CHAPTER 9

The unstable lightness of rock once again: Careers, trajectories and DIY cultures in Portuguese indie rock

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This chapter is concerned with DIY ('Do it yourself') careers as an employability pattern (Guerra 2013, 2016; Oliveira 2020) affected by the impact of the neoliberal worldview on the trajectories of the participants in the Portuguese indie rock scenes. First, we examine the social positions of the protagonists of the Portuguese indie rock scene, focusing on gender and social class, and highlighting the socio-political and economic changes that occurred between 2010 and 2020. Second, we seek to understand how these social actors have built their professional-creative DIY careers considering their different positions within the indie rock scene. Third, and for this purpose, we also offer a typology of these careers in the Portuguese context, based on extensive and intensive research. The data were collected in two phases: between 2005 and 2010, and between 2015 and 2020. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, we conducted 273 in-depth and semi-structured interviews with individuals involved in the production and mediation of Portuguese indie rock.

1. DIY music careers in a neoliberal atmosphere

In the early twentieth century, do-it-yourself (DIY) referred to creating, repairing and/or modifying something without using an experienced craftsman/professional. It later came to encompass a wide range of cultural and creative practices (Bennett & Guerra 2019a; Guerra 2017, 2018). While its musical roots date back to the 1950s and the rock'n'roll era, DIY gained greater prominence with the emergence of punk from the mid-1970s. Based on a logic of empowerment and musicians' ownership of the means of production as an alternative to traditional and mainstream produc-

tion and promotion circuits, several punk bands created their production platforms and organised themselves into networks, fostering the emergence of alternative distribution circuits from those dominating the music-cultural industries. During the 1980s and 1990s, the DIY ethos remained strongly linked to the punk aesthetic but extended to other music genres and spheres of alternative cultural production (Bennett 2018) as well as to other socio-cultural domains, including environmental/climate change issues, animal rights, veganism and the fight against poverty and racism (Haenfler 2018; McKay 1998). Once the different genres and music scenes, such as punk, metal and electronic dance music, expanded beyond the Anglo-Saxon context, DIY culture followed, and now manifest in various local cultures globally, including the Global South (Guerra 2020b). Despite local specificities, music scenes and DIY cultures are now a transglobal phenomenon. At the same time, they occur at the intersections between art and economy, resistance and subsistence and/or existence, ethos and praxis (Guerra 2021). 'While by no means eschewing anti-hegemonic concerns, this transformation of DIY into what might reasonably be termed a global 'alternative culture' has also seen it evolve to a level of professionalism that is aimed towards ensuring aesthetic and, where possible, economic sustainability of cultural production practices'. (Bennett & Guerra 2019b: 7).

The conceptualisation of a DIY career requires understanding it as a form of professional trajectory that stems from the need to manage the 'pathological effects', both political and economic, of post-industrialisation, and the risk and uncertainty that characterise contemporary societies. In the risk society of late modernity (Beck 1992; Giddens 2002), guided by neoliberal configurations, ideals and narratives, not only are biographical trajectories more uncertain and unpredictable, but processes are also becoming increasingly individualized and/or atomized (Chapman 2013; Dale 2016; Everts *et al.* 2021; Gavanas & Reitsamer 2016).

DIY careers have emerged as a response to this context, asserting themselves as a cultural-creative expression, materialized in economic practices and assuming themselves as viable professional occupations (Bennett 2018; Bennett & Guerra 2019b; Guerra 2018; Oliveira 2020). Technological innovations and the internet have made a decisive contribution to this through the emergence of a platform economy (YouTube, TikTok, Instagram), that makes uploading and publishing content extremely simple and capitalises on content created by independent cultural creators. Although they do not provide a total democratisation of cultural-creative production processes, the role of DIY careers in enabling more people to produce and disseminate their own cultural products is transforming cultural production practices into professional careers. So how can cultural creators earn income through this online content (Guerra 2020b; Wierenga 2009)?

