artist, another child artist a competitor. I think there are opportunities for various child artists and each one has to have their own competence and their own value to win over their audience. I like to joke, for example, that those who listen to Caetano Veloso, do not hate Gilberto Gil not. He may like Caetano Veloso, he may like Gil, one likes one more, another likes another more. Sometimes the guy likes Caetano a little more at a time in his life, then he likes Gilberto more and then vice versa. He even wants the two of them to sing together. So you can't consider Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso enemies or competitors. They are even friends and add their strength to reach further [E1, p. 12].

E1's view contradicts some findings on competition in the animation production sector by Gatti Junior et al. (2014, p. 461), who state that “the production of animations for

cinema suffers greatly from competition from US production.” Gatti Junior and Marietto (2014) add that until mid-2006–2007, Brazil was not in a position to produce animations at prices and speeds compatible with international standards, as most productions shown on open and pay-TV were imported—mainly from studios in the United States and Canada. However, in a subsequent account, interviewee E2 corroborates Gatti Junior & Marietto (2014) and provides clues for understanding E1’s positioning.

Pernambuco has this somewhat more artistic look of the production of animation cinema. Some people are succeeding, some companies are succeeding in piercing the bubbles and giving a more commercial bias. And that's very good, Mr. Plot and Viu Cine mostly. They're getting their products to go farther, such as social media access, Twitter, YouTube, and private TV, and getting paid, so that generates royalties and contracts.

So that's very important. As a rule, most producers and directors of animation of Pernambuco are still within a more artistic context of doing work, of doing animation works to participate in festivals and public TV exhibitions [E2].”

E2’s narrative indicates productive exceptions that mitigate the negative impacts of globalization-driven competition, which helps explain E1’s account, as his company is among those that gained market space. E2, however, emphasizes an artistic orientation that may distort a managerial view and act as an obstructive lens for market analysis.

It remains unclear whether E1’s narrative—presenting his venture as an exception to competition—is borne out, or whether his artistic vision undercuts his analysis. In another passage, however, E1 links these issues to partnerships his company signed with major market players, a strategy that may have secured a comfortable market position, as the following account suggests.

So, we realized to expand much more the way of engagement of communication and delivery for the fans. At that exact moment, we presented this content that was not yet complete, had three or four clips, for some players. One of them was Sony Music, which was a gigantic international record label, an international major and Discovery Kids, which is also a closed-channel international TV. For our happiness, the two found the content very interesting and said they wanted it; Sony, to release the DVD and distribute on streaming and audio platforms, Spotify, Deezer, i.e. one more platform, another distribution, another way to communicate and deliver the content. So we released the DVD and went on Spotify, Deezer, iTunes with Sony and the clips were passed on closed TV, Discovery Kids channel between commercials because the program and the clips have a small duration and we found that this content, if it was standardized, if it had the same minutiae, it could be considered as TV content [E1, p. 3].

E1's report demonstrates cultural entrepreneurs' ability to spot animation-market opportunities: choosing the right moment to form key partnerships to expand market reach while addressing a central sector challenge—distribution and its slow financial return—also noted by Buccini (2021).

Financial returns from distribution are typically slow because licensing—one of studios' main revenue sources—yields results only after the production-exhibition-acceptance cycle is complete, which can take more than two years (Machado & Fischer, 2017). Accordingly, national producers must pursue parallel activities to maintain financial sustainability, such as advertising campaigns and commercial work.

#### **4.1 Narratives of audiovisual producers**

Pernambuco's audiovisual production has a unique role in current Brazilian culture. Despite relying largely on some state and national public promotion policies, this production has gained market space and remained on an upward trajectory since the Retomada period, with Perfumed Ball in 1997 (Nogueira, 2014).



The functioning of contemporary economic systems in which audiovisual artifact production is embedded depends on a structured set of shared beliefs and cultural provisions incorporated by the agents and institutions that promote engagement in the development of cultural products (Carvalho & Brito, 2024). In this logic, the cultural producer working in Pernambuco articulates discourses that are perceived and valued by their collaborative network.

