

Cultural diplomacy as an instrument of foreign policy in Brazil-India international relations

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Abstract

This article analyzes the use of cultural diplomacy as an instrument of foreign policy by Brazil and India through their respective cultural promotion bodies, the Guimarães Rosa Institute (IGR) and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), and whether it occurs in the same way. The initial hypothesis is that, although Brazilian cultural diplomacy is old and consolidated, there is a major gap when compared with Indian strategy and implementation. The methodology used is qualitative, based on documentary analysis and a bibliographic review exclusively of Brazilian and Indian authors, especially Edgard Telles Ribeiro's work *Cultural Diplomacy: Its Role in Brazilian Foreign Policy*. The geographic and economic distribution of the units around the world was then analyzed, highlighting the positive aspects of these distributions. Finally, it was possible to conclude that the promotion of culture by the two countries does not occur in the same way, nor reciprocally, and that cultural diplomacy is still seen as a merely complementary element rather than a strategic instrument in international relations and Brazilian foreign policy.

Keywords: Brazil; Cultural Diplomacy; India; Foreign Policy.

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1. Introduction

Brazil was the first Latin American country to recognize India's independence in 1947 and, in the following year, 1948, would establish diplomatic relations with it (VIEIRA, 2023, p.9). Two decades later, Brazil would receive Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on Brazilian territory. This visit aimed to establish partnerships in several areas between Brasília and New Delhi, especially in the atomic and cultural sectors. Based on these initial protocols, more than 55 bilateral agreements would be drafted in total, with approximately 40% of these agreements concerning education, technical cooperation, culture and immigration by 2019 (UEBEL, 2019, p.37).

In 1950, there would be the first version of what we now know as the Guimarães Rosa Institute, called the Brazilian Lectureship, which sent Brazilian researchers, writers and professors to foreign universities with the aim of creating the area of Brazilian studies within those institutions (COELHO; ALMEIDA, 2024, p. 10). Finally, in 2022, after several changes, the Guimarães Rosa Institute (IGR) emerged, bringing together most of the responsibilities involving the coordination and promotion of Brazilian culture beyond the country's territorial limits.

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) is a body belonging to India's Ministry of External Affairs, created in 1946, whose purpose is to promote cultural exchange with other countries and disseminate its culture from an Indian perspective. Since its creation, it has actively operated in several countries around the world, focusing on emerging nations, partner countries - such as those of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) - and countries of the Indian diaspora (ICCR, 2025b).

In this context, for comparative purposes, the following question arises: Does the promotion of Brazilian and Indian culture occur in the same way?

To answer this question, the general objective of this study is to understand how culture serves as an instrument of foreign policy in relations between Brazil and India, and in the relationship of both countries with the other countries of the international system. As a specific objective, a brief context will be introduced regarding the history of Cultural Diplomacy in each country and how it takes place today through each State's cultural promotion bodies, the Guimarães Rosa Institute and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. The analysis of the work of each cultural institute will also be, in part, comparative, highlighting their main ideas and gaps and making it possible to identify points to be strengthened. To this end, the following will be considered: geographic distribution as an important point for understanding international presence; the foreign policy objectives of each country and how culture promotes a feeling of trust between States; and the distribution of both bodies in economic terms, highlighting their main trading partners and the potential for growth in this sector.

The initial hypothesis is that, although Brazilian cultural diplomacy is old and well consolidated (DUMONT; FLÉCHET, 2014, p.204), there is still a discrepancy in the promotion of its culture in relation to India, since there is currently no permanent unit of the Guimarães Rosa Institute in Indian territory, as there is of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations in Brazil. Going beyond bilateral relations, in the context of the initial formation of BRICS - now BRICS+^{*} - it is possible to observe that India pays greater attention to cultural expansion among its members, with ICCR presence in the other four founding countries. This demonstrates the strategic role that India assigns to cultural diplomacy in its foreign policy. By comparison, Brazil is present, through the IGR, only in South Africa, mainly because of partnership initiatives between

^{*} The BRICS+ includes: Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Indonesia and Iran (BRICS, 2025).

