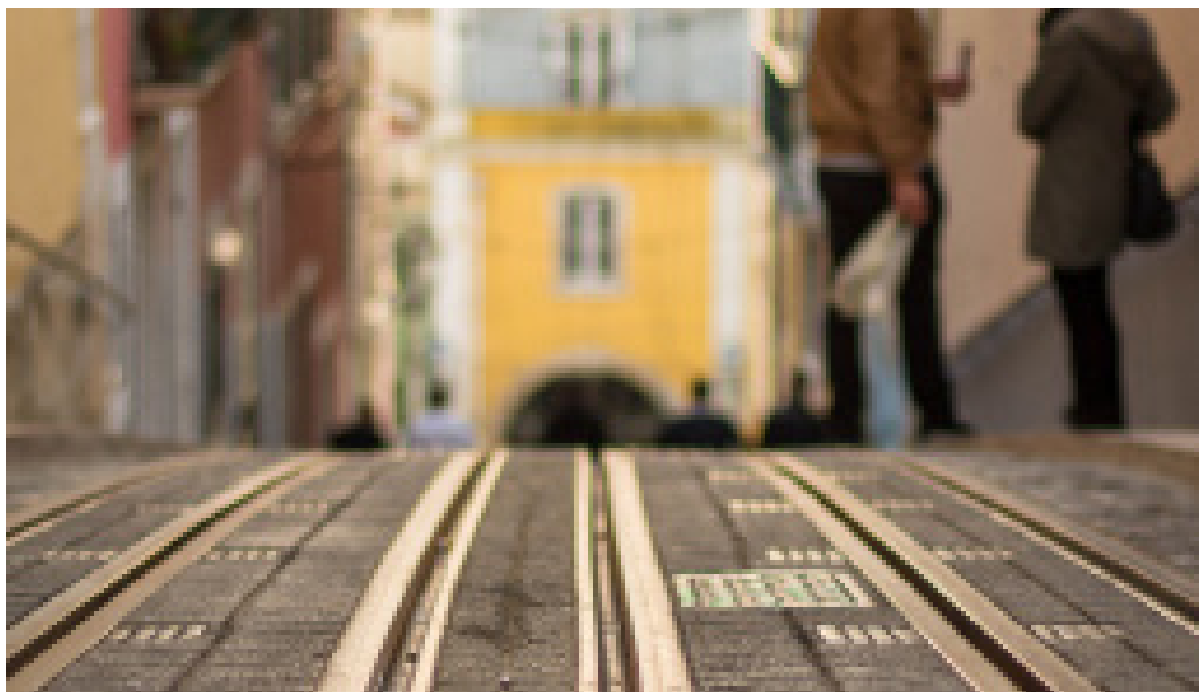


IETM MAPPING

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# CONTEMPORARY PERFORMING ARTS IN PORTUGAL: AN OVERVIEW



by Maria João Guardão

Image: Marc Roberts on [Flickr](#)



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**Contemporary performing arts in Portugal: an overview**

**Mapping IETM**

by **Maria João Guardão**

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# Table of contents

## 1 - PORTUGAL: THE BASICS 4

- 1.1. Key figures 4
- 1.2. From bailout to Web Summit: years of living dangerously 4
- 1.3. IETM in Portugal 5

t

## 2 - THE CONTEMPORARY PERFORMING ARTS SCENE 6

- 2.1. State funding: overview and recent changes 7
- 2.2. Local Government funding 9
- 2.3. Other sources of financial support 13
- 2.4. Festivals, residencies, networks, schools: crucial areas  
for performing arts creation 14
- 2.5. Recent trends in the Portuguese performing arts scene 15

The last IETM plenary meeting in Portugal took place in Lisbon in 1998, with the city at the centre of a powerful movement in performative arts. After an auspicious start to the new millennium, however, the last decade in Portugal has been a rollercoaster ride in terms of economic and social politics, something that has had a serious impact on the country and its citizens.

IETM's Oporto plenary meeting sees us return to Portugal 20 years later, once again at an intense period within Portuguese performing arts. Following years of low arts funding, there are now artist-driven, municipality-driven and State-driven transformations in place as well as a number of exciting international trends.

# 01.

## PORTUGAL: THE BASICS

### 1.1. Key figures<sup>1</sup>

Population: 10.325 million

Official language: Portuguese

Currency: Euro

Capital city: Lisbon

Size<sup>2</sup>: 92,090km<sup>2</sup> (land area 91,470km<sup>2</sup> / water area 620km<sup>2</sup>)

Average earnings: €1,107 per month (2016) (men €1,215 / women €982)

Minimum wage: €580 per month (2018)

Current unemployment rate: 8.9% (2017)

### 1.2. From bailout to Web Summit: years of living dangerously

On 15 September 2012, masses of Portuguese citizens took to their nation's streets yelling 'To hell with Troika, we want our lives back!' The march, which brought together an estimated one million citizens throughout the country, centred around demonstrations on the streets of the capital. Rather than being linked to any political party or union organisation, the march was instead organised via social media by a group of citizens. Its organisers drew together an incredibly diverse group of protesters, enlisting people from all social and cultural tribes and ages. Everyone from families with kids, grandparents and dogs, to white-haired pensioners and youngsters in Anonymous masks were involved, many of them taking part in a demonstration for the first time in their lives. To date, it is still the country's largest protest against austerity measures.

Since an auspicious start to the new millennium, the last decade in Portugal has been a rollercoaster ride in terms of economic and social politics, something that has had a serious impact on the country and its citizens. In 2009, unemployment reached its highest level since 2000 and public debt began to grow in a spiral that would last five years. Portugal was a sinking country with structural weaknesses and huge sovereign debt. Unable to ride the waves of international crisis, rating agencies labelled the country's credibility as 'trash'.