Thus, the producer emerges as an agent who plans, designs, and coordinates productive factors to enable audiovisual creation—among them, cartoon production—according to artistic, social, political, and economic criteria established and valued by the community. Consequently, these activities contribute to developing the creative industry's potential and recognize the sector as strategic within local productive ecosystems (Paiva Júnior et al., 2019).

The cultural entrepreneurial ecosystem has the potential to generate cultural values, as it is formed by actors and institutions operating within social networks that validate and sustain the productive arrangement (Laddha, 2023). For the author, this entrepreneurial ecosystem aligns with economic development and the maintenance of entrepreneurial activities by contributing to wealth and employment generation, enhancing innovative processes, and advancing the social sphere.

Animation in Pernambuco operates within an audiovisual ecosystem mediated by cultural entrepreneurs. Accordingly, the sector is characterized by coordination around production, advances in the quality of independent films, and public policies that secure external resources for cultural producers (Paiva Júnior et al., 2019; Costa, 2022).

Bier & Gentleman (2015) analyze fundraising methods used by cultural enterprises in Brazil, showing that the Rouanet Law stands as the main funding source and that crowdfunding has emerged as an alternative amid the bureaucracy of the former. The authors also note that the Brazilian State seeks regulatory mechanisms to promote culture—such as the National Plan of Culture, the National System of Culture, and the Rouanet Law—to embody public policy directed at emerging demands in

the Brazilian cultural sector (Bier & Gentleman, 2015). This is also observed in the animation production sector, as illustrated by E2:

I think there's promotion for film editors, you know? But I believe three areas are still missing—actually, one in particular: training. The government needs to promote more professionals in the field through technical school courses. It's still very small, very limited, even though it's good and voluntary. Often, it happens by coincidence—you have a neighbor who's animating, takes a course, and you join in, then start working with animation. This is mostly thanks to something half involuntary. We needed stimulus from the start—in schools, in the business environment, and in the labor market—because this is an area that will generate many jobs in the future. Animation is everywhere: on cell phone screens, in wedding videos, birthday videos—everything needs animation nowadays. So, it's a market that could be better nurtured through foundational training. Businesses also need stronger incentives, like tax breaks or other forms of support for this important industry. Companies in other countries receive significant public support, but in Brazil, they receive none.

There's little tax or economic incentive, and limited access to public banks for equipment purchases. Incentives exist for executing projects and promoting distribution, but material often gets stuck with no place to be shown. We need to guarantee spaces—cinemas and other environments—to exhibit this work [E2, p. 7].

One very positive aspect in the state is Funcultura, the state government program that supports culture in general, with audiovisual particularly well managed—at least during the PT and PSDB State governments, especially under Eduardo Campos. They took good care of culture. I have political differences with the Campos team, but we can't fail to acknowledge and praise their attention to culture, especially audiovisual, which made Pernambuco cinema one of the strongest in the country. This is thanks to the law we have here. It's common to go to São Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul, Minas, and hear admiration for Funcultura [E3, p. 4].

The accounts of E3 and E2 corroborate Nogueira (2014), who notes that the government has invested timidly in the audiovisual sector through public notices

promoting the selection and financing of cultural projects. Their reports also reinforce narratives justifying such investments—such as cultural artifacts gaining prominence in today's society—and compare local investments with those in developed countries.

Fischer & Machado (2017) argue that these discourses have influenced certain governments, as leaders recognize the sector's relevance for cultural expression and begin investing in structuring policies to encourage animation industries. The authors note that the global animated content market generates around \$242.92 billion annually.

