



Stronger
Peripheries

Building
a Southern
Coalition in
Performing
Arts

Pedro Costa,
Ricardo Venâncio Lopes
and Anja Pletikosa
(coord.)

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STRONGER PERIPHERIES:

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Building a Southern Coalition in Performing Arts

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Cultural Policies in Portugal —the Rhythm Beats the Hopes

Paula
Varanda

Setting the Scene

For nearly a decade, Portugal's political scenario has been one of stability and continued progression through a promised process of change and revitalization. The Socialist Party has led the country with social state and economic recovery policies in line with EU standards. Democracy is in vivid motion, but political lobby, demagoguery and corruption continue to undermine our development. Is it endemic.... or pandemic? The government's performance is sharply scrutinized by parliament, the media, citizens and key players in many sectors. It's a "fight for your right", in danger of losing to populism, liberalism and conservative majorities. For the cultural sector, a history of instability and uncertainty scratches the optimistic frame; it's a "long and winding road" of expectations and unfulfilled needs that drains the power of hope.

This country of ten million inhabitants faces the Atlantic in the West and extends to the deep interior borders with Spain in the East. The 1974 Carnation Revolution was the birth of our democracy, when we were marked by immigration and the harms of socioeconomic inequality, poor education, and political isolation. During 40 years of the Estado Novo dictatorship, cultural policy was dominated by fierce propaganda relating to a national identity shaped by conservative moralism and traditions. Slowly and erratically, the State has assumed the responsibilities of guaranteeing the right to culture expressed in the 1976 Constitution:

It is the State's duty to correct existing asymmetries in the country regarding the means and instruments of cultural action; to support initiatives that encourage individual and collective creation, as well as greater circulation of quality works and cultural goods; to defend and promote national culture abroad. (Article 78 cited in Garcia et al., 2014, p. 194)¹

According to Teixeira Lopes three models that characterize different generations of 20th century cultural policy in the Western World have intertwined in the courses of Portugal's path (Lopes, 2007): the French proclaimed project of cultural democratization with dissemination of heritage and masterpieces emanated from the privileged classes; the education for culture and social animation with local practices defended by Anglo-Saxon models; and a third generation focused on cultural democracy, where the state's remit is accomplished by sharing resources with civil society organizations that ensure a representative public service of culture.

¹ All quotes were freely translated from Portuguese by the author.

The Portuguese official narrative recontextualizes the concepts of cultural democratization and cultural democracy with an emphasis on audience building as a demonstration of return on public investment (Lopes, pp.90–91). State policy has reinforced the mission of public institutions to promote access to cultural goods; however, for Lopes, the institutions failed to understand the newcomers and communities involved, thus generalizing an “official perspective” in the course of “inventing a collective habitus” that does not match reality (p. 96).

For Pinto Ribeiro (2009), democratization failed, because opening free cultural venues is not enough to make better and more cultivated citizens; without keys to reading works and different levels of interpretation, the impact of artwork is rendered banal and consumed under a process of massification (p. 15). Alternatively, a new left-wing cultural policy must consider the narratives that decolonize art history, culture, and territories (p. 20). The production of differentiated, rather than common, imaginaries, is a priority that will be accomplished by supporting cultural productions from minority groups (p. 23). In this line of thinking, Paiva defends that “cultural institutions must work towards creating conditions that facilitate free circulation between symbolic frontiers” (Paiva, 2019, p. 78).

In the performing arts, the core subject and lens through which this analysis on Portugal’s cultural policy is made, government responsibilities are tied to education, social and territorial cohesion, internationalization and employment. Problems with political validation, social participation, budget contraction, professional precarity, and arbitrary decisions compromise the fulfilment of the right to culture stated in our constitution. Such problems are also a consequence of inconsistent cultural policies, which have advanced indecisively between democratization of access to cultural heritage and productions, and democratic access to the means of cultural experience, production, and distribution. It is a complex maze, as we will address here, through an overview on topics such as: public governing of culture; decentralization networks; the arts funding system; and participatory projects that prevent or reduce marginalization.

