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Public libraries, cultural heritage and government action: possible interlocutions

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The present work addresses the historical trajectory of the concept of cultural heritage, discusses the processes of institutionalization of heritage in the light of contemporary theorists in the area, and emphasizes the role of public libraries as cultural and heritage institutions and their impact on the construction of a more fair and egalitarian society. Objective: The research sought to highlight the multifaceted relationship between public libraries, cultural heritage, and government action, observing how these three elements interconnect and influence each other. Methodology: with a qualitative approach, the research was based on a narrative literature review on the topic in question. Results: Based on news published in the media about the dismantling of libraries and considering the relationships that exist between the institutionalization of cultural heritage and government action, it is concluded that public libraries are part of a set of entities responsible for safeguarding a significant portion of national culture, are susceptible to government changes in terms of their management and maintenance, and can be used as instruments for the implementation of political, economic, and social ideals, supporting governance strategies. Conclusion: Based on the research results, it is necessary to: 1) create legal mechanisms to protect public libraries, establishing responsibilities for decisions that affect the fate of collections and libraries; 2) definition, via legislation, of what constitutes Brazilian documentary heritage, highlighting the importance of public libraries in their preservation and maintenance.

KEYWORDS

Public libraries. Cultural heritage. Documentary heritage. Governance.

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Bibliotecas públicas, patrimônio cultural e atuação governamental: interlocuções possíveis

RESUMO

Introdução: O presente trabalho aborda a trajetória histórica do conceito de patrimônio cultural, discorre sobre os processos de institucionalização do patrimônio à luz de teóricos contemporâneos da área e enfatiza o papel das bibliotecas públicas enquanto instituições culturais e patrimoniais e seu impacto na construção de uma sociedade mais justa e igualitária. Objetivo: a pesquisa buscou evidenciar a relação multifacetada entre bibliotecas públicas, patrimônio cultural e atuação governamental, observando como esses três elementos se interconectam e influenciam mutuamente. Metodologia: de abordagem qualitativa, a pesquisa baseou-se em uma revisão de literatura narrativa sobre a temática em questão. Resultados: A partir de notícias veiculadas na mídia sobre o desmonte de

| 1

bibliotecas e levando em consideração as relações existentes entre a institucionalização do patrimônio cultural e a atuação governamental, conclui-se que as bibliotecas públicas integram um conjunto de entidades responsáveis pela salvaguarda de uma parcela significativa da cultura nacional, estão suscetíveis às mudanças de governo no que tange à sua gestão e manutenção, e podem ser utilizadas como instrumentos para a efetivação de ideais políticos, econômicos e sociais, dando suporte a estratégias de governabilidade. Conclusão: a partir dos resultados da pesquisa, aponta-se a necessidade de: 1) criação de mecanismos legais de proteção às bibliotecas públicas, estabelecendo responsabilidades sobre decisões que interfiram no destino de acervos e bibliotecas; 2) definição, via legislação, do que constitui o patrimônio documental brasileiro, evidenciando a importância das bibliotecas públicas na sua preservação e manutenção.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE
Bibliotecas públicas. Patrimônio cultural. Patrimônio documental. Governabilidade.

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| 2

1 INTRODUCTION

Public libraries serve as essential centers of knowledge, supporting education, disseminating culture, and fostering citizenship. As guardians of accumulated knowledge and catalysts for the pursuit of knowledge, these institutions have surpassed their primary function of storing documents, evolving into spaces for social interaction, information access, and cultural heritage preservation. In this context, the relationship between public libraries, cultural heritage, and government action is a topic of significant relevance. It reflects the historical importance of these institutions and the commitment of public authorities to promoting education, culture, and social inclusion.

Public libraries have a unique role in preserving cultural heritage. As preservers of cultural heritage and diversity, these institutions house collections of local authors, regional documentation, old books, periodicals, audiovisual material, and other information resources.

Government action plays a crucial role in preserving and fostering these spaces of knowledge. Public investment in libraries strengthens a nation's cultural infrastructure and promotes democratized access to education and information. Effective funding, planning, and sustainable management policies are essential to ensuring that public libraries can fulfill their mission comprehensively.

