

Cultural policies and local development: The Portuguese case

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1. The development of local cultural policies in a medium-sized, highly centralized European country

Within the European Union, Portugal is a medium-sized country. It has 10.3 million residents, 7.2 million of whom live along the coastal belt and 4.1 million in and around its two major cities: Lisbon and Porto. It is a highly centralized country. With the exception of the two autonomous regions of Azores and Madeira – two archipelagos in the Atlantic that together are home to about 500,000 Portuguese – the administration comprises only two levels: central government, assumed by the national government, and local government, split into 308 municipalities of all sizes, each headed by its city council (24 municipalities with more than 100,000 residents, six with more than 200,000 and one with more than 500,000)¹.

Since 1974, Portugal has been a political democracy. From 1976 to 1999, the local councils were chosen in local elections for a three-year term of office. Since 1999, the term has been four years. At the national level, two major parties have alternated in power: the right-wing Social Democratic Party (PSD – *Partido Social-Democrata*), a member of the European People's Party (EPP), and the left-wing Socialist Party (PS – *Partido Socialista*), a member of the Party of European Socialists (PES). Until 2019, there were three other smaller parliamentary parties, one right-wing, the Social Democratic Centre (CDS-PP – *Centro Democrático e Social – Partido Popular*) and two left-wing, the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP – *Partido Comunista Português*) and the Left Block (BE – *Bloco de Esquerda*). Since 2019, the political landscape has

¹ All values are based on the 2021 Census. To calculate the number of residents on the coastal belt, we considered the residents in the districts of Braga, Porto, Aveiro, Coimbra, Leiria, Lisbon, Setúbal and Faro.

become more fragmented, and in 2022 a far-right party (*Chega*) became the third party in the Parliament.

PSD and PS are predominant in the city councils, although the presence of the Communist Party is also significant, concentrated in the Alentejo region and the Greater Lisbon area, and CDS-PP has some influence in the Northern region. Table 4.1 provides the distribution of city councils by the various parties, comparing the current term of office (2021–25) with the previous ones.

Table 4.1.

City councils headed by parties and coalitions, between 2009-2013 and 2021-2025 (%):

Parties and coalitions	2009-2013	2013-2017	2017-2021	2021-2025
PS	42.9	48.7	52.3	48.4
PSD	38.0	27.9	25.6	23.4
PSD-CDS (+ others, if any)	7.1	6.5	6.2	13.6
CDS alone	0.3	1.6	1.9	1.9
CDU (= PCP + allies)	9.1	11.0	7.8	6.2
Other parties	0.3		0.6	0.3
Groups of citizens	2.3	4.2	5.6	6.2
	100	100	100	100

Source: National Electoral Commission.

Portugal has been a member of the European Union (EU, then European Communities) since 1986, and belongs to the Euro Area since its inception in 2002. In 2009, its per capita income was 80 per cent of the EU average, and in 2023 it was 81 per cent. The 2022 edition of the Human Development Index placed the country in the 42nd position, a lower rank within the category of ‘highly developed countries’.

Given these structural features, our aim is to briefly present the evolution of the role of Portuguese municipalities in the design and implementation of cultural policies, summarising the main assets and challenges. Our work will be based on the data provided by extensive studies on statistics and documents, and by case studies focusing on specific locations or regional areas, carried out by either the authors of this chapter, or others. The intention of this exercise is to show Portugal as an important case for sociological and economic research on the development of local cultural policies in the current European context.

2. Local policies: a structural element of public cultural policies

Let us consider the role of the municipalities in cultural policies since 1976. What stands out first is that the role has grown. Culture tends to shift from a 'non-place' in local policies to the status of 'priority intervention', having acquired a 'relatively central political position' (Azevedo 2007: 491, on the metropolitan area of Porto).

This development had two driving forces. For local power, the results obtained from providing basic infrastructure related to housing, health, distribution of water, energy and roads, which were the concern of the first elected town and city councils (in the 1970s and early 80s), permitted the gradual integration of cultural goals into their policies. For the national government, from the mid-1980s, the release of successive programmes to implement cultural facilities across the country meant the establishment of partnerships between national and local authorities for the construction and management of such facilities as libraries, archives and museums (see chapter 3).