Yet if a DIY career remains linked to the original DIY ethos and independence, there is now recognition of the need to achieve a sustainable lifestyle in which notions such as lifelong employment, or a regular salary no longer hold (Bennett 2018; Threadgold 2018). Considering a *precariat* economy, and subsequent uncertainty in employment trajectories, over the last twenty years, a process led by the Global North and replicated in the South, Standing (2011) argues that such changes have created a new type of social category: the *precariat*, comprising those who live and work in precarious conditions because they are dependent on short-term employment opportunities with little prospect for stable career development; moreover, they are at the mercy of market fluctuations and the cyclical crises of capitalism. When building artistic and creative careers, it is common to navigate between different part-time and short-term jobs to earn an income, leading many people to mobilise their often informally acquired skills to manage their professional trajectories. This is the re-conversion of 'subcultural capital' (Thornton 1996) and the activation of DIY skills, of resistance, of achievement, of freedom and of collective action, managing the uncertainty and precariousness that currently characterise the labour market and society (Haenfler 2018).

This chapter is concerned with DIY careers as an employability pattern (Guerra 2013, 2016; Oliveira 2020) affected by the impact of the neoliberal worldview on the trajectories of Portuguese indie rock scene participants. We first examine the social positions of the protagonists of the Portuguese indie rock scene, focusing on gender and social class, and highlighting the socio-political and economic changes that occurred between 2010 and 2020, marked by the economic and financial crisis that impacted Portugal between 2011 and 2014. We seek to understand how these social actors have built their professional-creative DIY careers in terms of their different positions within the indie rock scene, the crossings/contamination with other artistic domains, their tacit and formal competencies, their educational, professional and informal qualifications, and their promotion, dissemination, communication and agency networks. We then propose a typology-synthesis of these careers in the Portuguese context. This exercise of constant combination between DIY and do-it-together (DIT) creation/production questions the boundaries between the professional and the amateur, and the artistic contaminations between arts and music, and between music and the 'lifeworld'.

The data were collected in the periods 2005-10 and 2010–20. Using a mixed-methods approach (Crossley & Edwards 2016), we conducted 273 in-depth and semi-structured interviews (202 interviews in the first study and 71 in the second) with individuals involved in the production and mediation of Portuguese indie rock, including musicians, promoters, record label heads, music venue programmers, managers

and journalists. In both cases, we used snowball sampling to achieve an extensive territorial coverage of the indie scenes. The analysis was carried out by building key categories for data interpretation, based on the interview scripts. The interviews were subjected to a thematic content analysis. Multiple correspondence analysis was used for the construction of the typology.

2. The social space of Portuguese indie rock

As in other music scenes and other geographical contexts (Berkers & Schaap 2018; Gavanas & Reitsamer 2016; Guerra 2016; Guerra & Oliveira 2019; Leonard 2017; Reddington 2021; Reitsamer 2012), male hegemony is a defining feature of Portuguese indie rock. This is particularly visible in the 2010 research: 89 per cent of our sample was male. The female under-representation was mainly evident among the older generations, where there was an almost exclusive male presence. The difficulties in advancing a music career expressed by the few active women included exclusion from scene networks; gender stereotypes regarding supposed female characteristics, their interests, abilities, skills and roles assigned to them by society; horizontal and vertical segregation, which relegates women to less favourable employment conditions, income, power and recognition in the field of popular music production; difficulties in balancing professional and family life, especially with children; and objectification and sexual harassment. These experiences are in line with other research (Richards 2016; Smith *et al.* 2019). Ten years later, we still had a mainly male group of interview partners, but the proportion of women had increased to 21 per cent. Indeed, as expressed in the interviews, greater problematisation of gender inequalities and prevailing heteronormative constructions of gender and sexuality in the wake of feminist-queer movements and #MeToo have created greater awareness of, and engagement with, gender issues, especially among younger generations. This is shown in the recognition of the under-representation of women and the need to change the current configuration of the indie rock scene. We found that the greater problematisation of gender inequalities has been translated into promoting the reduction of differences between men and women when composing festival lineups and programming music venues, so music becomes a space for acceptance and tolerance. The collective and promoter Maternidade, formed in 2014 in Lisbon, and its transdisciplinary, feminist and queer festival Rama em Flor are examples. They want to counteract the marginalisation of women in concert line-ups, as well as the *machismo* and paternalism they consider institutionalised in Portuguese society. It also manifests in more recent musical projects, through the themes addressed in the lyrics and how the artists present themselves, questioning

gender stereotypes and criticising discrimination. This is the case for artists such as Vaiapraia and Filipe Sambado.