Then, in 2011, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was called to the rescue. Their €72bn bailout practically required a loss of sovereignty as the Financial and Economic Assistance Program led by the Troika (IMF + European Central Bank + European Commission) dictated the country's policies. The centre-left Socialist Party (PS) stepped down from government and elections allowed a right-wing social democrat coalition to implement a heavy set of austerity measures designed to re-balance public accounts at the expenses of excruciating social agony. State welfare was put at stake, entire families found themselves out of work and, subsequently, deprived of housing, the younger generation was forced to emigrate to find work and heavy taxes were placed on work and pensions. Merges and drastic cuts in public institutions led to irreversible damage, including the closure of the Cultural Activities Observatory and the loss of all its data (1996-2013). There were positive social shifts too, however, including the legalisation of abortion (2007), access to same-sex civil marriage (2010) and adoption by same-sex couples (2016).

Despite these austerity measures, public debt peaked in 2014, with the country engulfed by a sense of apathy and bitter disappointment. 'Colo' by Teresa Vilaverde and 'As Mil e Uma Noites' by Miguel Gomes (a trilogy) – fictitious films inspired by reality – are among the more accurate portrayals of the times. In 2015, further elections resulted in another narrow win for the right-wing, but saw an unprecedented coalition between the centre-left PS, the left-wing Left Block – led by Catarina Martins, a former actress and founder of Oporto collective *Visões Úteis* – and the Communist Party – a Parliament agreement only, labelled by the opposition as 'geringonça' = 'contraption' – sustain the left-wing government and its anti-austerity policies, both in counter cycle with Europe.

Three years later and Portugal, the former bailout country, now offers economic and political proof that the impossible is

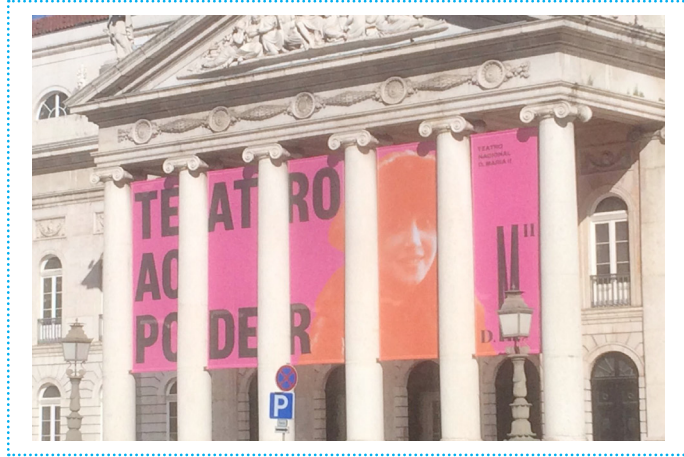
<sup>1</sup> all data (unless mentioned otherwise) from <https://www.pordata.pt/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.worldatlas.com/>

achievable. The national statistics office recently confirmed that the Portuguese economy was estimated to have grown 2.7% in 2016, the strongest rate of annual expansion since 2000, and a recent report by the Financial Times confirmed that 'Portugal's proudly anti-austerity prime minister is ebullient after returning the former bailout country to fiscal health and presiding over a robust economic recovery. Lisbon is no longer in breach of the EU's budget rules – a decision he calls a 'turning point' for the country's international reputation – and the economy looks set for its strongest expansion in almost two decades. Unemployment is falling at one of the fastest rates in Europe.' Discussing employment, PM António Costa stated in a recent parliamentary debate that 288,000 new jobs in the last two years demonstrates the 'victory of an alternative model.'

During this period, Fado became Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (2011), Lisbon hosted the Web Summit, the national football team won the European Football Championship, Portugal won the Eurovision Song Contest, and the country's self-esteem was at a high. In a parallel world, Oporto's Saber Fazer or Lisbon's Rede de Artes e Ofícios provide the visible tips of a larger movement that grew stronger during the years of crisis – with a desire to go back to basics as a form of making sense in a world ruled by macroeconomics, toxic food and enslaved clothes makers. As the face of the cities rapidly changed, preserving historic shops became as important as maintaining daily routines in the neighbourhood. The law protecting them arrived in 2017 yet many were lost as tourism skyrocketed and property became like gold dust, with the dilapidated buildings in which they nested sold to become fancy hotels or Airbnbs.

Now, Lisbon is a hotspot on Madonna's Instagram feed and Oporto was declared European's best tourist destination of 2017. Yet housing is a major issue in both cities with prices escalating beyond average salaries. Recently, the Rock in



National Theatre D. Maria II, 'Power to the theatre' (courtesy of the author)

Riot movement called for housing policies on the capital's streets, just as the Futuro Limpo (Clean Future) movement, which opposes drilling for fossil fuels (petrol and gas) along the Portuguese coastline, called for life.

In 2017, Portugal suffered the deadliest summer forests fires ever and, as 2018 arrived, in Lisbon's main downtown plaza the façade of the capital's National Theatre D. Maria II announced that Portugal was on the Verge of Extinction, with a cycle of plays, concerts, workshops, debates and publications illuminating what, and who, had been lost.

In Oporto, in a kiosk next to Jardim de S. Lázaro, tour promoters try to sell a departure point to the walking debates through a 'plural, mixed, diverse city, flexible enough to fit several views of the world and urban life'. They proclaim that, even when it is closed, 'it is still the place to glue posters about stuff happening in the neighbourhood, an info point. When it's open there's a archi-doodler inside, distributing maps and flyers, inviting people to these lame tours, talking with passers by, and drawing on the rest of the time (more zines and flyers and posters and

models and badges and stuff). You should definitely stop by if you're in Porto.' A piece of municipal property, the kiosk faces eviction at the end of May.

### 1.3. IETM in Portugal

The last IETM plenary meeting in Portugal took place in Lisbon in 1998, with the city at the centre of a powerful movement in performative arts. As well as hosting Expo 98 – a key event for the future of Portuguese performing arts – it also benefited from the revolutionary effects of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's ACARTE and the aftershock of Lisbon 94, European Capital of Culture (both of which IETM witnessed in 1994).