This article explores the relationship between public libraries, cultural heritage, and government action. It highlights the interconnection and influence of these three elements. By understanding the central role of public libraries as custodians of documentary heritage and the importance of government policies for their sustainability, we can enrich the dialogue on the preservation of knowledge and the promotion of culture in a constantly changing world.

The research has a qualitative approach and is based on a literature review to establish the theoretical framework on the subject. The following sections present the evolution of the concept of cultural heritage and the institutionalization of heritage, as well as the relationship between cultural heritage and government action. Public libraries are considered integral elements of the nation's heritage.

2 THE CONCEPT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

The term 'patrimony' originally referred to the inheritance of a family that is passed down through generations. Funari and Pelegrini (2009) highlight the meanings of the term 'heritage' in ancient Rome. In ancient Roman law, 'heritage' referred to all the private property belonging to the father of the family (the pater or pater familias). This included everything from movable and immovable property to animals, slaves, and even his wife and children. In this sense, 'heritage' was associated with individual and private property. It was not identified as something representative of the public good or of the community. On the contrary, it was focused exclusively on perpetuating family property.

The concept of cultural heritage is closely tied to France's economic and social history, particularly the French Revolution of 1789. However, the concept of heritage had already been evolving before this landmark event due to societal transformations. The notion of aristocratic heritage, characteristic of classical antiquity, expanded, and religious value was added to it during the transition to the Middle Ages. This period was marked by the strong influence of the Catholic Church on the social, economic, political, and cultural life of communities. During

this period, heritage came to represent not only a family legacy based on an individual conception but also something collective, such as the veneration of saints, the celebration of miracles, the appreciation of relics, and the construction of monumental churches. These elements make up religious heritage.

It was only a few centuries later, under the humanist and Renaissance perspectives, that the contemporary concept of cultural heritage emerged. During this period, there was an appreciation for ancient objects, and the practice of collecting emerged, leading to the establishment of what was later called the Antiquarium, an idea that eventually gave rise to the concept of museums.

The traditional concept of heritage underwent a significant change with the emergence of national states, particularly after the French and industrial revolutions. These revolutions not only allowed for a departure from prevailing economic, political, and social patterns, but also established the idea that people share a common past, which may consist of ancestors, customs, traditions, or beliefs. The creation of a common present and future is enabled by this past, leading to the consolidation of the collective character necessary for the creation of citizens required by the new socio-economic model (FUNARI; PELEGRINI, 2009).

It is important to note that contemporary national states emerged from two different legal systems, which in turn generated two different conceptions of heritage. There are two legal traditions that have influenced modern law: Roman civil law and common law. The concept of patrimony in Roman civil law holds that if an asset has public value, it should be prioritized for the nation as a whole. This means that the owner no longer has exclusive control over the administration of the asset, as it becomes part of the community. The Anglo-Saxon conception favors the right to private property, meaning the owner has complete control over their property and can use it as they see fit, regardless of its cultural value to the nation.

Heritage is recognized as a concrete material asset with high symbolic and/or material value for the nation, based on two different conceptions.

In the period between World War I and World War II (1914-1945), institutions were created to administer and preserve national heritage. The emphasis on national heritage peaked during this time. The nations that established the nation-state, such as France, England, and the United States, also became empires. Additionally, the colonizers appropriated the cultural goods and wealth of the colonized, believing themselves to be the true heirs of the cultural heritage left by their ancestors. This was influenced by nationalist ideas that were prevalent during these historical events. In the modern world, heritage is influenced by two factors: the nation-state and imperialism.

However, since the 1960s, civil society has increasingly criticized and resisted these conditions. This resistance has been demonstrated through various social movements, including those advocating for women's emancipation and civil rights. In this context, the concept of heritage has evolved to encompass a broader range of meaning than previously adopted. Heritage now includes not only material goods, both movable and immovable, but also immaterial goods such as knowledge, practices, and the entire context that surrounds their materiality. It is important to consider the diversity of present in the production of these goods and their significance to the communities to which they belong. It is no longer tenable to conceive of a national heritage as a singular entity, representative of a collective, materialized in physical objects such as monuments, buildings, and artifacts. Rather, a nation's heritage

comprises a multitude of heritages from diverse communities, consisting of both tangible and intangible elements, which together form a complex web of heritage. This web, with all its heterogeneity, diversity, and particularities, represents the heritage of a nation. In this context, cultural heritage comprises various manifestations, including documentary heritage. Institutions such as libraries and archives predominantly focus on its preservation.

