

# O THE POPULAR ASSOCIATIVE MOVEMENT – ROOTS AND FUTURE

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## 1.

### THE MODERNISATION PROCESS OF PORTUGUESE SOCIETY

After the 1974/75 Portuguese Revolution, there was a significant and widespread growth in associations, cooperatives and foundations. That growth cannot be dissociated from the regime transition, which was followed by a situation of greater porosity of the State to the participation of civil society and the implementation of different incentives – political and legal.

This change ultimately encompassed several associative “families”, in particular cultural, leisure and sports associations, which underwent substantial growth in that period. On the other hand, one can see that growth has remained constant (including in the 21<sup>st</sup> century): of the current associations with cultural, communication and leisure activities, 15,936 were created in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (48% of those active).

In addition to this continued growth, what other traits can one note about the evolution of this particular type of association (cultural, leisure and sports associations)? What has changed in the last few decades? What has changed in Portugal (with an impact on the life of associations)? Has associative legislation been changed? To what effect? Have the associations managed to adapt to the new technological context? What has changed internally?



To answer these questions, two different – and complementary – resources were deployed. Firstly, data collected through semi-directive interviews with the leaders of the structures of CNAP (National Council of Popular Associations) and CPCCRD (Portuguese Confederation of Culture, Leisure and Sports). Data from secondary sources were added, with particular emphasis on two studies carried out in the Municipality of Loures to characterise culture, leisure and sports associations. Such studies – in view of the field of observation and objectives – allow for a longitudinal analysis.

Portuguese society has known, over the last decades, a significant process of modernisation, which translates into very diverse domains:

- Transformation of economic and business structures;
- Development of science and technology;
- Education of new generations and socio-professional reorganisation;
- Feminisation and progressive outsourcing of work;
- Urbanisation of the population and spaces;
- Changing demographic and family life patterns;
- Democratisation of political structures;
- And media coverage of the public space and widening of technologically supported access to information (Cardoso *et al.*, 2015: 19).

This process is, however, far from finished; and it was not linear, nor was it free from obstacles and contradictions. And that left the country at a crossroads:

Portugal thus finds itself at a crossroads, combining features and dynamics of modernity, common to many of the European nations (in relation to which comparison becomes inevitable), to the vestiges of a more archaic society, which tend to persist and obstruct some of the ongoing transformations. On the one hand, it faces many of the new challenges and paradoxes of today's societies – look at population aging, the emergence of new forms of poverty, the crisis of democratic structures or the media coverage of society. But, on the other hand, it supports the features induced by the maintenance of old social

structures and dispositions, obstacles to the necessary, and much talked about, convergence process. Examples of said delays are economic specialisation in sectors of low technological intensity, persisting deficient levels of qualification of the population, insufficient social aid and yet limited development of new middle classes (Cardoso *et al.*, 2015: 19-20).

What was the impact of this modernisation process on the life of associations? What transformations have greater impact on cultural, leisure and sports associations? The leaders present in CNAP and the chairs of the structures of CPCCRD were questioned about this. And the interviewees mentioned (and emphasised) the following changes:

a) Transformations of work and employment

Respondents fundamentally mention two realities:

- Deregulation of working time (hour banks, flexibility and extended hours); and
- Precarious work bonds and job instability.

Areas that ultimately make it a challenge to recruit new managers – especially young managers.

b) Ageing population

Reality mirrored at different levels: in the activities promoted by associations, in the composition of social bodies, in the associative ideology itself.

On population aging and its effects, see Cardoso *et al.* (2015: 67).

c) Relations with democratic local government

The leaders interviewed mention the proximity and strong connection of associations with boroughs and municipalities – and a relationship centred on cooperation.

This relationship has been critical for the sustainability and local affirmation of associations.

d) Development of an individualistic and hedonistic culture



As Lima (2018: 9) underlines: “We live in a world that values individuality. Willpower, self-determination and independence. Being able to succeed on one’s own”.

This reality leads to disinterest in collective life and a growing mistrust of others and institutions.

- e) Strong competition from the lucrative private sector – and from television  
Today there is a diverse cultural and sports offer that competes directly with the activity promoted by associations.