The convergence of these two processes – the expansion of the political interest of town and city councils, and the desire of the national government to cooperate with them – boosted the decentralisation of culture for the very first time in Portugal. This trend was evident throughout the 1990s and the first decades of the 21st century. It did not put an end to the concentration of power that characterised the territorial distribution of resources and opportunities, mainly favouring the capital, Lisbon, and then the two metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto. But the trend contributed to the acknowledgement that municipalities were indispensable partners in devising public policies on culture – and this was a new concept in Portugal.

Table 4.2.

Local authorities and central government's expenditure on culture (2000-2023) (thousands of euros):

Years*	Local authority expenditure	Central government expenditure**
2000	339,879	277,881
2005	526,706	275,336
2010	433,943	366,493
2015	392,211	134,537
2020	470,475	222,021
2023	684,832	320,624

* 2023: Provisional data. ** State or national autonomous departments and foundations.

Source: Statistics Portugal.

This will become clearer with two examples. The first concerns the public financial resources invested in culture. Table 4.2 compares the expenditure of municipalities and the central government between 2000 and 2023.

The second example is related to the management of cultural facilities. Table 3 presents the relevant data from 2005 to 2023, showing the spread of those facilities throughout the territory.

Table 4.3.
Local cultural facilities, 2005-2023:

Facility	Year	% of municipalities reporting that they have the facility	Number of municipalities surveyed
Museum	2005	71	152
	2021	64	308
	2023	82	308
Library (or library services)	2005	90	152
	2022	98	308
Art gallery (or temporary exhibition facility)	2005	82	308
	2023	89	308
Theatre	2005	31	308
	2021	37	308
	2023	41	308

Sources: 2005: Neves 2005a, 2005b; Gomes *et al.* 2006. 2021-2022: Neves 2024. 2023: Statistics Portugal; ICA.

3. A predominant pattern in local cultural policies

The first thing to highlight in the empirical research is the increasing importance of culture as a topic of local policies, and, correspondingly, the improvement of the role of municipalities in public policies on culture. Since at least the mid-1980s, we cannot analyse these policies without taking into consideration the local players.

The second element is no less interesting. When we seek to identify the patterns of local action, one stands out among many, if not practically all the Portuguese municipalities, and it does not vary significantly across the distinct political guidelines of the elected parties. Notwithstanding some differences in terms of the political discourse on culture – Luísa Albuquerque (2011: 235–80) has suggested that right-wing municipalities focused more on culture as local identity, while the centre-left municipalities seemed to value more diverse cultural expressions and investment in public cultural facilities –, these differences do not outweigh the effect of a quite broad political consensus on the contents of local cultural policies (Silva 2007).

Table 4.4.

The predominant pattern of local cultural policies in Portugal:

Purpose of policies	Strategies
A. Preservation and enhancement of local heritage.	1. Promotion of material (monuments, archaeological sites, movable assets) and immaterial heritage (arts and traditions). 2. Intervention (alone or in collaboration with the national administration) in the preservation, recovery and management of heritage. 3. Support for local associations.
B. Development of local cultural assets (predominantly targeted at the local population or mostly to attract visitors and tourists).	4. Construction and management of cultural facilities (libraries, archives, museums, sites, concert halls). 5. Programming cultural events such as shows, festivals, festivities, often free of charge. 6. Partnership with local associations and commercial promoters of cultural events. 7. Holding regular events that project the town in the region and in the country, by enhancing unique traditions, expressions or motifs.
C. Education of cultural audiences.	8. Support for local associations. 9. Holding or supporting awareness-raising programmes and artistic education in schools.

It can be said that mainstream policies pursue three essential goals: the conservation and enhancement of local heritage, the development of the local cultural and artistic supply, and the training of new audiences for culture. To reach these widely shared goals, the municipalities have also largely shared the main strategies of action:

their own initiative and the support given to the initiative of others, namely investing in facilities and events; the construction of material structures; management and programming. Consequently, the hegemonic pattern in Portugal has been characterised by an array of matches between strategies and goals since the 1980s, when the municipalities were recognized as key actors in the implementation of public policies. Table 4.4. summarises this matrix.