Brazil and the African continent (DUMONT; FLÉCHET, 2014, p.215). Furthermore, culture serves as a means of rapprochement, stimulating negotiations, trust and dialogue between States and, given India's growing relevance on the international stage, this contact between cultures would bring countless long-term results (RIBEIRO, 2025, p.24).

Considering these elements, as well as the growing collaboration in several areas that Brazil has increasingly advanced with India since the beginning of bilateral relations between the countries (VISWANATHAN, 2019, p.24-25), it becomes necessary to study Indo-Brazilian cultural relations as a facilitating instrument for the other points of interest between the two countries, also taking into account the favorable scenario for collaboration, made possible by the current international context, and by the expansion and strengthening of BRICS. To this end, this study will adopt as its main reference the work of Edgard Telles Ribeiro: *Cultural Diplomacy: Its Role in Brazilian Foreign Policy*. Originally published in 1989, the book is considered a landmark in reflection on Brazilian cultural diplomacy, precisely because of its pioneering nature at the time. To this day, the work is widely recognized for its relevance in conceiving culture as a tool of foreign policy and as a factor of influence in other sectors. In 2011, a revised version updated to the circumstances of that period was released and, more recently, in 2025, it gained a third edition - the version used in the present study - which revisits and adapts its ideas to the contemporary scenario.

Methodologically, an analytical and exploratory approach is presented, with a qualitative method, using bibliographic review, documentary analysis and analysis of economic data as sources for data collection. The primary sources are the agreements signed between the countries, the government websites of each institute and World Bank indicators. The secondary source is the analysis of texts, articles and books related to the topic. Only works by Brazilian and Indian authors were used as primary and secondary sources, by the author's choice, with the aim of bringing a perspective from the South on the South itself.

Thus, the study is divided into four sections: an introduction; a section presenting the cultural diplomacy of each country; a section presenting the geographic and economic distribution of the institutes; and a conclusion. Taking all these points into consideration, the study seeks to answer the central question of the present work.

2. Cultural Diplomacy

Culture has occupied an increasingly relevant role in the foreign policy strategies of several countries, functioning as a means of international projection and as a tool for rapprochement between States (RIBEIRO, 2025). In Brazil, although cultural diplomacy has been present since the nineteenth century, its institutionalization occurred gradually, with recent advances such as the creation of the Guimarães Rosa Institute (FERREIRA, 2023). In India, by contrast, the consolidation of this practice occurred in a more centralized and earlier manner, with the creation of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) in 1950, as a result of regional discussions on culture. Both countries, by using culture as an instrument of international insertion, seek to strengthen their presence on the global stage, especially in emerging countries and strategic regions.

2.1. Brazilian Cultural Diplomacy: Brief Context

Culture has occupied an increasingly relevant role in the foreign policy strategies of several countries, functioning as a means of international projection and as a tool for rapprochement between States (RIBEIRO, 2025). In Brazil, although cultural diplomacy has been present since the nineteenth century, its institutionalization occurred gradually, with recent advances such as the creation of the Guimarães Rosa Institute (FERREIRA, 2023). In India, by contrast, the consolidation of this practice occurred in a more

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Cultural Diplomacy has been present in Brazil's international insertion strategies since, at least, the Second Reign. In 1889, with support from the Empire, the work "Le Brésil" was launched, bringing together major names from the so-called Brazilian "high society" with the aim of constructing the image of a civilized country on the international stage (FERREIRA, 2023, p.187-188). During the years that followed, this instrument served as a defender of Brazilian economic and strategic interests in the world (DUMONT; FLÉCHET, 2014, p.203). Such a definition is also presented by Edgard Telles Ribeiro (2025) when, in his work "Cultural Diplomacy: Its Role in Brazilian Foreign Policy", he states that "Cultural Diplomacy, in turn, would be the specific use of cultural relations for the achievement of national objectives of a not only cultural, but also political, commercial or economic nature." (RIBEIRO, 2025, p.31)

During the years in which the Baron of Rio Branco was the head of Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRE), between 1902 and 1912, the body began to work on disseminating a prestigious and polished image of Brazil, with the aim of establishing the standards by which the country wished to be recognized abroad (DUMONT; FLÉCHET, 2014, p.205), although not necessarily a faithful image. Not by chance, the Baron of Rio Branco was one of the authors of "Le Brésil", demonstrating the continuity of this strategy for presenting the country.