In addition, television is the main source of information and entertainment for the Portuguese population, “in particular for older and less educated generations, characterised not only by lower reading rates, but also by weaker adherence to outdoor cultural practices and greater distance from media based on new technological supports” (Cardoso *et al.*, 2015: 82).

This reality poses strong (and new) challenges for associations. Does it make sense to compete with these offers?

- f) Technological evolution

As state Cardoso *et al.* (2015: 361):

“An open question in the transition to a network society has to do with the ambivalent relationship between the dynamics of diffusion and the dynamics of inequality, namely regarding the use of the internet and social networks. What was an embryonic process a decade ago has now become a widespread reality. But not homogeneously, far from it. The inequalities in this regard, related to other social inequalities, now reveal the formation of new gaps and the emergence of contradictory tendencies”.

This inequality is visible in associations (and their main players). As say some of the interviewees, there were associations that adapted “to the new times” and others that did not succeed.

And even those that adapted, investing in technologies, now face an enormous challenge: the existence of leaders, associates and practitioners perfectly familiar with the internet and social networks, alongside others that do not use (nor are they qualified to use) such resources.

g) Stringent legislation

The activity and lives of associations are now heavily regulated (Pratas, 2016).

And the leader's view in this regard shows clear ambivalence:

- On the one hand, they acknowledge that associative legislation has helped improve processes and the quality of services;
- On the other hand, they feel that this legislation is completely out of touch with the reality of associations, constituting a strong obstacle to their activity.

h) Education Levels

As noted by Cardoso *et al.* (2015: 42), “the population's educational levels registered quite significant processes, mainly from the last decades of the twentieth century”.

That change was reflected in the life and organisation of associations. The interviewees mention two essential aspects: leaders with “another qualification”; and significant changes in the management of associations.

All of these changes had an impact on the internal life of cultural, leisure and sports associations. But there were also own options of the associative movement, with relevant implications. The leaders interviewed mention in this regard the critical role of collective representation structures the associations, fundamentally at four levels:

a) Decisive investment in the training of managers

Numerous awareness and training actions have been carried out – many of them promoted by CPCCRD.

Today's managers are better prepared – and this is mirrored in management, internal processes (and compliance with legislation) and the quality of services and activities.

b) Investment on technical support to associations

CPCCRD and several district and council structures provide legal and accounting support services to their associates.

c) Investment on knowledge

CPCCRD has been investing heavily in this area, especially in the last decade. Several reference works were published (with the support of CPCCRD), a scientific magazine (*Análise Associativa*) was created, as was the observatory of popular associations (OBAP).

This is another strategic area (according to the interviewees) that allows gaining perspective and improving the governance of associations.

d) The “claiming” process

This gave visibility to some problems and allowed influencing several legislative changes.

The longitudinal analysis of the associative reality in the Municipality of Loures – based on the two aforementioned studies – also allows identifying several relevant changes. Firstly, there are (positive) differences in terms of “formalisation, organisation and the path to greater transparency”:

It is at the level of formalisation, organisation and the path towards greater transparency, that the greatest challenges arise after 30 years, partly as a result of the legal and tax requirements and regulations that govern the allocation of aid, namely municipal (...) (Abrantes and Gomes, 2020: 148).

There are also significant changes in the scheme for the use of own headquarters: currently, the predominant scheme is assignment, whereas in 1989/90 it was lease. This change is associated with the deepening of relations with local democratic power.

Own revenue continues to be the main source of funding for associations, although it is now less important. At the same time, there is substantial increase (duplication) in support/subsidies – support from local authorities is of particular relevance (Abrantes and Gomes, 2020: 151).

Another area where differences are visible is the use of information and communication technologies:

(...) The use of information and communication technologies is transversal to most associations, whose leaders claim to use the internet on a daily basis, a reality quite different from that experienced when we carried out the previous study. In addition to telephone, email is now the main means of communication used. Social networks, especially Facebook, are new from 89/90, as is the existence of websites, blogs and even newsletters, other signs of the times that make a difference after thirty years and allow associations to increase potential disclosure of their activity, attracting regulars, greater proximity and external relationships (Abrantes and Gomes, 2020: 153-154).