In terms of age, we are facing a relational space marked by people aged between 30 and 40 (43 per cent of the sample in 2010, 56 per cent in 2020). These data suggest both continuity and a generational renewal of the Portuguese indie rock scene, although the continuity does not mean music careers are viewed and experienced in the same way by the younger generations.

In both moments, our respondents had a high level of education compared with the average Portuguese population. In 2010, 55 per cent of the interview partners had higher education; in 2020, this figure was 69 per cent. In 2020, the percentage of the resident population in Portugal aged 15 and over with higher education was 21.2 per cent. Yet few interview partners had formal higher education in music, and this was mainly in music production and sound engineering. This does not mean a total rejection of musical education: among the interviewees of the first phase, 19 per cent took singing and instrumental lessons; in the second, 38 per cent had similar 'private' music learning experiences. Seventeen of the latter respondents had attended a music conservatory, while others had rock and jazz lessons in institutions accredited by the Portuguese Ministry of Education. However, these classes were generally a means to acquire basic knowledge for a later self-taught DIY evolution, where freedom and experimentation contrasted with the rigidity of Portuguese music education.

DIY practices were important to most actors from the beginning of their cultural activities. They manifested in different learnings: singing and playing instruments; recording, producing, distributing, booking and organising concerts and tours; and developing/planning choreographies/performances on stage, making clothes and aesthetic artefacts, scenography and videography. In these three learning axes, we speak of informal learning processes and contexts characterised by trial-and-error and the sharing of information and skills based on belonging to creative-artistic communities and local music scenes, facilitated by digital technologies.

In 2010, only 21 per cent of the respondents were professionally involved in music and 44 per cent were amateurs. Due to the small Portuguese music industries, which make it difficult to earn a living from music, the main professional activity of this group was outside these industries and music happened in their free time. The remaining 35 per cent combined music-making with other activities in fields such as design, architecture and illustration to ensure their economic survival and to achieve social and personal fulfilment. All research participants felt the profession of a musician was practised in a precarious environment due to the low and unstable income.

In 2020, although musicians (like other creative workers) (Bennett 2018; Guerra 2016, 2020b; Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2011; McRobbie 2016) face increased precariousness and insecurity, we have seen an increase in those who describe their musical and/or music-related activities as professional (49 per cent) and a marked decrease in those considering themselves amateurs (14 per cent). These data include interview partners working as mediators, such as journalists/music critics, programmers, promoters, or agents for record labels – areas where professionalisation is easier.

Despite this change, in 2010 and in 2020 most interviewees belonged to the middle classes associated with liberal professions (58 per cent in 2010 and 66 per cent in 2020) in artistic, intellectual and scientific areas[49]. These data are in line with what several authors (Bennett 2018; Friedman *et al.* 2016; Threadgold 2018) have shown about the importance of socio-economic background in the creation of conditions for building DIY careers in the creative and cultural industries.

Most research participants lived in the cities of Lisbon and Porto. This geographical distribution closely follows the distribution of social agents of the artistic field generally, denoting the structural asymmetries and dualisms of Portugal. The markedly urban configuration of the Lisbon and Porto music scenes is unsurprising: it is easier to find more diverse lifestyles in the larger cities, as well as bigger circuits of production and circulation of different forms of artistic expression (Guerra 2013, 2016).

