

# **PARTICIPATORY ARTISTIC LITERACY: A PROPOSAL FOR RETHINKING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEOPLE AND CULTURE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Following a period in which the model of the democratisation of culture was the dominant framework guiding cultural policy in democratic Portugal, the model of cultural democracy has begun to emerge in certain political discourses and documents — such as the Porto Santo Charter — under the influence of the political instrument known as the National Plan for the Arts (Plano Nacional das Artes, PNA), developed by the Ministries of Culture and Education. This text presents both models, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the cultural field and João Teixeira Lopes's proposal for cultural democracy. It provides a qualitative analysis that also considers data from the 2020 survey on the cultural practices of the Portuguese population. Arguing that public policy should aim not only to develop audiences but to create opportunities for the population as a whole to engage with diverse artistic and cultural practices and expressions — thus fulfilling the ambition of cultural democracy — the text introduces the conceptual proposal of “participatory artistic literacy” as a means of exploring the relationship between people and culture. It further argues that participatory artistic literacy can be initially applied in educational settings (drawing, for instance, on practices developed within the scope of the National Arts Plan), in line with the principles of cultural democracy.

## **KEYWORDS**

audience development, cultural policy, cultural democracy,  
participatory artistic literacy, National Plan for the Arts

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# **LITERACIA ARTÍSTICA PARTICIPATIVA: UMA PROPOSTA PARA PENSAR A RELAÇÃO ENTRE AS PESSOAS E A CULTURA**

## **RESUMO**

Depois de o modelo da democratização da cultura ter sido a principal orientação das políticas culturais no Portugal democrático, o modelo da democracia cultural começa a surgir em alguns discursos políticos e documentos, como a Carta do Porto Santo, com a influência do instrumento político designado Plano Nacional das Artes, que é desenvolvido pelos Ministérios da Cultura e da Educação. O presente texto apresenta esses modelos, tendo como enquadramento a teoria de Pierre Bourdieu sobre o campo cultural e a proposta de democracia cultural de João Teixeira Lopes. Trata-se de uma análise qualitativa, que também pondera os dados dos resultados do inquérito às práticas culturais dos portugueses, de 2020. Considerando que, mais do que formar públicos, as políticas públicas devem procurar criar possibilidades de experimentação de diferentes práticas e manifestações artísticas e culturais

para toda a população, fazendo jus à ambição de democracia cultural vigente, o texto apresenta a proposta conceitual de “literacia artística participativa” para falar sobre a relação entre as pessoas e a cultura. Assim, é defendido igualmente que a literacia artística participativa pode ser aplicada primeiramente em contexto escolar (recorrendo, por exemplo, às práticas desenvolvidas no âmbito do Plano Nacional das Artes), encontrando-se em linha com os pressupostos da democracia cultural.

#### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

formação de públicos, políticas culturais, democracia cultural, literacia artística participativa, Plano Nacional das Artes

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The discussion around the main contemporary cultural orientations has been shaped by the choices societies may make between the democratisation of culture and/or cultural democracy — two long-standing and influential paradigms. “The notion of cultural democracy points to the limitations of the democratisation of culture and emphasises other dimensions of participation” (Neves et al., 2023, p. 17). In Portugal, however, debate within the cultural field and academic engagement with these practical concepts have emerged relatively late, which, according to Neves et al. (2023), helps to explain why democratisation has been the guiding principle of democratic governments since 1974. Cultural democracy was only explicitly adopted with the National Plan for the Arts (Plano Nacional das Artes, PNA), approved by Council of Ministers Resolution no. 42/2019, and the Porto Santo Charter, published in 2021<sup>1</sup> (Neves et al., 2023).

In light of the intention to transition towards a model of cultural democracy, it becomes pertinent to reflect on the kind of relationship that should be fostered between people and the various forms of cultural and artistic expression. Within the democratisation paradigm, the concept typically used to describe this relationship is that of audience development. The assumptions underlying audience development are based on encouraging individuals to enjoy art forms they do not yet appreciate. As such, policies in this area tend to be policies of taste, emphasising more elitist art forms while devaluing more popular ones. Critiques of the democratisation model centre on this hierarchical view of culture, in line with the theory of cultural legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1979/2010). While the democratisation of culture and cultural democracy are both practical concepts that public policy may choose to adopt — or even combine, as the PNA seeks to promote both simultaneously — cultural legitimacy is a theoretical concept through which the former can be critically examined.

