The Brazilian Army's Historical and Cultural Real Estate Assets as an Instrument of Strategic Communication

El patrimonio inmobiliario histórico-cultural del Ejército Brasileño como herramienta de comunicación estratégica

Abstract: This article analyzes the potential of the Brazilian Army's historical and cultural real estate heritage as a strategic communication tool. The research, qualitative and exploratory in nature, was based on documentary analysis following Cellard's framework, examining official regulations such as the National Defense White Paper, the National Defense Policy, and the National Defense Strategy (all from 2020), as well as the Army Strategic Communication Policy (2024), complemented by a literature review. The conceptual foundations of strategic communication and cultural heritage were discussed, alongside international experiences (United States, Pakistan, South Korea, and Turkey). The study concludes that Brazilian military heritage can be leveraged via pilot audiovisual projects, integrating cultural preservation and communication innovation. Such a strategy may strengthen ties between Defense and society, reinforce institutional legitimacy, and foster democratic debate on national identity and collective memory.

Keywords: strategic communication; real estate heritage; Brazilian Army; historical fortifications; document analysis.

Resumen: Este artículo analiza el potencial del patrimonio inmobiliario histórico-cultural del Ejército Brasileño como herramienta de comunicación estratégica. La investigación, de naturaleza cualitativa y exploratoria, se basó en la metodología de Cellard y en el análisis documental de normativas oficiales, como el Libro Blanco de Defensa Nacional, la Política Nacional de Defensa, la Estrategia Nacional de Defensa, todos de 2020, y la Política de Comunicación Estratégica del Ejército, de 2024, además de una revisión bibliográfica. Se discutieron los fundamentos conceptuales de la comunicación estratégica y el patrimonio cultural, además de experiencias internacionales (Estados Unidos, Pakistán, Corea del Sur y Turquía). El estudio concluye que el patrimonio militar brasileño puede explotarse en proyectos piloto audiovisuales, integrando la preservación cultural y la innovación comunicativa. Esta estrategia puede ampliar el acercamiento entre la Defensa y la sociedad, reforzando la legitimidad institucional y fomentando el debate democrático sobre la identidad nacional y la memoria colectiva.

Palabras clave: comunicación estratégica; patrimonio inmobiliario; Ejército Brasileño; fortificaciones históricas; análisis documental.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine exposes to the world the intensive use of large-scale strategic communication, promoting a veritable information war. These belligerent countries have used propaganda techniques, relying on the principles of post-truth and disinformation, in order to win over public opinion. Ukraine seeks to neutralize enemy disinformation, while Russia has employed black propaganda[1] to legitimize its actions. It is interesting to note that the use of strategic communication seeks to give freedom of action and obtain national and international support for each of the countries (Ślufińska, 2022).

The 21st century is characterized by an era of interdependence and instantaneity, driven by the dynamics of globalization and connectivity. This new reality requires organizations to quickly adapt their strategic vision, aiming for continuous alignment with a constantly changing world (Motta, 2022). In 2024, the Brazilian Army (BA) published its Strategic Communication Policy with the aim of addressing institutional threats in the informational dimension (Brasil, 2024). Thus, there is a strong indication that strategic communication has become essential for institutions, as it greatly facilitates accommodation to the new, extremely dynamic scenario.

In its guideline, the BA defined strategic communication as "the continuous systematization of communication processes [...] in order to maintain legitimacy and credibility, aiming to have freedom of action" (Brasil, 2024, our translation). This document is part of a broader set of public policies that aim to guide state institutions in the face of new information dynamics.

Authors such as Murphy (2012) show that the use of strategic communication by government actors is not a recent phenomenon. In the United States, attempts were made to influence foreign audiences in wartime contexts as early as the 19th century, when Winfield Scott sought to reach out to the Catholic Church in Mexico to win the support of Mexicans in the conflict between the two nations. Today, the main challenges for Strategic Communication (SC) include the complexity of the information environment, the speed and volume of information, as well as cultural and structural factors. In general, these challenges point to the need for innovation in the way strategic communication is handled and the similarity with the Brazilian scenario.