Social inequalities jeopardize access to culture in Portugal and State-funded erudite performing arts represent a minority among the cultural practices of the Portuguese population (Pais et al., 2020). Ambitions of audience development must give way to a political project committed to the participation of diversity and difference in cultural development, as well as making them visible and valued in society. Both public institutions and private stakeholders must seriously nourish such a project throughout this decade.

Central Government Policy and Institutions

A substantial report that maps resources, administration, and legislation describes how ideology has affected cultural policy in Portugal (Garcia et al., 2014). While right-wing governments privilege the preservation of classics and heritage and promote the market as regulator for new productions and activities, left-wing leaders normally defend an interventionist model, in which the State regulates the market and supports contemporary arts and cultural diversity with decisive funding and protective legislation (p. 19). The place and status of culture in central government has shifted many times, from being a Ministry of Culture to being a Secretariat, to being incorporated in ministries with education and science (p. 195). This instability has critically disturbed the course of a much-needed political project for culture of consequence.

From the mid-1990s to 2008, our cultural policy was characterized by growth and development; there were very positive indicators in relation to budget, infrastructure, cultural organizations, and dynamic synergy between offer and demand, with significant repercussions for internal development and international visibility. After 2009, cultural policy was marked by: crisis and disintegration with budget cuts, cultural organizations stripped of their missions, and polarization and inequality of access (Garcia et al., 2018, p. 12). Between 2011 and 2014 a harsh reform was imposed by the right-wing government that negotiated the austerity programme with the Troika² when the country suffered a bailout. The Ministry of Culture (in place since 1995) was dissolved and several public institutions were suppressed, and staff, expenditure and programmes were drastically reduced. The effects were devastating for cultural participation and independent professional activity.

Recovering a dignifying status and visibility for Culture was a major commitment of the Socialist Party, elected in 2015 and led by Prime Minister António Costa, who remained in power until November 2023.³ To reinstate culture as “an essential pillar of democracy, national identity, innovation and sustained development”,⁴ substantial financial investment, recovery of the public institutions, and

2 Consortium created by the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, to manage the Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, and Portugal bailout programmes.

3 António Costa has headed the last three governments with four ministers of culture. He resigned facing charges of influence peddling, that are yet to be clarified. The political scenario for 2024 is unpredictable, with new parliamentary elections happening in March.

4 Page 197 of *Programa do XXI Governo Constitucional*, available at <https://www.portugal.gov.pt/ficheiros-geral/programa-do-governo-pdf.aspx> [accessed 14-07-2023].

support to the independent sector were promised. The government programme promoted transversal operation between national sector departments and institutions, as well as collaboration with the local administrations and civil society, supporting dialogue and participation in the decisions of policy making. Major tasks to undertake throughout the legislature were the revision of the arts funding programme, the design of labour and social security legislation, the approval of fiscal incentives for creative industries, reinforcing the presence of the arts in the general education system and the national and international promotion of Portuguese culture.

The public health crisis with the pandemic of COVID-19 in 2020 was an earthquake for the cultural sector; and the political priorities of the electoral programme changed. The truth of an endemically precarious system was cruelly exposed, and organizations and individuals gathered in unprecedented cooperation and solidarity. After fierce criticism from cultural agents, central and local governments responded with several measures, following the example of private foundations.

The current government took office in 2022 with their major concern being to recover from the pandemic and overcome an economic and social crisis. The main challenges they set were to pursue a development model based on the training or professionalization of human resources and mitigation of inequalities, where the programme of culture endorsed an inclusive and creative society: “we will promote public policies aimed at accessibility and broad participation of audiences and their connection to institutions, works and creators”.⁵ In 2023 the Minister of Culture⁶ supervises eighteen bodies, including the General-Directorate for the Arts, three National Theatres and the National Ballet, as well as two departments for strategic planning, inter-ministerial cooperation and the licensing of cultural activities. The national budget for Culture in 2023 was announced to be €750 million, representing 0.9%⁷ of total state expenditure.⁸

State institutions are an important reflection of cultural policy. How do they accomplish the goals and principles dictated by the government’s

5 Page 170 of *Programa do XXIII Governo Constitucional*, available at <https://www.portugal.gov.pt/gc23/programa-do-governo-xviii/programa-do-governo-xviii-pdf.aspx?v=<mlkvi>=54f1146c-05ee-4f3a-be5c-b10f524d-8cec> [accessed 17-07-2023].