Brazil continued to encourage the dissemination of its language and culture to other countries in a discreet manner, with the creation of the Intellectual Expansion Service in 1934 (DUMONT; FLÉCHET, 2014, p.206), whose founding text was based on the following excerpt:

To organize a card index with the addresses of all writers, from all countries, capable of taking an interest in Brazil's literature and cultural life, especially those who, by knowing the Castilian language, could more easily understand Portuguese (DUMONT; FLÉCHET, 2014, p.206 apud Arquivo RC/AMLB/FCRB, 1-3-1934, p. 1-2)

Thus, it is understood that, even though "the objects and recipients of this diplomacy developed in the early 1960s" - and that these would be Latin America, the United States, Europe and Africa (DUMONT; FLECHET, 2014, p.216) - this cultural expansion toward strategic regions of the globe was already being considered in the 1930s, especially toward those that had a similar language, such as Spanish.

Next, the Cultural Department of Itamaraty (DC), created in 1938, began the path toward the establishment of the Political, Economic and Cultural Department (DPEC) and the Cultural Division of Itamaraty (DCI) - retaining the acronym of the former Intellectual Cooperation Division - in 1946, which would in fact carry out specific diplomatic missions for the promotion of culture (DUMONT; FLÉCHET, 2014, p. 210; TORRECUSO, 2021, p. 210).

Approximately 15 years later, with Law No. 3,917 of July 14, 1961 and a reorganization of Itamaraty, the Cultural Division of Itamaraty (DCI) became part of the Department of Cultural Information (DCInf), which was composed of the Intellectual Cooperation Division (DCInt), the Cultural Dissemination Division (DDC) and the Information Division (DI), a model that remained active during the beginning of the dictatorial period (BRASIL, 1961).

After the DI was annexed to the General Secretariat of Itamaraty in 1968, the DCInf redirected its activities related to scientific exchanges and cultural action, becoming the Cultural Department (DC) and then the Department of Cultural, Scientific and Technological Cooperation (DCT). In 1975, the DDC, the DCInt and the Technical Cooperation Division (DCTec) were grouped together. The creation of the Dissemination Division (DDI) in 1978, in order to "promote Brazilian reality abroad with emphasis on matters of cinema and television", also annexed the responsibilities of the DCT, thereby reaching, according to Cícero Martins, its broadest field of action (DUMONT; FLECHET, 2014, p.210).

It should be noted that, for a long time, Brazil was seen only as a consumer of foreign culture, mainly from countries of the Global North and Europe, in the logic that “the winds of culture blow only from east to west or from north to south” (DUMONT; FLÉCHET, 2014, p.204). The movement to structure the departments responsible for cultural actions was crucial for strengthening Brazilian Cultural Diplomacy, influencing its configuration to this day, in such a way that it began the transition of these winds and also started to carry the airs of Brazilian culture outside the territory. After the Department of Cultural and Information Affairs, the Department of Cultural and Educational Affairs (DCED) and the Division for Actions to Promote Brazilian Culture, DCULT, emerged (FERNANDES, 2022).

It was in 2022 that these departments and divisions, the Division for Actions to Promote Brazilian Culture (DCULT) and DCED - now called the Division of Educational Cooperation (DCE) - joined the Division of Multilateral Cultural Affairs (DAMC) and the Division of Portuguese Language (DLP) to form the newly created Guimarães Rosa Institute (IGR), established by Decree No. 11,024 of 03/31/2022 (BRASIL, 2023a). Now, in a structured way, the Institute would have more clearly established functions, in addition to having a headquarters and units spread throughout the world. We will discuss this geographic arrangement of the IGR throughout the study, drawing a comparison with that of the Indian institute, which will be presented in the next section.

