

# Fonca: The History of Art Funding in Mexico in the Course of Political Alternation (1989-2020)

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## ABSTRACT

The creation of the Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (Fonca) in 1989, not only represented the transformation of the relationship between the artistic community and the State, it also propitiated, together with the Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (Conaculta), a new way of conceiving cultural policy in Mexico. This article analyzes the structural bases of Fonca and identifies the administrative and operational modifications that it had in the political alternation of PRI, PAN and Morena and how they responded to the ideals of each party. The neoliberal profile of the fund is also explored, as well as the reasons why it was extinguished in 2020 and the current situation of the new Sistema de Apoyos a la Creación y a Proyectos Culturales (SACPC).

## KEYWORDS

trust, Fonca, Conaculta, culture, neoliberalism, contemporary art, funding

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**A**ligned with the neoliberal model<sup>1</sup> implemented in the country since the government of Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado (1982-1988), the Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (Fonca) was consolidated in 1989 as a mixed trust that made it possible to put into practice ideas proposed years earlier by a group of intellectuals regarding the need for the government to financially support the cultural sector without intervening in the selection or creation of works.<sup>2</sup>

During most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, art in Mexico was at the service of the education plan and was used, to a great extent, as a tool to convey official narratives to the population. The country's cultural policy began at the same time as the education system, once the latter was legally recognized in the Constitution of 1824.<sup>3</sup> At the end of the 1980s, this duality began to change with the entry of a new economic model into the country, promoted by the modernizing efforts of the technocratic Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).<sup>4</sup>

During the government of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (December 1, 1988-November 30, 1994), cultural administration and art promotion achieved degrees of autonomy, since the Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (Conaculta), with all the institutions under its responsibility, including Fonca, became a decentralized body of the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP), that is, an entity without legal responsibility or own assets, although with administrative autonomy to resolve the matters under its responsibility.

<sup>1</sup> According to the English geographer and social theorist David Harvey, "neoliberalism is a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms of the individual within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the State is to create and preserve the appropriate institutional framework for the development of these practices" (Harvey, 2007, p. 2). Before neoliberalism, Mexico operated according to the import substitution industrialization model, whose development was based on local production and not on exports.

<sup>2</sup> In 1975, Octavio Paz, together with Alí Chumacero, Salvador Elizondo, Elena Poniatowska and Gabriel Zaid, among others, published in *Plural* magazine the letter "Ideas para un Fondo Nacional de las Artes" (Ideas for a National Fund for the Arts).

<sup>3</sup> Since 1824, the states were given the freedom to organize the education system, which included teaching the "noble arts." In 1905 the Secretariat of Public Instruction and Fine Arts was created, with which an articulated cultural policy was formalized and put into practice for the first time. It was not until 1921 that the creation of a State Secretariat in charge of education and culture (the Secretariat of Public Education [SEP]) was decreed. In the 1960s a sub-secretariat of Culture was established, which incorporated the national institutes of Anthropology and History (INAH) and Fine Arts (INBAL), created in 1939 and 1946 respectively (Tovar, 1994, pp. 26-50).

<sup>4</sup> It was with the new neoliberal model that a technocratic elite emerged, that is, public officials with specialized knowledge, acquired, in many cases, in US universities that have been centers for the development of neoliberal theory (Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado, Carlos Salinas de Gortari and Felipe Calderón Hinojosa studied their postgraduate degrees at Harvard University, while Ernesto Zedillo did so at Yale). Technical skill trumped political skill.

This meant a first break in the national art-education link, which would end definitely in 2015, with the creation of the Secretariat of Culture.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the structural bases of Fonca and to identify the administrative and operational modifications that have taken place during the political alternation —with special attention to the Jóvenes Creadores program and the Sistema Nacional de Creadores de Arte (SNCA)— and how these have responded to the political plans of each party in power. In addition, through the study of the treatment given to Fonca in each six-year term, we seek to make a general examination of its history, which will allow us to understand the reasons that enabled its elimination as a fund and its transition to a Sistema de Apoyos a la Creación y a Proyectos Culturales (SACPC).

To this end, the history of Fonca is divided into two stages. The first (from its foundation in 1989 to 2006) allows us to learn about the political motives that encouraged its creation in a context of adaptation to both a new economic model that changed the functions of the State and the first democratic change of power in 2000, with Vicente Fox. The second (from December 2006 to March 2020), a period in which presidents from three different political parties ruled: Felipe Calderón Hinojosa (2006-2012), from PAN; Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018), from PRI, and, currently, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (2018-2024), from Morena. While the first six-year phase in this first stage was one of adaptation to the neoliberal model, the second one consolidated and intensified it. The final section addresses the extinction of the Fund during the current administration, an action that responds to the change in the political and economic model proposed by Morena, which calls itself *anti-neoliberal*.

The following pages seek to demonstrate that Fonca was a key factor in the construction of an art funding model with important degrees of autonomy, which allowed, to a large extent, to leave nationalist and partisan discourses out of its production.