6 Information provided by GEPAC (strategic planning and evaluation department) in: <https://www.gepac.gov.pt/organismos-da-cultural1> [accessed 17-07-2023].

7 Information provided by the General Budget Directorate (DGO) in https://online.dgo.gov.pt/DadosCidadao/Orcamento_CG.Entrada.aspx [accessed 10-08-2023].

8 Part supported by EU funds for PRR, and a third of the expenditure is for the national radio and television and the news agency.

programme? These places should stimulate reflection and debate and their directors must consider their political responsibility (Vlachou, 2022, pp.39 and 46). Since 2015,⁹ the D. Maria II National Theatre stands out as a case of democratic mediation with the real world (Borges, 2021), and the *Odisseia Nacional* programme in 2023¹⁰ is an extraordinary example of this commitment. The National Ballet (CNB) opened its doors to new Portuguese creators and contemporary dance,¹¹ but never assumed a significant role in decentralization. The other national theatres—São João (theatre) and São Carlos (opera and music)—continue to follow the model of sumptuous expensive productions, preserving archetypal styles and disciplinary hierarchies, with some concern for democratizing access to high culture.

Institutions created in the 1990s like Fundação Culturgest, Fundação de Serralves and Fundação Centro Cultural de Belém (partly funded by the State that approved their mission and management framework), have stability and autonomy to design their programmes. Their public service is leading-edge, diverse, and engaged. They secure international exchange and exposure for professionals and audiences, and they support the independent sector with financial co-production and facilities to create and/or present work. They legitimate and promote visibility to the national artistic creation and strongly influence peers and audiences, therefore having a role in forming the State’s artistic taste and cultural practices.

Local Policies and Administrations

Local government works in partnership with central government that structures the cultural policy of the country and the EU structural funds have stimulated this cooperative relationship under common objectives and conceptual directives. The country has 308 municipalities; they are autonomous, may follow different ideologies and govern to their territorial characteristics, needs and expectations.

The city of Lisbon developed an ambitious strategic plan (2009–2021), in response to the challenges it faced as a cosmopolitan capital, in a global context of intense circulation of people and goods, and the pressure of gentrification.¹² The areas of economy, education and citizenship engaged in joint planning underpinned by the idea that culture can express human diversity and build communities (Pinto

9 With Artistic Director Tiago Rodrigues.

10 With Artistic Director Pedro Penim.

11 With the artistic directors Luísa Taveira, Paulo Ribeiro and Sofia Campos (between 2010 and 2021).

12 While Catarina Vaz Pinto, experienced cultural manager and politician, held office at Lisbon City Council (Socialist Party, until 2021). She has vast experience on the international stage and networking.

et al., 2021, p. 9). All cultural departments and public venues were encouraged to include “the agendas of the present”, such as ecology, gender equality, multiculturalism, the promotion of active ageing and explore practices and methods for the people of Lisbon to participate “in a space of critical reflection that is par excellence that of culture” thus becoming “inductors of change and openness to new ideas and values” (p. 10). This outstanding strategy justified a substantial budget increase and a communication plan to implement significant adjustment and professionalization of municipal organizations, infrastructure rehabilitation, content expansion and programme design, audience accessibility, international networking, and support to civil society initiatives. Municipal outreach grew extensively as many subsequent projects demonstrate. For example, with the cooperation of educational services, the Descola project, connected the experience of contemporary arts and heritage with the national curriculum; and the threats of conflict and segmentation were addressed with an intercultural strategic policy, essential for “an innovative way of living and cohabiting with the diversity of cultural and ethnic groups in contemporary societies” (Ribeiro, 2009, p. 34).

An ambitious policy started in Porto in 2013,¹³ which involved significant investment in cultural venues and programming. The city achieved noteworthy international reputation, funding programmes for local agents were established, and peripheral suburban or run-down areas started to participate in the cultural identity of the city.

