

## **Artists, territories and cultural policy: recent dynamics in three Portuguese cities**

**Authors:** *Ana Flávia Machado*<sup>1</sup> (Cedeplar/UFMG)  
*Pedro Costa* (ISCTE-IUL)

### **Abstract:**

Contemporary economies are focused on issues anchored by place/territory, through public policies and market strategies. Economic evolution, cultural and institutional factors, civil society and public actions are integrated to design a multifaceted development process, with a trajectory dependent on its history and aspects associated with its particularities. When considering that municipal policies have a greater advantage in the cultural sector than other levels of governance (provinces/states, country), since cities have tools and instruments to shape the cultural economy to a local character, and meet their specificities and to local creative milieus, this work seeks to analyse the relationship between artists and cultural spaces in three Portuguese cities, namely, Lisbon, Porto and Évora. This paper aims to identify the relationship between artistic, cultural and creative agents with the place, mediated by the actions of these actors themselves, their networks as well as cultural policies, interview scripts were prepared. They deal with the specific activity, the relationship with other agents, including public authorities, and the perception of the city in question in terms of its various dimensions. The interviews took place over three months. Around 60 people, including artists and creatives, representatives of groups/collectives and managers of cultural spaces, answered the questions in person or through online meetings using the available platforms.

**Keywords:** Cultural policies, Cities, Urban creativity; Cultural/creative milieus, Portugal

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## *Introduction*

Contemporary economies are firmly anchored by place/territory through public policies and market strategies, as well as multiple other regulatory forces and governance mechanisms (Kebir et al, 2017). Economic evolution, cultural and institutional factors, civil society, and public actions are integrated to design a multifaceted development process with a trajectory dependent on its history and aspects associated with its particularities (Guimarães et al., 2020). In this movement, the cultural sector becomes relevant because it is associated with an environment where its activities systematize three principal axes: culture, creativity, and innovation. The articulation of these axes opens up the approach to issues relating to economic development, the (re)signification of territories, and the social dimension of production in terms of the identity of the resident population. This is intimately related to what A. J Scott designates as cultural-cognitive capitalism (Scott, 2008, 2014), shedding light to the fundamental role of cultural, aesthetic and symbolic aspects in value formation in increasingly intangible economies, and the importance of territorially based aspects in the de-codification of knowledge and information in contemporary societies (Costa, 2022).

Given that this founding spectrum of the cultural sector is marked by the diversity and differentiation of practices, products, and activities and that such diversity is reflected, among other factors, in the cleavage of the geographic and social space in which it develops and is inserted (e.g, Scott, 2000; Costa, 2002), a series of studies highlight the importance of research on the topic that is guided by local specificities (Comunian & Alexiou, 2015; Liefoghe et al., 2016; Staber, 2011, among others).

Considering that municipal policies have a quite significant advantage in the cultural sector than other levels of governance (provinces/states, country), since cities have tools and instruments to shape (more or less transversally) the cultural economy to a local character, and meet their specificities and to address the particularities of local creative milieus, this work seeks to analyze the relationship between artists and cultural spaces in three Portuguese cities, namely, Évora, Lisbon and Porto.

The choice of these three cities as units of analysis is based on a diversity of factors, and aims to address distinct typologies of cities, within Portuguese context. Évora is a World Heritage Site, a title granted by UNESCO in 1986, for hosting different layers

of History and important buildings since the Roman Empire, which made it a museum city in the Alentejo. Its cultural identity is established based on its heritage and traditional and less stressful habits of a small town compared to the two other large cities. This is one of the reasons for which, in 2027, it will assume the title of European Cultural Capital, with the "vagar"<sup>2</sup> concept, which seeks to give visibility to the Alentejo people's way of being and living. Lisbon is the capital and most dynamic and wide-ranging cultural center in the country, and creative dynamics in this city are particularly challenged nowadays, especially since the financial crisis of 2009 and the following period, when austerity policies and deep restructuring processes challenged the economic structure of the city. Several policies were enacted to expand its attractiveness to different demographic groups, such as students, retirees, and national and international digital nomads, as well as tourists, and multiple public and private investment dynamics were aimed at improve the well-being of (parts of) its population, through the restoration and occupation of historic buildings and monuments, expansion of artistic and cultural activities and promotion of entertainment and accommodation services. Finally, Porto, Portugal's second cultural hub and second largest tourist destination, also offers a rich and diverse historical heritage and cultural activities, especially in areas such as music, theatre, and visual arts, being also strongly challenged these days by critical gentrification and touristification processes.

This work aims to identify the relationship between artistic, cultural, and creative agents with the place and how they are mediated by the actions of these own actors, their networks and cultural policies. Therefore, to achieve those objectives, interview scripts were prepared and applied to cultural stakeholders in the 3 cities. They deal with the specific activity, the relationship with other agents, including public authorities, and the perception of the city in question in terms of its various dimensions. The interviews took place over three months. Around 60 people, including artists, representatives of groups/collectives, and managers of cultural spaces, answered the questions in person or through online meetings using the available platforms.

Keeping this purpose in mind, this paper is organized in five sections, including an introduction. In the second section, we briefly review the literature on relations

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<sup>2</sup> Slowness

between artists, cultural spaces, and cities. In the third section, we describe the methodology. In the fourth section, we analyse the empirical results. Finally, we present the concluding remarks.