2.2. Indian Cultural Diplomacy: Brief Context

Different from what we observe in the Brazilian trajectory, Indian Cultural Diplomacy has remained, from the beginning, linked to a single body responsible for this function: the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR). The context of its creation is that of pre-independence India, when British rule was no longer so strong and was about to end. The ICCR would emerge from the “Asian Relations Conference”, which took place in Delhi in 1947. During the event, some delegates, mainly from India, sought the creation of a cultural and scientific institute for all of Asia, focusing on scholarships and teacher exchanges among countries (APPADORAI, 1948, p.200).

Initially, the ICCR was linked to the Ministry of Education, but 12 years later, in 1970, it was transferred to the Ministry of External Affairs, with the idea that it would be a tool of Indian foreign policy. This decision was so assertive that, a few years later, the ICCR took over the Department of Culture, becoming responsible for “the culture that goes out and the culture that comes in”. (ICCR, 2025b)

Therefore, by transferring responsibility for the ICCR to the Ministry of External Affairs, India made clear its position of commitment to its cultural diplomacy, strictly speaking. For the ambassador and former director of the ICCR, Pavan K. Varma (2008, p.73), cultural diplomacy is something common for Indians, since their own communities reinforce the need for its use in interactions among themselves. The appreciation of the diverse cultures that make up the country itself is seen as essential before, and alongside, its promotion and interaction with foreign cultures; for this reason, contact with what comes from outside is not exactly a novelty.

Thinking about the domestic context, considering that India is one of the few countries so vast, diverse and ancient from a cultural point of view (INDIA, [s.d.]; OLIVEIRA, 1994, p. 139), the need for a tool capable of unifying the nation becomes evident. Indian reality explains the existence of the 11 ICCR units within its own territory, aimed at strengthening cultural relations, reducing violence and using cultural diplomacy also to encourage commercial and social relations among the states (BRASS, 1994, p.11). This internal presence of the Centers reinforces the importance of promoting cultural cohesion within the country, as well as facilitating dialogue with countries in the region, such as Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Myanmar (MUKHERJEE, 2009, p.158).

3. Cultural Relations

This section will address Brazil's and India's relations with each other and with the world, demonstrating, briefly, how these relations have unfolded in terms of trade, the exchange of students and professors, and diplomatic interactions between the countries. In addition, some characteristics of both Cultural Institutes will be addressed, such as their geographic and economic distribution in comparative form, in order to understand the main differences and what changes could be implemented in each body, taking as a basis, when relevant, the model of the other.

3.1. Geographic and Economic Distribution of the ICCR

The geographic distribution of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations is an important factor to analyze when thinking about foreign policy and Indian presence in the world. The 37 ICCR units outside India are distributed as follows: 21 in Asia, 5 in Europe, 5 in the Americas, 4 in Africa and 2 in Oceania. (ICCR, 2025b) On the Asian continent, the presence is substantially greater, since the Indian strategy, with regard to cultural diplomacy, is focused on the countries of the region, influenced by the history and initial objectives of the Asian Conference, such as bringing the countries of the continent closer together.

If we consider the distribution of ICCR units by subregion of the Asian continent[†], we find 6 in Southeast Asia, 5 in South Asia, 4 in Central Asia, 3 in East Asia, 2 in the Middle East and 1 in North Asia. The Indian presence in Southeast Asia reinforces the building of relations of security and reliability, mainly with ASEAN countries, which see the region as being of great economic importance. In addition, the export of Indian religious symbols such as the Buddha or Hindu gods, to countries such as Thailand and Vietnam, demonstrates the presence of the Indian community in these places and its cultural influence (SHEKAR, 2024, p.81).

The presence in small countries that make up the Indian diaspora, such as Fiji, Guyana, Mauritius, Maldives, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago, should also be highlighted. The presence of the ICCR in these countries serves to locate concentrations of people of Indian origin and build closer relations between governments, directly influencing the way the community is viewed by the host country (SRINIVAS, 2019, p.81).

In 2022, the ICCR was also present in 5 of India's 10 largest import trading partners, Brazil ranking 13th, and in 5 of India's 10 largest export trading partners, Brazil ranking 26th, according to the World Integrated Trade Solution[‡]- WITS tool of the World Bank (WITS, 2022b).