Other countries' experiences reinforce the importance of this debate. The case of Pakistan, for example, with the creation in 1949 of the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR)[2] sector, shows how strategic communication can positively change social perceptions in contexts of territorial dispute, such as in Kashmir (Kochhar, 2023). Analysis of these examples shows how strategic communication has become a central element in the dispute over narratives in the 21st century.

To meet the challenges of strategic communication, it is necessary to use new communication tools, such as digital media, engage communities, train personnel to execute

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1 "Black propaganda [...], which involved assigning the source of misinformation to an adversary." (Ibrahim; Rhode; Daseking, 2023, p. 14)

2 The ISPR operates with the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces and aims to garner national support for the Armed Forces and to strengthen their determination to fulfill their mission, while at the same time weakening the will of the adversary; it is responsible for formulating the military's media policy, protecting the Armed Forces from negative influences, and monitoring international and national media, among other social communication tasks (Adache, 2014).

strategic communication, and create innovative solutions. To tackle disinformation or other threats in the information field, "the most positive attitude is to disseminate and reinforce narratives, in a synchronized manner, about the essential elements of the institution's reputation and credibility, considering that 'everything communicates!'" (Nunes, 2019, p. VIII, our translation).

In this sense, this article examines the feasibility of using military historical and cultural heritage as a strategic communication tool. The analysis is based on bibliographic research, grounded in official defense documents, and dialogues with international experiences. The objective is to understand the extent to which historical and cultural heritage can act as a relevant symbolic resource to bring society closer to defense issues, while projecting values and identities associated with the Brazilian state.

2 METHODOLOGY

This article is characterized as qualitative and exploratory research, based on a bibliographic survey and document analysis. Official defense documents were examined, such as the National Defense White Paper (Livro [...], 2020), the National Defense Policy (PND – *Política Nacional de Defesa*) (Política [...], 2020), the National Defense Strategy (Política [...], 2020), and the Brazilian Army's Strategic Communication Policy (Brasil, 2024), as well as national and international academic literature related to cultural heritage and strategic communication.

For the analysis of primary documents, we adopted the documentary analysis methodology proposed by Cellard (2008), which considers five fundamental dimensions: the context of production, authorship, reliability, explicit and implicit meanings, and social relevance. This methodological procedure allowed us not only to understand the normative content of the texts, but also to identify shortcomings in terms of practical mechanisms for bringing National Defense closer to society.

In addition, reference literature was mobilized in three areas: strategic communication (Castells [1999, 2008, 2017], Lévy [1999], and Paul [2011]); cultural heritage (Abreu and Chagas [2003] and Gonçalves [2007]); and international experiences, such as the use of audiovisual productions from countries such as the United States, Pakistan, South Korea, and Türkiye. This combination allowed us to articulate theory and practice, with a view to understanding how historical and cultural real estate heritage can be incorporated as a strategic communication resource.

3 DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Conceptual foundations of strategic communication

Strategic communication is an expanding field of study, whose definition varies according to the author and context. For Christopher Paul (2011), it is a set of coordinated actions, messages, images, and forms of engagement toward informing, influencing, or persuading selected audiences in support of institutional or national objectives. This concept is based on four pillars: clarity of objectives and desired effects on audiences; coordination between communication agents, avoiding contradictory messages (informational fratricide*)*; consistency between discourse

and practice, reducing the so-called "say-do gap"; and the understanding that not only explicit messages communicate, but also actions (Paul, 2011).

However, contemporary strategic communication cannot be dissociated from the transformations promoted by the digital environment. Pierre Lévy (1999) developed fundamental concepts for understanding this new environment: cyberspace, understood as the "oceanic universe of information" permanently fed by users; cyberculture, as the set of practices and values emerging from this interconnected space; and the notion of collective intelligence, in which knowledge is distributed collaboratively. These concepts are accompanied by reflections on cyberdemocracy and virtuality, which highlight how digital networks expand the possibilities for expression and, at the same time, for control. In line with this perspective, recent studies point out that phenomena such as the digital panopticon[3] materialize new forms of diffuse surveillance, in which individuals self-exposure feeds mechanisms of monitoring and social discipline (Areas; Ramiro; Tamaoki, 2024).