IETM's Oporto plenary meeting sees the network return to Portugal 20 years later, once again at an intense period within Portuguese performing arts. Following years of low arts funding, there are now artist-driven, municipality-driven and State-driven transformations in place as well as a number of exciting international trends.

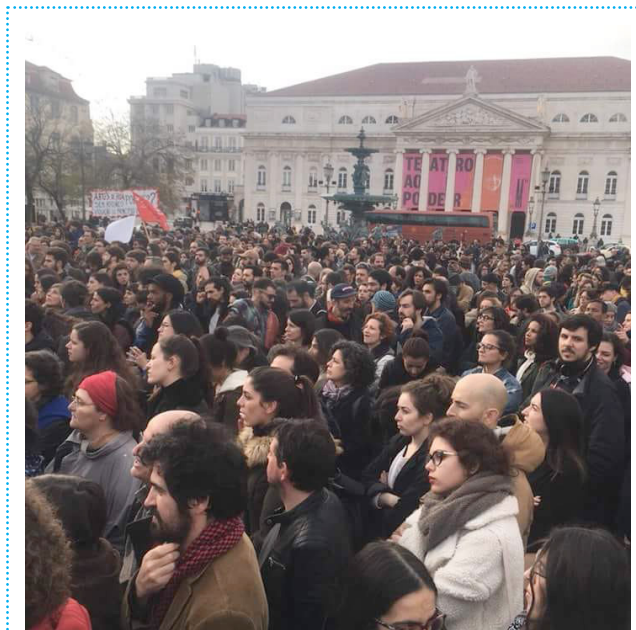
Partly due to the precarious situation of Portuguese cultural agents in the last

decade and partly down to IETM's long absence, there are currently only five IETM members in Portugal: one independent platform working in the development of cultural and artistic projects with a focus on circus and public space – Bússola; two regularly-funded theatre companies – CIA João Garcia Miguel, based in Lisbon, and Visões Úteis, based in Oporto; one multi-disciplinary Lisbon venue, Culturgest; and one dance support organisation, REDE.

## 02.

### THE CONTEMPORARY PERFORMING ARTS SCENE

As well as new artistic trends developing within the contemporary scene, there has been the arrival of an entire new generation of independent artists in key programming roles (on several scales), several independent companies getting a roof overhead and sharing resources – while others are shutting down – and new collectives coming together. There are also new, and influential, political players and significant changes in state funding models, which are being strongly contested. Municipalities are strengthening their cultural role and new centres are emerging while others strengthen their place. It's a vibrant time for cultural programmers, and some key names are embracing new projects while others gain stronger tools. Youth theatre and circus and street arts are gaining added visibility, as are accessibility – in its widest context (physical accessibility, but also social and intellectual) – and artistic education. Internationalisation is a key objective (and already a reality, though undermined by a lack of funds). New artists and new venues are appearing but there's also a real danger of extinction around the corner. At a mere 0.2% of the National Budget, the budget for culture is still insufficient for the vitality and broad horizons of its artistic and cultural agents.



Artists demonstrating in front of the National Theatre, April 2018 (© Isabel Abreu)

At the time of writing, the arts world in Portugal is in the midst of a revolution. In 2016 a team of cultural professionals, including cultural programmer and administrator Miguel Honrado and dance critic, producer and researcher Paula Varanda, took on key political roles in a recently-reinstated Ministry of Culture (led by poet and diplomat Luís Filipe Castro Mendes). Their aim was to transform the somewhat precarious art system via a participatory debate and, in particular, to make changes to the way in which the public budget for arts would be distributed. In early 2018 their first results were announced and a strong reaction followed: the arts world (particularly the independent scene) took to the streets with an unprecedented display of solidarity, while mainstream media gave significant visibility to the protests and the Parliament and local powers questioned the government. In a matter of weeks, three consecutive amendments to the

budget were proposed, another first for the country, and the model for arts is said to be set to undergo several changes, with a lively debate underway between cultural agents and the government. However, these exciting times come with obvious uncertainty. At the time of writing, the amount of funding available and the way it will be allocated is yet to be confirmed. What follows is a necessarily incomplete and blurred picture, capturing the feeling of turmoil experienced by the performing arts sector in Portugal today.



## 2.1. State funding: overview and recent changes

The Portuguese state is bound by its Constitution to support and stimulate artistic creation in its diversity as well as promoting the circulation of quality cultural assets. However, state funding to culture has never amounted to more than 0.6% of the National Budget (NB). Funding peaked in 2005 with the European flow of Cultural Operational Program (POC) and then started shrinking. It was already at a significantly depleted level in 2011, when the austerity government cut 40% of funding for all artistic structures and the impact was devastating. Currently, the budget for culture equates to 0.2% of the NB, an estimated €480M. Of this sum, €17.6M is allocated to the arts support by DGARTES (the Portuguese Arts Council – Direção Geral das Artes) and this increased to €19.2M when Prime Minister António Costa recently announced budget reinforcements.

Operating under the direct patronage of the Culture Secretary of State, DGARTES is the central branch that coordinates and executes the arts policy, distributing funding for the professional artistic activities of both independent companies and artists. As mentioned above, a new model for arts support was introduced in 2018, aiming to ‘stimulate arts creation, production and diffusion, promote arts articulation with other sectorial areas and value artistic fruition as a tool to correct territorial and cultural, economic, social and human development asymmetries.’ Decentralisation and internationalisation are key areas within the current cultural policy, and this translates into several new funding lines – some already clearly defined, others still subject to change.

