

PORTUGUESE SOAP OPERAS: A GENRE AT THE CROSSROADS

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Abstract

In the context of ever greater circulation of televisual content of all genres and formats, this paper focuses on the intersections between the global and the local to understand how a specific genre – soap opera – was localised in a specific cultural and geographical setting giving origin to a production model that gained local prominence and nowadays faces a number of new challenges. Our general argument draws on the empirical findings of original research on the molding of this specific televisual genre and format called “telenovela”, and the specific production mode associated with it, and reflects on its historical emergence and the contingencies of such a process. Our goal is to identify the variables that allowed this genre to gain local dominance and later achieve international circulation. Following the results of quantitative and qualitative research, we argue that the structure of the local production and distribution settings and the dominant ideology of the associated production culture promoted the emergence of an original local production culture and sustains it until today.

Keywords: Telenovela, Production Culture, Portugal, Television production, Social Capital

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Introduction

Telenovela is a particular type of soap opera that emerged in Latin America in the 1950s and 1960s as a distinguished popular television genre (Rogers & Antola, 1985). Along the decades, *Telenovelas* developed their own form, establishing themselves as a pillar of local televisions' appeal. This local appeal was apparently highly rooted in historical forms of local fiction with themes varying from country to country (Pumarejo, 1987). Although *Telenovelas* shared with soap operas some of the basic tenets of serial narratives, namely the constant delay of narrative resolution (Wilson, 2008), differently from these, they proposed a narrative closure, rarely lasting for more than six months, and depicted different themes and structures, in most cases rooted in the local and national experience (Martin-Barbero, 1995). Mexican *novelas* for instance, have always been more melodramatic, while Brazilian ones have always been highly engaged with historical or social issues (Bielby & Harrington, 2005). This fact probably explains why the localisation of this fictional content has mostly been associated with processes of reception and the construction of cultural identities at a national level (Dhoest, 2007; Peter & deVreese, 2004; Castelló, 2007; Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2013).

In this paper, we propose a different approach. Instead of looking at reception processes as an explanatory method for the localisation of Televisual content, we want to focus on the production side, and its ideological, institutional and systemic features, as explanatory mechanisms. We want to understand how and why specific production cultures emerge, that are widely accepted by local audiences and later result in internationalisation processes. For this study, we will focus on the case of the Portuguese *Telenovela* and the production culture associated with the genre.

Since their inception, *Telenovelas* have easily crossed borders, namely within geo-linguistic regions. Sinclair, Jacka, and Cunningham (1996), observe that as content crosses borders,

not only do audiences generate unanticipated meanings, but also the product undergoes a dynamic process of "cultural syncretism" that modifies genre conventions. This partially explains why different local versions of internationally known genres and formats emerge but, in our view, it does not explain why some thrive and others never reach critical mass.

Of all the different manifestations of *Telenovelas*, one of the most successful ones has undoubtedly been the Brazilian form of the genre. In the 1970s of the twentieth century, Brazilian soaps, namely the ones produced by *TV Globo*, became the paramount form of popular culture in the country, attracting mass audiences and favourable governmental policies that quickly boosted the international circulation of *Globo* produced *Novelas* (Rogers & Antola, 1985).

In the midst of the profound transformations the medium went through in the final decade of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century, with the emergence of transnational TV networks, international TV formats and multinational TV groups, the flow of the circulation of *Telenovelas* did not stop (Bielby and Harrington, 2005). In this period new models emerged, namely the scripted entertainment formats (Chalaby, 2016) and other forms of adaptation (Buonanno, 2009) that revitalised the genre and facilitated its internationalisation. Some argue that the authenticity of telenovelas dissolved during this period into a neutral, hybrid, universal export formula (Bilte-reyst & Meers, 2000; Adriaens, 2010) that could facilitate the international circulation of the genre. Others (Karlıdağ, 2014), affirm that geo-linguistic and geo-cultural proximity justify the adoption of content on a regional level, in contra-flow against the homogenisation promoted by global Westernised content, though facilitating the dominance that, for instance, Turkish soaps have in the Balkans, Russia and the Middle East.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that in many countries, namely Portugal, a clear transformation occurred in the beginning of the twenty-first century, when locally produced *Telenovelas*

took the leadership of audiences ratings from the more international versions of the genre, namely the Brazilian ones (O'Donnell, 2004; Burnay, 2005; Paixão da Costa, 2003).