3. A typology of Portuguese DIY indie music careers

Aiming to better understand the construction of DIY music careers, we conducted a typological reading of these careers, according to the main strategies mobilised in the current neoliberal context and the intensity and forms of expression of DIY among them. To define the career profiles, we considered two analytical dimensions. The first captures the strategies adopted by social actors to ensure the sustainability and economic viability of their careers, including continuous musical activity (i.e. always being in a phase of the production cycle), networking, the capacity for reinvention, a concert circuit, regularly publishing albums and other artistic materials, and using copyright and related rights. The second dimension describes a combination of music-related activities with others in non-musical/artistic fields to earn a living. Based on these dimensions, we were able to identify seven ideal-typical career profiles in mu-

[49] In the Portuguese context, this refers to people who occupy professional management positions, who are integrated within the so-called intellectual jobs or are highly specialised. In the case of the younger generations, it means highly educated people such as senior managers, administrative or directorate workers, knowledge professionals or professionals such as doctors, lawyers and economists.

sic: catch-all musicians, non-stop musicians, mediator musicians, author musicians, mediators, non-musicians and weekend musicians. They are fluid ideal-types since, due to the precariousness and uncertainty in their trajectories, it is usual to pass from one to another ideal-type throughout their musical careers. Sometimes abrupt, these transitions are the result of the state of the music industries, and the cultural industry, based on precarious contracts; or even external factors such as the economic situation of the country, for example the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent restructuring.

'Catch-all musicians' comprises 8 per cent of respondents in 2010 and 27 per cent in 2020. This profile includes musicians who mostly combine their music careers with other music-related activities to overcome the instability and uncertainty of a music career, such as writing and playing for other musicians and working as producers and composers for cinema, television, and advertising. Their own music-making is not their primary source of income. We have designated this career profile as the 'catch-all musicians' because such a music career involves greater versatility. This capacity for adaptation and multiplication of projects and roles is also their main strategy to deal with an uncertain artistic trajectory. This occurs in a markedly DIY way, but it is also DIT because it is anchored in relational networks.

'Non-stop musicians' included 6 per cent of respondents in 2010 and 10 per cent in 2020. Finding a balance between music-making and other professional activities is a reality for these individuals, but the connection between the day job and the artistic sphere is more evident. The defining element is maintaining a continuous musical activity by planning the whole creative process and its phases and defining objectives to be achieved and a work methodology. These actors can reinvent themselves as musicians and artists, which translates into the development of various musical projects, not only enabling musicians to express their creativity in different musical styles, but also broadening the possibilities of playing live and sources of income. This means ensuring that their cycle of creation–performance–dissemination is never interrupted, requiring regular releases of albums, EPs, singles and videos. In this career profile, music takes a professional character, with planning, dedication to work, perseverance and the capacity to multiply roles in the music scene. It is in this and the previous category that a highly professional perception of music-making prevails, and DIY practices present a more professional dimension.

'Mediator musicians' encompassed 6 per cent of respondents in 2010 and 31 per cent in 2020. Unlike the two previous career profiles, these actors do not combine music-making with other professions outside the music industries. However, the split still exists: they work as promoters, editors, agents or music venue creators – professions that allow for creativity but focused on 'mediation' activities. This reflects

DIY ethics and praxis due to the lack of channels for publicising and promoting their musical work. At the same time, DIY labels and promoters act as important creative agents, fostering collaborative practices to maintain and consolidate musical careers. The development of several musical projects is not an option for this career profile because the focus is on the multiplication of roles rather than the realisation of musical projects. The musicians in this career profile tend to be younger, particularly in 2020. This is also the only career profile in which most members understand music as being only one of the channels and possible languages to share their vision of the world. We find a sceptical perspective regarding living solely as musicians, with the interviewees stating the virtual impossibility of being a full-time musician in Portugal, let alone an independent one. Together they reveal the will to express themselves through artistic languages besides music, including video, poetry, urban art, comics, cinema and dance. They see the possibility of eventually combining music with other artistic activities, and playing other roles in the independent music scene, more related to mediation than creation. Involvement in the world of music tends to be seen as a cyclical form of experimentation with diverse artistic languages.