Some features of this pattern arise directly from the typical structures of local political systems. If we bear in mind the rules of the four-year electoral competition (that is, the need to show publicly the ‘progress’ made and the ‘works’ achieved by each local council, and what can be done to recruit and obtain political support in the local community) we will better grasp the contrast between the focus on the medium or large-size facility (at a local scale), and the (lower) attention paid to its organisation and activity, or the significance of the relationship between political players and the leaders of local associations, or cultural agents. These rules also help us understand two other characteristics of this pattern of action: the prioritisation of short-term results, and the corresponding devaluation of planning, sustainability, and allocation of human resources and technical skills needed for long-term action.

Other standard features of Portuguese local power are better understood as a consequence of structural characteristics of the respective social system. Outside the urban areas of Lisbon and Porto, the cultural partners of municipalities are predominantly associations and schools; but the reason for this lies mostly in the frailty, in terms of number and duration, of the artistic and cultural agents, that is, the weakness or even absence of an artistic field. Furthermore, when considering public authorities, it is a similarly frail local cultural demand that leads political power to define art education as a priority for action, and to target school audiences.

Finally, some aspects of the pattern are explained by economic and spatial features. The key role assumed by the town and city councils throughout the territory beyond Lisbon and Porto is partially explained by the economic weakness of the local arts and creative industries. Additionally, the excessive dispersion of the administrative organisation in Portugal – with more than 300 municipalities, most of them small, and without a regional level articulating them to the national government – hampers the making of the critical mass that would be indispensable to implement cultural policies less dependent on localism and its rules of legitimacy and political competition.

4. The relationship between local policies and national policies: complementarity rather than competition

As mentioned before, the rationale underlying the predominant pattern of action governing local cultural policies in Portugal is not very sensitive to ideological differentiation; it can be documented in centre-left, left and centre-right councils. There are differences, certainly, but they do not put in question the structural elements of the pattern.

Meanwhile, a particular sensitivity to the evolution of national and European policies is part of that rationale (for an overview based on content analysis, see Gama & Costa 2021). It explains the fact that, since the 1980s, local policies have gradually assimilated new goals and strategies that complement rather than replace the pre-existing ones. Openness to external stimuli (political guidelines, fundings, good practices, mediators) is one of the strengths of the pattern of local action, and one of the reasons for its resilience. It has been remarkably expeditious in incorporating locally the general discourses and political banners on cultural issues. That was the case, successively or concomitantly, of mottos such as cultural democratisation; the new boost to popular traditions; the enhancement of heritage and cultural assets; culture as a leverage for development; the education of audiences; cultural tourism; networks; creative industries.

Local councils have also shown their ability to respond positively and in a timely manner to the challenges and investment opportunities, partnerships and assertions produced by national and European programmes – both in terms of goals and methodologies, and of technical and financial resources. The national networks of libraries, archives, museums and theatres – that were described in chapter 3 – demand an active participation of municipalities. The same applies to the European Cohesion Policy and the funds it provides for the preservation of monuments, sites and public facilities. Technical expertise regarding policy planning and evaluation is also pivotal in the development of local action.

These driving forces are more effective than the legal changes made to municipal competences in the cultural field, or the social and political composition of local councils. But it would be wrong to neglect these changes, which generally converge in the same direction. Over the years, municipalities expanded their legal and practical powers, ameliorated their technical structure, and took advantage of the evolution of the generational, professional and political background of mayors and councillors in charge of cultural departments. Whenever the elected officials are younger, have advanced academic skills, belong to technical and intellectual professions, and are familiar with the political discourse of democracy and cultural development, the chances to have a coherent cultural policy rise notably.