In a context where the most dynamic broadcasting and TV production companies operating today in Europe have in most cases a transnational outlook (Chalaby, 2009; Keinonen, 2018), domestic markets still represent a safe haven for many broadcasters and producers. The high level of adaptation to local institutional contexts and policies, partially explains these islands of resistance to the dismantling of the past close relationship between media and nation. We argue this is complemented by original local production cultures and associated structures that support the production of local content that could not be imported from other markets. Complementarily, we affirm that a genre is successfully localised at a national or regional level as a consequence of the consolidation of this specific production culture and associated systemic components, namely in terms of the type of social capital they depict, that later facilitate the international flow of the locally developed genres. In an opposite direction, the identification these localisations offer to local audiences, via the embeddedness within their texts of national themes and topics of interest, sometimes even stimulating an opposition between local or national identities and "otherness" (Buonanno, 2009), is usually presented as the main explanation for this process (Adriaens, 2010). We contend that these explanations are mostly focused on the reception side of the process and do not consider the structural aspects, namely the production cultures associated with the genre and the systemic social components they entail. Our focus is on the role specific media "nation based" systems and cultural settings play in nurturing local production cultures that, our argument posits, are essential for the localisation of existing international genres or formats.

In this paper, we want to focus on the localisation of a specific television genre – the *telenovela* - in the context of a small

nation, Portugal, and in doing so, expand the scholarly understanding of the cultures of television production and the processes that allow that, in the context of a globalised TV ecology, nation based systems still flourish. Our main objective is to understand how and why a novel configuration of the genre emerged in Portugal in the last twenty-five years (O'Donnell, 2004), and the relation this has with the emergence of a local production mode that, we claim, corresponds to an original production culture.

Questions and method: understanding the domestic Portuguese *Telenovela*

Telenovelas rose to the top of the domestic Portuguese television market back at the beginning of the twenty-first century under the leadership of private broadcaster TVI, after decades of co-existence with the Brazilian version of the genre (Paixão da Costa, 2003), and have since then been the main televisual content consumed by national audiences (ERC, 2017). This growth in consumption patterns was accompanied by a steady growth in the volume of hours of TV fiction produced, a fact that allowed that in 2017 Portugal produced 10% of all hours of TV fiction produced in Europe, as much as the UK (10%) and more than France (6%) (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2017).

Success amongst local audiences, and the implementation at national level of a sustainable and institutionalised production and distribution value chain, are two facets of our object of study: the production culture that has emerged in Portugal around, first the localisation, and later the internationalisation, of *Telenovelas*. Localisation was a harsh process and not at all a story of immediate success. In fact, it took more than twenty years for the localised version of the genre to gain wide social acceptance in the country (Ferreira, Reis, Santos, 2011). Our hypotheses is that it was only when a local production culture, with its own ideology, rules and structures, was in place, that the locally produced content was massively adopted. It was the forming of this production culture and not the thematic,

identitarian or dramatic nature of the genre, that actually supported its up take by audiences, and later its dominance.

Brazilian *Telenovelas* were introduced in the country in the seventies and the first locally produced *Telenovela* - in fact the first domestic *telenovela* to be produced anywhere in Europe - *Vila Faia*, was produced and aired by the Public Broadcaster RTP in 1982. A number of *telenovelas* were produced on a somewhat sporadic basis in the course of the 1980s and 1990s, mostly as a response to a process of Brazilian cultural domination (O'Donnell, 2004). The success of these different *novelas* was variable, but none of them was able to compete successfully with the prime-time Brazilian imports (Paixão da Costa, 2003; Burnay, 2005). This happened despite their adherence to topics with a strong local flavour and a clear attempt to engage with issues of national identity and code representations of a collective history (Hagedoorn, 2006), precisely some of the textual and cultural dimensions mentioned in the literature to explain the success of the genre (Allen, 1985; Liebes & Livingstone, 1998; Creeber, 2001). However, in this case, evidence shows that the identification possibilities the genre offered to local audiences was not a guarantee of the success of its localisation.

