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Cultural knowledge as climate resilience: examining the integration of Bem Viver into Brazil's national culture plan (2025–2035)

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Brazil's newly proposed National Culture Plan (Plano Nacional de Cultura, PNC) for 2025–2035 introduces a notable policy innovation by incorporating Bem Viver, an Indigenous and traditional worldview emphasising harmony between humans and nature, into its cultural management framework. This commentary focuses on Eixo 7, "Culture, Bem Viver and Climate Action," which positions traditional knowledge as a strategy for climate resilience. The commentary outlines the policy's core provisions and offers a balanced analysis of its theoretical underpinnings, practical implications, and comparative relevance across different cultural management models. While the integration of Bem Viver into national cultural policy represents a conceptually significant step, challenges related to intergovernmental coordination, resource allocation, and outcome measurement warrant careful consideration.

KEYWORDS

Bem Viver, Brazil, climate resilience, cultural policy, national culture plan

Introduction

In 2025, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva submitted *Projeto de Lei nº 5.894, de 2025* to the National Congress, aiming to formally establish the National Culture Plan (Plano Nacional de Cultura, henceforth PNC) for the decade 2025–2035. The new plan replaces the previous National Plan for Culture (2010–2020), which remained in force through successive extensions until 2024 and experienced significant institutional disruption following the 2016 impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff and the ensuing political period until 2023. This new PNC was developed after a period in which both cultural and environmental policies at the federal level had been substantially deprioritised and, in several instances, dismantled during the Bolsonaro administration (2019–2022), when the Ministry of Culture was downgraded to a secretariat, its budget was reduced, and climate action policies were largely absent. The plan was elaborated under the leadership of Minister Margareth Menezes, an artist and cultural manager from Bahia and the first Black woman to hold the position.

Grounded in Article 215, Paragraph 3, and Article 216-A of the Federal Constitution and shaped through multiple rounds of public consultation, including the 4th National Culture Conference, the bill explicitly defines culture as a "core element of democracy, inclusion, justice, and sustainable development" (Brasil, 2025, Art. 2°). The PNC comprises eight strategic axes: 1. Social Participation and Management; 2. Promotion of Culture; 3. Heritage and Memory; 4. Training; 5. Infrastructure, Venues and Cultural Spaces; 6. Creative

Economy, Solidary Economy, Work, Employment, Income and Social Protection; 7. Culture, Bem Viver (Good Living) and Climate Action; and 8. Digital Culture and Digital Rights. Among these, Axis 7 (“Culture, Bem Viver and Climate Action”/ *Cultura, Bem Viver e Ação Climática*) stands out for integrating traditional knowledge and climate resilience into the national cultural management framework, representing an exploratory move toward cross-sectoral coordination in cultural policy.

This commentary concentrates on Eixo 7 and examines how it incorporates Bem Viver, a worldview rooted in Latin American Indigenous and traditional communities that foregrounds harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, into the cultural policy apparatus. Alcantara and Sampaio (2017) have argued that Bem Viver may serve as a viable alternative to conventional development paradigms, offering a reflective counterpoint to consumerism and environmental degradation. Does this policy integration open up new practical dimensions for cultural management? What might be said about its theoretical grounding, its practical implications, and its applicability across different cultural management models? This commentary provides a factual overview of the policy content and develops a balanced, multi-perspective analysis, with the aim of contributing a modest voice to broader cultural policy discussions.

Core policy content

According to Article 5, Item VII, of *Projeto de Lei n° 5.894, de 2025*, Eixo 7 stipulates the following: a) to protect, value and foster the cultures and knowledge of traditional peoples and communities, indigenous peoples, and communities of *matriz africana* (African Cultural Matrix or African Heritage), including Quilombola communities, as a strategy for resilience and the promotion of Bem Viver and climate action; and b) to promote the adaptation, mitigation and recovery of the cultural sector in the face of the impacts of disasters and environmental and health emergencies, in articulation with agents, groups, communities and cultural spaces (Brasil, 2025).

This provision occupies a distinct position within the broader PNC framework. Clause (a) explicitly frames the protection, valorisation, and promotion of specific groups’ cultures and knowledge as both a “climate resilience strategy” and a vehicle for advancing Bem Viver. Bem Viver, or *Buen Vivir*, originates from the Quechua Indigenous notion of *Sumak Kawsay* (Plentiful Living) and has been enshrined in the national Constitutions of Ecuador (2008) and Bolivia (2009). This conceptual grounding suggests a shift in cultural management beyond its traditional functions of preservation and display, assigning it a more proactive role—namely, supporting communities in confronting climate-related challenges through the documentation and reinforcement of traditional knowledge. Clause (b), meanwhile, addresses the adaptive capacity of the cultural sector itself, calling for coordination with diverse cultural actors, communities, and spaces to achieve “adaptation, mitigation and recovery” in the event of disasters or emergencies.