## FIRST STAGE OF FONCA (1989-2006)

### The neoliberalization of art funding in Mexico

When Salinas came to power, he sought to “modernize” (neoliberalize) the country, and this included culture. On December 7, 1988, just a few days after taking office, Conaculta was created by presidential decree. A sector of the population suspected that the haste in founding it responded to a need to legitimize through intellectu-

als a mandate that caused discontent among the population, due to the alleged electoral fraud (Ejea, 2011, p. 95).

The establishment of the Council was based on the three major objectives of the cultural policy of the National Development Plan 1988-1994: the protection and dissemination of cultural heritage, the dissemination of art and culture, and the encouragement of artistic creativity. To guarantee this last point, in March 1989 (three months after the Council was founded), Fonca was created, whose function would be to promote and foster the country's high-level cultural and artistic development by providing grants to artists and intellectuals. Amy Sarah Carroll<sup>5</sup> found a relationship between the emergence of both the Council and the Fund and the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), since when the negotiations were made public, a broad sector of the Mexican population opposed them for fear that national culture would be weakened (2017, p. 23). With this in mind, such cultural apparatuses appeared as mechanisms to calm concerns and thus proceed with the economic opening plan.

In *Modernización y política cultural (Modernization and Cultural Policy*, in English), Rafael Tovar y de Teresa pointed out that cultural tasks, by their very nature and magnitude, could not be the exclusive responsibility of the State, but required concerted efforts of the whole society. For this reason, the mechanism implemented for the neoliberal Fonca was a mixed trust, with both public and private economic contributions and a mandate that would allow it to distribute the grant money through the National Credit Society at the beginig and then through a banking institution (Banco Nacional de México [Banamex]).<sup>6</sup> More precisely, the mandate agreement specified its purpose: “the creation of a financial mechanism through which donations would be received from the State and civil society to support the creation and dissemination of artistic and cultural assets [...]” (Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2006, p. 1). Historically, public trusts have served as financial tools with which the State promotes projects of public interest. Although they began to be used in Mexico since the post-revolutionary era, it was in the 1990s when they became a widely used legal figure.

<sup>5</sup> American anthropologist, author of the book *REMEX: Toward and Art History of the NAFTA Era*, in which she analyzes the impact that NAFTA had on Mexican art.

<sup>6</sup> A *mandate* is an agreement by which a mandator entrusts the execution of certain legal acts to a mandatary, who is bound to execute them on behalf of the mandator —what makes it different from a trust is its contractual character—. In this case, Conaculta was the mandator, Banamex was the mandatory (at first, it was Sociedad Nacional de Crédito) and the mandate was Fonca. A *fiduciary mandate* is when a trust manages a mandate agreement for another entity to carry out certain activities of the administration on its behalf.

If the functioning of Conaculta resembled the French ministerial model—in terms of being in charge of coordinating the country’s cultural policy, the agglomeration and articulation of different cultural institutions, the centralization of resources and the verticality of decisions—, Fonca followed a line more similar to that of the United States, specifically, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)—the independent federal agency in charge of the administration and distribution of resources to artistic projects—, which sought artistic autonomy, democratic participation through open calls, objective selection criteria and decentralization.

In tune with the neoliberal concept of *freedom*,<sup>7</sup> both the Council and the Fund were created on the premise that the State cannot intervene in their production, except economically or in terms of promotion and dissemination. The way in which Fonca sought to ensure this freedom of creation was through the establishment of selection committees, made up of professionals and leaders in each discipline. This was a first attempt to democratize the encouragement to artistic creation, since peer evaluation could prevent extra-aesthetic interests in the selection process.

Jóvenes Creadores was one of the first programs to implement this mechanism. Founded at the same time as the Fund, its purpose has been to benefit people between 18 and 34 years of age over the course of a year to develop an artistic project. In addition to the financial support,<sup>8</sup> it provides mentoring by artists, organizes annual meetings to promote interdisciplinary dialogue and disseminates the work of the grantees through various activities, such as the annual exhibition *Creación en movimiento*.

In 1993, the Sistema Nacional de Creadores de Arte (SNCA) was established by presidential agreement to support, on the one hand, for a period of three years (with the possibility of renewal) the production of works by outstanding artists over 35 years of age, and, on the other hand, to provide lifelong economic compensation to artists who have made an “exceptionally important” contribution to Mexican culture, recognized as creators emeritus.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> In neoliberalism, the concept of *freedom* starts from enterprise freedom and extends to individual freedom: of consumption, expression, culture, way of life, choice of work, etc. (Harvey, 2007, p. 43). The fact that freedom was the banner of this system explains why the political and cultural discourse of the modernizing plan of Salinism was imbued with this concept.