### *Cultural activities and cities: a brief review of the literature*

The power of the place as a creative environment lies in combining a physical area with identity and distinction expressed in outstanding artistic-cultural and creative activities. This entails a geographical and a symbolic dimension, that can be easily observed not just by the clustering of cultural activities in particular areas of the territories and the cities (cf. Scott, 2000, Costa, 2002) but also by the aforementioned role of place (and the specific cultural processes and dynamics of each territory) as distinctive asset and competitive advantage in the globalized cultural-cognitive capitalism (Scott, 2014). According to Florida, Adler, and Mellander (2016), place replaces the industrial corporation as the main economic and social organizing unit. And in this case, the place is the city, as the "buzz" environment enables connection, the formation of networks, and the dissemination of skills and knowledge. This is of utmost importance in project-oriented activities, such as the cultural ones, where reputation-building and tacit information are key-factors to feed the supply and demand processes and gatekeeping mechanisms (e.g, Costa, 2012). The fundamental importance of cities and agglomeration in cultural and creative dynamics has been highlighted by the most varied authors (e.g., Scott, 2000; Cooke & Lazzeretti, 2008), with this vitality often more focused on the organic dynamics generated by the city's creative agents and in particular governance logics rather than in explicit public policy actions aimed at developing creativity or the "creative city." (e.g Scott, 2008)

Markusen and Shoroch (2006) seek to measure the contribution of cultural art to cities and regional development through the work of the artist and the cultural and creative agent, valuing the conception of the regional economy through the production process and not the product in itself. They analyze the presence of the artistic class in different American metropolitan regions, considering that its overrepresentation would indicate its ability to generate new products, techniques, languages, including externalities. The public good, which they call the artistic dividend, translates into the potential to generate business, income, employment, revitalize places, and boost political participation.

With the advancement of the 21st century, the cultural dimension is still employed as a means to reshape cities in urban planning processes. One of the most notable axes of this strategy is the occupation of old buildings, the design and artistic expression in their remodelling, and the encouragement of occupation by artists and cultural events. Cultural quarters are the outcomes of this process. Bain and Landau (2022) assert that:

“Cultural quarters contain a density of proximate assets—organizations, businesses, participants, and artists within differently-sized artistic production and consumption venues. Frequently labelled in urban planning and city marketing documents, cultural quarters are spatial strategies that reinforce the economic and symbolic value of art and culture by transforming an urban area into a destination for tourists and art world stakeholders” (pages 1610-1611). Being highlighted for many decades in the literature (e.g, O’Connor and Wynne, 1996; Bell and Jayne, 2004; Costa and Lopes, 2013), these cultural districts (both the more “organic” ones and those more driven by “deliberate action” of public or private promoters) embody a diversity of forms of creative ecosystems, cultural atmospheres or creative milieus.

Costa (2012) and Costa and Lopes (2015) also aim to establish a connection between artistic and cultural practices and urban spaces, whether linked to the creative milieu of a city (as in the 2012 study focusing on Lisbon, Barcelona, and São Paulo) or specific neighbourhoods within large cities (such as Bairro Alto, Gràcia, and Vila Madalena, respectively). They argue that artistic and cultural interventions in these areas, especially those emerging organically from the social, cultural, and economic dynamics of each city, have the potential to invigorate them, engage with local communities, and uncover the multiple layers of uses, symbols, and potential segregations within them. Such interventions are seen as valuable practices for revitalizing the routine of these urban spaces.

However, it is observed that the combination of cultural environments, whether in cities or their neighbourhoods, with cultural tourism has led, beyond vibrancy, to gentrification and the challenging of local identity(ies). The neighbourhood transformation resulting from real estate speculation often drives out long-time residents to more distant areas with lower incomes, making room for newcomers, typically with higher socioeconomic status, from the same city or, in many European cities, immigrants from wealthier countries who consume and enjoy culture (Cocola-Gant & Lopez-Gay,

2020) or from Global South countries as a labor force. By the same token, self-segregation mechanisms within artistic communities tend to accelerate the exit of cultural and creative agents from these neighbourhoods in face of their symbolic mainstreaming, besides gentrification (eg. Costa and Lopes, 2013, 2015).

In the case of European cities, the title of European Capital of Culture, bestowed by UNESCO, tends to precede this movement. Various initiatives are adopted to promote arts, culture, and creativity, aiming to showcase the distinctive features of that place to outsiders and foreigners.

In order to avoid these undesirable outcomes, urban planning should be reconsidered, aiming to articulate tourism with local residents well-being, fighting monofunctionalization and assuring the diversity of social practices and economic activities, including culture and art. This entails ensuring the maintenance of what is already in place and fostering the coexistence of foreigners with locals without "internationalizing" excessively customs and knowledge, as well as without forming "foreign-only enclaves," a term used by Cocola-Gant and Lopez-Gay (2020).

However, this is a challenge for many cities that experienced this type of urban planning in the 1990s and the first decade of the current century and went through the experience of being a European Capital of Culture. There are contexts where the reversal of the process is greatly hindered by the importance that tourism activities assume in income and employment generation (or even in fighting economic crisis and inducing growth in periods of particular economic/social deprivation). This is the case in Portugal and, by extension, in the three selected cities. The tourism industry in Portugal represents about 19% of its GDP (WTTC, 2018).