The relevance television fiction drama has for the construction of national identities is an accepted fact (Dhoest, 2007; Castelló, 2007), and the reception part of the process has been deeply studied, namely with a focus on different national or regional European settings (Adriaens, 2010; Frangou, 2002; O'Donnell, 2004). At the same time, there is very little literature that focuses on the national contexts of production and, more importantly, on the relation between these contexts and the successful localisation of televisual genres that happens in contra-flow with the adoption of transnational television formats. This process also points to current tensions between the global and the local, the last being characterised by a more fragile and volatile environment that often gets less attention from scholars than the dominant global conglomerates.

This research addresses the following questions:

- 1) What are the main traits of the localisation of the *telenovela* genre in Portugal?
- 2) What is the relation between this process and the consolidation of an original local production culture, and how is this culture defined?
- 3) How have issues of scale, institutional structures and production modes, contributed to the emergence of a local production culture?
- 4) How is this culture understood by professionals working in the field at the local level and how is its emergence explained by them?

We will partially resort to O'Donnell's model (1999) and its focus on television fiction as an ideological creation with specific production and programming frameworks that, along with historical, economic and political extra-textual dimensions, frame a production culture. We will discuss the period of consolidation of the Portuguese *Telenovela* and go over institutional and organisational aspects in order to identify key moments that mark the dominance of the genre. Since the initial periods of the introduction of the Brazilian version of the genre, and its appropriation by local audiences, have been thoroughly studied, as well as the initial local efforts to localise the format (Burnay, 2005; O'Donnell, 2004; Paixão da Costa, 2003), we will mostly focus our analysis on the more recent phases of the process. This includes the period between 2001 and 2017, when the genre gained prominence. Our efforts will pay attention to the structural and production sides of the process, though neglecting the reception side, unless in those cases where the take-up of the genre by audiences signals a change in the way different actors in the system, namely producers and broadcasters, look at *Telenovelas*.

In this article, television production is analysed as a social system. This does not mean we reduce it to a reflection of specific social contexts, nor does it mean we solely focus on the wider network of actors that integrate the field. It means we look at

production as a process supported by a given structure where different actors occupy defined positions and interact amongst themselves in accordance with the resources they have, in order to achieve common goals (Hesmondhalgh, 2006). We specifically examine the localisation of *Telenovelas* in Portugal by focusing on the modes in which these actors understand the production process and establish, via their interactions, the underlying structure and the rules and norms associated with it. This includes a focus, following O'Donnell's (1999) understanding of television fiction as an ideological creation, on how these actors self-reflect upon their work and establish their measures of success, but also how they consensually define their future goals (Burt, 2000). The idea of television production as a social system is based on the three assumptions presented by Joseph Straubhaar (2007). First, television as a cultural technology is bounded, but not determined, by political, economic and institutional structures. Second, these structures provide resources and constraints for cultural agents, such as television producers. Third, the rules and patterns that determine everyday practice grow within these boundaries but are shaped by the institutions and those who work within them. The structure of a television production company, for example, is the complex sum of the daily routines and creative work of its managers, directors, writers, technicians and actors, who work within rules and with resources assigned by those who own and run the structure (Straubhaar, 2007). At the same time, we regard the nature of the relations between the actors in this network and the outcomes of that, as a core element of the process that indicates that the creation and distribution of social capital (Enns, Malinick & Matthews, 2008; Damásio, 2011) represents a core facet of the process.

We will consider as units of analysis production companies, broadcasters and different actors in the production sector in Portugal that were active in the period between 2001 and 2017, from writers to producers, directors, actors and channels managers. We intend to highlight an understanding of a production culture as a multi-level process based on the