Market leadership in content production and consumption is dominated by the United States, followed by emerging economies like India and Korea, which position themselves as outsourcing hubs offering lower labor costs than European countries (Fischer & Machado, 2017). In E1's account, the entrepreneur used Brazilian government incentives to produce his first animation, supplementing them with personal resources. Among sustainability strategies, forming strategic partnerships with specialized studios stands out, as shown in E1's report:

And since 2015, in the production of this short film, we found a partner in Rio—Backers Studio, a studio with long experience in dramaturgy, including producing Brazilian versions of Pixar and Disney films. So, we were working with the highest quality reference, and the team embraced the project—even in the first production, when we had only a small amount of money from the Funcultura fund we had approved [E1, p. 15].

E1's narrative shows that beyond financial resources, strategic partnerships are indispensable for animation production in Pernambuco. By contracting Backers Studio—a company experienced in animation dramaturgy—the entrepreneur demonstrates resource optimization and a concern for quality, which can influence audience reception. The studio's leadership believed in E1's project and agreed to collaborate, even though his company was not yet financially structured:

We were working with the highest quality reference, and the team accepted the project—even in the first production, when we had only a small amount of money from the Funcultura fund. We allocated a value for voice work without knowing market rates. When we spoke to the team in Rio, they said: ‘My friend, this value is totally out of the market, but we’ll do it to help.’ And we’ve been with them ever since [E1, p. 15].

Cultural entrepreneurs strive to make sense of their production despite limited resources, considering the cultural and linguistic diversity of their audience. This aligns with Stuart Hall’s reception theory, which emphasizes audience diversity and cultural practices in producing and interpreting cultural works (Hall, 1997, 2003).

Public resources are essential for sustaining small animation enterprises. Yet, obtaining them remains a challenge for new producers. Gatti Junior & Marietto (2017) examine this through the case of TV Penguin, which operationalized the production and commercialization of Peixonauta, achieving international quality and overcoming market barriers. The authors highlight entrepreneurs’ focus on project management, creative strategies, and navigating governmental and market factors in their context (Gatti Junior & Marietto, 2017).

Entrepreneurs acknowledge financial limitations and seek creative alternatives to ensure quality and audience understanding. This reinforces Hall (2003), who underscores the importance of considering contextual constraints in producing and receiving cultural products. These findings highlight the critical role of cultural entrepreneurs in building dynamic production arrangements by integrating market strategies, public policies, and symbolic practices within the animation ecosystem.

## 5 FINAL REMARKS

The study’s findings show that Mr. Plot’s cultural entrepreneurs articulate animation production through the strategic combination of technological resources, public policies, and market partnerships, consolidating innovative practices in Pernambuco’s

audiovisual sector. Brazilian animation gained greater prominence from the 2000s with the popularization of computers and reduced production costs, expanding into shorts, feature films, television series, advertising, and mobile media. In Recife, the capital of the Brazilian State of Pernambuco, the first attempt to produce animated series occurred in the early 2000s, achieving success only in 2013 with the consolidation of Mr. Plot.

Mr. Plot initially shifted its focus and expanded its market through the strategic articulation of its cultural entrepreneurs, as highlighted by the authors. The influence of global players, freelance professionals, and leaders of small independent studios involved in Pernambuco's animation production also shaped regional dynamics, complemented by cultural promotion policies.

Mr. Plot's trajectory represents an exception in the animated entertainment market. After initially relying on public resources to make its productions viable, the company capitalized on its trajectory and assumed a leading role in national animation production.

Animation is configured as the art of movement, expressing imagery through fictitious images. Its relevance in the creative industry lies precisely at the intersection of artistic practice and economic activity.

The actions of cultural entrepreneurs are fundamental to strengthening and expanding animation producers by articulating and disseminating discourses aligned with market demands while interpreting and incorporating social expectations into their creations. Future research should deepen the analysis of the cultural entrepreneur's role in the integrated circuit of production, distribution, and consumption of animated content, particularly in the context of mediations promoted by digital technologies.

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3. Development of theoretical propositions (theoretical work)	✓	✓	
4. Theoretical foundation / Literature review	✓	✓	
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6. Data collection	✓		
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9. Critical revision of the manuscript		✓	✓
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