### *Methodology*

The relationship between artists, cultural venues, and cities is analyzed through the application of semi-structured interview scripts to key stakeholders, namely artists and public and private managers of cultural structures in the cities of Évora, Lisbon, and Porto. To a large extent, the interviews were conducted in person, especially in Lisbon. Based on constructed categories, according to theoretical references related to the dimensions of artistic-cultural work, territorial issues, and public policies, the interviews

were subsequently analysed through predetermined categories, aiming to gather and organize the set of information obtained from their fragmentation and categorization.

Considering these outlines, the script includes questions about the agents' background in arts and culture, their relationship with other agents, the identification of advantages and disadvantages for artistic-cultural development in the territory, evaluation of cultural policy, seeking to identify the existence (or absence) of best practices or situations that may have contributed to such performance. To achieve this, the scripts include open-ended questions about the cultural scene of the place in the selected period and statements to capture the stakeholders' perception regarding the characteristics of the place and cultural-related policies (educational, urban planning, tourism).

In this study, cultural agents/institutions were confronted with ten affirmations (eleven for respondents in Évora, due to its designation as the European Capital of Culture in 2027) utilizing a Likert Scale. This measurement method seeks to assess people's opinions and attitudes. On a scale from 1 to 5, respondents are asked to assign 1 to complete disagreement with the statement and 5 to indicate complete agreement with the statement. Based on this scale, statistics related to the mean and mode are constructed to evaluate better the convergence (or divergence) of opinions in each territory and among the three. Even though involving a subjective nature due to perception, these two indicators reflect a certain uniformity in understanding the interaction between cultural and artistic aspects and the cities.

To define the sample, academic experts were consulted, who identified the main cultural institutions/venues in each city, and through a "snowball" method, the interviewees proposed other suggestions for structures, groups and artists. In Évora, ten interviews were conducted in September and October 2023, with one-third conducted in person and two-third conducted by Meet platform. In Lisbon, 30 respondents were reached between December 2023 and February 2024, with over 60% conducted in person. In Porto, 21 interviews were conducted, with one-quarter of them conducted in person, from October to December 2023.

The diversity of stakeholders was ensured in the sampling. In the city of Évora, both public managers (library, museum, theatre) and private agents (art galleries, cultural associations, foundations, film clubs) enabled the coverage of a myriad of artistic

segments such as heritage, museums, visual arts, cinema, theatre, and music. In Lisbon, public managers of cultural facilities, private managers, and independent artists were also consulted. Once again, representatives from heritage, museums, cinemas, music, performing arts, visual arts, and bookstores were present. In Porto, the situation was similar, although there was a greater participation of artist collectives and independent artists coming from music, performing arts, screen printing, and illustration backgrounds<sup>3</sup>.

Two considerations should be made. When "both" is mentioned in the respondent's gender, it means that two people (one male and one female) responded to the interview. In other cases, only one respondent is mentioned because there was only one interviewee. Regarding the respondent's occupation, a differentiation was made between a cultural centre manager and a multi-arts centre manager. The former is associated with public and private institutions with teams more significant than 15 people, while the latter refers to small-scale private structures.

The number of interviewees in each city followed the demographic dimension and the presence of cultural facilities and artists in the city. At a certain point, responses were similar, even though the respondents represented different cultural segments.

### *Analysis of the interviews*

Next, we present the analysis of the interview scripts conducted in each of the three cities separately. The interviewees are not identified, and some responses are expressed verbatim. To maintain anonymity in the responses, all interviewees are referred to as the masculine gender. A table assigning values according to the Likert scale is presented and analysed in each subsection.

### *Évora*

The city of Évora had a population of 53,753 inhabitants in 2022, according to the 2021 Census conducted by the National Institute of Statistics (INE). Additionally, according to the 2021 Census, Évora has 203 individuals employed in artistic,

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<sup>3</sup> The figure in the appendix shows the profile of respondents by gender, city, occupation/sector



entertainment, sports, and recreational activities, representing 0.4% of those employed in these activities in Portugal and 0.38% of the city's population.<sup>4</sup>

It is a mid-sized city by Portuguese population standards. Located in the Alentejo region, it is considered its capital. Évora's historic centre has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1986. Its main cultural structures include the National Museum, Public Library, Garcia Resende Theatre, Eugénio de Almeida Arts Foundation, Music Conservatory, University of Évora, and other relevant artistic and cultural spaces. Regarding heritage, there are important landmarks such as the Temple of Diana, the Cathedral, the Capela dos Ossos, and the city walls, among others.

According to one of the respondents: "Évora is a peculiar city because it brings together various layers of History, as Romans, Arabs, Portuguese, and other peoples occupied it. Its cultural identity is rooted in History, so it is considered a museum city with heritage and entrenched habits. The population has a great awareness of how to deal with heritage. Even if residents do not frequent its structures, such as the Chapel of Bones, for example, they are aware and know how to protect their heritage." Another respondent emphasizes that the city is "polarized between two major axes, the historic centre and the residents of the neighbourhoods living outside the walls, hindering cohesion. Despite being ancient and with residents living there for a long time, this division creates "islands" within the city. The historic centre is busy during the day and practically empty at night. Students, who could constitute an audience for activities, pay little attention to Évora's cultural scene."