2.1 The institutionalization of cultural heritage

The institutionalization of heritage began in the 18th century when French public authorities took the first steps to preserve goods and monuments deemed valuable to the nation's history. This idea of a common heritage for a social group, which defines its identity, guided the establishment of public policies and the creation of government bodies dedicated to protecting cultural assets. As stated in the previous section, to effectively consolidate political projects with nationalist ideals, it was necessary to define certain strategies. One of the most important strategies was the creation of cultural identity references that aligned with the standards required by the newly created national states. This was crucial for the history of heritage institutionalization.

During the 19th century, national heritages were created, and in Brazil, the appreciation and protection of these heritages began with the modernist cultural movement, which originated from the 'Week of Modern Art' in 1922. The concept of heritage protection was realized in 1933 when then-president Getúlio Vargas declared the city of Ouro Preto (MG) a national monument in Decree No. 22.928. In 1937, Decree-Law No. 25 established the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Service (NHAHS), which later became the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute (NHAHI). This was Brazil's first federal organization dedicated to heritage preservation.

This text aims to explore how cultural institutions select and maintain a nation's cultural heritage. It compiles contributions from contemporary theorists on this topic.

In his Theory of Semiophores, Krzystof Pomian, a Polish philosopher and historian, aimed to establish a connection between the selection of material goods and the practice of collecting. This habit was common among the elite in the 18th century, leading to the formation of numerous collections that eventually gave rise to the world's first museums. According to the author, objects that have lost their original function and are no longer useful carry a meaning beyond their physicality. As these objects transition from a utilitarian state to a state of contemplation or celebration, they become semiophores, serving as material supports for ideas with high evocative power. This is why they hold value as collectors' items.

According to Pomian (1984), the selection of cultural heritage objects depends on their ability to convey meanings associated with their past, rarity, and external appearance. Pomian (1984) argues that heritage is essentially composed of objects that carry meaning, or semiophores.

Michael Pollak, a French sociologist, views heritage as a system of references that extends beyond Pomian's Semiophore Theory. The author discusses Maurice Halbwachs' 'Theory of Collective Memory' and its relation to the concepts of identity and belonging. Additionally, Pierre Nora's concept of 'places of memory' is explored, which refers to both physical and mental locations where certain memories can be relived (Pollak, 1989, 1992).

| 5

According to Pollak, the current situation highlights the negative impact of national collective memory, which tends to standardize and oppress, on minority memories. Pollak argues that the prolonged silence about the past is not a sign of forgetfulness, but rather a form of resistance by a powerless civil society against the overwhelming official discourse (POLLAK, 1989, p. 5).

Pollak's reflections on cultural heritage align with the views of Spanish anthropologist Llorenç Prats, who regards it as a social construct and invention. Prats argues that cultural heritage is constructed through discourse and legitimized to achieve specific objectives (PRATS, 1998). According to Pollak and Prats, the selection of elements for cultural heritage is never neutral or innocent, but rather intentional and strategic. It is done with the purpose of correlating ideas, values, and the social context from which it originates. In other words, the construction of a nation's cultural heritage is a deliberate process.

Prats (1998) disagrees with Krzystof Pomian's view that scarcity, loss of functionality, or nobility are characteristics that define heritage. Instead, the author argues that the criteria of 'history', 'nature', and 'genius' are the true criteria that surround the symbolic references that can potentially be considered heritage in contemporary society. These references, both material and immaterial, would truly achieve the status of cultural heritage when they are 'activated' by certain institutions, particularly those belonging to political powers through local, regional, and national governments.

Thus, heritage serves the purpose of collective identification, but it can also be used by institutions to implement their programs and symbolically legitimize their identity ideologies through the activation of collective memory.

