Cultural Synthesizism Updated: Policy Initiatives and Shifts Related to the Arts and Cultural Nonprofit Sector in Colombia

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Colombia's nonprofit arts and cultural sector remains "diverse, immense, and brilliant" (Appe, 2007) and in the last almost 10 years, continues to be an economic driver and critical component to cultural dialogue and the building of a culture of peace in Colombia. In my 2007 piece, I presented *cultural synthesizism*, which hinged on the State being responsive to the cultural diversity in Colombia and addressing the challenges of information flow and availability within the sector.

Government continues policy initiatives to engage in data collection about the arts and cultural sector and the nonprofit sector more generally to address the challenges of information flow and availability in Colombia. In 2007, I wrote about the Network of Cooperation for Development which was housed in Bogotá's Mayor's office and sought to "map" private and public sectors in the capital city by collecting data and registering nonprofit organizations. The Network is now defunct, however, the interest in collecting data and information about the nonprofit sector remains on the policy agenda. The most recent effort is the 2012 Decree No. 019, which introduced a new registration process and new registry called the Registry of Enterprise and Social (RUES, http://www.rues.org.co), in which arts and cultural nonprofits are to be included. It is intended to be an efficient way to give the State and the public information on business, contractors, cooperatives, and nonprofit organizations.

Over the last five years, I have examined policy tools like Colombia's RUES and their implications on the nonprofit sector and policy sub-sectors like arts and culture. Government registries of nonprofits organizations, also called government-driven databases of nonprofits and government information systems of nonprofits, are tools to 'map' civil society. These tools gather, collate, and publish information on civil society. I have argued that who (e.g., research communities, scholars, donor institutions, governments, and nonprofit organizations themselves) is mapping or collecting data on nonprofits is important and begs questioning as it influences what is included and excluded (Appe 2011; 2012; 2013). Other scholars have gone further by arguing that not only *the who* in mapping matters, rather that *the why* we are mapping or collecting data should be asked (Nickel & Eikenberry 2016). These criticisms have pulled from James Scott's scholarship on 'maps of legibility'. That is, mapping or registration makes (certain) artifacts or ideas *legible*, however, it offers only a portion of reality as it is through the lens of the "official observer" (Scott 1998, p. 4). Mapping and registering nonprofit organizations are means in which to make "organizations more legible, more visible, and more governable" (Nickel & Eikenberry 2016, p. 397). Thereby, mapping by government in particular becomes a type of regulatory tool. Thus, for the arts and cultural nonprofit sector in diverse contexts—from the U.S. to India to Colombia— government mappings and registries might have ramifications that limit freedoms and promote censorship. Undoubtedly, a global debate continues about state-nonprofit

relations related to data collection, registration, and State intervention in the nonprofit sector more generally.

As my 2007 piece explained, the arts and cultural sector has an important role to play in Colombia given the country's violence and its more than 50-year conflict. Ensuring freedoms of expression and active civil society participation must be a priority in Colombia. Indeed, a policy shift that will affect the arts and cultural sector and nonprofit organizations generally in Colombia is the peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) which began in 2012 (Isacson 2014; Zambrano and Gómez 2013). The current challenge for civil society—and I would argue for the arts and cultural sector in particular—in Colombia is carving out its role in the pending peace process (Actalliance 2013). The transition to peace will require the expertise and experience of civil society; the arts and cultural sector should be at the forefront.

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