Towns like Viseu (central region), Guimarães (northern region), and Loulé (southern region), are exemplary cases of remarkable decentralization efforts. The municipal theatre, or cultural centre,¹⁴ established reliable relationships with cultural agents that brought quality, professionalism and diversity to the programmes available to local populations, thus enabling collective experience and critical appreciation of contemporary, traditional, and commercial forms. In Viseu and Guimarães, independent organizations have taken part in the core development of these projects. These municipalities stimulate active networking and cultivate their significance and reputation in the national circuit of aesthetic trends and ideas. They also invest in international programmes and large-scale events that support the mobility of artists and attract foreign audiences, programmers, and investors.

¹³ While Paulo Cunha e Silva, experienced cultural manager, with networking know-how, served as councillor for culture elected with the independent president, still in power. Cunha e Silva died in 2015.

¹⁴ Teatro Viriato in Viseu, Centro Cultural Vila Flor in Guimarães, and Cineteatro Louletano in Loulé.

Generally in relation to culture, the local government intervenes in holding popular festivities and in the management of theatres and cinemas, archives and libraries, museums and monuments; culture often shares department with sports, education, youth and sometimes tourism too. Although proximity and specificity are highlighted as advantages in local scale administrations (Gama & Costa, 2021), the anxiety of electoral results, especially in provincial areas, dictates how cultural organization programmes are instrumentalized and controlled, which has been subject to sharp critique (Matoso, 2019). The scale, population and context-specific priorities of each municipality are very diverse and so is the political relevance of culture:

Despite the allocation of financial resources to the cultural sector by the municipalities being, in percentage terms, much stronger than the investments and financing carried out by the central administration, a closer analysis highlights the enormous difficulties that Portuguese municipalities have in defining and implementing cultural policies. (Gama & Costa, 2021, p.17)

Networks for Decentralization

To accomplish the decentralization and the democratization of culture, central and local governments have agreed on joint policy to specify guidelines, objectives and means by which public institutions operate at national, regional, and local level. The National Network of Public Libraries was initiated in the late 1980s with the goal of providing all county seats with a public library (Figueiredo, 2004); and the Portuguese Network of Museums was formalized in 2004 with a framework for a system that envisioned “decentralization, mediation, qualification, and cooperation between museums” (Camacho, 2010, p. 17).

In the early 2000s, with the support of European Funds, a national venue rehabilitation project took place to install a theatre in all district capitals and give form to the aspiration of creating a countrywide network for performing arts. This plan, however, was lacking in other means needed to fulfil the mission of these institutions to increase cultural participation, and the local responsibilities were unclear:

Almost nothing was demanded in relation to the future from the municipalities that applied for funding to build a theatre (...). In the relationship between the ministry and the municipalities, the obligations regarding the functioning of the theatres were not defined. (Rodrigues, 2009, p. 70)

Few venues had adequate resources, and few municipal directors were skilled in managing cultural policy. This was aggravated, and still is, by the many mayors for whom culture is “one of the last options or otherwise, instrumentalized to the service of propaganda” (p. 68). Municipalities prioritized managing practices that avoided long-term commitments with qualified teams, educational services, co-production, and widespread promotion throughout their territory. Sporadic mainstream blockbuster shows or the hiring of professional companies following the “key-in-the-hand” model,¹⁵ were the opposite of programmes that promote sustained continuity, local creativity and audience development. Without a strategic funding programme, the ambition of decentralization was destined to fail.

The law for the Network of Portuguese Theatres and Cinema was finally published in 2019 and is now implemented with a venue accreditation process, funding applications for programming and staff training programmes. The aforementioned problems are yet to be resolved, and the project has been criticized for underestimating the consequences of political, social and economic differences in the territory and disregarding new production modes that emerge in the cultural landscape (Ferreira, 2019). Still, the consolidation of the network could help municipalities to design public local and regional outreach programmes, in partnership with third sector cultural organizations. Not all mayors want to invest in this cultural policy; hopefully the network will help to expose their negligence towards the societies they should be working for.

Municipal networks such as Artemrede (Lisbon, Vale do Tejo and central regions) and Comédias do Minho (northern region) are singular and exemplary. They have demonstrated the efficiency and transformative potential of a powerful model to decentralize the public service of culture, engage local community in cultural participation, and achieve social and territorial cohesion. They bring together artists, communities, and institutions in long-term collaborations that are essential for a public policy that is consistently committed to cultural democracy. Artemrede has extended this role by organizing political forums that stimulate networking between decision makers in municipalities, and conferences that also include other institutions, non-governmental organizations, academia and citizens.¹⁶

15 An expression we use in Portugal for when the municipalities open the theatre to the invited artists leaving them with the responsibilities of setting up, preparing, presenting to, and receiving the audience for the performance.