Manuel Castells's contributions complement this framework by demonstrating that we live in a networked society, marked by a new historical paradigm in which information becomes the main raw material. In this context, networks constitute the new social morphology, substantially reorganizing the processes of production, power, culture, and experience (Castells, 1999). Two central concepts stand out: the space of flows, a spatial logic that globally connects strategic nodes (cities, institutions, media), and timeless time, characterized by simultaneity and temporal compression made possible by digital technologies (Castells, 2008). Moreover, Castells (2017) highlights how social movements use digital networks to dispute meanings and build legitimacy, showing that the power of flows takes precedence over the flows of power, that is, the ability to intervene in networks and shape narratives proves to be more decisive than the simple possession of material resources.

Thus, the integration of the contributions of Paul, Lévy, and Castells allows us to understand strategic communication as a process that goes beyond the instrumental dimension of sending messages. It should be analyzed as a practice embedded in informational and symbolic disputes characteristic of networked society, in which digital surveillance, the collaborative production of meanings, and the global circulation of information flows reshape the challenges of contemporary strategic communication.

Based on these theoretical references, it becomes possible to understand that strategic communication is not limited to the dissemination of institutional messages, but is configured as a practice situated in a digital environment marked by networks, information flows, and symbolic disputes. In this context, the BA's historical and cultural real estate heritage can be analyzed not only as a material asset or expression of institutional memory, but also as a strategic element in the construction of narratives, identities, and social legitimacy. When inserted into the space of flows described by Castells (1999), articulated with Lévy's (1999) cyberculture, and operationalized by the principles of coordination and coherence highlighted by Paul (2011), military heritage acquires expanded communicational potential, functioning as an instrument of dialogue between the institution and society amid contemporary dynamics of information and power.

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3   The term "panopticon," coined in the 18th century by Jeremy Bentham, describes a type of prison in which a single guard could control many prisoners without them knowing whether or not they were being watched (Silva, 2023).

3.2 Conceptual foundations of real estate heritage

The notion of heritage, particularly cultural heritage, should not be reduced to a purely material or legal view. It is a complex category that articulates memory, identity, and power. According to Regina Abreu and Mário Chagas (2003), heritage should be understood as a social and historical construct, resulting from the relationship of human groups with their assets, practices, and representations. From this perspective, preserving an asset does not only mean conserving its materiality, but above all safeguarding the collective meanings attributed to it, ensuring its transmission to future generations.

As José Reginaldo Gonçalves (2007) points out, heritage operates as a universal "category of thought," present in any society, and its value goes beyond the utilitarian aspect: it is a "total social fact," involving economic, religious, political, and aesthetic dimensions. This reading broadens the horizon of the debate on military real estate heritage. The Army's fortifications, barracks, and historic buildings are not just "brick-and-mortar assets," but also territories of memory that carry symbolic, identity-related, and emotional values for different communities (Abreu; Chagas, 2003).

In Brazil, this concept is supported by the 1988 Constitution, in Articles 215 and 216 (Brasil, 2024), which broadened the concept of cultural heritage to include both tangible and intangible assets. This view is in line with the idea that military real estate heritage, in addition to serving defensive functions, preserves narratives of the nation's formation, allowing society to critically reflect on its history and strengthen identity bonds.

3.3 Normative foundations

The possible use of historical and cultural real estate heritage is supported by high-level documentation on National Defense, such as the *National Defense White Paper,* the *National Defense Policy*, and the *National Defense Strategy*, all from 2020. These documents establish the *National Defense Objectives* (NDO), among which NDO VI stands out: "Expand the involvement of Brazilian society in national defense issues," strongly linked to the theme of strategic communication (Política [...], 2020). This objective is materialized by Defense Strategies (ED – *Estratégias de Defesa*), such as ED-13, "Promotion of defense issues in education," and ED-14, "Use of social communication." They encompass Strategic Defense Actions (AED – *Ações Estratégicas de Defesa*), such as AED-69 and AED-74, which deal with the inclusion of defense issues in the national education system and the development of institutional promotion activities (Política [...], 2020).