'Author musicians' made up 6 per cent of respondents in 2010 and 7 per cent in 2020. This is the only career profile whose members live exclusively from the music they create for themselves. In other words, they do not need to create music for other people or be involved in mediating activities. This implies a diversified set of strategies. First, in line with several studies that have identified networking and the acquisition of social capital as crucial for advancing a music career (Becker 1982; Guerra 2016; Reitsamer & Prokop 2018), these interviewees referred to the mobilisation of networking and the establishment of relationships in the musical environment. However, like the 'mediator musicians', the reduction of the size of musical projects (solo projects or projects with two or three people) was also a career-management option, making it easier and cheaper to book bands and allowing salaries to be divided between fewer people. This denotes the influence and impact of neoliberal ideals and their individualisation logics on the trajectories of musicians. The same happens with the planning and definition of a work methodology, the maintenance of continuous musical activity and the realisation of a concert circuit. Still, within the scope of strategies mobilised by these musicians, it is important to mention the copyrights from the works they create, which enable them to generate income from their music, often an essential supplement in periods when income from other sources is scarce. This is the only career profile in which this option is so significant[50]. This leads us to an authorial vision of the artistic work. For most of these

[50] Musicians in other career profiles also use copyright, but this is less significant for them.

interviewees, music has a professional dimension. Consequently, and like the 'non-stop musicians', planning and dedication to work and a persistent posture are their main ways of managing the uncertainties associated with a professional trajectory in music. Most also face trajectories explicitly marked by DIY, leading them to seek control over the different phases of the processes of creation, production and dissemination of music, often adding technical and management tasks to creative activities.

'Mediators' included an extensive set of interviewees, especially in 2010 (51 per cent in 2010, 25 per cent in 2020). These heterogenous social actors play crucial roles in the indie rock music scene, but are not musicians, distinguishing this from the other career profiles. They are journalists/music critics, radio broadcasters, promoters, agents, managers, label managers, music venue owners and/or programmers, and record store owners. Almost all could make a living exclusively from their activity in the music field, in both 2010 and 2020. They therefore had a professional perception of music. The exceptions were those in charge of record labels, especially in 2010. At that time, about half had another job that was their main source of income. The publishing activity was a hobby, reflecting a strong passion for music. Ten years later, this was the reality for only one of the record label heads, who worked as an office clerk in a textile company during the day. In the remaining cases, the economic sustainability of their careers was entirely anchored in the musical sphere, often combining editorial activity with promotion or management. Nevertheless, except for the journalists, who mostly had higher professional education, professional trajectories were developed on a DIY basis. This means that learning was based on learning-by-doing and trial-and-error, as their involvement in music grew. It is in this career profile, as well as among the 'mediator musicians', that we find more women in the two moments[51]. A music career for women continues to pass essentially through the sphere of mediation.

The last two career profiles concern only the first period of analysis[52]. We have designated one as 'non-musicians', comprising 7 per cent of the interviewees. Their main characteristic is that they have built musical trajectories without considering music as a professional option. They never lived (or considered living) from their activity as musicians and have never been economically dependent on music as they forge their careers in non-musical fields. It has always been a space of freedom and

[51] In the case of mediators, in 2010 the percentage of women was 11 per cent and in 2020 it was 24 per cent. In the case of mediator musicians, in 2010 the percentage of women was 10 per cent and in 2020 it was 32 per cent.

[52] This is due to the objectives of the doctoral thesis that supports the second moment of analysis considered in this chapter. In this case, only people who make their living from music creation or other activities within the music industries were considered for the sample. DJs were also excluded from the analysis.

passion. For many, their involvement in music goes back more than 30 years and DIY logics and practices have prevailed in how they acquired their musical skills, their attitude to the musical field and the self-taught way they have managed their careers. This career profile brings together the founders of Portuguese indie rock who have marked – and continue to mark – the history of popular music. This is related to them being young during the dictatorship and/or immediately after 25 April 1974, being the pioneers of the break with a traditional, closed, rural Portugal.