From a cultural management perspective, this integration represents an effort to dismantle the boundaries separating

cultural policy from other domains of public policy. For instance, Article 3 of the PNC enumerates several guiding principles, including the valorisation of traditional knowledge, techniques, and practices; the promotion of cross-sectoral integration; and an emphasis on territorialisation (Brasil, 2025). These provisions resonate with Eixo 7 and imply that cultural management, in its operational dimension, must account for environmental factors. Similarly, Article 4 mandates that policy take into consideration *territorialidade* (territoriality) and *interseccionalidade* (intersectionality) within the framework of the *Sistema Nacional de Cultura* (SNC), the main institutional mechanism for coordination among federal, state, and municipal levels. This suggests that cultural programmes may need to be designed with greater flexibility and inclusiveness across different regions and social groups.

Alcantara and Sampaio’s (2017) discussion of Bem Viver lends theoretical support here, reminding us that such policy design may not merely involve technical adjustments, but may also represent an attempt to reorient cultural management toward broader questions of human–nature relations. That said, how these principles will be translated into concrete cultural projects, funding allocations, and evaluation criteria remains to be clarified through subsequent implementation regulations, a point to which the analysis will return.

Analysis and reflections on the policy integration

At the theoretical level, Eixo 7’s incorporation of Bem Viver into cultural policy provides a thought-provoking framework for cultural management. Alcantara and Sampaio (2017) argue that Bem Viver offers an alternative normative framework to conventional development paradigms, one that resonates with the PNC’s emphasis on sustainable development articulated in Article 2. This integration may prompt cultural managers to reconsider the scope of their remit: culture is no longer merely a sphere of entertainment or heritage preservation, but may also play a supportive role in addressing environmental change. From multiple standpoints, this attempt reflects an aspiration on the part of policymakers to bring cultural management into closer alignment with contemporary societal needs.

At the practical level, however, the concrete difficulties facing cultural management merit serious consideration. First, Brazil is a federal state, and the implementation of cultural policy depends on coordination across federal, state, and municipal levels. Although Eixo 7 envisions cross-sectoral collaboration, challenges may arise in practice concerning budget allocation under resource constraints, the development of unified indicators, and the meaningful participation of traditional communities. For example, documenting and promoting traditional knowledge requires sustained fieldwork and community trust, while the sudden onset of climate-related disasters calls for rapid response from the cultural sector; balancing these two demands is no simple task. Second, the outcomes of cultural projects are often difficult to quantify: compared with environmental or economic indicators, culture’s contribution to resilience tends to be indirect, potentially posing challenges of measurability when policies come under evaluation. If

expectations placed on culture outstrip the available implementation mechanisms, a gap may emerge between the ambition of the policy text and its on-the-ground realisation.

Furthermore, the role of culture in sustainable development itself warrants a degree of scepticism. From a reflective standpoint, although the policy frames traditional knowledge as a resilience strategy, whether cultural management can effectively drive sustainable development outcomes remains an open question. On the one hand, culture can foster community identity and adaptive capacity; on the other, if reliance is placed primarily on the cultural dimension while more direct instruments, such as infrastructure, technical support, or economic incentives, are neglected, its actual impact may prove limited. Lagares et al. (2017), discussing Bem Viver as an alternative framework for reconfiguring Brazilian cities, observe that existing urban models, shaped by capitalist and colonial legacies, struggle to accommodate the needs of diverse communities. This serves as a reminder that the integration of cultural policy, however attractive in principle, may encounter structural constraints when translated into concrete action. Similarly, Gervazio et al. (2023), in an empirical study of family farmers in the northern Amazon region of Mato Grosso, find that sustainable development and Bem Viver are understood as a “dialectical, continuously constructed process,” highlighting the importance of collective participation and traditional knowledge, while also noting that, in isolated rural communities, the realisation of these ideas must contend with practical obstacles such as large-scale agricultural expansion. Lasso et al. (2023), approaching the question from the angle of bioeconomy and socio-biodiversity, argue that although combining traditional practices with sustainable use may offer pathways toward Bem Viver, socio-environmental crises in the context of climate change must still be addressed. Taken together, these studies suggest that while the role of culture is undoubtedly significant, it may not independently shoulder the weight of sustainable development, and its boundaries need to be delineated through multi-dimensional assessment.

Against this backdrop, it is worth comparing Brazil's cultural management model with those found in Europe and Asia. Whether these different institutional traditions could accommodate a concept like Bem Viver, and with what degree of ease, remains relevant to the broader discussion. From a European perspective, cultural management in countries such as Germany often emphasises institutionalisation and legislative safeguards, advancing cultural programmes through national or regional heritage protection frameworks, structured funding schemes, and established evaluation processes. A notable example is the nationwide Culture4Climate initiative, which engages the entire cultural sector in climate protection and sustainability through structured frameworks supported by federal bodies and the German Cultural Council (Culture4Climate, 2026). Similar patterns can be observed at the EU level with the New European Bauhaus initiative (New European Bauhaus, 2026), which integrates culture, design and heritage with the European Green Deal through coordinated policy instruments.