<sup>1</sup> Policy Guidance Document on Cultural Democracy, resulting from the Porto Santo Conference held during the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2021. The Charter is addressed to European policymakers at all levels, cultural and educational organisations, and European citizens in general (Cultura Portugal, 2021).

Currently, in Portugal, a significant proportion of the population engages with spaces dedicated to popular cultural expression, whereas more elitist forms, such as opera, attract the attention of only a tiny minority, according to the most recent data on Portuguese cultural practices (Pais et al., 2022). Nonetheless, national data underscore the significance of educational resources in shaping cultural practices, aligning with findings from other international contexts (Coulangeon & Roharik, 2005; Villarroya, 2010). In this regard, the PNA may prove to be a strategic tool, even though it is a voluntary scheme and, as such, does not reach all children and young people in Portuguese public schools. Although the PNA can be adopted by any educational institution, whether public or private, this paper focuses exclusively on public schools due to their democratic character.

This text proposes the concept of “participatory artistic literacy” as an alternative to audience development, informing public policies aligned with cultural democracy when designing and implementing policies that foster the relationship between people and culture. First, the text outlines the theoretical debate surrounding the concepts of democratisation of culture and cultural democracy. It then examines selected indicators related to the cultural practices of the Portuguese population and the logic of taste imposition associated with the democratisation model. Finally, it presents the conceptual proposal of participatory artistic literacy, which is consistent with the principles of cultural democracy and has gained traction in national policy discourse, primarily due to the PNA and the Porto Santo Charter.

Despite the limitations of the PNA — as a voluntary plan that, for now, does not reach all schools clusters — it can serve as a starting point for the promotion of participatory artistic literacy, given that it is grounded in the same theoretical assumptions: those that advocate for a cultural democracy model and for the idea of doing with (children and young people) rather than for (in a purely top-down approach). Schools are uniquely positioned to promote participatory artistic literacy, both due to their democratic nature and because of existing indicators that highlight the importance of education and schooling in the development of diverse and eclectic cultural practices.

## 2. DEMOCRATISATION OF CULTURE AND CULTURAL DEMOCRACY

The concept of democratisation of culture emerged in the 1950s. In 1959, France established the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, led by André Malraux. The creation of this institution brought a new dynamic to the relationship between cultural policies and practices, promoting “the possibility of democratising culture and the gradual expansion of State intervention across French territory, with the defence of a relatively conservative cultural canon” (Vargas, 2022, p. 74). This concept is based on the idea that there is a legitimate culture that should be democratised — that is, extended for consumption by all people, regardless of their social or economic status. Democratisation of culture

relies on six fundamental dimensions or conceptions, according to Lopes (2007): cultural transmission; paternalism; hierarchy of culture; arbitrariness in what is or is not considered culture, denying openness to diversity; essentialism of audiences, failing to recognise them as cultural publics; and a reductive conception of the individual as an agent with the power to choose multiple meanings rather than a single meaning.

The concept of “cultural democracy” began to gain visibility in the 1980s, emerging to highlight the limitations of the democratisation of culture (Neves et al., 2023). Nevertheless, in Portugal at that time, the focus remained on democratising culture, and it was only with the Porto Santo Charter in 2021 that cultural democracy became an explicit objective within Portuguese public cultural policies, even though the electoral programmes of various political parties still primarily emphasise democratisation without explicitly mentioning cultural democracy.

Thus, “cultural democracy” arises as a critique of the “democratisation of culture”. However, “the hierarchical model is still currently supported by rigid worldviews, predominantly privileging high culture over popular culture” (Cruz, 2021, p. 64). More elitist authors defend high culture as the only legitimate form, considering other forms as “spectacle” (Llosa, 2017). Other authors argue that such distinctions are increasingly difficult to maintain due to eclectic tastes (O’Brien & Ianni, 2022), emerging platforms, and artistic dialogues that cross various knowledges and practices, contributing to the transformation of the cultural legitimacy paradigm (Cruz, 2021; Lahire, 2004/2006; Marques, 2015).