This is how the general picture can be described. There are many cases of innovation in cultural interventions, carried out by municipalities that are at the frontline of national trends, or adopt a bottom-up approach based on local resources. Still, most municipalities are mainly the recipients and implementers of external guidelines, coming from the national administration, European blueprints, academic researchers or consultants, and cultural intermediaries such as producers, programmers and curators. Far from being inconsistent to each other, the national and the local policies are, in general, cumulative (converging efforts resulting in more resources) and complementary (the municipality acting in areas where the government action is less noticeable) (Santos 1998). The effects of territorialisation and decentralisation are mostly visible in medium-sized urban hubs (Santos 1998, 2005; Fortuna & Silva 2002).

5. A pattern generating political and social effects

We have seen how a predominant pattern of local cultural policies has been established in Portugal since the mid-80s, when the country took consistent steps in decentralizing public cultural policies, and the municipalities, having generally reached a certain level of basic infrastructures (regarding water and electricity supply, as well as transport and communications), could undertake new responsibilities in the cultural area. The main goals were the preservation of heritage, the enhancement of cultural assets and the education of audiences; for that, city councils invested in public facilities, assumed the organisation of events, and launched partnerships with local associations and schools.

The pattern has proven to be, in its essential features, crosscutting political differences, achieving a high level of normative consensus and social legitimacy. It produced, and continues to produce, remarkable and lasting effects on social reality.

First, it contributed both to improving the presence of culture in the design and implementation of local policies, and to enhancing the role of these policies in the wider context of national cultural policies. The situation evolved from near-meaninglessness or irrelevance to tangible practices and results, even if of unequal reach and support.

Second, as described in chapter 3, the activity of municipalities has contributed significantly to the improvement of public cultural facilities in Portugal in the last four decades, and to a less unbalanced territorial distribution (Neves 2024: 199). Table 4.5 highlights the increase in the number of facilities organised into national networks with local participation.

Table 4.5.

The evolution of national networks of cultural facilities in Portugal (2012-2025) (number of facilities):

Public Libraries National Network (launched in 1987)	2012	2017	2022	2023		2025
Total number of libraries in the network	194	219	245	427		
Municipal public libraries	301			303		303
Portuguese Network of Museums (launched in 2000)	2012	2017	2022	2023	2024	
Total number of museums in the network	137	149	165	165	169	
Museums and palaces run by the Ministry of Culture	33		28		47	
Municipal Museums			74		78	
Museums run by regional government in Azores and Madeira	14		14		14	
Portuguese Archive Network (launched in 2008)			2022			2025
Total number of archives in the network			46			52
Archives run by the central state			18			17
Municipal archives			16			21
Regional archives (Madeira)						1
Portuguese Network of Theatres and Cinemas (launched in 2019; accreditation since 2021)			2022	2023		2025
Total number of theatres and cine-theatres in the network			84	85		99
Municipal theatres				69		92

Portuguese Contemporary Art Network (launched in 2021; membership started in 2023)				2023		2025
Total number of members in the network				66		76
Facilities run by the central state				2		
Facilities run by the municipalities				27		
Facilities run by regional government in Azores and Madeira				2		

Sources: IMC 2012, Neves 2024, Equipa da RPM 2024, DGLAB, DGARTES, RPAC.

Third, the principle of partnership has gradually extended to the area of programming. As a matter of fact, it started out typically by means of the collaboration between each municipality and the central administration. But eventually it also structured the cooperation between different municipalities or municipal facilities (often with the support and encouragement of regionally decentralized government services). Many examples could be offered: to consider only those already subjected to academic review, think of ‘Comum’ (*Common*), launched in 2004 and comprising seven municipalities of the Centre Region (Rebelo *et al.* 2007), ‘Artemrede’ (*Artinetwork*), launched in 2005 (Lopes 2019, and chapter 3 of this book), ‘5 Sentidos’ (*5 Senses*), launched in 2009 (Ferreira *et al.* 2016, and chapter 3), or ‘Comédias do Minho’ (*Minho Comedies*), extensively analysed in chapter 6.