16 See, for example, https://www.artemrede.pt/pt_pt/forum-politico [accessed 31-08-2023] or Costa (2015).

Independent Organizations and Arts Funding

Public funding to the arts contributes to several goals of cultural policy: “support cultural creation, production, and dissemination; democratization of access to culture; cultural decentralization; and internationalization of Portuguese culture” (Garcia et al., 2014, pp.19–20). The independent sector meets these goals with great vitality in several domains, disciplinary areas, target audiences and administrative configurations. For Teixeira Lopes (2007), the paradigm of cultural democracy must reject absolute criteria of taste and the State must find an active response to the needs of the third sector and the variety of cultural fields it represents.

The first application procedure for performing arts was launched in 1996, and the General-Directorate of the Arts (DGARTES) has managed this system since 2006.¹⁷ Neves (2020) remarks how this measure has largely proved to be necessary in order to ensure the “permanence, diversity and dissemination of the artistic offer in the territory, in a logic of proximity to the populations” (p. 28). It is however, a highly controversial process and very vulnerable to political fluctuations; its impact has not been systematically evaluated, and there is no survey methodology that supports efficient solutions for implementation (p. 32).

A quantitative national picture of the third sector is difficult to draw with the disperse and irregular statistics of DGARTES: 836 professional groups from the performing, visual or cross-disciplinary arts were identified in 2012 (Garcia et al., 2014, p. 101); 2,800 collective or individual entities were registered in the electronic platform of DGARTES (Neves et al., 2017). But the application procedure results¹⁸ are demonstrative of the demands and the national portfolio¹⁹ supported by the system: 229 independent professional entities were funded in 2017—140 with two/four-year programmes of continued activity, 18 with one-year programmes, and 71 with single projects (Fernandes, 2018, p. 11); in 2022 the pluriennial programmes comprised 211 entities (from 370 applicants) and 292 single projects were financed (of circa 775 applications). In 2023, from more than 1,200 applications, 302 artistic creation and programming projects were selected.²⁰ In the two/four-year programmes, the area of theatre

17 The system can be found at: <https://www.dgartes.gov.pt> [accessed 19-07-2023].

18 Retrieved from the records of the procedures available at <https://www.dgartes.gov.pt/pt/vnode/2> [accessed 31-07-2023].

19 National portfolio is an expression I’m borrowing from the British Arts Council support system reports.

20 The numbers from 2022 and 2023 were retrieved from the tables in the minutes of the procedures and have not been treated statistically.

obtains 38% of the total allocated budget, while dance receives 7% (2022 results), and funded entities tend to be concentrated in the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto (Fernandes, 2018, p. 21)—these significant discrepancies reveal an arbitrary cultural policy.

Contracts with the State secure means for professional groups to function and fulfil their commitments with other organizations, but candidates can define projects relatively freely. Cultural agents highlight positive aspects of the funding system such as its existence and continuity, and the scope of artistic areas, type of entities and territory covered. Agents tend to agree on the negative aspects, which include the low budget, excessive bureaucracy, irregularity of the procedures, and lack of communication from the funding body (Neves, 2017, p. 284). In the view of unions and professional associations²¹ the system fails because of deficient national policy, undermined by chronic divestment.

The continual decline in central and local government budgets gives rise to severe limitations on government intervention, encouraging mainly random individual measures subject to permanent contingency. Such actions cannot be described as constituting a strategically planned, properly articulated, and continuity-based cultural policy. (Garcia et al., 2018, p. 13)

From 2009 to 2016, arts funding dropped from €21 million to €13 million per year and timidly recovered to €16 million in 2017. In 2018 a new support model meant that granted applications could access an urgent individual budget increase, but the overall budget for the whole programme did not increase and many historical structures were excluded. Such results led to a huge backlash, which forced the government to review expenditure and accommodate 40 more organizations into the portfolio. In 2022 DGARTES announced a € 36 million budget to support the arts; however, this amount had to be reviewed again, to accommodate requests from the four-year plurennial programmes during their application process. It was increased to €41 million. A new dispute emerged, because of the separate consideration of two-year candidates; 65% were excluded and many had to close or suspend their activity. The short-term project grant award processes in 2022 and 2023 also provide relevant evidence: the jury evaluated applications very positively, but funding only reached a quarter of the candidates. It is puzzling and defeating. In a country where the quality of the civil service is often mediocre, risk-taking projects which score the top marks in the criteria and objectives set by the State are rejected.