<sup>8</sup> The monthly support in 1989 was 1,200 Mexican pesos; 4,840 in 1999; 7,967 in 2009; and 8,532 in 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Initially, the categories for both Jóvenes Creadores and Creadores Intelectuales (predecessor of the SNCA) were: Plastic Arts, Dance, Literature, Music, Theater and Architecture. By 2020 the number of categories had increased to 10, including Literature in Indigenous Languages, Popular Arts and Traditions, Audiovisual Media and Applied Arts.

The consolidation of both Conaculta and Fonca gradually led to the institutionalization of artistic production. In the early nineties, while in the category of Plastic Arts traditional media continued to be supported, independent spaces emerged which, according to Vania Macías, were not, as in the seventies, a response to a political disagreement, but “a discomfort within an inefficient institutional artistic structure incapable of generating new discourses and understanding the cultural transformation and hybridization that was taking place in the country” (2006, p. 366).

Those alternative spaces, where artists of different generations converged, gradually became important centers for the exchange of ideas and creation (Montero, 2014, p. 126). The adjustments of the early years of Fonca—like the expansion of programs according to artistic needs and trends or the mechanisms to guarantee transparency and freedom of creation— and the emergence of SNCA, in 1993, led to the fact that in a short time it began to position itself as a fundamental piece in the national artistic production. What was previously produced outside the system, in this alternation could now be done with the Fund’s grants without compromising freedom of expression. As an example, some members of Temístocles 44,<sup>10</sup> a space that lasted from 1993 to 1995, obtained grants from Jóvenes Creadores in the following years: Damián Ortega in 1995 (sculpture), Daniel Guzmán in 1997 (alternative media) and Luis Felipe Ortega in 1998 (alternative media). The fact that Fonca had been taking the alternative path made it increasingly difficult to distinguish the inside from the outside in the Mexican artistic scene.

The selection committees played a very important role in supporting new disciplines, and by the second half of the 1990s in changing the category of Plastic Arts to Visual Arts, which included, in addition to sculpture, photography, graphics and painting, disciplines that were already widely used in contemporary art, such as installation and video, which were grouped in the subcategory of Alternative Media and Performance.

Salinas’ promises of modernization and blind confidence in the new economic model weakened at the end of his six-year term by the uprising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), which opposed the privatization of the *ejido* (the same day NAFTA

<sup>10</sup> Independent space in the Polanco neighborhood of Mexico City, where artistic processes were discussed, work was exhibited and some issues of the magazine *Alegría* were published, which contained Essays, Reviews, Manifestos and translations of theoretical texts. It was made up by the artists: Eduardo Abaroa, Franco Aceves, Abraham Cruzvillegas, Ulises García, Fernando García Correa, Rosario García Crespo, José Miguel Casanova, Diego Gutiérrez, Daniel Guzmán, Damián Ortega, Luis Felipe Ortega, Daniela Rossell, Sofía Táboas, Pablo Vargas Lugo and art historian Haydée Rovirosa.

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came into effect, on January 1, 1994) and, eventually, by the “December error.”<sup>11</sup> Despite the crisis, succeeding president Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) in 1996 carried out one of the most important reforms in the history of the country: the electoral reform, making the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), created during the Salinas administration as an autonomous body, not subject to the government, but to the citizens, to guarantee its impartiality (Aguayo, 2010). This allowed PRI, after 70 years, to leave power peacefully.

Following the withdrawal of that party after the 2000 presidential elections, Mexico experienced for the first time a democratic process of alternation. With Vicente Fox Quesada, the reconfiguration of a new business elite that no longer depended on the government, but on capital and the external market, became more evident. As Marcela Hernández points out, “It was the rupture of a vision of the business world, and the rupture of an old political system born from the revolution.” The relationship between businessmen and the State was transformed: “there is no longer such ideological distance from economic policy, rather there is convergence and alliance. Not only do they enjoy the benefits of privatization and free market policy, but they are now also part of the State” (2004, pp. 78 and 87). Although the privileges promised by NAFTA to the private sector and the privileges it obtained were beginning to be evident, the businessmen did not achieve their main purposes during Fox’s administration: the structural reforms, mainly the energy, tax and labor reforms, due to the fact that PAN did not have the majority in Congress (Alba, 2020, p. 544).

The very business profile of the president —former director of Coca-Cola’s national operations, one of the most important multinational companies— reflected that the neoliberal model was already established in the country. Even in the first year of his six-year term, he declared that his government was “of businessmen, by businessmen and for businessmen (DPA, 2021).” Arturo Guillén asserts that the arrival of PAN to power did not mean any change in the economic strategy, since the structural reform agenda proposed by multilateral organizations was maintained, the privatiza-

<sup>11</sup> Phrase with which Salinas de Gortari referred to the bad decisions made by Ernesto Zedillo’s cabinet that led to the devaluation of the Peso. Harvey points out that the pressure for deep neoliberalization in Mexico ended in the 1995 crisis, known as the Tequila Effect (or Tequila Crisis), which, as in 1982, was due to the rise in interest rates by the Federal Reserve of USA. Even though the United States Congress refused to help Mexico, Bill Clinton offered a rescue package of 47.5 billion, since being one of the main defenders and promoters of neoliberalism, it was not convenient for him to lose legitimacy in the model or in NAFTA. In addition, he saw a danger in the possible loss of employment in US companies that exported to Mexico or the increase in immigration (Harvey, 2007, 114).

tion program was followed up and trade and financial openness was kept unaltered (2012, p. 63).