Audience development, which has been a goal of democratisation cultural policies, becomes conceptually problematic when considering the hierarchical critiques made of the democratisation model. People should have the chance to make cultural choices and have equal access to cultural products that interest or appeal to them, thereby undermining the opportunity to experience other forms of expression that differ from those predefined by their *habitus* or class (Bourdieu, 1979/2010). Contrary to Bourdieu’s (1979/2010) theory, taste is not defined solely by an individual’s *habitus*, understood as a set of predispositions transmitted within each social class. Taste, as theorised by Lahire (2004/2006), also results from diverse life trajectories that may or may not relate to a person’s social origin. Cultural tastes are not the only factor influencing cultural practices, as they may also be influenced by other factors, such as school obligations, professional requirements, a desire for relaxation, or the free availability of cultural offerings (Lahire, 2004/2006).

The concept of “cultural legitimacy”, proposed by Bourdieu (1979/2010), suggests that social and economic inequalities are reflected in the cultural field, considering the characteristics of each social group (class). Thus, legitimate cultural practices are those consumed and/or practised by the more powerful social groups. In contrast, cultural and artistic expressions consumed and/or practised by less privileged groups are deemed illegitimate. Democratisation of culture is criticised precisely for aiming to grant access mainly to the former at the expense of the latter. Cultural democracy

regards all forms as legitimate and worthy of consumption and/or practice. Indeed, cultural legitimacy also constitutes a critique of the democratisation model. Bourdieu's (1979/2010) analysis, however, operates on a macro-social scale. Lahire (2004/2006), by contrast, seeks to analyse society on a micro-social scale, considering the plurality of dispositions to which each individual is subject.

Therefore, people's tastes and cultural practices depend on a set of factors, not solely on their class-based tastes (derived from their *habitus*), which confer legitimacy in defining what constitutes art. What defines art is its exceptionality. Some codes and conventions help define an artistic object. However, the definition of art, like that of culture, is subject to negotiation over time, and each creative work is open to multiple interpretations and subjectivities (Eco, 1972/2021). In art and culture, more important than a concrete definition — of which there is none, only a range of negotiable definitions depending on the interests at stake — is the understanding that there are disputes over what is legitimate and what is illegitimate. Historically, the arts considered legitimate (Bourdieu, 1979/2010) and which should be democratised are associated with the tastes of elite groups with not only economic but also social, intellectual, and symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1989/2021). Currently, under the influence of cultural industries and mass culture (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2010), and given the plurality of life trajectories (Lahire, 2004/2006), cultural legitimacy appears to be in transformation. Some studies (Coulangeon, 2005, 2015; Coulangeon & Roharik, 2005; Villarroya, 2010) indicate that there is still insufficient evidence to wholly reject the theory of cultural legitimacy, while emphasising the importance of educational resources and capital in the social differentiation of tastes and as a decisive factor in cultural consumption.

In this context, it is particularly relevant to consider the PNA, developed by the Ministries of Culture and Education, to which all school (public or private) may voluntarily adhere and subsequently create a school cultural project to coordinate the various initiatives promoted for and with the educational community in the field of culture. This instrument thus becomes privileged in this reflection. Council of Ministers Resolution no. 42/2019 (Resolução do Conselho de Ministros n.º 42/2019, 2019) recognises “the potential of the arts, in their multiplicity of manifestations, to cultivate respect for diversity, freedom, personal expression, openness to others, appreciation of aesthetic experience and heritage preservation” (p. 1390). The same document also highlights education as “a privileged means to promote social justice and equality of opportunity, aiming for the educational success of all, particularly during compulsory schooling” (p. 1390).