recursive interplay of industry structures with the social practices of production organisation and execution. In doing so, we propose a research endeavour that focuses both on the structures of production and on the practices they entail (Couldry, 2004). This approach resonates with that of Caldwell (2008) and its focus on the production process and the labour force that supports it, that points to the continuity between media analysis and institutional practices. Caldwell's (2008) approach also points to the relevance which the degree of self-reflexivity of the actors involved in a production has for the moulding of the production culture they are a part of. This interplay and close dependency between structures and agents is similar to that proposed by Giddens (1984) in structuration theory and the perspective that highlights the importance of reflexive agents and their actions. A specific production culture corresponds in our view to the emergence and reproduction of a social system and associated practices in a given context. More precisely, it points to the recursive interplay of social interactions and social systems (like in this case an industry), which is grounded in the knowledgeable activities of situated actors who draw upon rules and resources in a diversity of action contexts. Our argument is that this arrangement (practices + rules + resources + ideology) is what consolidates the specific production culture as a social system the agents act in. That is to say, agents reflexively refer in their interactions to rules of signification and legitimation as well as to resources of domination. Considering this, if we want to understand a production culture we have to talk with these different actors. At the same time, we also need to look at the outcomes of the system, that is, in this case, the produced TV fiction content in itself, since there is a dialogic between these two aspects: variations in quantity and features of the content being produced affect the existing production culture and are at the same time determined by it. In order to do so, we will not resort to any type of content analysis, since we are not interested in the meanings embedded in the representations in themselves, but only in their syntactic and structural features. Our methodology draws on media

industry research and production studies (Davies, 2006; Caldwell, 2008) and the proposed research design resorts both to quantitative and qualitative methods.

On the quantitative side, we resorted to a descriptive design based on the analysis of secondary information describing the outcomes of the system (content produced) in the period between 1999 and 2017. This analysis is essential in order to understand the economic and institutional conditions the production culture is bound to. In order to conduct this analysis, we produced a tailored database including daily audience measures from the three providers in the market – GFK, Marktest and Media Monitor – for the entire period.

The chosen period covers the moments before and after a number of disruptive events in the system that were highlighted following the analysis of our data. This period covers the emergence and consolidation of the production culture we are studying. The first moment, corresponds to the instant domestically produced *telenovelas* rose to become preferred by audiences. In early 2000, TVI launched its first domestic *novela* - produced by NBP (in those days the main production company in the country later acquired by the Spanish conglomerate Media Capital) entitled *Jardins Proibidos*. *Jardins Proibidos* was the first domestically produced Portuguese telenovela ever to outperform a Brazilian *novela* being screened at the same time - Globo' s *Laços de Família* being shown at that time on SIC. The second moment occurs in 2013, and corresponds to the moment when for the first time a domestically produced *telenovela* - *Sol de Inverno* - aired by SIC (traditionally the channel where Brazilian productions were aired) reached the top of the audience ratings. The third moment starts in 2014, when all three FTA broadcasters in Portugal – RTP (PBS), TVI and SIC (both private broadcasters) started broadcasting *telenovelas* in their prime time. We stopped our analysis in 2017, the year RTP (PBS) stopped broadcasting *Telenovelas* and focused its attention on other types of serialised drama content.

The initial descriptive stage was followed by an exploratory stage that constitutes the bulk of our research. During this stage, we resorted to qualitative methods and techniques, namely semi-structured interviews. The empirical data for this analysis was collected in 2018 via semi-structured interviews with key actors in the system (sample described in Table 1) that were later processed with NVIVO 12 Plus. We interviewed different actors scattered along the television's production and distribution value chain, namely those more on the managerial side, like producers and managing directors pertaining to the two major production firms, programme editors and executives of the three FTA broadcasting stations in the country (RTP; TVI and SIC) and independent professionals. More on the artistic side, we talked with actors, production designers, writers and directors. Additionally, providers of artistic and technical media services, and other industry experts such as critics, were interviewed. These latter interviews enabled us to cross-check most findings. In total, 32 interviews were conducted independently by the authors, taking an average of 1.5 hours each. The main topics covered by the interviews were: the professional background of the interviewed; self-reflection about the evolution of the genre in the country; description of its tasks and duties in the context of the structure in which he/she operates; description of methods for organisation of projects and integration of the customer (i.e. the broadcaster). Complementarily, we asked all those interviewed to generally comment on the main changes over the years in the production methods in the sector and reflect upon that evolution. The content of each interview varies slightly, but common denominators were always present: the role of the interviewee and his/her understanding of that role in the broader context of the industry; his/her explanation for the successful localisation of the genre in the country and the main traits of that process, and a broader discussion on past evolution and future challenges. The interviews allowed us to understand the ideology that mould the production culture and its main features, and also revealed the interrelationships between the different actors that integrate the culture.