Thus, corroborating what Telles Ribeiro (2025, p.31-32, 44, 55) argues, the continuous presence of ICCR units in countries with a permanent unit contributes, even if not directly, to the strengthening of commercial relations, insofar as constant cultural activity creates a more favorable environment for cooperation and mutual understanding, whose effects become increasingly evident over time.

In addition, the presence of the ICCR in the BRICS founding countries demonstrates special attention to how Indian cultural diplomacy not only targets commercial results, but can also act to strengthen ties between the countries of the bloc, increase trust and, consequently, develop the other discussions.

[†] For analytical purposes, the author adopts the division of Asia into six major geographic and cultural regions: Far East (or East Asia), Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Middle East and East Asia, as addressed by Husain (2020), Madepalli and Bhatia (2021) and Fajardo (2020).

3.2. Geographic and Economic Distribution of the IGR

Culture has occupied an increasingly relevant role in the foreign policy strategies of several countries, functioning as a means of international projection and as a tool for rapprochement between States (RIBEIRO, 2025). In Brazil, although cultural diplomacy has been present since the nineteenth century, its institutionalization occurred gradually, with recent advances such as the creation of the Guimarães Rosa Institute (FERREIRA, 2023). In India, by contrast, the consolidation of this practice occurred in a more centralized and earlier manner, with the creation of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR

The geographic distribution of the Guimarães Rosa Institute has, in part, the same focus. In total, in addition to the Brazilian headquarters, the IGR has 24 units abroad. The distribution across continents is as follows: 13 in the Americas, 6 in Africa, 3 in Europe and 2 in Asia, with no units in Oceania.

It is possible to observe that, like the ICCR, the distribution of the Brazilian institute occurs mainly in neighboring countries and on its own continent. This distribution can be explained by the objective of Brazilian cultural diplomacy to expand its cultural influence to Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries, aiming to facilitate contact with and absorption of Brazilian culture, especially literature (DUMONT; FLÉCHET, 2014, p.206 apud Arquivo RC/AMLB/FCRB, 1-3-1934, p. 1-2).

The IGR is headquartered in 3 of Brazil's 10 largest import trading partners and in 4 of its 10 largest export trading partners. It is worth noting that, in both rankings, India is among Brazil's 10 largest partners, ranking 5th in imports and 10th in exports (WITS, 2022a). In the countries of the "Brazilian diaspora", considering the data from the study "Empowering the South American Diaspora as an Agent of Sustainable Development" by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the IGR is present only in Italy and Paraguay (OIM, 2022, p.13).

Even though in 2022 there were, in total, 157 international posts promoting culture abroad (BRASIL, 2023b, p.174), it is the permanent units of the Guimarães Rosa Institute that provide continuity to the work developed and promote reliability and security between countries. As provided by the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations with regard to the establishment of embassies, the establishment of a cultural body in another country should also be considered one of the most significant diplomatic acts, since it concretely symbolizes an interest in cooperation and exchange between States. It is through institutional presence and cultural assimilation that the legitimacy and stability of bilateral relations are recognized.

The basic idea here could not be simpler: if a country possesses a rich, strong, varied, dynamic culture - and is proud of it to the point of disseminating it beyond its borders - that country, by demonstrating its capacity in the cultural sphere, will likewise be drawing attention, implicitly, to its qualifications in other areas of activity, however varied they may be. (RIBEIRO, 2011, p.37)

India, in addition to standing out in trade with Brazil, and with forecasts of growth for the coming years (MUKHI, 2023, p.156), has similarities with the country. More than a former colony of the United Kingdom, India also had part of its territory colonized by Portugal: the region of Goa, on the west coast. During the colonial period, Goa and Brazil already maintained exchanges of spices with each other, as well as technical exchanges between cultivation specialists, with the aim of adapting new species such as cinnamon, pepper and nutmeg (TAVARES, 2023, p.27). Even after the independence of both parts, the Portuguese cultural heritage remained strongly rooted, shaping aspects of local cultures, which is reflected to this day in the Lusitanian presence in religion, architecture and Goan[§] and Brazilian vocabulary (COSTA, 2023, p.58). Portuguese is still a language spoken in the region of Goa today and, even though it is not among the country's official languages, it remains present, for example, in signage and museums^{**}. The encouragement of the

[§] Demonym for the state of Goa, India.