Although they lend legitimacy to the debate, these documents also have important limitations. From the documentary analysis methodology proposed by Cellard (2008), it is possible to consider that:

1. Context of production: the texts were drafted amid a political climate of budgetary constraints and a search for social legitimacy for the Armed Forces;
2. Authorship: these are official documents, with strongly normative language, primarily reflecting the government's view;

3. Reliability: although they consist of institutional references, they do not express social plurality in a balanced way;

4. Explicit and implicit meanings: explicitly, they propose to expand social participation; implicitly, they demonstrate the difficulty of translating this objective into practical implementation mechanisms.

An example is the principle of the *National Defense Policy*: "Encourage the fundamental involvement of all segments of Brazilian society in defense matters" (Política [...], 2020, p. 21, our translation). The formulation indicates the relevance of the topic, but it does not present concrete instruments to enable this engagement, nor criteria for its evaluation. Similarly, the *National Defense White Paper* emphasizes the importance of bringing defense closer to civil society, but it does so through broad and generic descriptions, without detailing public policies that can guarantee its effectiveness.

Thus, although these documents constitute the normative framework that authorizes the use of historical and cultural heritage as a strategic communication tool, it is necessary to analyze them critically, identifying both their symbolic and legal value and their shortcomings. This reinforces the need for innovative proposals that transcend the legal dimension and are capable of bringing defense and society closer together through more tangible instruments.

3.4 Brazil's historical and cultural military real estate collection

The Brazilian Army's historical real estate collection is significant, including forts, fortresses, barracks, monuments, and mausoleums, which were built over the centuries to defend the territorial integrity of a country with continental dimensions. The regional significance of the construction of each of these fortifications has psychosocial attributes for the communities that lived and live in their vicinity. For Cruxen (2011), military architecture in general is characterized by dualism: functioning as a fortification in the face of a threat and, at the same time, expressing values. Thus, the architectural symbolism associated with housing, the nucleus that generates settlement and provides security, allows the creation of social bonds with the population.

These characteristics are evident to a greater or lesser degree in the historical military constructions existing in Brazil. The Real Forte Príncipe da Beira, in Costa Marques (RO), and the Forte de Coimbra, in Corumbá (MS), exemplify this dualism of military architecture. On the one hand, they served as a defense against Spanish attempts to invade the colonial territory disputed between the Iberian powers; on the other, they were symbols linked to belonging, identity, and the involvement of the Indigenous population in defending these positions. Today, these inland forts represent the historical effort to conquer and maintain borders, attracting visitors interested in learning about relevant aspects of national history.

On the coast, the fortifications located in Recife, Rio de Janeiro, and Salvador bear symbolic marks of the genesis of Brazilian identity, associated with defense against French, English, and Dutch invaders. According to the 2022 census by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and

Statistics (IBGE, 2023), Recife (PE) has 1,488,920 inhabitants, Rio de Janeiro (RJ) has 6,211,223, and Salvador (BA) has 2,417,678, totaling approximately 10 million Brazilians. This data indicates the potential impact, considering the demographic density, of military heritage in these regions, where there are greater social identification and possibilities for using the fortifications in educational and cultural activities, such as visits, classes, presentations, and commemorative events.

The construction of military projects in Brazil mobilized skilled labor, engineers, and master craftsmen. In the case of the Real Forte Príncipe da Beira, in accordance with the Indian Directory of the Marquis of Pombal (1699-1782), the Indigenous workforce was trained and instructed in tasks and trades, with workers coming from other locations (Barroso, 2015). Thus, in addition to their defensive function, the fortresses preserved and transferred technical and artistic knowledge.