Most interviewees pointed out that the region is poor and lacks large companies, which hinders the formation of an audience for culture and the attraction of companies that could act as patrons of arts and culture. In another interview, it was mentioned that the city is more focused on heritage issues than on cultural activities. Cultural tourism focused on heritage is intense and, for the most part, is, for a day, generating little revenue for the city.

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<sup>4</sup> A disclaimer must be presented concerning this data (as well as for the similar data used for the other two cities). Accordingly, to what occurs in multiple other contexts, occupational data for artistic professionals are certainly quite under-represented (even in an universal and mandatory survey such as the demographic Census) as most people do not categorize themselves as artists or cultural professionals as their main occupation (being often involved in other professional occupations, which is declared as their main one).

There is also substantial agreement that Évora does not have a vibrant cultural life. According to one of the interviewees, "It used to be a bohemian city, but today it lacks vibrancy, being disconnected from its own life. It does not enhance what is unique. Those who inhabit the city are becoming tourists, with less interaction between people. Furthermore, the cosmopolitan qualities of the city are being disregarded."

Perceptions about the City Council's action performance are divided. Interviewees closer to the current president positively evaluate the Council's performance in arts and culture. However, the vast majority point to a management rather than a state policy, serving those close to the government and financing cultural activities focused on tourism.

Looking at Figure 1, it is evident that almost all respondents agree that Évora is a city that attracts many tourists (statement 2). On the other hand, the vast majority believe that public transportation in the city does not facilitate access to cultural activities (statement 9). Assessments of the ease of fundraising for these activities are also not promising, with an average of 1.7 and a mode of 2 (statement 6), reinforcing what some have said about the region's limited economic dynamism and the relative absence of public support for activities. The fact that Évora is not considered a bohemian city (statement 1) does not have cultural spaces to host artistic-cultural activities (statement 5) and has little involvement of the city council in culture (statement 7) aligns with what was reported in the open-ended questions of the script.

Although few of the interviewed agents are organizing and monitoring the Vagar project for the European Capital of Culture in 2027, they believe the candidacy can bring visibility to Évora, its heritage, and the city's way of life and production. Two of them believe that it will contribute to the city and the Alentejo region, increasing its self-esteem and sense of belonging. However, some interviewees criticize that it is a top-down process, with little dialogue with those involved in culture and the general population, and being behind schedule.

Figure 1 – Responses to statements, mean, and mode in Évora

Statements/Interviews (columns)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	mean	mode
Evora is a bohemian city	3	2	3	2	2	1	3	3	1	3	2,3	3
Evora attracts many tourists	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	3	4,8	5
Residents, in general, frequently attend artistic and cultural activities.	4	3	5	3	3	1	4	3	3	3	3,2	3
The schedule is well advertised.	4	3	4	3	4	3	2	2	3	3	3,1	3
There are many cultural places that host these activities.	2	3	2	4	3	2	3	4	2	2	2,7	2
There is ease in fundraising for the execution of these activities.	2	2	1	3	2	1	1	2	1	2	1,7	2
The authority responsible for arts and culture is highly active in the city.	4	2	2	4	3	2	2	3	3	4	2,9	2
There is a strong presence of municipal government actions in the city	2	3	5	4	3	2	4	3	3	1	3	3
Public transportation facilitate access to cultural activities	1	2	1	4	3	1	1	2	2	2	1,8	1 ou 2
The city has many amenities.	3	3	4	3	4	2	5	2	2	2	3	2 ou 3
The title of European Capital of Culture will contribute to making the city's cultural scene more visible.	3	2	5	5	4	2	3	5	4	3	3,6	3 ou 5

Source: the authors (2023).

## *Lisboa*

Lisbon is the country's capital and, accordingly to some interviewees, concentrates all kinds of activities, not only those associated with art and culture. The population was 546,923 in 2022.<sup>5</sup> About 5,500 people work in the arts and culture sector, almost 1% of the city's population. In addition to hosting several national public facilities such as the National Museum of Ancient Art, the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Chiado, the National Tile Museum, and the National Library, among many others, it has multiple city-level (municipal) venues/institutions, including the ones managed by the Municipal Governance and Cultural Animation Company (EGEAC). . These include, in terms of galleries, Quadrum, Boavista, Avenida da Índia, Pavilhão Branco, and Torreão Nascente da Cordoaria Nacional. As for monuments, there are the Castle of São Jorge and the Monument to the Discoveries. Among museums, it manages the Lisbon Museum, Casa Fernando Pessoa, Fado Museum, Puppet Museum, Aljube Museum, Bordalo Pinheiro Museum, and Júlio Pomar Museum. São Jorge Cine, Bairro Alto, Capitólio, Luiz de Camões, and São Luiz theatres are also facilities under the governance of EGEAC. In parallel to these, multiple public and private cultural spaces of large (including for instance, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Belém Cultural Centre, or MAAT Museum) and small sizes are present in the city, and in the case of the latter, they tend to host more alternative manifestations of arts and culture, and to concentrate the bigger slices of non-mainstream supply in the whole country, for the several art fields and the different segments of cultural sector. A whole restructuring was carried out in the city for it to assume the title of European Capital of Culture in 1994, and from this date to our days a strong consolidation of the cultural structures, the audiences and the mediation mechanisms has been occurring, for decades, being this city the main centre for the several creative ecosystems, both mainstream and independent, in the diverse sub sectoral cultural fields.