There are also differences as far as the main protagonists – members of social bodies. As stated by Abrantes and Gomes (2020: 156 and following):

- a) When speaking of this associative type and its main protagonists, we continue to refer to an eminently male universe. Note, however, that a mutation is underway, and the presence of women is increasingly effective;
- b) One cannot describe changes in the age of managers, professions and social classes (as mentioned, the universes surveyed in the two studies are different).

Despite this, one can conclude (in relation to the current chairs of the board):

One can see in this distribution of chairs of the boards of associations of the Municipality of Loures, on the one hand, the presence of a range of social class belongings, and, on the other hand, a clear trend for classes with greater resources to predominate among these associative leaders (Nunes *et al.*, 2020: 78).

These two studies, local in nature, show an evolution (in the Municipality of Loures) clearly aligned with the abovementioned transformations that took place nationally. And they add several questions of great interest (which can be transposed to other areas, such as the national one): for example, about the financing of associations; or social classes and associative participation.

## 2.

### SOCIAL ECONOMY AND CULTURE, LEISURE AND SPORTS ASSOCIATIONS

Culture, leisure and sports associations are the largest associative “family” in Portugal – and also the largest “family” in social economy. According to the Social Economy Satellite Account – 2016 (2019), there are 71,885 non-profit entities (or organisations) in Portugal, of which 32,759 are cultural, leisure and sports associations (that is, 46%).

The difference in relation to the second largest associative “family” (religious entities) is significant: there are 8,533 entities (see table 1). And the same happens when comparing with the other entities of social economy:

- a) Cooperatives (2,343 entities);
- b) Mutual associations (97 entities);
- c) Misericórdias (387 entities);
- d) Foundations (619 entities);
- e) Private social solidarity institutions (5,622 entities);
- f) Community and self-managed subsectors (1,678 entities).

Despite the strong numerical expression, cultural, communication and leisure activities in 2016 represented only about 5% of the total paid employment and GVA of non-profit entities (see table 1). Health and social services were the most relevant areas of activity in terms of GVA and employment: health represented 24.6% of GVA and 32.1% of paid employment; and social services generated 24.3% of GVA and 29.8% of paid employment.

As for geographic distribution (territorial analysis), there is greater concentration of culture, communication and leisure associations in the north and centre of the country (map 1). Alentejo is the region with the most associations per 1000 inhabitants (map 2).



<b>International classification of non-profit and third sector organisations</b>	<b>Economic activity units</b>	<b>Job</b>	<b>Paid employment</b>	<b>GAV</b>
	<b>No.</b>	<b>ETC</b>	<b>ETC</b>	<b>10 (6) euros</b>
Culture, communication and leisure activities	33,722	12,048	11,789	242
Education	2,594	29,966	29,811	671
Health	2,386	75,503	75,460	1,186
Social services	6,978	70,196	70,000	1,170
Environmental protection and animal welfare activities	726	714	702	10
Community and economic development and housing	2,106	2,606	2,439	37
Civic, legal, political and international intervention activities	5,912	2,797	2,769	50
Philanthropy and volunteering promotion	322	190	186	3
Religion	8,533	9,802	9,797	175
Business, professional and unions organisations	3,815	8,268	8,128	153
Professional, scientific and administrative services	2,547	5,976	5,775	303
Other activities	2,244	18,222	18,030	821
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>71,885</b>	<b>236,288</b>	<b>234,886</b>	<b>4,819</b>
<b>NATIONAL ECONOMY</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>4,419,870</b>	<b>3,839,523</b>	<b>162,226</b>