In the cultural sphere, there were some attempts to legally modify both Conaculta and Fonca, to make resource management swifter and have legal certainty through the bill of the Act for the Promotion and Dissemination of Culture, presented by Sari Bermúdez in 2005 (Cámara de Diputados, 2005). It was rejected, however, due to the danger that deputies saw that this act would be part of the attempts to introduce neoliberal reforms and that it would relinquish powers and areas of influence to the private sector.

On the other hand, during this six-year term, in 2004, in response to the artistic community's questioning on Fonca's transparency, a code of ethics was established with guiding principles for jurors, in order to avoid conflicts of interest that may damage the impartiality and objectivity of the selection process (especially the fact that public servants could not be beneficiaries of any grant and that jurors had to give notice in case they had links with any of the applicants).

A significant fact of the first alternating government was that both the Council and the Fund survived and that their operational structures, as well as the degrees of autonomy conferred on them, were respected. This was an important achievement, since it meant that the existence of trans-sexennial cultural organizations was possible.

The first stage of Fonca, from its creation in 1989 until the end of Fox's six-year term, was marked by a series of changes that met the demands of the artistic community, as well as the context of the end of century and the first half of the 2000s, such as the break with traditional disciplines and themes, to allow the entry of artistic expressions that were already circulating outside institutional spaces, such as video art, performance or the aforementioned installations. It was also a period of internal adjustments, reflected in setting out rules to make the Fund's operation transparent and avoid favoritism and corruption, with a considerable increase both in the number of grants and, given the high demand, in the amount allocated to the programs.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> While in 1989, 30 economic incentives were granted to Jóvenes Creadores, 50 to Creadores Intelectuales Creators (later SNCA) and 21,000,000 pesos were allocated to the programs per call, at the end of Fox's administration, in 2006, the number of grants increased to 100 and 84 respectively, and the amount allocated to the programs increased to 164,000,000 pesos.

**SECOND STAGE OF Fonca (2006-2020)****Culture during the alternation of PAN, PRI and Morena**

Fonca's second moment began in a context of intensification of the neoliberal model, which was observed in greater activity in foreign policy and in the approval of structural reforms. Calderón stated that the 2008 economic crisis had to be turned into an opportunity to strengthen international trade. Already during the electoral debates for the Presidency, he pinpointed that it was essential for the country to be inserted in the international dynamics, and that "more Mexico in the world and more world for Mexico" was needed. This showed how, 20 years after the opening of the country's trade, the Mexican economy began to depend more and more on foreign investment.

Art and culture were used as a tool to project a favorable image of Mexico and for the country to be symbolically present in other nations. In line with this interest, Conaculta launched, through Fonca, the Programa de Promoción a Artistas Visuales Mexicanos (Program for the Promotion of Mexican Visual Artists), whose purpose was to promote and disseminate Mexican talent abroad as well as to enrich the collections of the national museums of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (National Institute of Fine Arts, INBA). What is striking about this program is that, unlike Jóvenes Creadores or the SNCA, the money was allocated neither to the production of works nor to the artists, but to the galleries and the exhibition of the pieces in fairs or international markets (rental of stands, dissemination material, packaging, shipping of pieces, insurance of works and airplane tickets for artists and gallery owners). From the beginning, the program was highly questioned, as it was a federal resource oriented to private institutions. The galleries that benefited—chosen by a selection committee created by Fonca—were, for the most part, those already consolidated and with some economic solidity, such as Kurimanzutto, OMR or Hilario Galguera, something that gave the program an exclusive character.

In this way, the government exerted an influence on the art market itself, an area at the time alien to public interests. In neoliberal terms, this fact stands out because it contradicts the *laissez-faire* model, since the State intervened in the market by means of a kind of subsidy to contemporary art companies (the galleries) in order to obtain a benefit (the vindication of the country's image to attract international investment).

The economic investment in a program of these characteristics was possible because towards the end of Calderón's six-year term,

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according to the logic of using art as a tool for commercial promotion, Conaculta received the highest budget up to that moment: 16,663,000,000 pesos (versus the 6,000,000,000 pesos allocated in 2006) and Fonca went from an initial budget allocation of 215,000,000 pesos to 670,000,000 pesos in 2011, which allowed increasing incentives for artistic creation in more than 50%.