Table 1 – Sample: Qualitative analysis

| | Gender | Age | Profession | Professional role/Position in the value chain |
|----|--------|-----|--|---|
| 1 | M | 66 | Channel Manager | Production and distribution |
| 2 | F | 74 | Actress | Production |
| 3 | F | 53 | Actress | Production |
| 4 | F | | Art director | Production – production design |
| 5 | M | 57 | Art Director | Production – production design |
| 6 | M | 73 | Actor | Production |
| 7 | M | 53 | Production general manager in production company | Development - production |
| 8 | M | 61 | Television critic | Reception - critic |
| 9 | M | 63 | Writer | Development |
| 10 | M | 60 | Production manager | Production |
| 11 | M | 59 | Writer | Production |
| 12 | M | 58 | Writer | Development |
| 13 | M | 50 | Channel manager/Programme editor | Distribution and exhibition |
| 14 | F | 44 | Director/Show runner | Production |
| 15 | M | 67 | CEO production company | Production and distribution |
| 16 | M | 54 | Director/Show runner | Production |
| 17 | F | 41 | Cinematographer | Production |
| 18 | F | 32 | Editor | Production/Post production |
| 19 | M | 56 | Line producer | Production |
| 20 | M | 54 | Location manager | Production |
| 21 | F | 51 | Production supervisor | Production |
| 22 | M | 43 | Programmer | Distribution/Exhibition |
| 23 | F | 51 | Production assistant | Production |
| 24 | M | 60 | Channel manager | Distribution/Exhibition |
| 25 | M | 55 | Director | Production |
| 26 | F | 43 | Art director | Production |
| 27 | F | 38 | Actress | Production |
| 28 | M | 41 | Actor | Production |
| 29 | M | 39 | Writer | Development |
| 30 | M | 54 | Sound engineer | Production |
| 31 | M | 65 | Stage director | Production |
| 32 | M | 42 | Cinematographer | Production |

Results and discussion: the emergence of a production culture

Portugal is small country in the South of Europe with a population of approximately 11 million and a distinct national language that is spoken by a community of more than 220 million people worldwide as a consequence of the country's colonial past and its presence in different regions of the world, namely Brazil and Angola. The country has a solid history of domestic television production; since the 1950s, and until the 1990s there were no other broadcasters except the public service broadcaster RTP, with two channels – RTP 1 and 2. The market opened to private broadcasters in the 1990s with the introduction, first of SIC and later of TVI, that quickly took over more than 50% of the market (Mateus, 2016). Transition from analogue to digital was not an easy process (Quico, Damásio, Henriques, 2012). Terrestrial digital television was introduced only in 2013 after a number of drawbacks, but was never able to affirm itself as a valuable alternative to conditional access-based services. In recent years, access to television broadcast is largely made via subscription services – in 2018 more than 80% of the homes had a paid television service (Marktest, 2018), DTH, xDSL and FTTH being the dominant technologies (ERC, 2017). Independent television production began to emerge in the late 1980s, namely in relation with the production of the first *telenovelas* (Paixão da Costa, 2003). The production sector has always been relatively small, with only 30 independent producers accounted for in 2018 in the database of the national association of independent producers – APIT (www.apitv.com). Differently from other European countries (Keinonen, 2018) ownership of production companies by international conglomerates is not at all the norm. Only one main production company – Plural – is owned by an international conglomerate (Media Capital) and only two international large companies – Endemol and Fremantle – have a significant presence in the country. During the studied period, ownership of production companies was relatively stable, with only two main transformations: the selling of

NBP, the first producer of *telenovelas*, to Media Capital, that later changed the name of the company to Plural, and the creation by NBP former owners of a new production company dedicated to the production of *telenovelas*, SP Televisão. These two companies, considering Plural is a direct heir of NBP, are responsible for the large majority of productions of *telenovelas* in the period between 1999 and 2017 – 212 of the 215 mentioned in Table 2. Very few companies tried to enter this production market during the entire period. In the early stages of the process, small independent producers, like Edipim or Estúdios Atlântida, ventured into the market with little success, and later attempts by larger producers, like Endemol, also failed (O'Donnell, 2004). It seems that specific conditions had to be in place on the institutional side for success to be achieved!