Table 1

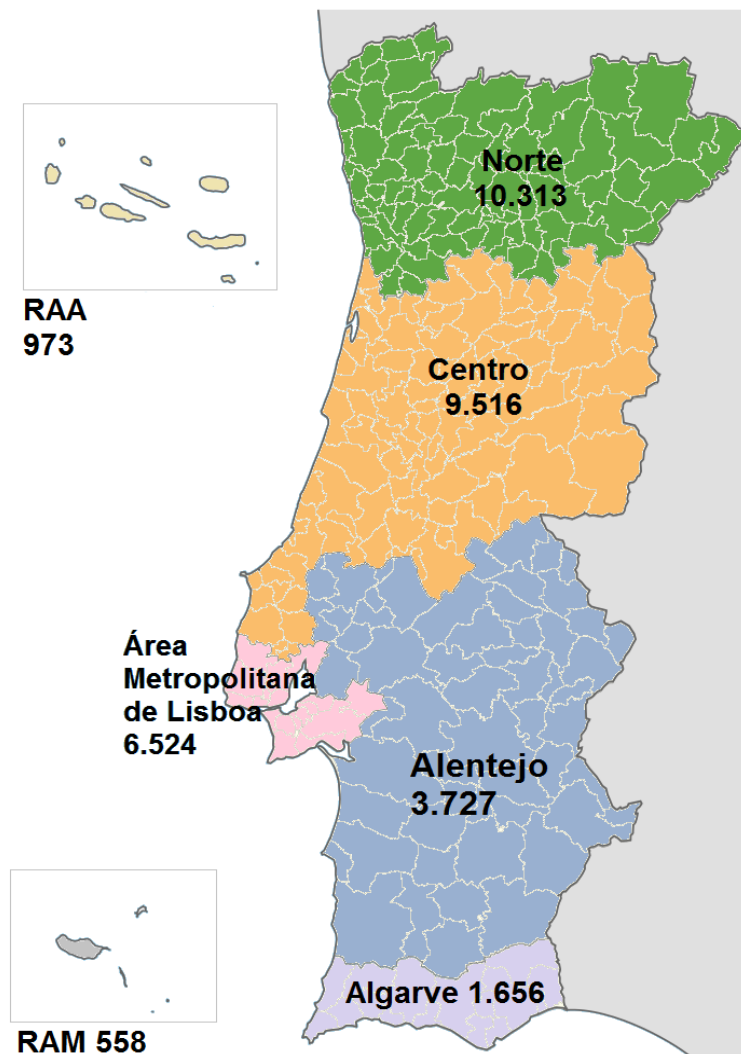
Distribution of the main indicators according to the international classification of non-profit organisations and the third sector (2016)

Source: Social Economy Satellite Account (2016) – INE (2019).

Comparing the territorial distribution of associations with cultural, communication and leisure activities with that of all non-profit entities, there are regularities:

- a) The northern region has the largest number of units (in both cases);

- b) And Alentejo is the region with the most units per 1000 inhabitants (also in both cases).



