

BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE MATCHMAKING BETWEEN PRIVATE FOR-PROFIT SECTOR AND CULTURAL AND CREATIVE SECTORS DURING PANDEMIC. ADDED VALUE, MOTIVATIONS, AND COMPANIES' BENEFITS TO JOIN THE PORTUGAL #ENTRAEMCENA PLATFORM

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The motivations and role of private agents and companies in funding culture was debated along centuries until our times (Rouzé, 2019; Santos and Conde, 1990), an historical moment where brands are increasingly associated with cultural products due to their symbolic value (Schroeder et al., 2010) and where there is an increasing appropriation of culture and creativity as a useful tool for multiple sectors businesses (Hesmondhalgh, 2013; Gehman & Soublière, 2017).

Even if they usually respond to specific objectives and units, CSR policies and marketing strategies are often blended along multiple actions of funding, sponsoring and communication (Foà and Ribeiro, 2013) to enhance brand promises and to engage people with companies' culture and values.

Culture and arts are very sensitive targets in the era of attention economy (Davenport and Beck, 2001; Falkinger, 2007) and reputation economy (Gandini, 2016) due to their communicational power and financial instability and dependency.

The study follows a multi-stakeholder approach and adopts a mixed-methods design (Bryman, 2012) to explore the dynamics hidden behind the creation, adoption and end of an innovative digital marketplace (Rangaswamy et al., 2020) for cultural and creative sectors in Portugal, promoted by the institutional sponsorship of the Ministry of Culture and fuelled by the economic investment of agents from private and for-profit sector.

In 2020, during the pandemic crisis, Portugal #Entraemcena (PEC) was presented as a "movement" aiming to promote the matchmaking – encounter

and exchanges (Cusumano et al., 2019) – between agents from the cultural and creative sectors and the commercial private sector, as well as, to support a change within the relational paradigm between the two sides of the market (the offer and the demand of funding) through the implementation of a digital, neutral intermediary.

The objectives of financing or purchasing artistic products/services were realized through specific operational models, called Ideas (launched by artists and cultural organizations) and Challenges (launched by companies and commercial brands).

PEC raised the expectations of the cultural and creative sector for the easiness and apparent effectiveness of this model, which contrasted with what was done in parallel at the government level, during a time of great uncertainty and constraints.

Our study considers PEC's immediate but fleeting media impact (exploration phase 2020: user experience and news coverage analysis) and proposes to deepen the knowledge about the phenomenon, describing the types of agents and relations that sustain the composition of this ecosystem, analysing its' effective forms of use, the motivations, resources and added value of the different players enrolled.

We map the entire PEC ecosystem using a three-phased research design, based on the platformization of society and cultural production theories (van Dijck, 2018; Nieborg and Poell, 2018) to identify the purposes of:

1. the technological infrastructure: platform's communication affordances, channels, management.
2. the economical dimension: funding sources, policies, agreement, expectation and outcomes from investors' perspective;
3. the social dimension: rules, benefits, duties, application, and assessment criteria from artists' perspective.

We first analyse, using content analysis and user experience's tests, the affordances and the contents from PEC online sources, its social media and

related news media coverage, to identify quoted agents, covered themes and respective benefits and added value of the initiative.

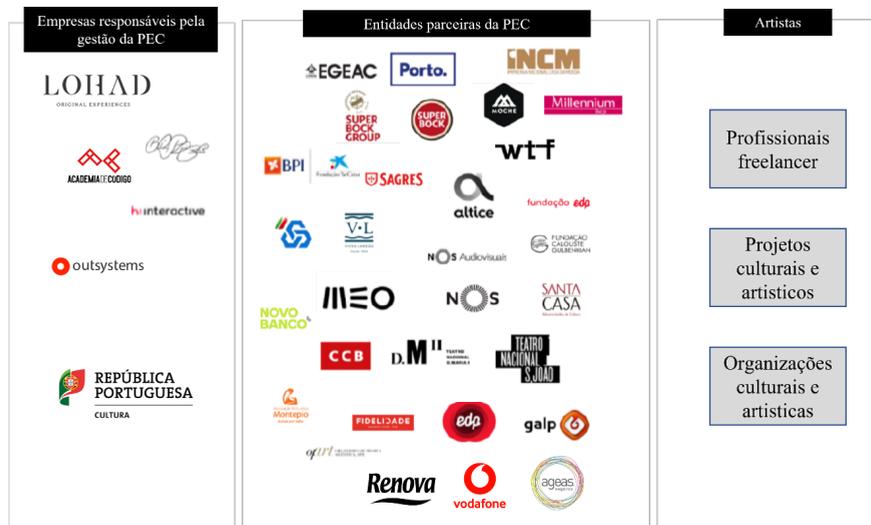
During this phase some doubts raise and persist about the source and allocation of the announced amount of money, the type of involvement and commitment warranted by exposed public agents and bodies, as well as the responsibilities of platform and procedures management.