Descriptive research: how *telenovelas* became dominant

After the early attempts of the 1980s and 1990s, that involved RTP and TVI and several producers, with NBP playing a prominent role from 1992 onwards, it was only in the year 2000 that the domestically produced *telenovelas* were able to attract greater audience figures than their Brazilian counterparts. Initial productions of the 1980s and 1990s had a high production value, with a large part of the *telenovelas* being shot in exteriors, and depicted a diverse culture since they encompassed a great range of narratives and themes. Adherence to local values was a must. Many of these productions dwelt on narratives grounded in the national imaginary and were set in different parts of the country (Paixão da Costa, 2003). Despite this, however, the figures show quite clearly that these productions were not able to compete successfully with the prime-time Brazilian imports (Burnay, 2005). This relatively poor performance of Portuguese *Telenovelas*, in comparison to their Brazilian competitors, during the eighties and nineties, is often associated with their overwhelmingly conservative feel (O'Donnell, 2004) and their inability to deal

with a range of social issues such as racism, homosexuality, intergenerational conflict and so on (Paixão da Costa, 2003). In other words, they were targeting national audiences by focusing on themes that could resonate with their cultural identity, but they were not doing it in an innovative manner. Then everything changed in 2000. With the strong support of the broadcaster TVI, NBP produced *Jardins Proibidos* and climbed to the top of the prime time ratings. Tables 2 and 3 compare the highest ratings and shares in the period per channel and in total, and show the dominance of TVI in the period. 2001 was the year in which TVI started broadcasting three *telenovelas* daily, all produced by NBP, but it was also the year that Media Capital, that had previously acquired TVI, also entered the capital of NBP. Media Capital became the main shareholder of NBP in 2002 and later in 2007, the unique shareholder of the company, changing its name to “Plural” in the process. It was also with the NBP produced *Telenovela Ganância* that, in 2001, SIC tried to respond to the growth of TVI. That attempt failed, as did later ones, this time

with international producer Endemol. It was only in 2014, with *Mar Salgado*, that SIC managed to beat its competition. The relevant fact is that, since 2014, SIC successful productions have all been produced by SP Televisão, a company created in 2007 by the former owners of NBP and that integrated a large number of the professionals that worked for that company. In Table 3, we can verify that in the period, only one of the top 5 productions of SIC is a local production while all the others are Brazilian ones. The same is true for RTP. Only two of the productions in the list are national ones – *O sábio* and *Os nossos dias* – and both were produced by SP. What these figures show is that along the period there seem to have been a number of competences – an understanding of the way of doing content that is engaging for television audiences – that a number of professionals working for these companies – NBP, Plural and Sp Televisão – have acquired. The competences associated with this mode of production seem to be independent, although related, of the concrete channel and Production Company these professionals are working for.

Table 2: Productions with the highest rating (rat%) and share (shr%) in the period total

| CHANNEL | YEAR | NOVELA | EPISODES | DURATION | RAT% | SHR% | RAT# |
|---------|------|----------------------|----------|-----------|------|------|---------|
| SIC | 1999 | TORRE DE BABEL | 66 | 56:14:05 | 24.1 | 61.9 | 2.158.9 |
| SIC | 1999 | SUAVE VENENO | 164 | 159:32:49 | 16.4 | 50.9 | 1.474.9 |
| SIC | 2014 | MAR SALGADO | 325 | 271:35:54 | 15.2 | 31.5 | 1471.5 |
| SIC | 1999 | TERRA NOSTRA | 293 | 289:49:16 | 15.1 | 46.3 | 1.357.3 |
| SIC | 1999 | A FORÇA DE UM DESEJO | 182 | 144:28:41 | 14.9 | 50.7 | 1.335.5 |
| TVI | 2015 | A UNICA MULHER II | 174 | 155:46:34 | 14.7 | 30.0 | 1422.8 |
| TVI | 2017 | A HERDEIRA | 6 | 6:36:10 | 14.1 | 29.2 | 1363.6 |
| SIC | 2013 | SOL DE INVERNO | 282 | 243:29:32 | 14.0 | 28.5 | 1353.2 |
| TVI | 2009 | MEU AMOR | 319 | 239:20:20 | 13.9 | 38.9 | 1313.1 |
| TVI | 2015 | A UNICA MULHER | 195 | 190:19:47 | 13.9 | 29.0 | 1345.3 |