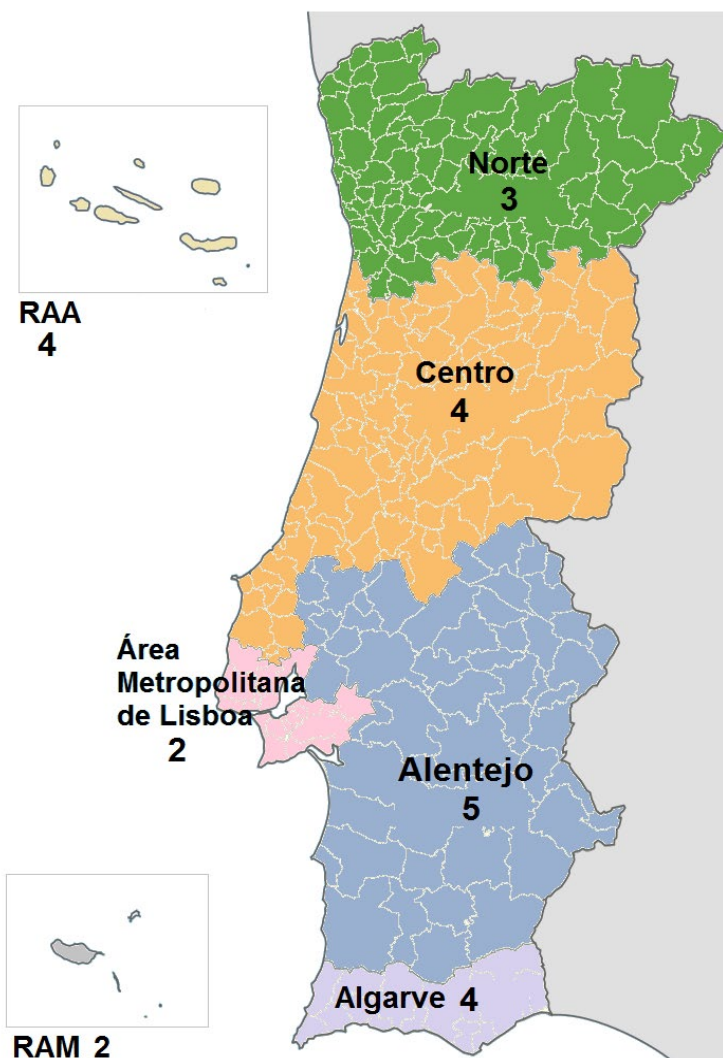
Map 1

Distribution of associations with altruistic purposes with cultural, communication and leisure activities by NUTs II (2016)

Source image: Wikipedia, 2005. Retrieved on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020 from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portugal\\_NUTS\\_II.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portugal_NUTS_II.svg)

Data source: Social Economy Satellite Account (2016) – INE (2019)

[Autonomous Region of the Azores / North / Centre / Greater Lisbon / Alentejo / Algarve / Autonomous Region of Madeira]



Map 2

Distribution of associations with altruistic purposes with cultural, communication and leisure activities per 1000 inhabitants and by NUTs II (2016)

Source Image: Wikipedia, 2005. Retrieved on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020  
from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portugal\\_NUTS\\_II.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portugal_NUTS_II.svg)

Source of data: INE - Annual Estimates of the Resident Population, (2016). Retrieved on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020 from <https://www.pordata.pt/DB/Municipios/Ambiente+de+Consulta/Tabela>.

And Social Economy Satellite Account (2016) – INE (2019)

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/ Autonomous Region of Madeira]

### 3.

#### THE EFFECTS OF CULTURAL, LEISURE AND SPORTS ASSOCIATIONS

What are the effects (social, economic, cultural, for democracy) of culture, leisure and sports associations? This point will attempt to answer this question. It contains data from secondary sources – namely, statistical publications and other studies on the Portuguese reality – with data from semi-directive interviews carried out with members of CNAP and the chairs of the CPCCRD structures.

Cultural, leisure and sports associations play an important role in the socialisation process of individuals. That role was stressed by several of the leaders interviewed. In addition, the leaders of CNAP and CPCCRD structures identified six other effects of this type of association: strengthening social and territorial cohesion; promoting the health and well-being of the population; democratisation of culture and sport; other democratic effects; and economic effects.

Within the scope of social cohesion, the leaders inquired mention four critical dimensions:

- a) Culture, leisure and sports associations are aggregators;  
Urban and metropolitan densification has accentuated social and lifestyle heterogeneity, the generalisation of anonymity and individualisation. And it destroyed solidarity relations in the community. Cultural, leisure and sports associations counter this effect.
- b) They favour inter-generational integration;  
See what happens, for example, with philharmonic bands – which include men and women of different ages, jobs and classes (Lourosa, 2012: 108).
- c) They are essential to integrate the elderly;
- d) And they promote a sense of belonging.

Several of the interviewees also mentioned the importance of cultural, leisure and sports associations for territorial cohesion:

*“In areas of low population density, they are at times the only existing social institution. They receive mail, sell bread, operate as a social centre. There are even situations where you go there to have your hair cut”.*

Another much-mentioned effect concerns the implications for individuals’ physical and mental health: the leaders interviewed underline the importance of participation in associations for health and happiness.