The interview respondents in Lisbon have a quite diverse profile: some work autonomously (artists) or are managers of small-scale institutions with teams of up to 15 people, primarily private associations, while other work in larger institutions such as

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<sup>5</sup> This is the population of the city of Lisbon (administratively, Lisbon municipality), but in this case, that is just the centre of a metropolitan area, with aprox. 2,5-3 million inhabitants, which is polarized (in economic and also cultural terms) by Lisbon, and supplies a wider demand to its cultural/creative ecosystems.

cultural centres and public museums. Almost all stated that Lisbon is a culturally vibrant city. However, some point out the difficulties created by the limited hours of public transportation that affect some activities carried out during the night period.

Regarding this point, one of the interviewees states, "It is a place with a vibrant cultural sector. However, there is a great imbalance between Lisbon and the rest of the country. There are major asymmetries in the development of projects and access to the public outside Lisbon and Porto. Artists who are in other cities end up coming to Lisbon. Cultural facilities are concentrated in the city centre, not democratizing access for those who live in more distant places from the centre." Another affirms that "it used to be more vibrant, since large events and shows, especially for tourists, have taken away the city's cultural identity and its bohemian character." In the same vein, one respondent says that "the rampant advance of gentrification and touristification has profoundly altered the dynamics of the city. The city currently needs more for its citizens. Lisbon is not very vibrant for residents." However, another respondent points out that. "Lisbon has many fabulous artists; people must attend cultural activities more and value culture. Countless theatres closed in Lisbon. It feels like people would like vibrancy, but government and bureaucracy do not facilitate it." A fifth interviewee thinks that "it is a vibrant place with a lid. There are many galleries in Lisbon. They question the outcome of the exhibitions. Everyone is working for free. People go to the openings and do not return. There are few collectors, and they tend to be conservative, which makes the visual arts less daring."

Regarding the advantages of the artistic-cultural activity/space being located in Lisbon, among the responses of the interviewees, the following stand out: the breadth of offering various artistic-cultural modalities, diversity of peoples, and, consequently, a multicultural city; the cosmopolitan character of the city; moment of expansion and transformation of the city's landscape; concentration of artists creates synergies; visibility of a highly diversified program; size of the audience; presence of young students allows for opting for a bold program; well-developed infrastructure network; conscious of the representation of minority groups.

In reference of the disadvantages of the location, they reflect the other side of the coin of all aspects pointed out as advantages, namely: touristification and real estate speculation that have increased land rents, leading to a higher cost of living and gentrification; loss of "identity" of local culture; a production that is very focused on

foreigners and less on residents; excess supply with significant overlap in cultural programming, creating competitive dynamics; lack of intermediate spaces for rehearsals and laboratories.

When asked about their relationships with other cultural agents, the responses are positive, highlighting the formation of networks with artists and cultural facilities located in Lisbon, other cities in Portugal, and throughout Europe, as well as with Brazilian and African artists who speak Portuguese.

Many of them have a relationship with the City Council because they are related to EGEAC structures. If they are not under this governance, they receive financial support or occupy properties of the Council. However, some respondents have no relationship with the municipal government.

The evaluation of the municipality's cultural policy divides opinions. Some respondents assert that the City Council does not value culture, and when it does, it focuses on tourism. For one respondent, "culture and tourism have different horizons in policy development. Tourism is immediate and event-based, whereas cultural policy should consider the long term." Considering this dimension, several responses gather what should be done regarding cultural policy. Actions such as audience development, democratization of access, support for artists (mentioning the successful experience of the Criatório program in Porto), maintenance not only of built heritage but also of intangible heritage, including products from traditional shops and restaurants in the city, are suggested.

Another respondent situates the evolution of municipal cultural policy over time. "For twelve years, in previous administrations, the policy was well conducted, visionary, knowledgeable, and able to listen and understand the territory. Lisbon has greatly evolved in decentralizing cultural offerings and access to the arts and developing long-term projects, such as libraries, as living spaces for creation, citizenship, and participation. It developed a strategic plan for culture. Lisbon took several steps in its relationship with international organizations. Cultural policy in Lisbon aligned with Agenda 21 – decentralized places and people's participation. Lisbon took prominent positions in cultural organizations. However, the recent change in local government did not result in a drastic break because they retained people from the previous team. However, there is a

whole media-driven, neoliberal vision of what culture is. They are more interested in tourism." Furthermore, on this point, another interviewee argues that "the emphasis on public cultural facilities burdens the budget, allocating a low amount of resources to artists' production, education for culture, and the relationship between artists and their audiences in light of technological transformations."