^{**} Based on the author's experience during a visit to Goa in December 2022.

Lusophone language and culture, which in 2022 had approximately 10,000 speakers and 2,000 students, comes as a way of preventing the extinction of this common factor of cultural rapprochement (XAVIER, 2022, p.23). Therefore, the installation of a Guimarães Rosa Institute in the country, especially in the state of Goa, would fulfill both the objectives of the Institute itself in “coordinating the participation of the Brazilian Government in [...] the promotion of the Portuguese language” (BRASIL, 2023a), and the encouragement of long-term results in other sectors, such as the economic one.

4. Final Considerations

The comparative analysis between the Cultural Institutes of Brazil and India brings to light structural, strategic and objective-related differences that reflect each country’s priorities, but also their understandings of the role of culture on the international stage. Both bodies, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and the Guimarães Rosa Institute (IGR), demonstrate an appreciation of culture as a tool for rapprochement and for building lasting bonds with other States. However, the way in which this appreciation is transformed into concrete actions changes considerably.

Whereas Indian cultural diplomacy is marked by a strategic distribution of its cultural centers, which reveals both the intention to deepen ties with its neighbors and concern with regions of geopolitical importance, Brazilian cultural diplomacy has prioritized its neighborhood, with greater projection in Latin America and Africa. India, in turn, demonstrates planning that articulates culture, security and economy, with a marked presence in BRICS and ASEAN countries and in relevant trading partners, according to WITS data. Brazilian action, although legitimate and consistent in certain aspects, needs a more ambitious projection coordinated with strategic interests, such as defense and economic insertion.

The absence of IGR units in countries important to Brazilian foreign policy, such as the major trading partners of Asia and Oceania, highlights a gap that needs to be filled with planning and long-term vision. The installation of cultural centers in these territories should not be thought of merely as a symbolic gesture, but as a concrete foreign policy strategy, aligned with the idea that cultural sympathy precedes political and economic reliability and collaboration, as Telles Ribeiro already emphasized in his work in 1989.

The persistence of Portuguese cultural heritage in Goa even after independence reveals the depth of the historical ties shared with Brazil, reinforcing the existence of fertile ground for the work of Brazilian cultural diplomacy. The continued presence of the Portuguese language, although small, and local efforts for its preservation indicate a symbolic affinity that can and should be explored as a starting point for cooperation actions. In this context, the installation of a Guimarães Rosa Institute would not only recover a common history, but would also fulfill one of the Institute’s central objectives: the promotion of the Portuguese language and its variants, especially in a region receptive to Lusophony, enhancing, from this historical-cultural bond, new dialogues and collaborations in the educational, economic and political spheres. In a context of strengthening South-South relations and the commitments assumed through the Indo-Brazilian Joint Commission and participation in forums such as IBSA and BRICS+, reciprocity in cultural institutional presence could further strengthen ties between Brazil and India, reinforcing not only bilateral friendship, but also expanding channels of cooperation in sectors such as education, science and technology.

The comparison also reveals that the ICCR understands culture as a tool for national integration. The presence of 11 ICCR units within its own territory reinforces the notion that cultural diplomacy should also be exercised in the domestic context, so that it becomes possible to use cohesive and orderly cultural diplomacy in India’s relations with the world. It is a matter of understanding the role of culture, above all, in the initial formation of a solid and plural national identity, and then projecting that same identity onto the international stage, following the logic adopted by the ICCR of disseminating Indian culture from its own perspective. This perspective could be better explored by Brazil, especially considering its own cultural potential and the possibilities for regional integration.

Finally, it is essential to recognize that, for Brazil to assert itself as a relevant actor on the international stage, something it has long been seeking, culture must cease to be treated as an ornament of diplomacy and start to be conceived as a strategic instrument. Continuous cultural promotion in key countries can generate concrete and lasting results, both in greater receptivity among the local population and in the creation of environments favorable to cooperation. In this way, if Brazil, like India, wishes to strengthen its trade relations and expand its insertion into strategic markets, investing in the structured and permanent dissemination of its culture, through the IGR, will be a choice that is as necessary as it is promising.

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