Lima (2018: 69-70) explains this effect: “In this last chapter, I wish to go a little further and share with you research that shows, in an increasingly solid way, that social interaction does not «just» bring one happiness (or despair): the relationship with others affects your health. Yes, it is true: having good relations with others contributes to being less vulnerable to diseases and to longer life expectancy”. In a subsequent study (2019), Lima seeks to develop the thesis that associative participation is not just “a question of being civic, it is a question of health and happiness”:

The time spent on behalf of associations, the effort we dedicate to collective institutions, the work we do for others, on our own initiative and without expecting compensation, is extremely well used, research has shown. Although nobody volunteers or works in an associative organisation to obtain personal advantage, the fact is that this altruism pays off. In terms of greater meaning for life – because one feels that one takes part in something bigger than oneself, which goes beyond the ordinary everyday life and contributes a little to a slightly better world. In terms of greater connection to others – both collectively, and in creating complicity, bonds of mutual help and solidarity (Lima, 2019: 25).

The studies carried out on the motivation for associative life (in cultural, leisure and sports associations) confirm this thesis: most leaders did not join the associations thinking about this return (Pereira *et al.*, 2020: 62; and Ornelas *et al.*, 2013: 96). The study of associations in the municipality of Loures (Pereira *et al.*, 2020: 62) illustrates the above: most leaders became members of the associations because they liked the activity (45%), wished to help

others (15%), for a better society (14%) or for “good will” (14%); and only 8% of respondents answered “to make my life more meaningful”.

Another relevant effect concerns the promotion of access for all to culture and sport. According to the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic, “everyone has the right to culture” (article 73 (1)), and to “physical culture and sport” (article 79 (1)). The Constitution explains how such rights should be ensured:

“The State promotes the democratisation of culture, encouraging and ensuring access of all citizens to cultural fruition and creation, in collaboration with the media, cultural associations and foundations, cultural and leisure collectives, associations for cultural heritage, residents’ organisations and other cultural agents “(Article 73 (3)).

“It is for the State, in collaboration with schools and sports associations and collectives, to promote, stimulate, guide and support the practice and diffusion of physical culture and sport, and to prevent violence in sport” (Article 79 (2)).

On this subject, one should add that the rates of cultural practices in Portugal are usually among the lowest in European countries (Neves and Gomes, 2018: 42 and 44); and also that cultural and educational inequalities are directly related: individuals with higher cultural levels and practices tend to be more educated (Neves and Gomes, 2018: 46). This reality suggests the two-fold importance of public cultural policies in Portugal: “increased attention to access to culture and cultural practices by the population with lower education levels; without neglecting, however, measures directed at those with higher education” (Neves and Gomes, 2018: 48).

It is in relation to the first sense or aim – blurring social barriers – that culture, leisure and sports associations have an important word to say and may take on an even more relevant role. How? By strengthening collaboration with local power – municipalities and boroughs. And by establishing partnerships with the Ministry of Culture (and Central Administration services).

Beyond the impact on the democratisation of culture and sport, the leaders interviewed also mentioned other democratic effects of cultural, leisure and sports associations:

- a) They state that this type of association promotes cooperation and citizen participation – they are “schools of citizenship”;
- b) Institutionally, two other democratic implications are mentioned: partnerships with public authorities, especially local democratic authorities; and representation of interests (of communities and the popular associative movement).

The interviewees also highlighted the economic effects of cultural, leisure and sports associations: *“they create jobs, fundamentally the large collectives”*; *“they mean many hours of volunteer work, especially by managers”*; *“they pay taxes”*; *“they are net contributors to the state budget”*; *“they are essential in boosting local economy”*.

That perception is in line with the data from the Social Economy Satellite Account. As already mentioned, associations with culture, communication and leisure activities represent about 5% of total paid employment and GVA of non-profit entities (table 1).

4.

THE NARRATIVE OF THE CRISIS AND THE FUTURE OF CULTURAL,  
LEISURE AND SPORTS ASSOCIATIONS

There is a narrative strongly rooted in the associative environment: that associations are in crisis – which crisis is going through different times. That narrative “stems from the idealisation of a glorious past that allegedly lost momentum and is in the process of decomposition” (Capucha and Nunes, 2020: 161). Those who build and reproduce this image seldom take the trouble to check how idealised realities were, as opposed to imagination:

Would it have been easy 50, 100 or more years ago to find someone to run associations? Was it more difficult to find people capable and available to commit to this task than it is today? How many young people (discounting the phenomenon of lengthening average life expectancy) were associative leaders? Probably few, perhaps less than today, given that youth itself was a rare and brief condition for the overwhelming majority of popular classes. Did associations at any of these times germinate like wheat everywhere? So why are persistent ones so rare and notable? Was the associative fabric as diverse as it is today? Complaints about the crisis of associations and the difficulty in finding leaders also abounded in these other times (Capucha and Nunes, 2020: 161).