Perceptions regarding statements related to Lisbon's cultural scene align with the responses obtained in the open-ended questions reported above. Figure 2 provides the attribution of values to statements capturing this perception. Once again, the attraction of tourists (statement 2) shows high agreement, as only one interviewee assigned a value of 4 to the statement, while all other 29 participants indicated 5. Although there is some divergence, "Lisbon is a bohemian city" (statement 1), "Residents, in general, frequently attend artistic and cultural activities" (statement 3), "Cultural programming is well advertised" (statement 4), "There are many cultural spaces hosting activities" (statement 5), and "The city has many amenities" (statement 10) presented a mode equal to 4, even though the average of the responses was at a lower value, between 3 and 4. With a mode of 3, the statement "Public transportation facilitates access to activities" (statement 9) showed less agreement, mainly due to the concentration of this offer in the central area, bus and metro operating hours, and the lack of punctuality in the bus network. Like in other cities, "There is ease in raising funds for activity execution" has the lowest agreement with a mode of 2 and an average of 2.4. It received the highest value of 1 among all ten statements, referring to total disagreement. Additionally, with a mode equal to 2, statements "The institution responsible for arts and culture is very active in the city" and "There is a strong presence of municipal government actions in the city" are noted, indicating the dissatisfaction of cultural agents, both private and public, with the public management of the city's cultural scene.

Figure 2 – Responses to statements, mean, and mode in Lisbon

Interviewees (line)/Statements (column)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	5	5	4	3	4	2	2	2	4	3
2	3	5	4	3	5	3	4	4	4	4
3	4	5	3	3	3	1	4		1	3
4	2	5	3	3	4	2	3	3	2	3
5	3	5	3	3	4	3	4	3	4	4
6	3	5	2	4	2	2	3	3	4	3
7	4	5	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	2
8	4	5	2	4	2	1	1	1	2	4
9		5	3	5	3	2	1	1	4	5
10	3	4	3	4	4	2	2	2	4	3
11	2	5	3	4	4	3	2	5	3	4
12	4	5	4	3	4	2	4	3	3	3
13	5	5	4	5	2	1	2	3	3	4
14	4	5	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3
15	4	5	4	5	3	3	4	4	3	5
16	5	5	2	3	4	3	3	4	5	5
17	4	5	2	4	2	1		2	2	2
18	3	5	4	4	5	3	2	3	4	3
19	2	5	3	4	4	2	2	2	4	
20	5	5	2	3	3	3	2	2	2	2
21	3	5	2	4	4	2	2	1	3	3
22	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4
23	5	5	4	4	4	2	3		2	5
24	3	5	4	4	3	2	2	2	3	4
25	4	5	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	4
26	4	5	3	3	4	2	3	4	3	4
27	3	5	4	3	3	3	2	2	2	2
28	5	5	5	4	3	4	2	2	3	3
29	4	5	3	2	4	4	3	2	4	4
30	3	5	3	2	3	1	4	2	3	4
Mean	3,72	4,97	3,27	3,60	3,50	2,40	2,76	2,68	3,20	3,52
Mode	4	5	4	4	4	2	2	2	3	4

Source: the authors (2023 and 2024).

### *Porto*

Porto is located in the northern region of Portugal, constituting the country's second-largest city in terms of its economic and demographic dimension. Its population in 2022 was 238,298 inhabitants, according to the Census.<sup>6</sup> Its historic centre (especially São Bento Station, Church of São Francisco, Church of Santo Ildefonso), Serra do Pilar Monastery, and Luís I Bridge became UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 1996. It boasts several museums, with the Serralves Foundation standing out, as well as performance

<sup>6</sup> Again, in this case, Porto cannot be seen isolated from its metropolitan area and even all the broader region North Coast (from Minho to Aveiro) which is polarizing. Even if here there are other important (and growing) urban poles, even in cultural terms, Port is still the main centre of a region with more than 2 million inhabitants (in its broader version).



venues like the Coliseum, Rivoli, Bolhão, Casa da Música, the Cine Batalha complex, multi-arts centres, and the Stop Shopping Centre, which hosts a variety of music studios, among other artistic and cultural organizations.

According to the 2021 Census, 1,871 individuals were employed in artistic, entertainment, sports, and recreational activities in Porto, accounting for 3.67% of such employment in Portugal and 0.78% of the city's population. Just like in Lisbon, the city has a share of employed people in the sector in question above the national average.

The city's cultural scene is predominantly shaped by activities in the institutional spaces mentioned above, but especially by organizations that emerged mostly during a period when municipal cultural management was largely absent. Between 2001 and 2013, despite the city being designated as the European Capital of Culture in 2001 and thus gaining the legacy of urban rehabilitation, the municipal executive assumed a policy that tend to a certain extent to neglected the cultural sector, which was essentially seen as a source of expense. One of the interviewees points out: "During this period, there was a destruction of cultural policy, with no possibility of dialogue between cultural agents and municipal management."

However, the change in municipal executive representatives in 2013 altered the guidelines of cultural policy, as culture began to be identified as an investment alternative, not only for local expression but especially as a means of attracting tourists. According to the account of this interviewee, "A program to promote creative industries was developed during this period, focusing on the creation of content, intellectual property, and design, aiming to attract people to work in the arts and culture. Another policy instrument, the 'Culture in Expansion' Program (2014), laid the groundwork for territorial decentralization by dispersing cultural offerings and bringing culture to the periphery." Furthermore, the City Council invested in revitalizing structures such as the Rivoli Theatre, Campo Alegre, and the Batalha Cinema Centre.