The last career profile, 'weekend musicians', encompasses 16 per cent of the 2010 respondents. Unlike the previous career profile, for whom involvement in music is a constant, their connection to and involvement in the world of music is intermittent. They are essentially DJs and bloggers who, like the interviewees from the previous career profile, never envisaged their musical activity as a profession. It occupies their leisure time, and their professional daily life is filled with other professional activity. It is also a career profile where the configuration of musical trajectories is marked by a DIY ethos and praxis, prefigured in dispositions of assumed 'music lovers'. Their designation as 'weekend musicians' is not stigmatizing: it reveals a vibrant and cosmopolitan urban culture at the dawn of the 2010s in the cities of Coimbra, Lisbon and Porto that has allowed more people to combine art with life[53]. This occurred in the 1990s with the UK club culture, but could only emerge in Portugal recently, given the particularities of its semi-peripheral socio-historical development and dictatorship.

4. Conclusion

We have read DIY careers as a pattern of promoting employability within the framework of the effects of the neoliberal worldview on the transitions and trajectories of the musicians and other creatives who make up the Portuguese indie rock scene. Based on a pioneer empirical study at the Portuguese and European scales, over a ten-year period, our investigations led to two main conclusions. The first is that the protagonists of these music scenes have not changed much in terms of their main socio-demographic characteristics. However, within this framework of continuity, two relevant changes have occurred. Although the Portuguese indie rock scene remains predominantly male, there is an increased participation of women and a greater awareness of, and concern about, gender issues – especially among the younger generations. Nevertheless, we should highlight that women continue to de-

[53] In the same sense, it should be made clear that this does not mean musicians in the other career profiles do not play at the weekend. Our point is that for the musicians who are part of this career profile (essentially DJs), their involvement with music only happens in their leisure time.

velop careers mainly as 'mediators' and 'mediator musicians', so differences remain in the types of music careers women pursue.

The second change is a significant increase in those who represent their involvement in music as professionals, accompanied by a sharp reduction in those who consider themselves amateurs. This is most clearly expressed through the decrease in 'mediators' and the increase in 'mediator musicians'. This is due to the fact that by 2020, due to improved access to digital technologies for music, an increasing number of mediators are also active as musicians, as well as the increase in DIY *ethos* and *praxis*. In recent years it has been common to see the formation of collectives of musicians who share mediation activities related to the music they create, due to a lack of channels for publicising and promoting their musical work. In recent years, even if developed precariously, a career in indie music has become an increasingly viable and sustainable option from both the professional and financial perspectives. As McRobbie (2016) argues, for middle-class youth it has become increasingly important to forge 'affective attachments' with employment and develop careers for satisfaction. Over a decade, there have thus been both continuities and discontinuities.

The second conclusion refers to the common denominator of these careers: although DIY ethics and praxis can be seen as intertwined with neoliberal values and ideas in modern capitalism, for our interviewees they are also an essential strategy for pursuing their music careers in the context of neoliberal working conditions. In their differences, the trajectories of these social actors have been marked by DIY from their beginnings to the present day. Whether it manifests itself in the processes of learning and acquiring skills, in their stance in the musical field or in the self-taught way they manage their careers, this DIY ethos has allowed these actors to deal with precariousness and with the impacts that result from a neoliberal paradigm in the trajectories of creative workers. This seems to be intensified in Portugal, where due to socio-historical circumstances, the weaknesses of the cultural and creative industries are accentuated and the effects of the cyclical financial crises of capitalism are felt very intensely and shared with Spain, Greece and Italy.

Finally, we wish to examine what could be done to improve the situation of DIY musicians in Portugal. Both investigations made it clear that these DIY careers are also DIT. They imply a strong involvement in collaborative and co-creation networks. One way to improve the situation of these musicians may be to promote the creation and consolidation of networks for sharing information, resources and coping strategies. These careers could also be developed in line with public policies specifically oriented towards popular music, as it occurs in other countries.