At the same time that culture was economically boosted, decisions were made that harmed the sector, such as the *Anti-Money Laundering Act* (Federal Act for the Prevention and Identification of Transactions with Illegal Origin Resources [LFPIORPI], Cámara de Diputados, 2012). In the context of the war against drug trafficking, its purpose was to identify commercial transactions carried out with illicit money and prevent its entry into the country through international transactions. Its Article 17 includes as a vulnerable activity the auction and marketing of works of art exceeding 2,400 times the minimum wage of Mexico City. An amount was set for accepting cash payments, and in some cases client information (sources of income and personal data) must be shared with the Secretariat of Finance and Public Credit, measures that affected the Mexican art market. As for Fonca, the 2013 Rules of Operation state that donations over 5,000,000 pesos can only be accepted if authorized by its Advisory Committee, which leads us to believe that the measure was an adaptation to the new act.

On the other hand, during Calderón's administration, a paragraph was added to Article 4 of the Constitution (2006) stating that everyone has the right to access to culture and the enjoyment of goods and services provided by the State, and that the State will promote the means for cultural dissemination and development, attending to manifestations and expressions with full respect for creative freedom. Something that stands out in these added lines is that the focus is placed on the rights of the people who receive the works of art and not on those who produce them, who should have the right to live from the benefits of their works and to have access to social security. These legal loopholes are what caused the high demand and dependence of artists on Fonca's support for three decades.

George Yúdice mentioned that when culture is conceived as a resource, it is absorbed by economic logic and, therefore, access, distribution and management have greater weight than artistic production (2002, p. 14). On the other hand, one of the great characteristics of neoliberalism is the precarization of labor and the transfer of the responsibility for welfare from the State to individuals, which results in a lack of social security in some labor

sectors, such as the artistic one. In this sense, Claudina Domingo pointed out that as long as the State did not create a socio-economic structure to uphold creators, Fonca would be a necessary program (2019).

The additions to Article 4 of the Constitution coincided with the implementation of Fonca's Social Retribution Program (Programa de Retribución Social). Since 2011, the beneficiaries of some programs, such as Jóvenes Creadores, and members of the SNCA, must make a retribution, which even until 2020 had to be in accordance with any of the following schemes: artistic (presentations, recitals, etc.), donation (copies to public libraries and works to museum collections), formative (diploma courses, consultancies, tutorials, workshops, etc.) or dissemination (juries, curatorship, conferences, round tables, etc.).

The Fund justified this activity on the grounds that it was seeking more efficient mechanisms to ensure that the investment of public resources in grants, support and incentives would tangibly and directly benefit society. Among the purposes of the program was to create new audiences and decentralize art by taking advantage of the experience and talent of the Fund's beneficiaries, as well as to make the artistic production generated by the Fund available to society. On the other hand, it was intended to favor artists by linking them with other cultural institutions in the country. However, what the social retribution allowed the State to do was to comply, to a certain degree, without representing high economic costs for the government, with the rights and obligations recently incorporated to Article 4 of the Constitution.

It was with the arrival of Enrique Peña Nieto to power, and with him, the return of a supposedly renewed PRI, that the structural reforms demanded by the business sector since the Fox administration were achieved: the 11 reforms that were carried out were telecommunications, economic competition, financial, tax, political, electoral, social security, transparency, criminal procedures, labor, education and energy. These were promoted through the Pact for Mexico (2012), an agreement aimed to "raise competitiveness, strengthen the democratic institutional regime and expand social rights." This completed the privatization of a series of areas that had been protected—such as oil or electricity—, benefiting the interests of the national and international neoliberal oligarchy.

One of the first reforms approved, and the one that caused most discontent, was the education reform, since for the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (National Union of Education Workers, SNTE), which represents the workers assigned to

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SEP—including those of Conaculta at that time— it was more of a punitive labor reform.<sup>13</sup> For its part, the Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (National Coordination of Education Workers, CNTE), a dissident faction of the SNTE, began a mobilization in the capital of the country that by 2015 had already gained a lot of strength. That same year, during his third government report, Peña Nieto surprisingly proposed as part of the 10 measures to strengthen the country the creation of a Secretariat of Culture.

Mary Carmen Sánchez Ambriz points out that this decision possibly masked a political movement of union negotiation:<sup>14</sup> “Aurelio Nuño [Secretary of Education] was amassing problems with teachers and it was necessary for cultural workers to break away from the SNTE. As a result of the creation of the Secretariat of Culture, many of them now belong to the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores of the Secretariat of Culture” (Sánchez, 2018, n.p.).

The idea of creating a federal secretariat for culture had been present since before the founding of Conaculta, but it had never materialized. It is known that in 1982 José Luis Martínez proposed its creation to De la Madrid, who discussed it during his electoral campaign, and that in 1988 Salinas asked Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes to lead a possible Secretariat of Culture, but because neither of them accepted, the creation of a Council was arranged instead. It was a recurring theme in every six-year term since the beginning of the political alternation, in 2000: Sari Bermúdez intended to make a legal restructuring with the bill presented; Sergio Vela talked about it with Calderón at the time, and Consuelo Sáizar promoted legal reforms through a bill for a Culture Act, which was not effecuated (Cruz and Lara, 2012, pp. 94-115).