### 3. INEQUALITIES IN ACCESS AND THE IMPOSITION OF TASTE

In Portugal, the concept of “democratisation of culture” has shaped the history of cultural policies, based on the argument that legitimate culture should be preserved, reproduced, transmitted, and made accessible to all. However, the implementation of

cultural policies in democratic Portugal has been a slow and hesitant process (Marques, 2014; Santos, 1998; Vargas, 2022; Xavier, 2016), with a focus on heritage management, infrastructure, and support for cultural activities (Marques, 2014; Santos, 1998; Vargas, 2022). Although post-1976 political discourse prioritised democratisation in the field of cultural policy, its impact was greater in rhetoric (Santos, 1998) than in practice, leading some authors to consider the democratisation of culture in Portugal a failure (Marques, 2014; Xavier, 2016). A significant portion of cultural heritage and artistic creation fails to effectively reach the majority of the population, as illustrated by the survey results on Portuguese cultural practices. The “more legitimate” forms of cultural creation remain confined to limited circles and are not enjoyed by most people; cultural consumption thus remains socially stratified (Borges, 2022). For example, individuals in households with an income of up to €500 participate more in local festivals and fairs, whereas opera is consumed almost exclusively by those earning over €2,700 (Borges, 2022).

Recent data on the Portuguese context indicate that “the hierarchical statuses produced by the opposition between elite and mass culture do not preclude the emergence of new cultural segmentations, such as those resulting from the opposition between omnivorous and univorous consumption”<sup>2</sup> (Pais, 2022, p. 328). This is especially relevant given that proximity to legitimate culture among younger, more educated, and economically comfortable classes does not prevent them from engaging in more popular practices, resulting in the omnivorous pattern that characterises their cultural profiles (Pais, 2022).

Despite low levels of cultural consumption nationally, Portuguese authors express optimism regarding the increase in cultural practices due to intergenerational educational mobility (Borges, 2022; Cameira, 2022; Magalhães & Silva, 2022; Pais, 2022), which stems from the democratisation of access to education. “If this trend continues, it is expected that the cultural participation of the Portuguese will increase in the near future, [and that] with the extension of educational trajectories, the hierarchy of inherited cultural capital will be destabilised by the effect of acquired school capital” (Pais, 2022, p. 344).

Intergenerational educational mobility may also relate to individuals’ artistic training (Gomes, 2022). Thus, the data suggest that educational mobility contributes to the acquisition of cultural capital and the diversification of cultural practices. In this regard, schools have the potential to serve as strategic spaces for implementing culture-oriented policies, as has occurred in some cases through instruments such as the PNA.

In a context of democratisation of culture — often framed in terms of audience development — a politics of taste is formed, based on elitist assumptions wherein representatives of the minority that venerates high art project their own tastes into cultural policy. The field of culture thus reproduces a logic of power in which the more dominant groups (economically, socially, culturally, and symbolically) exert influence over the less dominant ones, in line with Bourdieu’s theories (1979/2010, 1989/2021).

<sup>2</sup> According to the proposal by Coulangeon and Roharik (2005), the concept of omnivores may be understood as synonymous with eclectic individuals (i.e., those whose cultural consumption is diverse and plural). In contrast, the concept of univores refers to individuals with more singular and restricted tastes.



This power relation is so deeply embedded that the issue lies not in material access, but in people's tastes and lifestyles, resulting in high art being, to some extent, esoteric for the general population. This is because there are codes, logics, and conventions (Becker, 1982/2010) that are either not grasped by most people or are consciously rejected. After all, they do not resonate with them. According to Bourdieu (1979/2010), classes with less power tend to reject tastes they perceive as not belonging to them or as not aligning with their class.

Access to culture transcends cognitive, intellectual, and aesthetic reasons; it also involves sociability with those we consider similar to ourselves. If one attends a performance whose conventions are unfamiliar, and the people there dress and behave differently from what one is used to — using codes that one does not understand — that alone may be enough to alienate someone from that cultural space. The idea of democratisation is historically based on the belief that part of culture is worthy of being enjoyed by everyone, and that it is this part that should be the object of cultural policy. If a segment of the population does not access it, the solution is to teach those people to like what they do not like. This has an impositive dimension and constitutes a politics of taste. It underpins the objective of audience development in cultural policies: if people are educated, they will appreciate legitimate forms of expression; if they do not, it is because they lack education.