Fourth, with perhaps the exception of Lisbon (where many cultural entities are located), the complementariness and cumulateness of local and national policies has benefited the country as a whole. Even in Porto, the second largest city, the importance of the municipality is obvious, either to exert pressure on the government to invest, or to ensure effects of scale through partnerships. The medium-sized coastal cities and the urban hubs of inland regions are other clear beneficiaries. And in small inland locations, it is the municipal intervention that mitigates the lack of institutions and the extreme frailty of local markets.

Finally, the political and symbolic role of culture has expanded. Since the democratisation of local power in 1976, the role of culture has shown its potential in the dynamics of electoral competition, political legitimacy, local marketing and in engendering social consensus – in particular, through networking among political officials and association leaders. Other dimensions were added: the representations of group

cultural identity as the aggregator and instrument of social mobilisation in local development processes; the economic potential of heritage and artistic attractions, particularly for tourism and small businesses; the ability to design and boost processes of urban gentrification based on this dual face of culture: heritage and creativity. In asserting the regional and national projection of cities and municipalities, culture has gradually become a 'brand'. Local policies have consistently turned to the processes of recognition and symbolic confirmation used in institutions such as UNESCO and the European Union. The identification based on a cultural marker continues to have a significant impact on competition for political centrality, people to live and visit, capital to invest. Events like the European Capitals of Culture, or labels as the World Heritage List, are really added value for local strategies: besides Lisbon and Porto, European capitals of culture in 1994 and 2001, Guimarães was capital in 2012 and Évora will be in 2027; and there are currently 17 Portuguese monuments or sites inscribed in the World Heritage List, as well as ten intangible goods. The same goes for festivals and other major events, in several fields, ranging from literature to performative arts, from cinema to fine arts. Table 4.6 presents the territorial distribution of current literary festivals; it is only one example, but rather eloquent.

Table 4.6.
Current literary festivals (2025):

Name	Location	Year of foundation
Vila Nova de Foz Côa Poetry and Music Festival	Vila Nova de Foz Côa	1984
Correntes d'Escrita	Póvoa de Varzim	2000
Poesia à Mesa Literary Festival	S. João da Madeira	2003
LeV - Literature on the Road	Matosinhos	2007
Escritaria Literary Festival	Penafiel	2008
Fronteira - Castelo Branco Children's and Young People's Literature Festival	Castelo Branco	2012

Livros a Oeste Literary Festival	Lourinhã	2012
Gardunha Literary Festival	Fundão	2014
Bragança Literary Festival	Bragança	2015
Tabula Rasa – Fátima Literay Festival	Fátima	2015
FOLIO – Óbidos International Literature Festival	Óbidos*	2015
Ovar Literay Festival	Ovar	2015
FLiD – Douro Literary Festival	Sabrosa	2015
Sertã Reading Marathon	Sertã	2015
Chaves Literature Festival	Chaves	2016
FLIQ – Querença International Literary Festival	Loulé	2016
FFIL – Freixo International Literature Festival	Freixo de Espada à Cinta	2017
Húmus - Guimarães Literary Festival	Guimarães	2017
LATITUDES – Literature and Travellers	Óbidos*	2017
FLII – Palavras de Fogo International Interior Literary Festival	Arganil, Coimbra, Condeixa-a-Nova, Góis, Lousã and Pedrógão Grande	2018
Lisboa 5L – International Festival of Portuguese Literature and Language	Braga	2021
UTOPIA – Literary Festival	Braga	2023

FLIM – Mealhada Literary Festival	Mealhada	2023
Entre Mares International Literary Festival	Portimão	2025

* Óbidos City of Literature (UNESCO) since 2015.

6. Factors of change in the predominant pattern of action

The pattern of action that emerged in the last quarter of the 20th century and formatted local cultural policies in Portugal produced effective results, so its consolidation is not surprising. It suits the reality of the Portuguese state – highly centralised, with an unbalanced spatial organisation, with no tradition of regional structures, and with a civil society which, in terms of European standards, is largely dependent on public authorities. On the other hand, it capitalised on structural features of the local political system – such as competition between parties, networking with local interest groups, and the electoral value of investments in facilities – to achieve significant progress in terms of the cultural resources available for local populations.