Table 3: Productions with the highest rating (rat%) and share (shr%) in the period per channel (top 5)

| CHANNEL | YEAR | NOVELA | EPISODES | DURATION | RAT% | SHR% | RAT# |
|---------|------|------------------------------|----------|-----------|--------|--------|----------|
| RTP | 2014 | AGUA DE MAR | 215 | 126:24:35 | 4.4 | 9.3 | 424.4 |
| | 2013 | WINDECK: O PREÇO DA AMBIÇÃO | 187 | 93:00:28 | 3.6 | 17.7 | 353.1 |
| | 2013 | OS NOSSOS DIAS | 638 | 446:06:06 | 3.5 | 17.7 | 340.6 |
| | 2017 | O SABIO | 191 | 126:16:13 | 2.6 | 13.0 | 254.9 |
| | 2013 | ERAMOS SEIS | 289 | 212:18:21 | 1.4 | 11.9 | 139.0 |
| SIC | 1999 | TORRE DE BABEL | 66 | 2,343113 | 24.1 | 61.9 | 2158.9 |
| | 1999 | SUAVE VENENO (total) | 164 | 6,647789 | 16.4 | 50.9 | 1474.9 |
| | 2014 | MAR SALGADO | 325 | 11,3166 | 15.2 | 31.5 | 1471.5 |
| | 1999 | TERRA NOSTRA | 293 | 12,07588 | 15.075 | 46.325 | 1357.275 |
| | 1999 | A FORÇA DE UM DESEJO (total) | 182 | 6,019919 | 14.9 | 50.7 | 1335.5 |
| TVI | 2015 | A UNICA MULHER II | 174 | 6,490671 | 14.7 | 30 | 1422.8 |
| | 2017 | A HERDEIRA | 6 | 0,275116 | 14.1 | 29.2 | 1363.6 |
| | 2009 | MEU AMOR (total) | 319 | 9,972454 | 13.9 | 38.85 | 1313.05 |
| | 2015 | A UNICA MULHER | 195 | 7,930405 | 13.9 | 29 | 1345.3 |
| | 2014 | O BEIJO DO ESCORPIAO | 195 | 6,745382 | 12.9 | 27.2 | 1250.6 |

Ever since the arrival of the commercial stations in the early nineties, competition between the three main Portuguese channels (RTP1, SIC and TVI) has taken place overwhelmingly in the realm of the *telenovela*. Table 4 indicates the number of *telenovelas* broadcasted in the period per channel, while Table 5 illustrates the astonishing number of hours of *telenovelas* that were broadcast in the period. SIC higher figures include the Brazilian productions aired in the period, and RTP's much lower figures result from the fact that the broadcaster

ceased to air *telenovelas* in 1999 after its sporadic attempts of the 1980s and 1990s, and only returned to the genre in 2013. Throughout the period, *telenovelas* attracted audience shares of at times over forty percent and reached the incredible figure of one production with 500 episodes between 2001 and 2003 – *Anjo Selvagem* – and more than 2.5 million viewers in its last episode with a share of 44.5%. For SIC and TVI the total number of productions is highly stable in the period, indicating that their support for the genre was constant.

Table 4 - Number of Telenovelas broadcast in the period

| CHANNEL | PERIOD | NUMBER OF TELENOVELAS BROADCASTED |
|---------|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| RTP | 2013-2017 | 9 |
| SIC | 1999-2017 | 131 |
| TVI | 1999-2017 | 75 |
| Total | 1999-2017 | 215 |

Table 5 - Total hours of Telenovelas broadcast per day

| CHANNEL | PERIOD | NUMBER OF HOURS OF BROADCAST | NUMBER OF HOURS OF TELENOVELAS | & IN TOTAL |
|---------|-----------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------|
| RTP | 2013-2017 | 43.830 | 1436:15:22 | 13.85 |
| SIC | 1999-2017 | 157.788 | 21860:06:44 | 11.66 |
| TVI | 1999-2017 | 157.788 | 18402:22:19 | 3.28 |