As mentioned, this model of fund attribution is under intense debate and subject to change. In general, funds are distributed via public calls, following evaluations by independent juries (though there are some exceptions) and according to established

criteria, including geographical criteria that set out to fund organisations evenly across Portugal. This model aims to support and strengthen decentralisation, circulation and internationalisation. In 2018, funding for artistic structures (on several scales, from author’s companies to companies linked to municipal venues) for the next biennial or quadrennial are to absorb the biggest chunk of the funds available from DGARTES. Independent artist’s companies and companies linked to municipal venues or to festivals and schools apply to the same funding line and, for the first time since state funding to professional artistic structures was organised in 1996, there is a Contemporary Circus and Street Arts stream, while structures based in the autonomous Azores and Madeira regions can also apply.

The Minister of Culture recently stated in Parliament that, compared with the last cycle of arts funding (2013-16), 48 new structures will be supported in this cycle and that average support to each structure has grown from €88,000 to €109,000. Provisional results show that 168 performing arts structures are funded (that of a total of 183, including visual arts structures). At the time of writing, final

results are only available for Contemporary Circus and Street Arts. Recurrently-funded structures are shown here, while here is historic funding from 2013 to date (though with mixed models).

Parallel to the support given to artistic structures, the new model proposes a Partnership Support Program and a Projects Support Program (again subject to changes in form and funding), both with funds attributed directly and via open call, with an overall amount provisionally set at €2.6M. The Partnership Support Program – replacing the ‘Tripartido’ Support (formerly attributed to projects by companies with support from municipalities/institutions and DGARTES) – supports the creation, circulation and programming of projects as well as audience development projects (provisional numbers point to €500,000 available in total); the Projects Support Program is set to finance internationalisation (provisional numbers point to a fund of €500,000, distributed via two calls per year), programming, creation, audience development and national circulation (€1.4M) and publishing and training/educational projects (€200,000).

Please note that this is a rough and



'Sopro', by Tiago Rodrigues (© Christophe Raynaud de Lage)

incomplete picture of a complex and evolving funding system and that all the information is very recent. Figures are drawn from information on the DGARTES database and also information given by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Culture to Parliament – information that, although official, is meant to provide an indicative general overview.

### Main venues funded by the State

The state directly supports the three national theatres through its Fundo de Fomento Cultural. These are the Lisbon-based National Theatre D. Maria II (€5.9M), the National Ballet Company (CNB) and the national opera house S. Carlos National Theatre – funded via a structure that includes both OPART (€21.1M) and Oporto-based National Theatre of S. João – TNSJ (€5.4M). These figures encompass all costs and, as a reference, National Theatre D. Maria II has a programming budget of €1M. Lisbon's CCB Foundation and Oporto's Serralves Foundation and Casa da Música also receive state funding.

The current artistic director of National Theatre D. Maria II (TNDMII) is actor, dramaturg and theatre director Tiago Rodrigues. A politically engaged left-wing artist whose work has received national and international acclaim (cf. his latest work *Sopro*, co-produced by Avignon Festival) Rodrigues was invited (by the right-wing government) to direct the TNDMII in 2014 and, at 37, became not only the youngest ever to assume the role in such a decisive institution but also, and more importantly, the representative of an artistic generation that grew up in the Portuguese performing arts scene during the 2000s. Prior to assuming the role, he had been fully exposed to vibrant national and international influences (he worked with Artistas Unidos and tg STAN collectives before creating his own structure Mundo Perfeito – that he folded when he became TNDMII's director) and was supported by some key networks already in place (artistic residency center O Espaço do Tempo

(EdT), Alcantara Festival and venues as Culturgest, Maria Matos Theatre, S. Luiz Theatre, Centro Cultural de Belém, Viriato Theatre and Centro Cultural Vila Flor are prime examples). In addition, he also had to deal with the scarcity of national means, became accustomed to collaboration as a decisive working tool and became acutely aware of the importance of clear working ethics and debate. Now in his second mandate, he has put together a program that is strongly anchored in diverse Portuguese creation – working with such names as Mónica Calle, Marlene Monteiro Freitas, Rui Catalão, Jorge Silva Melo or Miguel Fragata and Inês Barahona (whose play for young audiences 'Do Bosque para a Noite' will première at the Avignon Festival in 2018) – as well as employing charismatic international names – Biennial Artist in the City's Christiane Jatahi is an upcoming example – and has worked on increasing visibility and support to emergent artists (Amélia Rey Colaço bursary), dramaturgy and publishing. He has also crafted a model based on co-production, circulation and the development of decentralised partnerships, traversing the country (Eunice.net) and also including international networks such as Apap. He currently directs the Ecole des Maîtres.

Returning to the theatres, the National Theatre of S. João (TNSJ) houses three theatres in various locations: the São João National Theatre, the Carlos Alberto Theatre (TeCA) and the S. Bento da Vitória Monastery (MSBV). Its artistic director, Nuno Carinhas, a well-established artist, painter, set designer and theatre director with a career that has spanned a huge range of work with the independent performing arts scene, has put together a vast program that stages national, international, cross-disciplinary artistic work. This endeavour has been taken up alongside assessing director Nuno M. Cardoso and Pedro Sobrado, who was recently sworn in as president of the TNSJ board, a household name directly responsible for the publishing program 'Theatre essays', among others. Leading a charismatic programming politics since 2009, Carinhas has been crucial to co-producing the independent Oporto performing arts scene, especially during the privatisation of Rivoli Theatre (from 2006 to 2013), when TNSJ hosted international festivals such as Dancem! and FITEI – the Iberian Theatre International Festival – both of which brought international artistic works to Portugal as well as co-producing local artists. Ultimately, this overarching program assures that the theatre can



'27 Bones', by Tânia Carvalho (© Margarida Dias)



hold a stronger national and international position, integrating the UTE - European Union of Theatres, for example – as well as an educational effort targeting the development of knowledge of dramatic theatrical texts among teachers, critics and general audiences.