However, factors of change in Portugal in the transition from the 20th the 21st century have challenged this pattern of action. They are increasingly influential and operate at three levels.

The first is the local demand for culture. The restructuring of Portuguese society, associated with the processes of schooling, tertiarisation, urbanisation and reduction of inequalities between men and women, has a specific and expressive effect on the cultural field. One can observe a stronger presence of the younger, more educated, age groups, with urban references, in the design of cultural demand. Hybrid forms and mixtures can emerge, generating greater heterogeneity and plasticity of that demand: namely, the dialogue of performing and visual arts with creative industries, new combinations of art consumption and entertainment, of cultural practice and self-presentation, the juvenile appropriation of public space, the process of digitalisation, the growing role of social networks as platforms for communication and group identity (see Donnat 2009: 205–24). The point is that local cultural policies are no longer faced only with the classical challenge of expanding audiences; they also need to take into consideration the critical issue of multiple and diverse audiences, and the evolving standards of knowledge, taste and practice.

The second level concerns local dynamics in the world of art. Real situations can be very different, but in recent times a paradigm of professional or semi-professional expertise emerged in various Portuguese cities. This paradigm is based on logics

of territorialisation, mobilising concepts such as 'urban scenes', 'neighbourhoods', 'districts' and 'cultural clusters'. Synergies between different branches of art and industry have been explored, through spatial concentration, creating specific identity markers, and through 'atmospheres' – that is, the collective ways of being, acting, producing and consuming, presented as inherent to those spaces. These strategies often take advantage of gentrification processes in city areas such as historical centres or former industrial areas; and seize the positive externalities generated, for example, by the construction of new cultural and leisure facilities. Alternatively, they elaborate on resources endogenous to certain communities and art businesses (for example, in fine and visual arts). In any case, their paradigm contrasts with the relationship between public authorities and groups of benevolent consumers and cultural promoters, which marked, for decades, the political action of Portuguese municipalities in terms of culture.

The third level concerns policies. In the 1970s and 1980s, the main goal of cultural policy, both at national and local level, was democratisation: freedom of creation and its accessibility to the public (including access to heritage, as past creation). This objective did not lose importance since it was not fully met (see Pais *et al.* 2022). But over the years, other themes and purposes were brought into the debate and the implementation of cultural policy: the role of culture as an integrator in urban and regional development processes; the added value of arts and artists for innovation-driven economies and, in particular, to the attractiveness of 'creative cities' (Florida 2005); the key contribution of culture and creative industries to wealth and employment, as emphasised by the economics of culture (Throsby 2003), and then underlined by the European Commission itself (KEA 2006); and the consequences for the design of public policies, questioning the long-term consensus established in countries, such as Portugal, on the grounds of prioritising public investment in the construction and management of infrastructures.

These reorientations of cultural policy gain new meaning and importance in a general context of weakening public policies and ideological appreciation of markets, entrepreneurship and civil society. In fact, the Post-War model of the welfare state had also advocated a strong state intervention in the cultural field, to preserve heritage, support creation and facilitate public access to the 'spiritual assets'. But this model was challenged by financial constraints; and, to a certain point, the recent emphasis on the economic value of the cultural sector and the efficiency of patronage and the market, is either a defensive adaptation to the new era of neoliberalism or a rhetorical device to justify the retreat of the state. In any case, it is a big issue for public policy.

7. Towards another pattern of local policies?

Recent economic and sociological research, based on case studies, has highlighted trends in local cultural policies that go beyond the hegemonic pattern of action².

The first one is the combination of cultural policy – either the protection of heritage, or the construction and management of facilities, or even the support given to artistic creation – with other local policies. Some examples are the articulation with urban regeneration, with touristic promotion and with education. Such a comprehensive approach to culture, as a crosscutting element of the various sectoral policies, tries to integrate them by reference to the identity of local groups – what unites the inhabitants of a given city or municipality, what singles them out in comparison to others, and can be used as a factor of cohesion and competitiveness (for the empirical analysis see Silva 2000, Fortuna & Silva 2002, Babo 2010).