Peña Nieto proposed in his pre-candidacy to institute a State body with autonomy, its own assets and public authority, democratic and federative in nature, to coordinate the country’s cultural policy (Moreno, 2012), however, during his first two government reports the subject was not discussed again. Rafael Tovar y de Teresa, director of Conaculta for the second time, had ruled out on several occasions the possibility of creating a Secretariat of Culture, since, he assured, in a country like Mexico a Council was entirely appropriate. For these reasons, it could be thought that the

<sup>13</sup> Discontent centered on two of the proposals: the implementation of performance evaluations for teachers (it did not matter the specialization of each teacher: all were evaluated equally) and the cancellation of automatic positions.

<sup>14</sup> The relationship of unions with the neoliberal model has been complex, as the reduction of social protection by the State affects them and, rather, they have become an obstacle to the system. For more information, see *Neoliberalismo y sindicalismo mexicano aletargado* (2016), by Marco Antonio Leyva and Briguet Loami López.

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decision to create the secretariat at that very moment could have been taken as a measure to co-opt the SNTE: had it not been for that reason, it might have remained just one more of the many proposals put forward in the past.

On the other hand, there were those who saw in Peña Nieto's decision a last attempt to legitimize the image of his government—replicating Salinas' strategy with the creation of la Secretaría de Cultura—, since by then he was facing serious problems, such as the social mobilization for the 43 missing students of the Ayotzinapa Rural Normal School, the corruption scandals and the high number of murders. Eduardo Nivón argued that:

A secretariat that is announced on September 2 and approved on December 15 has no time to process its contents. Three and a half months was what it took to create the Secretariat of Culture, without any vote against it in the Chamber of Deputies and two against it in the Chamber of Senators, which is amazing, because either culture is sublime or because it is harmless and it does not matter if it is created or not. There was no time for discussion. It is created because there is a social mood to do so and the president does it because, given his political situation, he is seeking to legitimize instruments and one of them was to create such a secretariat; nevertheless, there is a risk of producing a failed institution [Observatorio Políticas Culturales, 2016, 1:24:27].<sup>15</sup>

Despite the interests it could have served, the creation of la Secretaría de Cultura meant a highly relevant fact: culture would no longer be subordinated to education; a duality that, as Nivón points out, although they were close institutions, they lived a very unstable divorce, because their purposes are very different: "Education homogenizes, it creates the basis to be able to make citizens, it creates the basis for equality. Culture is the opposite, it is based on diversity. It is a contradictory fusion [...]" (Observatorio Políticas Culturales, 2016, 1:19:43). By becoming a secretariat, culture would now have equal hierarchy with education and would enjoy legal and administrative autonomy for the first time.

Nonetheless, unlike the ministries or secretariats of culture in other countries, the newly created Secretariat did not transfer the role of granting incentives to artistic creation from Fonca to a general directorate: its profile as a mixed fund and its capacity to select

<sup>15</sup> Editorial translation. All quotes and description of terms where the original text is in Spanish are also editorial translations.

and distribute grants were preserved. For this reason, it does not appear in the organization chart of the *Manual de Organización General* of the Secretariat of Culture (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2010), since at that time it was neither an administrative unit nor a decentralized administrative body.

Before the creation of the Secretariat of Culture, the Fund was part of a general directorate of the Council, thanks to which it had administrative and operational certainty and an annually allocated budget. Adriana Konzevik Cabib, former executive secretary of Fonca, asserted that since Fonca did not have a labeled resource, it had depended on the good will of the secretariat and, she added, there were few projects in which the private sector participated. “Fonca actually lives from the fiscal budget, from people’s taxes and from a resource granted by the Secretariat of Culture [...]” (Canal 22, 2020a, 16:39). However, with the change from Council to Secretariat, this figure was lost. According to another former executive secretary of the Fund, Marina Núñez Bernal, “in reality it did not exist administratively as a structure, it was simply a bank account with its fiduciary Banamex” (Canal 22, 2020b, 3:53).

One of the advantages of its figure as a mandate was that the resources could be multiannual, i.e., they did not have to be spent in the fiscal year. On the other hand, it had subaccounts with clear operating rules, which allowed third parties to make contributions for specific projects, although this model has been losing strength in recent years (Paul, 2020). If the Fund was already beginning to weaken, ceasing to be a directorate placed it in a vulnerable position.<sup>16</sup> The legal split between culture and education and the endorsement to a secretariat could have been transcendental events to strengthen and improve the system of art funding in the country. However, contrary to what was expected, those changes were counterproductive, as Fonca was left without legal support, which led to its easy disappearance in 2020.

When in 2018 Andrés Manuel López Obrador ran for the third time as a presidential candidate, he faced, as pointed out by Jacques Coste, a double situation: the loss of confidence of society in the political parties that led the democratic transition (PRI, PAN and PRD) and a generalized disgruntlement with corruption, where Peña Nieto’s embezzlement was the one that caused the greatest indignation (2020).