Elsewhere, choreographer Paulo Ribeiro, a leading name within Portuguese dance, a programmer and the charismatic artistic director of the Viriato Theatre for over a decade (home to his own company, now directed by choreographers and dancers António Cabrita and São Castro), took over the programming of the National Ballet Company (CNB) in 2016. He started 2018 by launching a strong programming line, namely a retrospective of Tânia Carvalho's work (in a cycle co-produced by Maria Matos and S.Luiz Theatres), and converting the studios Estúdios Victor Cordon – a beautiful rehearsal space located in Lisbon's Chiado and usually shared by CNB and São Carlos performers – into a formal program of residencies, classes and artistic creation, open to performing artists and coordinated by choreographer Rui Lopes Graça.

Two years ago, the National Ballet Company (CNB) celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary under the direction of Luísa Taveira, which has led the company to unprecedented crossovers. Initiatives such as collaborations with theatre companies or directors such as Cão Solteiro, Praga Theater and Carlos Pimenta or Tiago Rodrigues directing its repertoire ran in parallel with a strong policy of inviting household names in choreography – Olga Roriz, Rui Horta or Vasco Wellenkamp, as well as Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker or Faustin Linyekula. Now on the board of administration of the Centro Cultural de Belém (CCB), Taveira is once again programming for the cultural arts centre by the river where she has been key to the creation of both Companhia Maior (an elder performers company that works under the direction of different performing arts creators) and BoxNova (a space for emergent artists). Furthermore, administrators such as Miguel Lobo



'Ensaio para uma cartografia', by Mónica Calle (© Vitorino Coragem)

Antunes and António Mega Ferreira have set the pace for decisive programming – for both large-scale national and international productions as well as close support and visibility to emergent Portuguese artists.

Finally, while the National Theatre of São Carlos, the Portuguese Opera House, is still tackling various political decisions, with budget austerity being the key word, Oporto's Casa da Música (Music House) is thriving under António Jorge Pacheco and his programming team's direction. In the Serralves Foundation, meanwhile, the recently-appointed museum director João Ribas is already a household name, while historic key programmer for performance arts Cristina Grande and, in music, Pedro Rocha, are fundamental to the performing arts scene.

Please note that there are other public funds and that this map only examines the main ones supporting performing arts.

## 2.2. Local Government funding

Following European trends and funding, there's been a move towards state and local governments investing in cultural strategies and structures as key lines for regional and territorial development. Some local, historic theatres have been brought back to life while others were built in the first decade of the millennium. Elsewhere, networks such as Rede 5 Sentidos or Artemrede have been formed, all to a backdrop of 120 theatres and a recurring scarcity of means (low programming funds and capacitated agents) aggravated by the crisis years. In a recent report on public financing for cultural and creative activities, the National Statistics Institute (INE) stated that 'in 2016, according to data collected through the Survey on Public Financing of Cultural, Creative and Sports Activities, the Local Governments allocated 385.7 million Euros to cultural and creative activities (1.7% lower compared to the previous year), mainly in the following domains: 'interdisciplinary activities' (28.8%), 'performing arts' (22.8%), 'cultural heritage' (20.5%), and 'libraries and archives' (17.2%).' Although this funding is not specific to the performing arts, and includes venues, professional and amateur

structures and events, numbers point to over €90M invested in performing arts by local governments, with the Lisbon Metropolitan Area leading the way.

A northern epicentre within this trend can be found within the Comédias do Minho (in the Minho region), a performing arts project that works within local communities and is funded by five municipalities. On the southern Alentejo coast, two municipalities also came together to combat the cultural void of the winter season with the program Lavar o Mar (plowing the sea). The events take place from October to May, with artists Madalena Victorino and Giacomo Scalisi programming residencies and creative work designed to involve the local area and people, as well as presenting key international performing arts work, often from contemporary circus. Nearer to Lisbon, in collaboration with the municipalities of Cartaxo and Torres Novas, the Festival Materiais Diversos has 'propelled a region contributing to the cultural, social and economic development of its communities.' Curated by Elisabete Paiva, it has a strong national and international programme, and produces associate artists such as Filipa Francisco and Sofia Dias & Vítor Roriz. In the south, near Faro, artists Ana Borralho and João Galante have been building up CasaBranca, a creation structure that hosts the annual Verão Azul festival.

Other exciting locations include Santa Maria da Feira – home to the street arts festival Imaginarius and host of Street Fest – Ílhavo's new 23 Milhas arts residency program and contemporary circus festival LEME, in the centre, and the Azorean Ponta Delgada municipality (on S. Miguel island), with its new Arquipélago Arts Center and charismatic Walk&Talk Festival. The general aim for all of these municipalities – whether they are just emerging or busy strengthening their positions – is to reinforce the cultural decentralisation process, support new territorial epicentres and increase both the cultural offering and the democratisation of access.



*Jaguar* by Marlene Monteiro Freitas (© Laurent Paillier)

Access Culture, an association which promotes physical, social and intellectual access to cultural programming and venues, recently promoted the creation of 'Central Peripheries', an 'informal working group which brings together individuals who are focused on creating artistic work outside of Portugal's two main urban centres'.

The following pages, however, focus on the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Oporto, which are generally the most active municipalities and urban cultural centres in Portugal.

### **Lisbon**

In the city of Lisbon, EGEAC is the municipal company promoting cultural diversity via street festivals and the management of cultural spaces, including theatres, museums, art galleries and monuments such as the São Jorge Castle. It operates under the political tutelage of cultural councillor Catarina Vaz Pinto – founder of the seminal educational structure Forum Dança and recently-elected president of Artemrede – who was invited by the municipality in 2009 by then-mayor and current Prime Minister António Costa, and is presided over by Joana Gomes Cardoso.

Until very recently São Luiz and Maria Matos theatres were the main municipal venues for performing arts and were oriented towards public service as well as being programmed by independent artistic directors. With self-governing budgets and strong links to international programming networks, they have played a pivotal role in supporting the independent performing arts scene through the recent years of crisis, commissioning and co-producing a diverse group of both emergent and established Portuguese artists (performers, actors, theatre directors, choreographers, dramaturgs and researchers) and supporting creation, circulation and internationalisation through their national and international networks. Currently, the two theatres have very different future prospects.