Dominique Poulot, a French historian, agrees with Llorenç Prats' view of heritage. However, Poulot believes that not only political institutions but also economic ones, particularly through tourism, have an impact on heritage (POULOT, 2008). Prats also regards power and the economy, specifically tourism, as components of heritage. According to Prats, those with the most power institutionalize heritage. According to Poulot, constructing the history of cultural heritage properties requires establishing connections with reality and discovering the reasons that led to their selection as heritage. Blindly accepting a listed property as national heritage without critical examination is not advisable. Poulot advocates for a deconstructivist approach to heritage history, which challenges the disciplinary methods that institutionalize heritage.

3 CULTURAL HERITAGE AND GOVERNMENT ACTION

Considering the theoretical reflections presented, it can be concluded that cultural heritage is at the base of the power relations of social groups, providing the creation of their identities in the construction of the places where they live.

Places of memory are therefore "[...] ways of maintaining and recognizing the social existence of certain cultural groups that are united by a memory that gives them identity ties" (Machado, 2012, p. 3).

In this sense, there can be conflict when it comes to selecting national heritage assets, or even when it comes to valuing and recognizing assets that have already been heritage listed in other eras, privileging certain aspects that harm others, creating a "false" reflection of a

group's reality, or even creating heritage that is presumed to represent a certain group and purposely excluding other(s) that should be forgotten.

Baczko (1986) "[...] refers to the social imaginary as a potential means of controlling collective life and especially the exercise of authority and power." This idea is in line with that of Foucault (2008), when he states that power is in institutions even before it is in the society and state that house it; in other words, for the author, there is an inseparable relationship between institutions and power.

Following Foucault's line of thought, it is possible to observe cultural heritage through civil society; in other words, cultural heritage is clearly associated with societies of control and can be considered a category of thought and action, an institution that reflects the power relations of a community or a group of individuals.

Government action takes place at various levels, including through the appropriation of cultural heritage and the possibility of using its symbolic universe to achieve objectives.

> Memory, this collective operation of events and integrations of the past that we want to safeguard, is part of, as we have seen, more or less conscious attempts to define and reinforce feelings of belonging and social boundaries between collectivities of different sizes: parties, unions, churches, villages, regions, clans, families, nations, etc. Reference to the past serves to maintain the cohesion of the groups and institutions that make up a society, to define their respective place, their complementarity, but also the irreducible oppositions. Maintaining internal cohesion and defending the boundaries of what a group has in common, [...] these are the two essential functions of common memory. This means providing a framework of references and points of reference (Pollak, 1989, p. 9).

It can therefore be deduced that the memory that unites social groups with other memories is both unifying and excluding while it finds common elements to reinforce the feeling of belonging and therefore contributes to the constitution of identity, it excludes and ignores elements that may contradict the national identity, making it so that

> [...] inequalities "disappear" because they reject everything that does not correspond to or fit in with national, state and municipal identities, imagined on elitist principles and which potentiate in everyday life the exclusion already contained in the memory that unites them. (Machado, 2012, p. 6).

On the other hand, the role of the state is fundamental within the organization of national and official memory for the maintenance of the "invented" collective identity, as it intentionally selects the framework of references that should be celebrated by official memory, thus effecting a strategic creation of memory:

> The analysis of the vicissitudes of heritage is fully included in the scope of a new political awareness, not only in the case of government measures dealing specifically with heritage [...], but also in the fact that the existence of a heritage rationale can provide an environment for international politics and the conduct of business in the broadest sense. (Poulot, 2008, p. 34).

In this way, the purpose of heritage goes beyond representing a nation's past; it becomes, in fact, an instrument for conducting government policies, with high economic potential, especially materialized through cultural tourism.

3.1 Public libraries, cultural heritage, and government action

The book, the main material used by libraries, is recognized as a cultural asset. As such, it can be observed from different angles: a) from the aspect of functionality: as a support for recording information/knowledge; b) from the socio-scientific aspect: as a source/resource of information on a particular subject or theme; c) from the aspect of materiality: as an object in itself.