The second trend is the development of new forms of relationship among policy makers, associations, intellectuals, artists and cultural intermediaries; and the improvement of partnerships between cultural institutions and markets. This generates economies of scale and agglomeration, favours the achievement of positive externalities, and provides upgrading processes in the value chain. In general, the intention of policy-makers is to explore the dual value (cultural and economic) of cultural goods (Throsby 2003), and the interaction of human capital, cultural capital and social capital available in a given territory; to maximise the dynamics of creativity, innovation and initiative associated with specific urban quarters, places or localised artistic scenes; to foster public and private cooperation with a view to clustering artistic and cultural activities. It is an attempt to launch forms of governance able to take advantage of the local cultural resources, and to articulate them within the broader framework of local development (Costa 2002, Babo 2010).

The third trend is the redefinition of policy contexts. In the Portuguese case, it means to overcome the local level, understood as excessively confining public policies to the borders of each municipality. This can be done in three ways, which may be complementary to one another. One is to reposition a given town in the urban or regional area in which it is located, highlighting whatever best characterises its location. The second way is through cooperation with neighbouring municipalities,

² We will take into consideration the dynamics studied by Pedro Costa, in Lisbon (Costa 2002; 2008), by Elisa Babo, in Vila do Conde, one of the municipalities of the metropolitan area of Porto, and in Montemor-o-Novo, a small municipality situated about 100km from Lisbon (Babo 2010), by Paula Guerra, on urban scenes linked to rock music in Lisbon and Porto (Guerra 2013) and (for some aspects) by Carlos Fortuna, Augusto Santos Silva and others in various medium-sized Portuguese cities, namely, Viana do Castelo, Braga, Guimarães, Chaves, Vila Real, Bragança, Aveiro and Coimbra (Fortuna & Silva 2002; Silva *et al.* 1998; Silva 2000: 87-137).

to gain scale, established on the basis of voluntary association involving the sharing of resources, objectives and benefits. The third is to invest in partnerships with external players, be they institutions, events or creators, national or international – partnerships based, generally speaking, on thematic affinities or personal knowledge. However, the lack of intermediate forms of administration (between the local government and the national government) hampers the development of this last trend in Portugal – because it lacks the political and electoral incentives that we have seen work well at the municipal level (Azevedo 2007; Silva 2007; Babo 2010).

All in all, the proper way to address these realities and emerging challenges is probably to identify them as factors of change in the predominant pattern of local cultural policies. It is up to the empirical research to determine, case by case, their potential for transformation. Table 4.7 summarises these changes, actual or latent, in local policies. It modifies Table 4.1, in order to show the increasing complexity of cultural policies.

Table 4.7.

Ongoing changes in the dominant pattern of action in local cultural policies:

Purposes	Strategies for action
A. Preservation and enhancement of local heritage	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promotion of material (monuments, archaeological sites, movable assets) and immaterial heritage (arts and traditions). 2. Intervention (alone or in collaboration with the national administration) in the preservation, recovery and management of heritage. 3. Support for local associations.
B. Education of cultural audiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Support for local associations. 5. Holding or supporting awareness raising programmes and artistic education in schools.
C. Development of local assets (predominantly targeted at the local population, or mostly to attract visitors and tourists)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Construction and management of cultural facilities (libraries, archives, museums, sites, concert halls). 7. Programming cultural events, namely shows, festivals, festivities, often free of charge. 8. Support for local associations and commercial promoters of cultural events. 9. Holding regular events that project the town in the region and in the country, by enhancing unique traditions, expressions or motifs.