Pina Bausch danced Café Muller for the last time in the São Luiz Theatre (SLT), a venue that utilises its three stages within a multidisciplinary programming philosophy that is anchored in theatre, has a firm feminist approach in its programming lines and is accessible to several lines of creation. Aida Tavares – one of the few women involved in the artistic direction of one of Portugal's main venues – took

on the baton from Jorge Salavisa (historic CNB and Ballet Gulbenkian's director) and has been steadily building a curatorial line of her own together with Susana Duarte, who is responsible for youth programming. With a longstanding relationship with Paris' Theatre de la Ville and co-producing key contemporary artists ranging from Portuguese Praga Theatre to Italian Romeo Castellucci, SLT regularly opens its doors to artists' 'occupations'. A recent example is Project P!, which was curated by performance arts researcher Ana Pais and drew several generations of performance artists in Portugal to the theatre to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Almada Negreiros' Futurist Conference (a seminal performance held in SLT in 1917).

Maria Matos Theatre (MMT), meanwhile, has taken up a pivotal role in the performing arts scene, positioning itself as a socially and politically-active theatre both locally and internationally under Mark Deputter's artistic direction (2008-2017). Following his charismatic programming at the Centro Cultural de Belém, along with his main project Alcantara – a key festival and structure that started 25 years ago as Danças na Cidade (founded by Mónica Lapa) – MMT has hosted and co-produced performances and independent artists, companies and festivals, commissioning thematic events, as well as promoting the presentation of foreign artists, international co-productions and the internationalisation of Portuguese creation. Deputter's vision – together with Liliana Coutinho and Pedro Santos, as well as invited co-commissioners like choreographer Vera Mantero – has focused on political, social and ecological issues through multidisciplinary cycles involving performances, lectures, debates, films, installations and interventions in the public space.

The recent transition of Mark Deputter and his curatorial team to Culturgest – a crucial multidisciplinary venue that has been led by the vision of programmers such as António Pinto Ribeiro, Miguel Lobo Antunes, Gil Mendo and Francisco

Frazão – following a public concourse, will be felt in the forthcoming 2018/19 season, but has already impacted heavily upon Lisbon's performing arts landscape. MMT management is being privatised – a decision that has been strongly contested by the sector – and, beyond July 2018, the future of this iconic theatre is unknown. Indeed, the EGEAC instead decided to invest in the Teatro do Bairro Alto, the home venue of historical independent theatre company Cornucópia, led by Luís Miguel Cintra, which folded in 2017 to huge consternation. Its precious space in the heart of Lisbon's Príncipe Real is being renovated while a public concourse for its artistic direction is held. This promises a new and open horizon for the city's performing arts venues, despite being the result of two dramatic blows to the Portuguese arts scene.

The recently-renovated Belém Theatre also offers a crucial new venue for children's and youth performing arts and is set to open soon under the artistic direction of Susana Menezes, former curator of the Maria Matos Theatre. This is a booming sector led by artists such as Aldara Bizarro, Sílvia Real, Catarina Requeijo and Formiga Atómica, among many talented others.

Rua das Gaivotas 6, meanwhile, Teatro Praga's new irradiating arts centre in downtown Lisbon – a municipal space that

is also home to choreographer Marlene Monteiro Freitas's structure PORK – offers a stage for emergent artists and independent projects, as well as a vital place for debate and research.

Several municipal spaces house historic independent theatre companies such as A Comuna Theatre, Novo Grupo/Teatro Aberto or A Barraca Cinetheatre, as well as Meridional Theatre, A Garagem or Luís Silva's Karnart.

Biennale Artist in the City is a key performing arts city project, offering seminal international creators such as Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker, Tim Etchells, Faustin Linyekula or, in 2018, Christiane Jatahi an invitation to Lisbon to present key pieces and create new ones within the city along with Lisbon's own artists or/and arts students. It calls for collaboration between municipal and national and public and private city structures, namely Alcantara, which is a crucial partner.

TODOS Festival, meanwhile, is a beacon for municipal social intervention through arts. It rotates every three years from one traditional neighbourhood to another, maintaining a high artistic profile while working with the many communities within the city.



'Spring Awakening', by Teatro Praga (© Alípio Padilha)

Key multidisciplinary venues such as Culturgest, the Gulbenkian Foundation centre or the Centro Cultural de Belém are vital to contemporary arts creation, presentation and fruition in Lisbon, but smaller independent venues also play a crucial role. ZDB – Negócio, a small presentation venue programmed by Marta Furtado in the heart of Bairro Alto has proven to be both resilient and pivotal while theatre company venues like João Garcia Miguel's new Teatro Ibérico or Teatro da Politécnica, home of Jorge Silva Melo's *Artistas Unidos*, regularly open their stage for other independent productions despite being centred on their own works.

Artist spaces, which are often shared or rented for symbolic fees, are also crucial to research, rehearsal, and presentation. Emblematic 'New Portuguese Dance' performers like Francisco Camacho's Eira, Clara Andermatt's studio or the Rumo do Fumo (Vera Mantero and Miguel Pereira) and Forum Dança headquarters offer examples of some such spaces, yet are fragile structures that take a long time to build and can easily disintegrate. This was the case with João Fiadeiro's seminal Atelier *RE.AL*, which folded due to a lack of funding in 2014. Cão Solteiro collective premises, CAL, Primeiros Sintomas, Monica Calle's Casa Conveniente and Tiago Vieira's Latoaria also offer key venues for experimental work, but are somewhat rough and at risk. Largo Residencias is key to artistic interventions within the community.

Finally, the Alcantara Festival, the Almada Theatre Festival and Temps d'Images are examples of the important festivals on offer in the town. *Cumplicidades*, founded by choreographer Francisco Camacho, is a recently-established biennale with renewed programming lines by a cycle of newly-invited curators.