Observing the book as a cultural object or artifact makes it possible to go beyond the functional and socio-scientific aspects, allowing us to see it as a "thing", as something that can be admired and should be preserved for its beauty and/or exotic and unusual characteristics. Returning to the theorists presented in subsection 2.1, one can, for example, understand a rare book as a semiophore, from the point of view of the collector or bibliophile. Considering that the concept of bibliographic rarity adopted by many libraries comes from a conception that originated mainly in the universe of bibliographic collecting - made up of collectors, bibliophiles, and dealers specializing in rare works, one can understand the reasons why certain books are elevated to the category of rarities.

Returning to the idea that cultural heritage is, or can be, used strategically as an instrument to support governability, it is believed that public libraries, which are part of a nation's cultural heritage, are at the mercy of changes in government in terms of their creation, maintenance, and management and can be used to support the political and social ideals of their rulers.

In this work, public libraries are specifically addressed, as it is understood that they play an important role in minimizing inequality of access to information, combating disinformation, and promoting a fairer, more equal, and more ethical society. The IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto 2022 ratifies:

> The public library is the local information center, making all kinds of knowledge and information available to its users. It is an essential component of knowledge societies, continually adapting to new media to fulfill its function of providing universal access to information and enabling all people to make meaningful use of information. It provides a publicly accessible space for the production of knowledge, the sharing, and exchange of information and culture, as well as the promotion of civic engagement (IFLA; UNESCO, 2022).

The document also emphasizes the characteristics of its collection:

> Having high quality, being relevant to local needs and conditions, and portraying the linguistic and cultural diversity of the community are essential attributes. Collections should reflect current trends and the evolution of society, as well as the memory of human activity and the products of its imagination. Collections and services should not be subject to any form of ideological, political, or religious censorship or commercial pressures (IFLA; UNESCO, 2022).

In Brazil, the first public library was founded in the city of Salvador (BA) in 1811. However, it wasn't until the following century that public libraries began to receive more attention, especially since the Week of Modern Art in 1922, with the outstanding work of Mário de Andrade, who championed the creation of public libraries throughout Brazil:

> [...] seems to be one of the most necessary activities for the development of Brazilian culture today. Not that these libraries will solve any of the painful problems of our culture, such as literacy...But the dissemination of the habit of reading among the people, if well oriented, will inevitably create a more enlightened urban population, more capable of self-will, and less indifferent to national life. This will perhaps be a giant step towards stabilizing a racial entity, which, poor thing, is so devoid of other unifying forces. (Andrade, 1939 apud Suaiden, 2000, p. 53).

Mário de Andrade was a significant figure in the history of the defense of our country's cultural heritage, having been the author of the project to create SPHAN (now IPHAN). However, in Brazil, public policies for public libraries only emerged systematically and with clearly defined purposes from the 1990s onwards, especially with the creation of the National System of Public Libraries (SNBP) in 1992, linked to the Ministry of Culture and subordinated to the National Library Foundation. This initiative aimed to strengthen the country's public libraries, making it possible to implement "[...] a systemic process based on actions aimed at the interaction and integration of these libraries at a national level" (Biblioteca Nacional, 2006).

Since then, new actions and projects have been implemented, such as the National Program to Encourage Reading (PROLER), also linked to the FBN, in the same year; the Uma Biblioteca em Cada Município program, in 1993; the Arca das Letras project, in 2003, aimed at creating libraries in rural areas, created on the initiative of the Agrarian Development Secretariat of the Ministry of Agrarian Reform; the Hunger for Books Program, in 2005; and the More Culture Program, in 2007, which led to the opening of calls for investment in public libraries and expanded the concept of Culture Points, creating Reading Points (Machado, 2010).

> The significant increase in the number of public libraries nationwide between 1999 and 2014 can be understood from the implementation of public policies in the areas of books, reading, and libraries, such as the National Book and Reading Policy (PNLL) (2011), whose guidelines focus on the need to form a reading society as an essential and decisive condition for promoting the social inclusion of millions of Brazilians, and the National Reading and Writing Policy (PNLE) (2018), established as a permanent strategy to promote books, reading, writing, literature, and public access libraries in Brazil (Brasil, 2018). (Rocha; Oliveira, 2021).