Cultural policies based on democratisation raise questions about the definition of culture they operate with, often excluding equally rich cultural expressions that could also be considered in public policy. While we adopt a broader understanding of culture, cultural richness arises from how individuals' expressiveness contributes to their development as social beings, which need not necessarily occur through opera, for example, but also in other realms such as popular culture, which has been marginalised by democratisation policies in Portugal. Warning of perversions in cultural animation policy, including an excess of populism that sacrifices the civilisational value of culture for entertainment that may serve as mere political manipulation, Lopes (2007) proposes a cultural policy model that is negotiated, participatory, mediated, and non-impositive — one that does not impose a politics of taste and assumes that there is no fixed definition of culture. In other words, a model of cultural democracy that puts the publics at the centre. "Public efforts in what I consider to be the Gordian knot of cultural democracy — audience development — are fragile and disjointed" (Lopes, 2007, p. 95). According to Lopes (2007), the first step should be taken by cultural institutions, with the remaining steps taken jointly with the publics.

Audience development, as traditionally approached, may occur on various levels: from an economic perspective, where people pay to access culture, to a pedagogical one, where people are taught to appreciate something that is not among your cultural preferences — in other words, taste is injected. The former is driven by institutional strategy; the latter is associated with public policy, which in democratic Portugal has

focused mainly on the goal of democratisation of culture. As such, within the scope of cultural democracy, the prevailing idea today is, to some extent, to replace public with participant. In a broader sense, we are speaking of citizens with the potential to access cultural richness. Audience development may imply qualifying individuals so they begin to appreciate what they previously did not or could not, due to social class-related limitations on understanding certain cultural conventions. In this sense, the expression becomes problematic for thinking about cultural democracy policies. Every person is a potential member of a cultural public; focusing on individuals, rather than on audiences, may open up broader horizons for recognising diversity and understanding where people express and enjoy culture, without, at the same time, ruling out the possibility of more strategic and selective cultural policy directions.

#### 4. PARTICIPATORY ARTISTIC LITERACY

While it may be acceptable for cultural institutions to retain the terms “audiences” or “participants” to refer to those they wish to attract and develop strategic, more selective policy lines, the same expectation should not be applied to public policies in general, especially those that bridge the fields of culture and education. The central question that emerges from this reflection is: how can we foster people’s relationship with the arts without imposing our own taste? This reflection requires us to abandon the notion of audience development, at least as it has traditionally been conceived within the school context. Unlike a museum, a school does not have to cultivate audiences for particular works, artistic movements, or cultural expressions with a clearly defined mission. Nor is it subject to box office logics (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2010) where the visitor (publics) is only as valuable as their contribution to attendance figures. Instead, the school should serve as a space for discovery, promoting effective participation in cultural consumption through diverse practices and perspectives, even when this means challenging trends that relegate the arts and humanities in favour of financially lucrative areas for children and young people (Nussbaum, 2010/2019), and, above all, helping to counter Bourdieu’s (1979/2010) theory of the school as a reproducer of social inequalities.

In a competitive and unequal society, the State must assume a degree of responsibility. Cultural policies entail choices, and these choices inherently include and exclude certain groups. Therefore, while taste-based policy (Bourdieu, 1979/2010) cannot be eliminated from cultural practice, it can and should be complemented by more participatory approaches aimed at minimising such imposition. After all, the model of cultural democracy is most effective when creators and intermediaries are open to dialogue, sharing, and broad-based participation (Lopes, 2007), and this perspective should also apply to schools.

The concept of “cultural participation” began to gain traction in the 1970s, inspiring a wave of new policies based on sociocultural animation as an embodiment of cultural democracy (Cruz, 2021). The 1980s were instrumental in the institutionalisation



of community arts. However, the rise of neoliberalism in social, cultural, and economic policy, along with the weakening of the welfare State (Harvey, 2008), diminished their strength. By the 1990s, community arts were increasingly expected to “generate value and deliver social impact” (Cruz, 2021, p. 86). As a result, artists and civil society have had to adapt to the capitalist model (Matarasso, 2019). While authors such as Matarasso (2019) distinguish between participatory art and community art, both promote the involvement of those directly engaged. In Portugal and across Europe, numerous participatory and community art projects (Matarasso, 2019) suggest models of cultural democracy, even if they sometimes operate independently of political power. Ideally, they should remain autonomous to avoid co-optation, although political support (such as from local authorities) is not inherently problematic. Participatory art may therefore align with a model of participatory artistic literacy, to the extent that power is more equally distributed within each creative process. Literacy, in this context, becomes a form of critical learning, without the imposition that such learning must occur.