The advantage of this institutionalised approach lies in its relative stability and predictability, as these initiatives operate within established policy frameworks and receive public funding support. Compared with Brazil's approach, however, these initiatives generally operate through highly institutionalised

policy frameworks and administrative mechanisms. Climate concerns are integrated into cultural governance, yet they are less frequently articulated through Indigenous cosmologies or community-based traditional knowledge as foundational policy principles. By contrast, Brazil's model places greater weight on community participation and the “living” utilisation of traditional knowledge, reflecting a stronger orientation toward territorial adaptability, but at the same time it faces practical difficulties related to federal coordination and the dispersal of resources. Cunha and Sousa's (2023) systematic review further indicates that while the application of Bem Viver in local contexts is expanding, it remains predominantly characterised by confirmatory studies and critical dialogue, revealing a tension between policy practice and theoretical debate. This tension appears less pronounced in more institutionalised European settings, where policy innovation tends to follow established evaluative pathways.

Comparisons with Asia are more difficult to draw because the region encompasses highly diverse cultural policy traditions. Nevertheless, two illustrative examples can help clarify how climate-related concerns have been addressed within different governance contexts. Some Asian countries tend to closely tie culture to national economic development or the tourism industry, advancing cultural protection and utilisation through large-scale, government-led projects, while others place greater emphasis on community-level, grassroots practices and cultural transmission. In South Korea, for instance, climate-related initiatives affecting the cultural sector have often been embedded within broader national development and sustainability agendas. The Korean Green New Deal has supported energy-efficiency upgrades in public infrastructure, including museums, libraries, and other cultural facilities, situating cultural institutions within wider technological and environmental transformation programmes (Lee and Woo, 2020). In Japan, approaches often combine technological and infrastructural means with traditional ecological knowledge, as exemplified by the Satoyama Initiative that integrates cultural landscapes and community-based practices into sustainability frameworks (Satoyama Initiative, 2026). Such models can sometimes mobilise resources swiftly, yet they may also generate tensions between cultural diversity and unified planning.

In comparison with Brazil, Asian approaches to climate-related issues often rely more heavily on technological or infrastructural means, and less frequently elevate traditional knowledge to the status of a strategic axis in national cultural policy. The South Korean case illustrates a broader tendency for climate-related interventions involving the cultural sector to be pursued through infrastructural modernisation and technological upgrading. While such measures may strengthen institutional resilience, they differ from Brazil's emphasis on traditional knowledge and community worldviews as explicit policy resources. Brazil's approach, by contrast, seeks to embed cultural management within the more holistic framework of Bem Viver, a move that may foster innovation but may also amplify coordination difficulties in practice. Whether analogous Indigenous or traditional worldviews in certain Asian contexts might offer comparable resources for such an integration is an open question, and one that may shape the extent to which Brazil's Bem Viver-centred model proves adaptable elsewhere.

Taken together, these divergent models reflect different path choices in cultural management: Europe leans toward institutional stability, Asia toward developmental integration, and Brazil experiments with a cross-sectoral approach centred on communities and traditional knowledge. Whether Eixo 7's integration can effectively narrow these divergences in practice, or whether it will instead expose the limitations of each model, remains to be seen. What policymakers need to attend to is not only the appeal of these ideas, but also how to address the practical difficulties of resources, coordination, and evaluation during implementation.

Conclusion and implications

Eixo 7 of Brazil's National Culture Plan (2025–2035), by linking the concept of Bem Viver with cultural knowledge and climate action, presents a noteworthy case of policy integration for cultural management. It connects Indigenous and traditional worldviews with a national policy framework at the theoretical level, while emphasising cross-sectoral coordination and community participation at the practical level. From multiple perspectives, this attempt invites a reconsideration of the role cultural management might play in the face of climate change, while also drawing attention to the practical difficulties of implementation and the complexity inherent in culture's contribution to sustainable development.

That said, the long-term impact of this policy warrants further monitoring and evaluation. Bem Viver has long been a subject of discussion in Brazil, and the state's incorporation of this idea into cultural policy is, in itself, unsurprising. Yet the extent to which Brazil's advocacy of Bem Viver, when set alongside the institutionalised approaches of Europe or the development-oriented frameworks of Asia, can genuinely assist in addressing climate change remains an open question, and one that may not be easily settled through empirical research alone. Further qualitative inquiry will take time to yield answers. In any case, the normative value of this idea is worth acknowledging. Eixo 7's integrative

experiment provides a policy laboratory for gauging the extent to which cultural policy can contribute to ecological resilience: its conceptual value has been demonstrated, but its instrumental efficacy requires sustained observation. Future research may also explore the applicability of such culturally grounded policy approaches across different regional contexts.

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