It is clear that public policies aimed at public libraries revolve around reading and its increase. There is little debate about libraries from the point of view of heritage and memory preservation, except for projects and actions aimed specifically at the National Library.

The neglect of Brazilian culture and cultural heritage is a well-known fact, given its historical relationship with society, which is consequently felt in public libraries. An example of this is the extinction of 764 public libraries between 2015 and 2020. This number may be even higher, due to the ineffective control of state systems and the lack of data from the National System of Public Libraries (SNBP), linked to the Ministry of Culture, which was abolished in 2019 and replaced by the Special Secretariat for Culture, linked to the Ministry of Tourism (Carrança, 2022; Desmonte... 2022). Table 1 shows the data by region.

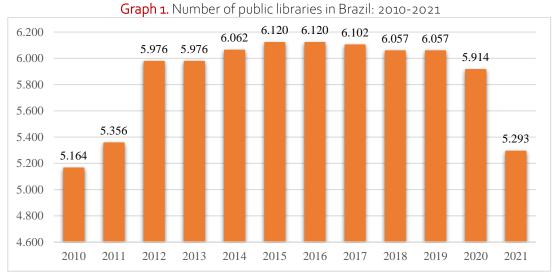Table 1. Number of public libraries closed in Brazil, from 2015 to 2020, by region

Region	2015	2020	Variation
Total / Brazil	6057	5293	-764
North	462	423	-39

Northeast	1844	1807	-37
Midwest	501	498	-3
Southeast	1957	1274	-683
South	1293	1291	-2

Source: Carrança (2022).

As Table 1 shows, the Southeast suffered the greatest loss, with 683 public libraries closed during the period. Of these, most were concentrated in the states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais and were municipal public libraries.

The SNBP Management Reports for 2012, 2013, 2014, 2021, and 2022 are available on the system's institutional website. There is a gap in the period from 2015 to 2020 (there is no report for these years). However, based on the documentation available, it is possible to visualize the evolution of the number of public libraries in the country between 2010 and 2021, as shown in Graph 1.

Graph 1. Number of public libraries in Brazil: 2010-2021

Source: based on the SNBP Activity Reports for 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2022 (Sistema Nacional de Bibliotecas Públicas, 2012; 2013; 2014; 2022).

The data presented confirms the observation made by Rocha and Oliveira (2021) about the increase in public policies aimed at the areas of books, reading, and libraries between 1999 and 2014, which was reflected in the expansion of public libraries in the country. However, they also reveal the extent to which public policies aimed at libraries are at the mercy of changes in government.

The history of the Ministry of Culture itself provides evidence of this process of lack of appreciation for Brazilian culture and cultural heritage, given that its existence has been questioned since the 1990s, with the Collor government, "[...] when the then president issued a Provisional Measure making the MinC a Special Secretariat directly linked to the Presidency of the Republic" (Prado, 2022); passing through the Temer government (2016-2018), when he decided to extinguish the Ministry of Culture, transforming it into a secretariat of the Ministry of Education (the decision lasted only a week, but generated a series of protests, especially from the Brazilian artistic class); and reaching the Bolsonaro government (2019-2022), when he "

| **10**

[. ...] downgraded the status of the Ministry of Culture to Special Secretariat for Culture" (Prado, 2022), initially linked to the Ministry of Citizenship and, later, to the Ministry of Tourism.

The dismantling of libraries in Brazil, especially recently, has worsened. The attacks on institutions are widespread and not just on public libraries. Libraries belonging to the federal public administration also suffer from the actions of uninformed and ill-intentioned managers, such as what was observed in February 2020, when it was reported in the media that a renovation would halve the physical space of the Planalto Palace Library to make way for an office with a private bathroom for use by the first lady. This library holds historical documents from the Presidency of the Republic, such as internal bulletins, sound recordings of presidential speeches, and reports from the National Truth Commission, and is still closed to the public today, with no plans to reopen, as Amado and Barretto (2023) point out.