'The clean and the dirty', by Vera Mantero (© TUNA)

### Oporto

Rui Rio, who was mayor of Oporto from 2001 to 2013, is now the leader of the centre-right party and a candidate for Prime Minister in the 2019 national elections. His infamous joke quoting Goebbels – 'when I hear about culture I run for my calculator' – was a cold shower for the city's independent performing arts scene following the aspirations and new paths opened up by Oporto European Capital of Culture 2001. Among other unpopular decisions, he rented the historic Rivoli Theatre to a private company, despite huge protests from the artistic community (and others). From 1989 to 2006, Rivoli had been a beacon for contemporary dance under the artistic direction of the late Isabel Alves Costa, founder of FIMP – Oporto Puppet's International Festival<sup>1</sup> – and artistic director of *Comédias do Minho* (the open-call *Bolsa de Criação Isabel Alves Costa* honours her life and work by supporting new independent performing artists). Rivoli became a flagship venue for

new mayor Rui Moreira, who was elected in 2013 (and re-elected for 2017-2021), as he set out a strong political cultural program for the city, aided by the driving force that was curator Paulo Cunha e Silva (after Cunha e Silva's sudden death, Moreira took on direct supervision of the sector dealing with Culture along with Mónica Guerreiro and Guilherme Blanc). The municipality 'Cultura em Expansão' program is aiming 'to put culture where it belongs, everywhere'. Arts support programs such as *Criatório*, which funds 16 performing arts projects with a budget of €15,000 each, or *Pláka*, which has innovated reflection on, and knowledge of, contemporary arts, are instrumental in the Oporto scene, which finds its centre in the Porto Municipal Theatre (TMP).

Through its two hubs of Rivoli and Campo Alegre, the theatre presents a multidisciplinary programme open to a wide range of styles and different kinds of audiences, led by artistic director Tiago Guedes. A charismatic choreographer, long-time associated artist to João Fiadeiro's *RE.AL* and an experienced networker, Guedes is the founder of *Materiais Diversos Festival* and directed two local theatres before he took the seat

<sup>1</sup> *then and now a stage for 'people and things that will (not) allow themselves to be handled', in the words of its artistic director, Teatro de Ferro's Igor Gandra*



at TMP in 2014. Four years later, after welcoming enthusiastic audiences, he is now reinforcing his programming lines and mission with national and international co-productions and support to artists and companies working from Oporto though the theatre's international positioning. The recent *Dañsfabrik* in Brest had its Portuguese focus curated by Guedes and invited Vera Mantero, *Ana Rita Teodoro*, Jonathan Saldanha, Claudia Dias and Marco da Silva Ferreira – who Guedes also chose for the *Focus Danse* to Lyon Biennale and is *associated artist* of the TMP for the for the biennial – along with actor and theatre director Jorge Andrade from Mala Voadora.

Elsewhere, the *DDD* (Days of dance) festival represents an eclectic window into local artists' work and puts on work from different themes and contexts, with Marco's *urban dance* placed alongside Olga Roriz's *dance theatre* or the 'contemporary' dance of *Cristina Planas Leitão*. Fundamentally it is an inclusive event that accommodates transmission projects and street occupations, and has spread to neighbouring towns Matosinhos and Gaia, demonstrating a clear artistic irrigation system.

The *Campo Alegre* hub is the home of several of the structures that played a pivotal role during the 'Rio years' and offers a place for residencies and research. The *Instável Company* (*Companhia Instável*), for example, directed by Ana Figueira, opened then-depleted facilities to residencies in 2011, making it a hub for creation and education named Lugar Instável (unstable place). Here, a new generation of performers met and mixed, led by artists such as choreographer Né Barros and *Víctor Hugo Pontes*. They initiated a collaboration between urban and contemporary dance, paving the way for flowing collectives where people can work as creators in their own pieces as well as acting as interpreters, filmmakers or light designers in another – like Marco da Silva Ferreira or Cristina Planas Leitão,

who work with Figueira's pivotal *Encontros desNORTE*.

Campo Alegre now hosts seven companies and projects, including contemporary circus Erva Daninha and Cátia Pinheiro and José Nunes' mixed arts projects with Estrutura and TEP – Oporto Experimental Theatre, which puts on politically-involved pieces led by the strong vision of Gonçalo Amorim.

Beyond TPM, venues and companies range from the Teatro Nacional de S.João / TeCa and S.Bento da Vitória Monastery to Joana Providência's Teatro do Bulhão, Igor Gandra's Teatro do Ferro, *Assédio's* Pocket Room, Circolando (in Cace) and Armazém 22. Mala Voadora also hosts a small yet charismatic programming venue that is often open to guests under a clear programming line.



'MeTe', by Ana Rita Teodoro (© Jose Caldeira)

Finally, the recent closure of *Fábrica*, a hotbed of independent structures in Oporto, was a blow to a landscape within which Mira Artes is now taking its place as the new spot for debate and performance – hosting a series of debates on feminism proposed by Ana Rocha (ex-Mezzannine's) and Manuela Matos Monteiro.

### 2.3. Other sources of financial support

Aside from public funding, the main funder of contemporary performing arts in Portugal is the *Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation*, based in Lisbon (with venues in Paris and London). Its mission is focused on 'fostering knowledge and raising the quality of life throughout the fields of the arts, social development, science and education' (from their website). It has several funding lines, one of which is specifically assigned to the International Circulation of Dance and Theatre. These annual calls (which are active until 2022) aim 'to support projects

that contribute to the international visibility of Portuguese theatre and dance creators or performers in international scenarios through the participation in events or festivals, including the presentation of projects/shows, associated (or not) to workshops, lectures or debates with the presence of artists and producers; to support production of theatre and dance performances, in co-production with international partners, directed primarily at creators in their early international career. Calls are open to Portuguese and/or foreign professional creators living in Portugal with an active role in theatre/dance and/or production in Portugal; applications are open to individual and companies.' The program only started in 2018 and, according to Gulbenkian's bursary department, funds around 20 projects per year.