The majority of the interviewees consider Porto a vibrant city. Many were born or studied in arts/culture-related courses at the University of Porto, which led them to stay in the city. They are involved in diverse segments (museums, music, visual and performing arts, literature) and emphasize that the scene is underground, less institutionalized. There is a prevalence of artist-run spaces and independent collectives

collaborating, forming a denser network than in Lisbon. One of the interviewees even points out that "outside conventional narratives, the scene in Porto can be more intense than in Lisbon."

The underground nature of artistic and cultural practices in Porto stems from the period when cultural policy was virtually non-existent, leading many artists to seek alternative forms, contributing to the formation of collaborative networks, as five interviewees noted. One of them states that, in the city, artists' actions are supportive, and there are more exchanges among them and with spaces, highlighting a lower level of competition. Although one of the interviews mentions little internationalization of the cultural scene, a considerable portion of the interviewees say they maintain contacts or establish partnerships with artists and collectives from other European countries and Brazil (one of the effects of the post 2009 crisis period in the region was the temporary emigration of young artists to other European cities, particularly London).

Another aspect of Porto's cultural policy highlighted by the interviewees is the Criatório program, implemented in 2016. This program supports artistic creation by artists and collectives through project competitions. Many of the interviewees have benefited from or currently benefit from this support.

Despite a more active cultural policy since 2014, some criticisms are directed at the actions of the City Council. The first and most striking is related to the recent Stop social movement. Stop is a shopping centre that became idle in the 1990s with the opening of other centres in the city. According to one of the interviewees, "cinemas were closed, few cafes survived, and the centre entered a negative spiral. For this reason, rents became cheap. A group of musicians rented a shop, and other musicians started occupying the shops due to cheaper rents. It became a space for creation, recording, production, and rehearsals for musicians. In July 2023, there were 120 rooms occupied for music, with about 500 musicians. In recent months, since mid-2022, there have been eviction attempts and coercive measures by the police (21 out of 127 rooms did not have a license) initiated by the City Council. However, the musicians made and are making movements and managed to reverse the expulsion from the building."

Another aspect emphasized by some interviewees is that the current City Council is so present in the cultural scene that it ends up inhibiting the autonomy of artists'

creations. According to one of the interviewees, "The Council has come to control everything done, institutionalizing the alternative profile of the cultural scene. I fear that the alternative space will become a threat." Another one points out, "Artists who were voices of protest are now close to power and have lost freedom. Furthermore, the money for culture is the same as real estate speculation, which creates a contradiction for artists because the resource comes from speculation and tourism."

Finally, as in Évora and Lisbon, almost all interviewees mention the increase in the cost of living in the city due to touristification. Rents have increased significantly, promoting gentrification.

Figure 3 presents the respondents' answers on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) for the ten statements, the same for the respondents from Évora and Lisbon. Once again, there is almost complete agreement (mean 4.83 and mode 5) for the statement, "Porto is a city that attracts many tourists." This response does not differ from what was observed in the other two cities, highlighting the importance of tourism in the country.

Figure 3 – Responses to statements, mean, and mode in Porto

Interviewees (line)/Statements (column)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	4	4	4	3	4	2	3	3	1	2
2	4	5	4	5	4	5	5	5	4	5
3	5	5	5	5	5	2	5	5	5	3
4	5	5	3	5	5	4	5	5	4	5
5	3	5	5	4	5	2	4	4	2	3
6	3	4	3	3	3	2	4	4	5	5
7	4	5	3	5	4	4	5	5	5	4
8	2	5	3	2	3	1	2	3	3	4
9	3	5	5	4	5	3	4	5	5	4
10		5	3		4	2	2	3		4
11	2,5	5	2	4	5	2	4	2,5	3	3
12	4	5	3	3	2	2	2	3	4	5
13	5	5	3	3	3	4	3	3	2	2
14	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	2	5
15	3	5	4	3	2	2	2	3	4	3
16	4	5	3	4	4	3	4	4	4	3
17	4	4,5	3	3,5	3	2	3	3,5	4	3,5
18	3	5	3	2	3	2	4	4	4	3
19	4	5	2	4	5	3	4	3	4	2
20	4	5	2	4	3	3	5	5	4	3
21	4	5	3	4	2	1	3	4	4	3
Mean	3,73	4,83	3,29	3,68	3,71	2,62	3,67	3,86	3,65	3,55
Mode	4	5	3	4	4	2	4	3	4	3

Source: Authors, 2023

On the other hand, statement 6 ("There is ease in raising funds for carrying out these artistic-cultural activities") is the one that shows the lowest level of agreement, with an average of 2.62 and a mode of 2, meaning that a more significant number of respondents disagreed with the statement, assigning a value of 2. Some mentioned that companies have no interest in financially supporting artistic-cultural activities and that the public budget needs to be increased to meet the demands.

Porto as a bohemian city (statement 1), well-publicized cultural programming (statement 4), the presence of many cultural facilities to host artistic-cultural activities (statement 5), the performance of the body responsible for culture (statement 7), and the facilitation of public transportation access to activities (statement 9) are well-evaluated

by the respondents, as the mode is four and the mean is above 3. However, there is more dispersion, with some respondents indicating lower values.