<sup>16</sup> A year before the creation of the secretariat, the Superior Audit Office of the Federation (ASF), after analyzing Fonca’s practices, declared that Conaculta had not complied with legal and regulatory provisions when it created the Fund, because it had entered into a mandate agreement with a banking institution (Informe del Resultado de la Fiscalización Superior de la Cuenta Pública, 2013).

In July of that year, at the lead of Morena, created only four years earlier, López Obrador won the elections with 53% of the total votes. Self-described as an *anti-neoliberal* party, his stance implied: not falling into the corruption of the neoliberal model, not turning the nation's assets into private businesses, not depending economically on the United States, not accepting agreements that subordinate the country and not requesting loans abroad. The rejection of the predominant system is based on the fact that from that logic it is not possible to carry out any project of civilizational advancement (Batres, 2017, pp. 55-59).

In the document *El poder de la cultura* (*The Power of Culture*, in English, 2018), which summarizes the six-year plan on the subject, it was stated that in order to strengthen culture, institutions, including its secretariat, had to be transformed. This meant, among other things, administrative simplification, cost reduction and reorientation of expenses. Unlike the cultural proposal put forward by López Obrador in 2012—which included support to incentivize artistic creation and a broad program of grants—, Fonca is not mentioned either in the electoral campaign or in this document, in which the only reference made to artistic funds and grants is to say that its allocation mechanism and budget execution would be reviewed.

It is important to note that for the president, culture is “what has to do with the peoples”, which is why the priority program of the Secretariat of Culture has been the Community Culture Program, which seeks to reach the 720 most vulnerable municipalities in the country. Following this logic, López Obrador has declared that culture had never been supported as much as in his government. Nevertheless, there were significant cuts to the budget of the sector's budget,<sup>17</sup> justified by the National Austerity Plan, which in November 2019 became the Federal Act of Republican Austerity.

In the first year of the current six-year term, two events sparked the debate around the relevance of Fonca. The first was the statement made by former senator of Morena, Jesusa Rodríguez, in a conference, in which she suggested artists should seek support from the private sector rather than the public budget (Videoconferencias FCPyS, 2019). The second was the publication of an infographic by *Notimex TV* (2009), titled *Los estímulos del Fonca: entre la opacidad y el despilfarro*, which disclosed the number of

<sup>17</sup> In 2019, 12,394,000,000 pesos were allocated, almost 600,000,000 pesos less than the previous year. Although the budget has increased in 2023 to 15,925,000,000,000 pesos, it still does not reach the historical figure of 17,100,000,000 allocated in 2013, in Peña Nieto's six-year term. It should be noted that a large part of the budget has been directed to the Bosque de Chapultepec Cultural Complex (with a total cost of nearly 10,000,000,000 pesos).

times that some artistic creators of Literature and Visual Arts of the Sistema Nacional de Creadores de Arte (SNCA) had received a grant from 1993 to 2018. The question they posed was whether it is possible to achieve cultural plurality and boost new creators, if the economic benefits usually recur in just a few names of the artistic community.

In view of the health emergency caused by COVID-19, on April 2, 2020, a presidential decree was published in the Official Gazette of the Federation ordering the extinction or termination of public trusts, public mandates and similar instruments, so that their money would be channeled to the Treasury of the Federation to be used for health purposes. The extinction would cover those entities with no organic structure or transparency. It is important to highlight that from the beginning this government saw both trusts and mandates as neoliberal instruments of corruption; actually, this measure had already been proposed in the *50 lineamientos para combatir la corrupción y la aplicación de una política de austeridad republicana (50 guidelines to fight corruption and the implementation of a republican) austerity policy* presented in July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018, in the official web site of A. M. López Obrador.

Without prior consultation with the Secretariat of Culture, and despite the request by Alejandra Frausto, Secretary of Culture before the SHCP to make an exception with Fonca, as it had an operational organization chart composed of hired personnel and management positions (Quiroga, 2020), it was eliminated as a trust and as a mandate. That fact meant a major break in the relationship maintained by the artistic community with the State for three decades.

The solution was for the Secretariat of Culture to incorporate Fonca into its organizational structure as a Sistema de Apoyos a la Creación y a Proyectos Culturales (SACPC), so that it would have “clear and transparent operating rules with no room for corruption. In addition to providing it with legal certainty, recognizing it as a National System of Creators that includes from the young creators of the states to the artists emeritus in all fields of creation” (Secretaría de Cultura, 2020, paragraph 5). According to a press release from the Secretariat, during the transition period, both incentives and grants would be maintained, and the calls for proposals would continue their course.

## CONCLUSIONS

The elimination of the Fund meant the end of a neoliberal structure, dismissing the possibility of receiving private investment.<sup>18</sup> Now its budget is made up of federal money and is delivered to the creators directly, without intermediaries, that is to say, through the Treasury of the Federation (the trust used to make the payment through a bank). Although the Secretary of Culture has explained this as a minimal change, this situation is worrying because of the possible consequences this may have for the autonomy of artistic creation and its operation, especially with a government that has a univocal idea of *culture* and *art*.