The [GDA Foundation](#), meanwhile, whose mission is to valorise performers and their work, has an annual funding line set aside for artistic projects. In 2018, it has a total amount of €150,000 to fund an average of 20 creation projects in Theatre and Dance.

#### 2.4. Festivals, residencies, networks, schools: crucial areas for performing arts creation

Continuing to create theatre and dance during times of scarcity requires strong support structures with a clear vision, steady funds and international networks.

[Alkantara](#) is a biennale performing arts festival based in Lisbon and is vital to the Portuguese arts scene. Curated by Thomas Walgrave, it co-produced and put on exciting works by new creators as well as both national and international household names, which adopt a diverse range of perspectives and tools to reflect upon the situation at hand. It will celebrate its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary next May with new works by first class artists João Fiadeiro and Vera Mantero and will hand over its programming to Carla Nobre Sousa and David Cabecinha (previously programming

assistants to Walgrave). Notably, Alkantara works also has a hub for artists' residencies as well as other structures.

In northern Guimarães, the Centro Cultural Vila Flor has carved out a vital place in performance arts. Home to the Oficina theatre company – led by actor João Pedro Vaz – it hosts the Festival Gil Vicente and GUIDance Festival, curated by Rui Torrinha. It offers a residency hub with a strong link to the National Theatre D. Maria II and has a twin venue CCJG (Centro Cultural José de Guimarães) hosting a strong performance program, making it one of the best places to create. Artists Miguel Moreira, Tânia Carvalho and Victor Hugo Santos provide something of a municipal artistic family that comes together in Guimarães.

'To feel at home in the place where you go to be lost' is probably the most accurate description of an artistic residency at [O Espaço do Tempo](#), a safe haven located in a convent in the Alentejo town of Montemor o Novo. Founded by choreographer Rui Horta in 2000, it hosts an average of 70 residencies per year (for national and international artists at a range of points in their careers), co-produces and presents work and is home to Portuguese

Performing Arts Platform, a biennale that presents the most compelling performing arts works and artists to an audience of renowned international programmers. It's programmed by Horta, Pia Kramer and a curating board that includes the programmers of several main national venues.

Ultimately, there are several networks at play in terms of structural representation, production and circulation. [REDE](#) represents the dance sector, [Plateia](#) does it for theatre, [PERFORMART](#) represents professionals in the performance arts sector, the 5 sentidos [5 senses] network promotes programming and co-producing at a national level while [Artemrede](#) is a project of cultural cooperation gathering together 15 Portuguese municipalities and promoting the interaction between cities of different sizes. Within its '[southern coalition](#)' geographical concept, it supports artistic projects as '[A manual on work and happiness](#)', by Mala Voadora (funded by Creative Europe), involving several regional venues and audiences of non-professional actors in a play that questions the future of work and the limits of happiness.



'Lovers Collection', by Raquel André (© Tiago de Jesus Brás)



## 2.5. Recent trends in the Portuguese performing arts scene

A recent publication on Portuguese theatre<sup>1</sup> summons up politics, experimentalism and utopia as working concepts to draw connecting lines through a diverse range of artists and works. One can extrapolate and say that Portuguese artists are strongly engaged in problematising the dominant discourse and seek to propose alternative visions and actions. Here are a few examples.

Firstly, Cláudia Dias' project 'Sete anos, sete peças' (Seven years, seven plays) started in the years of crisis and insisted on planning for the future. It uses encounter as a creative tool (now with Teatro de Ferro's Igor Gandra), has tied down several funding and presenting structures over a long period and is implicated with education, documentation and, of course, time. 'Each encounter will be made for future memory, in the hope of us waking up and still be[ing] alive.'<sup>2</sup>

Visões Úteis is an Oporto-based collective with a strong ethical and political commitment to 'a constant reflexion about the contemporary sense of making art' (as stated in their artistic manifesto). Their interventions in Oporto's dilapidated and expectant Campanhã, within Reclaim the Future European project, are central to their practice and positioning in the community – as is their associated artists program.

Joana Craveiro's Teatro do Vestido, meanwhile, works on visibility, calling upon memory and biography to deal with life as we experience it today through documental theatre. 'A living museum of small and forgotten memories' is a seminal play, followed by equally striking works

<sup>1</sup> 'Contemporary Portuguese Theatre - experimentalism, politics, and utopia (working title)', coord. Rui Pina Coelho, ed. TNDMII & Bicho do Mato 2017

<sup>2</sup> 'For future memory', Jorge Loureiro Figueira, in 'Sete anos, sete peças'



*Tamanho, performing arts space in Oporto (courtesy of the author)*

on post-colonial memory and on the invisibility of women in historic narratives. Invisibility and identities are also crucial vectors in the work of performers such as Mariana Tengner Barros, Miguel Bonneville, Sónia Baptista and Raquel Castro, while André Amálio's trilogy on colonialism also belongs in this map.

Finally, João dos Santos Martins' project 'New—Old Dance', in which he 'continued his research on the discursive traits of dance history through a program of exhibitions, talks, workshops and shows' (from his website), was held in the peripheral city of Santarém in 2017. The cycle showed seminal works by the likes of João Fiadeiro and Vera Mantero or Carlota Lagido and Sónia Baptista as well as commissioning new works by emerging choreographers such as Ana Rita Teodoro. This is an instance of different generations with strong authorial work intertwining. Along with historian Ana Bigotte Vieira, he showed 'For a Timeline To Be — genealogies of dance as an art practice in Portugal', a work in progress; Filipa Francisco Spies/Espiões project and Vânia Rovisco's Transmissions both call upon memory as a support for something else. Action, perhaps.

Please note that this ecosystem is a vital, creative and burgeoning landscape and that this only draws attention to some of its focal points.