In all areas of cultural expression, people apply criteria of quality, and in all of them, such criteria are contested and negotiated. In everyday life, people gradually reach a consensus. The notion of quality must thus be negotiated with those primarily involved in artistic production, and it must be accepted that there is no universal standard. The aesthetic nature of a community-based artwork may reveal that professional artists did not create it, but the piece reflects the process by which it was made. This transparent expression of collective effort allows observers to look past conventional notions of quality (Goldbard & Matarasso, 2021), understanding the work not as the product of professional artistry but as a manifestation of participatory and community-based practice. Thus, the goal is not to universalise standards but to allow for ongoing negotiation, embracing conflict and operating within an open field (Eco, 1972/2021) of multiple responses. Cultural democracy, after all, “is neither nihilistic nor given over to consumerism or the dictatorship of demand. Placing audiences at the centre of cultural policy also means situating them at the heart of the storm — in the founding contradictions and debates of cultural democracy itself” (Lopes, 2007, p. 103). Replacing the word “audiences” with “people” renders the statement compatible with the proposal outlined in this text.

This does not preclude institutions such as museums and art centres from considering which audiences they wish to reach and why — that is, what characteristics or preferences they aim to identify to define and address a target audience. However, this work must be done on a case-by-case basis, taking into account each institution’s aims and mission. The school, given its democratic character, remains a privileged space for working with children and young people on artistic literacy, exposing them to cultural diversity.

While we understand literacy as a process of learning imbued with diverse and consequential meanings, we can regard it as the development of a set of skills that individuals accumulate, synthesise, adapt, organise, reflect

upon, and use to find meaning in the “school” they carry within themselves.  
(Gradíssimo & Caetano, 2010, p. 76)

Literacy, thus, becomes a space for learning and experimentation, potentially leading to an understanding of artistic conventions (Becker, 1982/2010) and the awakening of new languages. Within a framework of cultural democracy, artistic literacy should be participatory, fostering horizontal exchanges of knowledge and cultural practices. This approach should enable children and young people to contribute to debates and propose initiatives. Rather than focusing on forming audiences or preparing people for culture, this proposal advocates for participatory artistic literacy, beginning in schools through programmes such as the PNA, and potentially extending to other contexts. Thus, the concept of formation shifts to that of participation, which is more consistent with the democratic model, as only a participatory model can truly be democratic.

In short, participatory artistic literacy is a conceptual alternative to the notion of audience development. Whereas audience formation often follows an imposing logic that can lead to the enforcement of particular tastes, participatory artistic literacy advocates for spaces that encourage experimentation with diverse forms of cultural and artistic expression, recognising the legitimacy of all such forms. Nevertheless, the proposal draws on the foundations already outlined by Lopes (2007) in his cultural democracy framework: rejection of hierarchical and hierarchising uses of culture; recognition of the collective and individual right to culture; support for the creation, distribution, and reception of cultural goods and works; and the development of a new professionalism capable of facilitating engagement with the arts while enabling multiple interpretations and viewpoints.

Within the context of cultural democracy, people’s relationship with culture should not be purely passive or consumerist. Instead, it should allow for active involvement in the creation of projects, enabling individuals to explore themselves as social and cultural beings with plural identities (Lahire, 1998/2002). Through participatory artistic literacy, people — particularly children and young people — can learn; discover more (about works, artists, practices, languages, etc.); experience (readings, performances, visuals, textures, etc.); broaden their reflections and interpretations, developing critical awareness; recognise conventions and codes (even if they do not identify with them); and have space to share their tastes and interests (even if bold or marginalised by the education system), make proposals, and create artistic projects through diverse expressive forms. All of this should happen in a way that informs individuals so they can later decide what they wish to consume or engage with. In contrast to the audience development model associated with the democratisation of culture, this approach shows possibilities without imposing cultural practices or consumption. In this participatory framework, such possibilities (whether in the form of artworks, such as books, poems, or films, or other forms of cultural expression) should be presented by both teachers and students.