During the appearance of the head of the Secretariat of Culture before the Comisiones Unidas de Cultura y Cinematografía, y Radio y Televisión (United Commissions for Culture and Cinematography, and Radio and Television, in English) in November 2020, Alejandra Frausto stated that “sometimes people get confused and believe that Fonca's independence was because it was a trust, because it had money from elsewhere, but it has always been federal money that fed it at the time” (Cámara de Diputados, 2020, 1:19:27).<sup>19</sup> Although it is known that during the last decades it was sustained with public resources, this was partly due to the fact that the pertinent modifications were not made regarding tax incentives, nor was a Patronage Act developed, in spite of the bills presented by different parties,<sup>19</sup> in addition to some obstacles for foreign investments, such as the *Anti-Money Laundering Act*. The autonomy of the Fund was not only, as the secretary points out, due to the possible entry of private money, but also, precisely, due to its intermediary character and for acting as a filter to distribute the budget according to non-partisan, exclusively artistic criteria. The Fund's neoliberal model, with all its shortcomings, ensured that the State's role with respect to art was that of operator and not producer.

<sup>18</sup> Due to fiduciary secrecy, it is difficult to trace which companies or individuals have invested in the Fund. It is known that in the early years, Fonca's private resources represented 35% of the total (Tovar, 1994, p. 115). Despite the fact that in the last years the money was mostly public (although this is difficult to verify, because the information is not made public), it was important to have a structure that guaranteed this possibility, in order not to depend solely on the federal budget.

<sup>19</sup> In 2017 and 2019, political parties Movimiento Ciudadano and Encuentro Social presented bills for a Federal Patronage Act, in order to consolidate a model of funding for culture, promote tax incentives to society and the private sector, strengthen co-funding mechanisms and encourage artistic creation. Currently, Article 190 of the Income Tax Law grants a tax incentive to taxpayers, which consists of applying a tax credit (credit balance) equivalent to the amount contributed to investment projects through the Tax Incentive for Investment Projects in National Theatrical Production; in the Edition and Publication of National Literary Works; Visual Arts; Dance; Music in the specific fields of Orchestra Conducting, Instrumental and Vocal Execution of Concert Music and Jazz (Efiartes). In 2019, for example, only seven companies supported projects for the visual arts, still a very small number.

With the transition from Fonca to SACPC, it would be difficult to speak of a continuity of the project, since it operates under an understanding of culture and art very different from the one it had when it was founded (and which prevailed throughout its existence). María Rivera asserted in 2020 that “All the definitions, the structure, the regulations and even the very definition of art and culture of the institution, of artistic excellence and autonomy, have already disappeared [...] Without its own regulations and independent funds, Mexican art and culture will be subject to economic ups and downs and to the whims of politicians who see cultural resources as an unnecessary waste of money [...]” (Rivera, 2020, paragraph 6 and 8). This is something that is already beginning to be noticed, in the delays in the monthly payments to the Jóvenes Creadores grant holders and members of the SNCA; in the lack of budget for the transfers required to carry out the social retribution as well as in the absence of facilitating agents for the fulfillment of this activity in institutions and spaces in different parts of the country; in the cancellation without clear explanations of the in-person meetings of Jóvenes Creadores in 2022; in the delay in the payment of salaries of SACPC workers, which led to a work stoppage in the middle of last year; and in an internal disorganization that is reflected in the five executive secretaries it has had in four years.

For more than three decades, Fonca systematized the encouragement of artistic creation and resolved, to some extent, responsibilities that the State has not attended to (for example, the conditions necessary for artists to live from their work). The importance of its existence lies in the fact that, for several reasons that go beyond the economic factor, it redefined national institutional art: it included in its programs and gave visibility to contemporary art disciplines that previously only occurred in the alternation—which made works enter institutional circuits, become part of private and public collections, and be possibly exhibited in museums or national and foreign galleries—; through the selection committees, freedom of expression was respected—making it possible to make visible themes more focused on political or social matters—; it fostered new forms of interaction among the artistic community (especially with the annual meetings); it generated a more direct dialogue between creators, institutions and the State; it disseminated the talent of the grant holders through the Social Reward program; it ensured continuous good-quality artistic production (without having to attend to needs unrelated to art) and, most importantly, it enjoyed a high degree of autonomy, which allowed it

to manage itself without the State having any kind of influence on issues that did not concern funding.

The survival of the Fund through the changes of political parties makes it evident that it filled a void in the Mexican art scene and became an indispensable mechanism for artistic creation. Only time will show how the decisions that have been taken and the changes that have been made with the new Sistema de Apoyos a la Creación y a Proyectos Culturales will affect the mechanism of funding contemporary art in Mexico and, therefore, national artistic production.

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