In an intermediate position, with a mode of 3, are statements regarding the enjoyment and consumption of cultural activities by city residents (statement 3), the strong presence of the public sector in activities related to culture, such as education, transportation, and security (statement 8), and the presence of amenities (statement 10). In this case, the mean is above 3, indicating a positive asymmetry in the distribution of responses to these statements.

With the exception of the statement regarding fundraising, the evaluation of cultural agents in Porto is quite favourable to the city's cultural scene. Furthermore, the city accommodates the sector well.

#### *Concluding remarks*

The interviews conducted in Évora, Lisbon, and Porto offer valuable insights into the agents' perceptions on the cultural dynamics in these Portuguese cities. Each has distinct characteristics but also shares similar challenges regarding the promotion and sustainability of cultural life. These are important issues considering the objectives of this paper, aiming to identify the main questions and challenges faced in these three Portuguese cities in our current days, rather than in an exhaustive characterization of each city's dynamics or their particular creative systems. In broader terms, the interest was in the identification of common challenges and specific particularities in each of these three cities, based on the stakeholders' discourses.

In Évora, the strong presence of historical heritage and the influence of cultural tourism stand out as strengths, but the lack of a vibrant cultural life is a concern shared by the interviewees. Excessive dependence on tourism may limit the development of an authentic and vibrant cultural scene. On the other hand, Lisbon stands out as a cosmopolitan city with a diverse cultural offering. However, criticisms point to a specific commodification process and particular logics of commercialization of culture, with events mainly geared toward tourists and gentrification threatening the local cultural identity. The interviewees highlight the underground cultural scene in Porto and the proactive role of the municipal Council since 2014. However, gentrification and real

estate pressure represent significant challenges for the local artistic community. In all cities, the difficulty of raising funds for cultural activities is a recurring concern. Additionally, the relationship between public management and artists is often debated, with criticisms of centralization of power and lack of creative autonomy.

Summing up, the interviews provide a multifaceted view of the cultural scenes in Évora, Lisbon, and Porto, highlighting their achievements and challenges. These perspectives can serve as a basis for developing more inclusive and sustainable cultural policies in these cities and beyond. For this purpose, it will be also fundamental to go deeper, in further detail, in the understanding of the local creative ecosystems and the specificities of the cultural milieus existing and developing in each of these cities. A more exhaustive and detailed knowledge of the locally anchored governance forms and regulatory mechanisms present in each city will be fundamental to extract the full implications of the results obtained in this article for cultural policies.

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Appendix

Figure A1 – Interviewee profile

Interviewee	Sex	City	Occupation/Sector
1	M	Évora	Music association manager
2	F	Évora	Library manager
3	M e F	Évora	Theatre manager
4	M	Évora	Cinema manager
5	F	Évora	Gallery owner and visual artist
6	F	Évora	Museum manager
7	F	Évora	Music association manager
8	F	Évora	Cultural centre manager
9	F	Évora	Multiarts centre manager
10	M e F	Évora	Visual arts association manager
11	M	Lisboa	Musician
12	F	Lisboa	Museum manager
13	F	Lisboa	Museum manager
14	F	Lisboa	Cultural centre manager
15	M	Lisboa	Cultural centre manager
16	M	Lisboa	Multiarts centre manager
17	M	Lisboa	Multiarts centre manager
18	F e M	Lisboa	Multiarts centre manager
19	F	Lisboa	Cultural centre manager
20	M	Lisboa	Gallerist
21	F	Lisboa	Library manager
22	F	Lisboa	Cinema manager
23	F	Lisboa	Bookstore Manager
24	F	Lisboa	Theatre manager
25	F	Lisboa	Film festival manager
26	M	Lisboa	Actor
27	M	Lisboa	Music house and festival manager

28	M	Lisboa	Gallerist
29	M	Lisboa	Visual artist
30	F	Lisboa	Cultural manager
31	F	Lisboa	Theatre director and actress
32	M	Lisboa	Festival manager
33	F	Lisboa	Multiarts centre manager
34	M	Lisboa	Cultural centre manager
35	F	Lisboa	Museum manager
36	F	Lisboa	Actress
37	F	Lisboa	Actress
38	F	Lisboa	Theatre manager
39	M	Lisboa	Opera singer
40	F	Lisboa	Dance company coordinator
41	M	Porto	Visual artist
42	M	Porto	Film director
43	M	Porto	Theatre group manager
44	F	Porto	Museum manager
45	F	Porto	Multiarts centre manager
46	M	Porto	Musician
47	M	Porto	Multiarts centre manager
48	F	Porto	Multiarts centre manager
49	F	Porto	Dance group manager
50	F	Porto	Theatre manager
51	F	Porto	Clown
52	F	Porto	Theatre group (festival)
53	M	Porto	Screen printer
54	F	Porto	Musician
55	F	Porto	Singer

56	F	Porto	Illustrator
57	F	Porto	Writer
58	M	Porto	Musician
59	M	Porto	Music producer
60	F	Porto	Multiarts centre manager
61	F	Porto	Multiarts centre manager

Source: the authors (2023 e 2024).