Then we did 3 focus groups with awarded and not awarded artists to clarify the occurred procedures and experiences. We clarify details about IP, privacy, budgeting and how the platform was just a first- contact instrument to develop relations between brand companies and artists, being totally external to any type of exchanges.

Thus, we identify a set of relevant agents who were “behind the scenes” responsible for the PEC launch and functioning.

We distinguish the ecosystem stakeholders among managers, partners, and artists as in the following Figure 1.

Figure 1. The PEC ecosystem



Source: own elaboration

We could identify among partners some public companies not only CEO's and founders of dozens of companies listed on the homepage but also the relevance of managers as the CEO of a communication and cultural events agency who coordinate all operations, some IT managers, and coders from tech-academies, start-ups and unicorn based in Portugal.

We interview the CEO coordinator who provides us a global perspective about the initiative, advocating a win-win situation as PEC creation was answering both to a social emergency (lack of sustainability for cultural and creative sector workers) and to a political challenge (reduce budget to directly answer to the crisis). The pivotal role of the coordinator in mobilizing the private sector decision makers (CEO) and his capacity to "build bridges" impelled the necessity to collect more information for the investors' side.

We define the PEC as sectorial platform, which business model is platform-based to create and deliver, particularly emotional and social value, according to Täuscher e Laudien (2018), as it is not so much efficient in transaction cost reduction but enhance the creation of a digital product community for an on-demand offline-service. Our results show that the technological infrastructure was a goal and not a medium for institutional and commercial players involved in its creation, as it served communicational objectives more than business/philanthropic/public service purposes.

This paper presents in-dept results from multiple cases-study (Yin, 2018) focused on three Challenges launched by three major companies of retail, telcos and insurance sectors, sampled from a progressive stakeholders' clustering process (Miles et al., 2019).

We analyse each Challenge and conduct other semi-structured interviews with brand and/or marketing managers of these three companies to discuss following themes:

- the reasons for joining the PEC movement;
- the previous commitment with art funding and usage of CSR or marketing budget to purchase/support artworks;

- the commitment and system of relations between the company, the platform and the PEC managers;
- the contents and rules of each Challenge (some include a compulsory usage of company brandname for the artistic composition title, IP restriction or other similar criteria);
- the funding process and the source of funds from company budget;
- the level of participation/the role of company CEO/management in the artistic selection;
- the inclusion of other artist directors;
- challenges, opportunities, interferences within operations and production of the funded artworks;
- impact assessment, media coverage and public/institutional relations outcomes.

Our results include the evaluation of each Challenge according five categories, composing our analytical framework, which allow comparisons between Challenges, and point to the relevance of previous commercial and personal relations between some of the PEC management players for the creation of this platform. The communication strategy and brand equity are key drivers of motivation for all involved companies. The main invested volume come from marketing budget, and it was part of a reallocation strategy, it means that it was instrumental and specifically reduced to pandemic-times.

We observe the presence of positive *feedback loop* (Cusumano & Gawer, 2015) driven by the Ministry and a mutual influence among investors, even if they were competitors on their main business sector.

The investors claim evident benefits from their participation in terms of tangible and intangible value. Media attention and coverage branded artistic product and positive multi-media storytelling contents are some of the most relevant benefits according to marketing managers and CEO's.

The most include this initiative within a wider strategy to position their brand according to its value and mission of being art-supporters, digital-oriented

and innovators, particularly during pandemic times. PEC represent a great opportunity in term of marketing communication as well as corporate communication (Kim, 2011) and desired positive impacts reach multiple segments, since no-profit and artistic sectors strongly affected and looking for quick and effective answers, to employees involved with the PEC, it Challenge and the artworks' lifecycle (call, selection production, dissemination), as well as loyal customers and social media followers.

Often one of the main “not-public” reason to join was also the soft power and/or the institutional relations involved within the invitation to join the PEC.

Most of independent artists were taking forward a protest against the lack of political protection to their professional status (Neves et al, 2020), and in many cases were highly engaged and hopefully about PEC on that time, pointing to companies good-practices and spreading the good-news online.

The same happened with news media, and our analysis identify the presence of a strategic orchestration of media relations, and how some recurrent themes were covered, and some brands often mentioned, even if not all artworks were completed or produced, when the PEC ends its activities due to the lack of sustainable business model for itself.

The PEC was a model offering a value retention system only for the investors (Täuscher & Laudien, 2018) but did not ensure sustainability to provide artist an innovative system to market their art and to establish mid-long or term relation with investors.

The platform slowly ends to function, maintaining its landing page online, with no communications, rumours, or follow-up. Companies and public body still benefit from the launching and dissemination of artwork and related events.

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