## 5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The relationship between people and culture is a complex one. The most recent survey on the cultural practices of the Portuguese population provided essential data to better understand this complexity, including the role of intergenerational educational mobility not only in terms of cultural consumption but also in the eclecticism of younger generations (Borges, 2022). The concept of audience development, traditionally a goal of cultural democratisation policies — policies that have largely failed in democratic Portugal (Marques, 2014; Santos, 1998; Xavier, 2016) — no longer makes sense in a context that aspires to cultural democracy. It is therefore necessary to rethink the relationship between people and culture, and to consider the school as a privileged space for constructing a strong model of cultural democracy in Portugal.

In this light, the concept of participatory artistic literacy, grounded in the practical tenets of cultural democracy (Lopes, 2007; Neves et al., 2023), emerges as an appropriate framework for public cultural policy. The operationalisation of this concept is foreseen within the political instrument of the PNA. However, a significant challenge remains: the voluntary nature of schools' adherence to this cultural policy instrument. This means that there is a lack of mechanisms to ensure that all public schools can join the PNA and thereby develop projects that foster participatory artistic literacy. Even if the PNA can function as a starting point for introducing a model of cultural democracy in Portuguese schools, it will be important in the future to consider measures that apply across all public schools, ensuring that every child and young person can benefit from practices rooted in participatory artistic literacy.

This proposal is intended to contribute to the debate on public policies for cultural democracy. Participatory artistic literacy may offer a response that ensures true democracy in the processes stemming from public policy — processes that involve individuals not merely as recipients of training, but also, to some extent, as co-educators. Through shared processes, it becomes possible to showcase art and co-create projects. Following the first step enabled by the PNA, it will also be crucial to reflect on school curricula and the authors introduced through the teaching of art history, literature, and other artistic languages. It is also essential to reflect on how to expand the classroom space to include authors from mainstream culture (Martel, 2010), in line with students' cultural consumption habits. Participatory artistic literacy aims to align the interests of all parties involved, enabling each to propose artistic objects for inclusion in a collective reflection.

This form of literacy must first be developed within the school context, as schools are democratic institutions in contemporary Portugal, attended by all children and young people, regardless of their family's or their own socio-economic capital. Additionally, it is due to the documented effects of intergenerational educational mobility on individuals' cultural capital. In this way, the school would already be taking the first step, in line with Lopes's (2007) proposal. Considering the impact of intergenerational educational mobility on the cultural practices of the Portuguese and the weakening of the hierarchised

cultural model in today's national context (Borges, 2022; Pais, 2022), this proposal argues that the school should be the institution to take the initial step in terms of public cultural policy. It maintains that the concept of participatory artistic literacy is the most appropriate for addressing the relationship between children, young people, and culture, one that should later be extended to other public institutions, enabling them to take subsequent steps together with the people (Lopes, 2007).

Through participatory artistic literacy, rather than acquiring imposed tastes, individuals are presented with opportunities for experimentation, which they may later choose to explore further, or not. Even when they do not enjoy a given artistic practice or object, they will have the tools to understand why, having already engaged with and reflected upon it. This is made possible by a negotiation in which students are introduced to the dominant tastes conveyed by the school while also having the opportunity to bring forward other tastes and interests — those aligned with their own *habitus* — at a life stage (childhood and youth) when their trajectories are still unfolding and therefore should be enriched by exposure to the diversity of cultural and artistic expression. In short, the same school that mandates the reading of Fernando Pessoa, Camões, and Saramago should also be open to reading and reflecting on authors whose legitimacy now arises from contemporary digital spaces, such as *bookstagram*s (Catanho, 2020) and *booktokers* (Sá, 2024). Only in this way can we speak of genuine participation (cultural democracy) rather than a mere logic of access (cultural democratisation with taste imposition).

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