Notably, engineering education in Brazil arose out of the need for defense. The Royal Charter of 1699 expressed interest in training technical soldiers in the art of building fortifications (Brasil, 2015). Fortification classes began in the 17th century, and in 1792, the Royal Academy of Artillery, Fortification, and Design was created, the embryo of the current Military Institute of Engineering (IME). Thus, the military fortifications built from the 18th century onwards embody Brazil's technical capacity in engineering.

In colonial times, the presence of a fort also signified the presence of the state in various dimensions. At the Real Forte Príncipe da Beira, for example, disputes between workers of different origins (Whites, Black, and Indigenous people, slaves, freedmen, civilians, and military personnel) were dealt with under Portuguese law (Barroso, 2015), reinforcing the authority of the space. The isolated location of this fortification allowed the use of local materials, such as *canga* stone (laterite), tiles, and wood, requiring the collective effort of master craftsmen, enslaved people, and Indigenous people (Barroso, 2015). The result was a structure that still stands imposingly on the right bank of the Guaporé River, reflecting the adaptability and constructive capacity of the workers.

Currently, there is a new social mobilization in favor of preserving these buildings. Academic works, such as those by Amorim (2013) and Nascimento (2024), advocate for the conservation of the Santa Cruz Fortress in Florianópolis (SC) and the Monte Serrat Fort in Salvador (BA). In addition, institutional partnerships, such as the agreement signed between the city of Salvador and the Brazilian Army for the restoration of the São Diogo and Santa Maria Forts, show the potential for collaboration in valuing this heritage as a cultural and identity resource.

During its more than 500 years of history, Brazil has been home to approximately 341 fortifications designed to defend the territory. Today, 109 of these buildings remain, 40 of which have already been listed by the National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN – *Instituto do Patrimonio Histórico e Artístico Nacional*) (Barroso, 2015). This scenario highlights both the richness and vulnerability of this heritage, reinforcing the need for consistent preservation policies.

Stories of defense, such as that of the Fort of Coimbra (CMO, 2013?) in 1801, reinforce the narrative potential of this heritage. Located on the banks of the Paraguay River in Mato Grosso do Sul, under the command of Colonel Ricardo Franco de Almeida Serra, the garrison resisted an attack by approximately 1,100 men for nine days, with only

49 combatants. This resistance, marked by courage, sacrifice, and a sense of duty, could be explored as a media prototype in Brazil, similar to international film productions that have transformed military episodes into epic narratives. This example connects national historical heritage to possibilities for strategic communication, serving as a bridge for the analysis of international experiences.

3.5 International examples of strategic communication

In different countries, we can see how heritage, the arts, and the cultural industry have been mobilized to consolidate national narratives. In the United States, for example, films such as *Fort Apache* (1948) and film industry productions during World War II, from the Office of War Information, played an important role in constructing a collective imagination about honor, territorial expansion, and support for the war effort. Currently, the U.S. Department of Defense's Office of Media and Entertainment is responsible for supporting studios, companies, producers, directors, screenwriters, etc. in the production and creation of films (DOW Production [...], 2021). Such productions reflect the articulation between market demands and political interests, revealing how strategic communication is intertwined with cultural and economic sectors (Murphy, 2012).

In Pakistan, the 2019 series *Eid-e-Wafa* and other ISPR-supported productions demonstrate how the state uses cultural products to spread patriotic narratives and legitimize public policies in contexts of regional instability (Subramanian, 2021). This model contrasts with the American one: while in the United States market logic predominates, with moments of alignment with state policies, in Pakistan there is more direct and continuous government control over cultural production. The choice of these two countries as references is therefore justified because they represent two opposite poles of media use in strategic communication: on the one hand, market logic (United States), and on the other, state logic (Pakistan).

Additional experiences reinforce this global trend. South Korea and Türkiye have explored audiovisual production as a means of reinforcing nationalism and projecting soft power through films, soap operas, and productions that reach global audiences (Kelkitli, 2024; Lee, 2016). These international experiences show that strategic communication, when linked to culture, can become a powerful tool for persuasion and symbolic projection, although it also raises questions about its democratic limits and the risk of instrumentalizing memory.