<p>D. Development of the local artistic and cultural environment</p>	<p>10. Attracting exogenous creators and cultural intermediaries. 11. Support for the professionalisation of artists and micro and small artistic-based companies. 12. Fostering the clustering of artistic and cultural activities. 13. Promoting economies of placement and/or urbanisation associated with the cultural and creative sector. 14. Promoting areas, quarters or cultural districts (located in the municipality or its surrounding urban/regional areas). 15. Integrating artistic and business representatives in the partnership and governance networks between municipalities and between public and private, local and supra-local institutions. 16. Encouraging generational renewal, modernisation and professionalisation of local cultural associations. 17. Investing in different events or in specific cultural niches or segments (such as festivals, residencies, programming of facilities, cultural mediation services), at the national and international scale.</p>
<p>E. Culture as a leverage for local development</p>	<p>18. Associating cultural policies to other sectoral policies (in particular in urban development and rehabilitation, tourism, attracting residents, social cohesion and education). 19. Investing in the cultural brand as a distinctive identity and element of regional or national assertiveness of the municipality. 20. Partnership with other municipalities, in order to gain economies of scale. 21. Enhancing the cultural discourse as a key element (or even framework) of political discourse.</p>

8. The importance of the Portuguese case for research on public policy

Portugal presents several specific characteristics. Democracy became a reality in the second half of the 1970s. The accession to the (now) European Union took place in 1986. Almost half of the population lives in the two main areas of Lisbon and Porto. Except for the Atlantic islands, there are only two territorial levels of administration: the national government and the 308 municipalities, most of them small. The state is highly centralised. The country experienced a late but very intense process of modernisation, resulting in structural transformations in the economy, education, labour market, gender relations, secularisation, cosmopolitanism, and exposure to creative industries.

In this context, culture has become an issue of local policies, and local cultural policies were valued as a key player within the national plans to improve public facilities, assets and artistic events. Their consolidation was based on a model focused on three main purposes – heritage, supply and audiences –, combining the direct intervention of public authorities and partnerships with local associations and schools, closely following the national and European political guidelines, and taking advantage of the financial resources thus provided.

This was a functional pattern of action: instrumental to the political legitimacy of the elected officials, it complemented and converged with national policies, generating tangible progress in the cultural life of many towns, and making the territorial distribution of resources less unbalanced (see Neves 2024). Its key elements overcame the ideological and political differences within town councils, despite the obvious left- or right-wing nuances, and the controversies between modernists and traditionalists, or between advocates of classical cultural hierarchies and those seduced by creative industries. It benefitted, and continues to benefit, from a broad political and social consensus. In many municipalities, it continues to be a benchmark for political bodies and civil servants.

However, changes are occurring in many areas: social contexts, the territorial dynamics of the economy, value chains, markets for goods and services, the framework of public policies. Its implications for countries like Portugal were significant throughout the first decade of the 21st century – and became particularly dramatic with the crisis of 2008-2010 and during the Adjustment Programme of 2011-2014.

On the one hand, it is a fact that various forms of capital (human, cultural, social, creative) can be mobilized, through cultural policies, into local economies, improving their social and territorial anchorage. The symbolic value of culture can serve as leverage for innovation and development processes based on a richer exploration of immaterial resources.

But on the other hand, these opportunities exist against the backdrop of a marked slowdown in public policies, the retraction of the welfare state, the enhancement of markets and civil societies – and a conspicuous ambivalence in the management of these trends, ranging from a process of adaptation and even reinvention of public policies, to the other extreme, their radical denial, accompanied or not by a liberal rhetoric. Regardless of the specific form in each case, the issue of governance – decision-making, implementation, monitoring – becomes more critical in this new European and national context.

Based on our research on Portugal, we would suggest that a certain evolution is currently happening. It does not imply the *replacement* of the existing pattern of local cultural policies, but its increasing *complexity*. New purposes interact with the three

usual goals regarding heritage, supply and audiences: they refer to the empowerment of local artistic milieux, and the integration of culture into broader strategies of planning and development. At the same time, it is possible and necessary to mobilise other methodologies of action, in addition to the classical ones (that is, prioritising the provision of facilities, services and programmes, offering financial, material and technical support for local cultural promoters, and launching partnerships with schools, groups and artistic institutions). These new methodologies include the professionalisation of cultural management, joint ventures with private players, mobilisation of external capital, and the affiliation to supra-local networks.

Like any other model, this one does not *explain* each social reality, regardless of its scale. That is a matter for empirical research. But it is intended to prove to be a heuristic and interpretative guide, whose validity and reach can be tested.