21 Rede, Plateia, CENA-STE, Performart, Acesso Cultura and Acção Cooperativista, among others.

Professional associations have persistently warned the Ministers of Culture. A strategy with DGARTES must be designed—*a priori* to opening the calls for grants—that considers knowledge of the field, the government programme for culture and the professional conditions required. Neither the expenditure increase, nor the system update have provided adequate responses to sector growth; the numbers may be overwhelming, but they can be explained. Firstly, the democratization of the arts funding system was an intentional reform of the cultural policy announced in 2015. With a large government campaign, the independent sector was called to participate in the discussion about this plan and encouraged to professionalize with the new arts support model. Secondly, the pandemic brought many different agents together, and the emergency response programmes avoided traditional grant award procedures. The number of funding beneficiaries increased, including groups that had never applied before, some of which lost market profits and discovered the opportunities of public support. Finally, two decades of public funding have supported the sector's professionalization and many more students have qualified in the arts and culture through higher education in recent years. They now aspire to work in this field. Arts and culture are risky, demanding, and competitive professions; but more people now value their social and economic potential. If the public institutions are not ready to employ more artists and culture professionals, the answer is in the third sector.

Participation as a Practice for Democracy

International programmes that intersect culture, education, and human rights seek to harness creative processes to enable inclusion, dialogue and civic participation in their aims to foster sustainable societies. In Northern Europe community and participatory art is led by the institutions; in Southern Europe the independent sector is the head of its development (Matarasso, 2019). In Portugal, artists and cultural collectives pioneered this kind of project, but over the last three decades some institutions and municipal organizations have integrated this into their cultural policy. The Ministry of Culture has not yet presented a robust strategy for this stream of creative and social practices.

The arts approach to concerns of multiculturalism, gender, race, age, and other elements that marginalize and divide our societies may be very attractive for governing bodies, but their intentions may be scrutinized. Practices directed towards societal impact have been criticized for forging an ideology of democracy as consensus (Kolb, 2011), and submit to political instrumentalization of the arts (Duxbury et al., 2017), becoming a means of political propaganda and of guaranteeing local engagement with culture.

A remarkable group of projects, led by the third sector, have a distinctive mission of social inclusion and representation (Cruz, 2015); these cultural practices provide an urgent space for encounter and self-reflection that improves our working and living together (Matarasso, 2019, p. 29). It is also urgent to acknowledge the vast amount of work that has been done in Portugal and that demands institutional investment.

In 2014 the Gulbenkian Foundation launched programme PARTIS, to support art that promotes social inclusion. This has contributed immensely to raising the profile of existing projects and to understanding the state of the art, accounted for in publications (Cruz, ed. 2020, 2023) and the website.²² Because participatory art differs from the conventions of institutional art, which requires the patterns for appreciation and evaluation be adapted, it is essential that artistic quality is assessed (Lucena, 2023). Projects are also being encouraged to monitor and evaluate their specific and effective social transformation (Teixeira, 2023).

Community and participatory practices in dance and theatre were introduced in Portugal by choreographer Madalena Victorino in the 1980s. Her work has singularized the aesthetics of rural and industrial activity and the culture of migrant or marginalized groups (Azevedo & Martins, 2014). Victorino's pieces offer an opportunity to be together and empathize with "otherness". With *Vale* (2010), we entered the heart of Ribatejo and saw the populations embody their cultural identity with the accomplice company of professional dancers and musicians (Varanda, 2020, p. 107). Artemrede commissioned this piece in 2009, to create a project that would involve the populations associated by the several cultural venues of the network members.