Considering these contrasting models, Brazil could benefit from the creation of pilot projects or media prototypes based on its military heritage. One possible path would be to adopt a hybrid model that combines public-private partnerships and the dynamism of the audiovisual sector (similar to the US market model) with institutional support and cultural policies to ensure historical preservation and identity enhancement (inspired by the Pakistani model). This initial suggestion will be revisited in more detail in the conclusion of this text, as a proposed recommendation for the Brazilian reality.

3.6 National media and technology context

With the increase in internet availability in Brazil, in 2023, around 31 million households had subscriptions to paid streaming services such as Netflix, Prime Video, and HBO, according to the Continuous National Household Sample Survey (*Pesquisa Nacional por Amostras de Domicílios Contínua*) (Moura, 2024). There is still enormous potential for growth, given that, in the same year, there were 464 million digital devices (computers, notebooks, tablets, and smartphones) in use in the country, according to a survey by the Getulio Vargas Foundation's Center for Applied Technology and Information (FGVCia) (Brasil [...], 2020). This scenario has stimulated robust investments: Netflix allocated approximately R$ 1 billion to Brazilian productions in 2023 and 2024, according to the newspaper Valor Econômico (Ravache, 2023), followed by the announcement of R$ 1.6 billion in investments in the audiovisual sector by the Federal Government (Governo [...], 2024).

These data reveal that Brazil has a consolidated audiovisual consumption infrastructure and a favorable ecosystem for the production of national content. Therefore, initiatives that explore military heritage through documentaries, series, or films find not only a broad technological base but also a rapidly expanding market. This context signals the viability of future strategic communication proposals based on the use of the BA's historical and cultural real estate heritage.

4   CONCLUSION

The analysis developed throughout this article has identified that the Brazilian Army's historical and cultural real estate heritage has significant potential to be incorporated as a strategic communication tool. Military fortifications and buildings represent not only architectural landmarks but also symbolic spaces, loaded with identity and narrative values that dialogue with Brazilian society.

The study showed that, in conceptual terms, strategic communication should be understood as an articulated process that involves not only messages, but also actions and symbols (Paul, 2011). When thinking about strategic communication in conjunction with cyberculture and network society (Castells, 1999, 2008, 2017; Lévy, 1999), it becomes clear that military heritage can transcend its preservation function and act as a high-impact communication resource.

From a comparative perspective, the international examples analyzed revealed two opposing models: the US model, driven by market demands but occasionally linked to defense policies, and the Pakistani model, characterized by direct state control over cultural productions. The analysis of the cases of South Korea and Türkiye reinforced how audiovisual media can be used as an instrument of soft power. For Brazil, a hybrid model is suggested, combining the dynamism of public-private partnerships and the audiovisual sector with institutional support to ensure the preservation and enhancement of historical memory.

In this sense, media prototypes are proposed that use military heritage as a setting and narrative: documentaries, short films, or series on streaming platforms, exploring episodes such as the resistance at the Fort of Coimbra. These pilot projects, even on a small scale,

will contribute to raising public awareness and consolidating the link between National Defense and civil society.

At the same time, it is necessary to consider contemporary challenges. The advancement of the digital panopticon and psychopolitical structures[4] (Silva, 2023) creates risks of information manipulation and excessive surveillance. Strategic communication must therefore balance its role of institutional strengthening with the democratic commitment to transparency and plurality. If, on the one hand, it is up to the Army to alert society to threats and misinformation, on the other hand, the institution must foster the creation of critical and participatory communities around the theme of defense.

It can thus be concluded that military historical and cultural real estate heritage can act as a bridge between the past and the present, linking memory, identity, and innovation. Its strategic use, anchored in media projects and supported by inclusive public policies, can reinforce the legitimacy of National Defense, while stimulating democratic debate and the appreciation of Brazilian cultural diversity.

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4   "Psychopolitical structures" is a broad and complex topic, but in general it deals with the interaction between psychological processes and politics, including how psychology can be used to manipulate people through political propaganda, or how politics affects people's mental health (Silva, 2023).

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