The interviewed leaders were asked whether the cultural, leisure and sports associations were already in crisis before the covid-19 pandemic. Most answered no: there were problems (such as the difficulty in recruiting new leaders), but not a crisis. This reveals these leaders’ strong critical sense – they do not reproduce the dominant narrative.

What are the most striking aspects of the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (for this type of association)? One of these aspects (probably the most significant) was the creation and consolidation of CPCCRD. CPCCRD was created in 2003, following the National Congress of Collectives in 2001 (Loures). And it managed to assert itself in the following decade, as described in the opening note of the book of the National Congress of Collectives, Associations and Clubs of 2015 (2016: 5):



Between 2001 and 2015 it was possible to structure associative life by transforming the Federation of Collectives into a Confederation; creating District Federations and Municipal Associations; doubling the number of affiliates; the Social Partner Statute; the National Collectives Day; the Philharmonic Bands Day; the Statute of the Associative Officer; establishing protocols with Universities; conducting and publishing scientific studies that give credibility and visibility to associations; intervening in the Basic Laws of Sport and the Basic Law of Social Economy; participating in the European Year of Volunteering; being acknowledged by INE as the largest network of entities in social economy and volunteering at national level; having a seat at the National Council for Social Economy and the National Sports Council; establishing international relations at different levels; developing national projects with the aid of foundations and companies and building bridges and consensus among associative entities (families).

One should add to this list of achievements and feats the creation of CNAP (following the 2015 National Congress of Collectives, Associations and Clubs); the integration of CPCCRD in the Economic and Social Council; and the creation of the Portuguese Confederation of Social Economy, in 2018 (CPCCRD being one of its founding structures).

The 2008 economic and financial crisis constituted another remarkable event. Culture, leisure and sports associations have shown strong resilience. And they helped cushion the impacts of the strong social crisis that followed. The most common example concerns the payment of tuition: many parents are no longer able to afford their children's tuition (for football, handball, theatre). But (in many cases) the children continued to attend these activities – even without the expected payment.

And the present? How can we describe the situation of cultural, leisure and sports associations today (in the context of a pandemic)? The question was put to the leaders of CNAP and structures of CPCCRD. And the answer (aside from the specific reality of the film clubs) was unanimous: the associations are “going through one of their biggest crises”. Crisis is widespread, but has some nuances:

a) Financial crisis (expenses remained, and revenue was substantially reduced).

That crisis was mitigated (or even solved) in several municipalities in the country, with the support of local authorities – mainly municipalities.

b) Closure of headquarters and many activities – with all the consequences resulting therefrom (see effects – point 3).

c) Demobilisation – and definitive closure of associations.

According to one of the interviewees: *“the leaders are very discouraged. There is a very high risk of demobilisation. In my opinion, 10% of the associations will not resume their activity”*.

And the future? One of the traits of this associative type is resilience. While associations will certainly close, the vast majority will resist – and continue to function. On the other hand, the pandemic has created opportunities. There are associations using several digital platforms to hold meetings, events (debates) and even general assemblies. New experience, with interesting results (in some cases). Are these experiences here to stay?

Two other areas will take a strong role, most likely, in coming years: partnerships (and integrated governance) and internal democracy. The first constitutes the guiding thread of the 2015 Associative Manifesto – Strategic Recommendations (approved by the National Congress of Communities, Associations and Clubs 2015-2016: 148-151): creation of partnerships between associations themselves (local, regional and national); with other entities of social economy; with companies; with local authorities; with the Government; with Universities.

The second concerns a “genetic mark” of this associative type. Cultural, leisure and sports associations are democratic organisations – they always have been. But today they face two serious threats: the small number of members who participate and intervene in general assemblies (except in critical moments); and the existence of few young people in the social bodies. This requires reflection – and a strategy that allows reversing this situation.

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