Artemrede found in PARTIS an important institutional partner for this stream of its mission, thus commissioning artists, driving application procedures, and engaging network members to have access to the aimed populations and guarantee public and political visibility. In 2016–2018 Artemrede promoted an education and competency development project—*Odisseias*—for young people from 16 to 25 years old. The artists invited were Rui Catalão (theatre), António-Pedro (music and film) and Radar 360° (circus and street art). They produced a performative work with participants that was shared locally in municipal theatres and at the Gulbenkian Foundation. In 2021, Artemrede co-produced *Meio no Meio*, by choreographer Victor

22 Since 2021 this programme has associated with Art for Change from Fundação La Caixa <https://gulbenkian.pt/partisartforchange/en/> [accessed on 31-08-2023].

Hugo Pontes,²³ which resulted in a very intense and highly successful piece, where young and old Portuguese, migrants and natives, from peripheral territories, define themselves in public, as people, as lives, as fears and ambitions for the 21st century.

Artemrede's vocation to engage artists, institutions and populations in participatory creative practices—becoming an active player in the practice of cultural policy—extended to international cooperation funded by Creative Europe. In the project Stronger Peripheries (2020–2024), the two commissions developed with Portuguese artists, demonstrate the importance of sharing critical issues within European collaboration spaces.

CONCERTO (2023), by Tiago Cadete, is a poignant testimony of Latin American immigrants in Portugal and Catalonia, Spain. After interviewing the participants, Cadete composed a score with the voices, using electronic manipulation. A clever device that used speakers spread out in the sitting area of the theatre, facing an empty stage. *CONCERTO* invites the audience to share a collective moment, to listen to the "other's" perspective, to understand or empathize with the critical lives of people that have abandoned their countries and family in search of security, education, and a better quality of life. From the individual and intimate stories emerges a collective voice that denounces the history of colonization, and the prejudice and injustice with which migrants are treated in their receiving countries.

In *HappyMerryJoyYay!* (2022), Inês Jacques explored the hypothesis of a better future. The devising process was made with communities from Portugal and France, where the participants contributed with ideas for the show's colours, costumes, scenery, text, and movement. The dance performance essays possible answers in an ongoing search that draws no conclusions about how this desired world should be. It instigates a collaborative and emancipatory relationship on stage, with two professional dancers and three participants that gives voice to embodied otherness and pursues a common ideal of happiness: the key message for which is to continue fighting and that brings unequal socioeconomic realities together.

Audience development is also a way of engaging society in cultural practices and the critical aesthetics of art. In the context of another EU cooperation project—BeSpecACTive! (2018–2022)—Artemrede promoted *Visionários* (ongoing), to connect artists, spectators, and institutions in a new relationship in which all partakers could debate from the same level. At first the spectators were apprentices and receivers (active receivers), but eventually they become active

23 With the choreographer's company, *Nome Próprio*, and PARTIS / FCG.

programmers, and propose what they would like to see in their theatre, what they would like to share with their communities.

Some Proposals to Conclude

Studies and essays about cultural policy in Portugal often combine contributions to the state of the art and proposals for government officials and cultural agents. From these valuable diagnoses we can identify a slow, but positive path of development, affected by persisting problems, some of which that have been contextualized here: weak cultural participation; precarious professional class and opportunities; poor education in arts and culture; discontinuous or absent political strategy; insufficient financial investment; disengagement with the fracturing themes of contemporary society; unprepared for the digital transition; geographic concentration in two metropolitan areas; reduced mobility and participation in international circuits; inefficient or arbitrary distribution of funds.

The State's cultural policy fails to fulfil electoral promises and the sector's demands. Possibly because, as Ferrão explains, culture is part of the group of so-called "weak" public policies, because they sit outside community policies, do not mobilize economic interests and are subject to little public scrutiny, being considered "subaltern domains in the collective life of societies" (2015, pp.84–85).

Empowering and securing cultural democracy is an urgent challenge to undertake. To achieve this ambition, the following measures should be carried out in the near future: implement a model of governance that involves civil society, cultural institutions, intersectoral collaboration, and local or regional administrations; decentralize the State's competences, decisions and financial resources with regionalization of the third sector support system; improve the civil services' proficiency and rigour and increase the employment of graduates in the areas of management, cultural programming and artistic creation; adopt systematic monitoring of the application of cultural policy with research centres at universities.

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