Another situation that caused outrage about the government's actions in relation to public administration libraries occurred in June 2021, and concerns the Palmares Cultural Foundation, a public institution founded in 1988, "aimed at promoting and preserving the cultural, historical, social, and economic values resulting from black influence in the formation of Brazilian society" (Fundação Cultural Palmares, 2022). Through Public Report 01 - CNIRC, signed by the then General Coordinator of the National Center for Information and Reference on Black Culture, it was announced that 5,300 books would be expunged from the Oliveira Silveira Library, as they were considered "inconvenient," whose themes and approaches would fall outside the scope of the Foundation, and would have a "pamphleteering and ideological character". (Conselho Regional de Biblioteconomia - 1ª Região, 2022b). The news had wide repercussions in the press and on social media, and notes of repudiation were issued by professional librarians and professional associations. The Regional Council of Librarianship - 1st Region (DF/GO/MT/MS) fined the organization and launched an investigation into the preparation of the Report, concluding that it "[...] did not have the effective participation of a responsible librarian professional, confirming the infraction notice on the improper exercise of the profession by an individual who did not graduate in Librarianship [...]" (Conselho Regional de Biblioteconomia - 1ª Região, 2022b). In January 2022, the Federal Court prohibited the Palmares Cultural Foundation from disposing of the collection.

> Such dismantling is not restricted to the district level. As far as the Executive and Judiciary are concerned, several libraries in ministries and also in federal justice bodies are being abolished or are in the process of being abolished because the spaces they occupy will be used as living spaces for the civil servants working there - as if these libraries were not also such spaces. In addition, many of these libraries have vast and valuable collections that make up Brazil's historical, cultural, and bibliographical heritage and whose destination is unknown. (Conselho Regional de Biblioteconomia - 1ª Região, 2022a).

There are also cases of total loss of collections, resulting from the government's disregard for culture and national heritage, such as the fire that hit the National Museum (Rio de Janeiro) in September 2018, which also consumed part of the institution's documentary and bibliographic collections, and the fire that hit the Cinemateca Brasileira (São Paulo) in June 2021. Both disasters could have been avoided if the authorities had taken seriously the alerts and warnings issued by the institutions' staff regarding poor infrastructure maintenance and a lack of investment.

| 11

School libraries also suffer the impacts of poor government decisions. In November 2022, the city of Goiânia (GO) announced the closure of 50 school libraries, due to the opening of around 5,000 places in pre-school and early childhood education. According to the Municipal Department of Education, the spaces occupied by these libraries will become classrooms, which will accommodate the children (Calazenço, 2022).

The extinction of libraries, the dismantling of collections (disposal or attempted disposal), dismantling, abandonment, de-characterization and deliberate destruction based on personal, ideological, partisan, or political motivations put the preservation of Brazil's bibliographic documentary heritage at risk. However, there are deeper reasons for such actions than a simple disregard for culture and cultural heritage: they are part of broader governance strategies.

6 CONCLUSION

From the readings carried out, it is possible to distinguish cultural heritage according to three different dimensions: a) the symbolic dimension, linked to the cultural values of a community and the collective identification of its members; b) the political dimension, since it is an intentional, political, and strategic construction process of the institutions to which it is subordinated; c) and the economic dimension, an aspect of the use and appropriation of heritage that feeds back on the two previous dimensions, and which has its most striking manifestation in cultural tourism.

The Brazilian population suffers from the high level of social and cultural inequality that plagues the country. Recently, library professionals and public library managers have had to deal with various concerns, such as budget cuts to cultural institutions, the reduction of investments in the field of culture and heritage preservation - with investments from institutions and funding agencies, many public libraries were able to implement improvements via projects, which has become increasingly difficult in the face of reduced incentives, and the proliferation of fake news.

Considering the three dimensions of heritage mentioned above, it is possible to see public libraries as part of a group of institutions that help safeguard a significant part of national culture - documentary heritage, especially bibliographic heritage. It is also concluded that these institutions are susceptible to changes in government in terms of their management and maintenance and can be used as instruments to support the implementation of their political, economic, and social ideals, supporting governance strategies.

In this sense, there is a need to create legal mechanisms to protect public libraries, establishing responsibilities for decisions that interfere with the fate of collections and libraries. Equally necessary is the definition, via legislation, of what constitutes Brazil's documentary heritage, highlighting the importance of public libraries in its preservation and maintenance.

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| 14

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