Descriptive results highlight a number of aspects. The first one is the close relation between the disruptive events previously mentioned and changes in power relations in the market that occur in synchronicity with the growth in the popularity of the genre. These changes either can be in terms of ownership or related to the integration of activities in the value chain. After its success, TVI bought NBP in an attempt to vertically integrate production, distribution and exhibition that lasts up until day. Changes of ownership in NBP resulted in the emergence of a new player – SP Televisão – that challenged the dominance of MEDIA CAPITAL's integrated model by providing similar content to the other broadcasters in the market, while also participating in their ownership (the main shareholder in SP is also a shareholder in the other private broadcaster SIC). With different business models, these two production companies came to control the market thereby gaining a dominant position. The fact they control both the means of production and have access to the broadcasters in exclusive terms is key to this. The relevance of these competitive advantages is demonstrated by the fact that, in the period, and once they attained this dominant position, no other player was able to challenge their position. This first conclusion points to a key fact of the production culture we are studying: this production culture is co-evolutionary in the sense that the development of the organisations that integrate it is highly dependent on the competitive and institutional environments. This means the production organisations that integrate this culture cannot be regarded as single entities and can only be studied by looking at the social practices by and through which cultures are constituted (Windeler & Sydow, 2001). This is highly relevant because it means that strategically placed actors

can intentionally influence the structures of the production culture, but they are never in a position to fully control the process. Therefore, their acts result not only in intended but also in unintended consequences. The more competitive the environment is, the more of these unintended consequences will occur. To prevent this, actors in the network will tend to develop ways of legitimising their power and reinforcing their dominance via greater control of resources and a stronger definition of the rules of signification in place. This process explains, on one side, the closeness of the network and on the other side, the relevant role the production of social capital of the bonding type has for its emergence and consolidation (Damásio, 2011).

This production culture takes the form of a close network of dependencies and, to assume its domination, actors must not only assure the control of the means of production but, more importantly, that they are the ones setting the ideology of the culture. The network structure that sustains the production culture and forces broadcasters, and producers to form some sort of alliance, is different from other known models, like in-house production or the sourcing of content from the exterior that impels transnational content. The direct relation between the emergence of these structures and the success of the genre, proves its relevance for the development of an original production culture, but also the dialogical relation between the two processes.

The second aspect has to do with the volume and rate of productions. If one considers the figures in detail, they imply that, during this period, different *telenovelas* were produced

at breathtaking speed: for the total amount per year to be reached, and considering the average number of 150 episodes per *telenovela*, a production company had to complete an entire production in around six months. Also considering the number of hours produced, an average of more than 25 minutes of ready to air content had to be produced per day. Since there is a strong difference between the amount of content one can produce in exteriors and in studio, usually a ratio of 1:2, this means that, in the period, the structures in place were able to produce at least 30 minutes of studio content per day. This represents a major logistical challenge and, besides the effort it implies on the side of all those involved, it also means that quality will be sacrificed in the name of quantity. Once again, this points to the same conclusion as above: that in search of dominance and stability, actors in the network will tend to develop and consolidate practices that assure them greater control of resources and stronger definition of the rules of signification in place, besides the exclusive competitive advantages that result from that. In the second part of the research, it became even clearer that this massive production mode is a key characteristic of the culture.

One last impression one can extract from these figures is that while the *telenovela* is clearly crucial for all these broadcasters and, in particular, for the private ones, in attracting and retaining audiences, its costs are relatively high (Paixão da Costa, 2003). This probably explains why they constantly wager on the genre but do that in a relatively small volume when compared to the total hours of broadcast (Table 5). Once again, and considering the reported high costs, the need for legitimacy on the side of the actors that integrate the networked production culture is potentially reinforced by this. They know that if their relevance – i.e. ability to attract audiences – is questioned, then the high costs they represent will make them easily replaceable by producers of cheaper content that assure better results. Considering this, not only are the best strategically placed actors in the network highly interested in reinforcing their dominant position, but the

same can be said for all other actors that are dependent on the production activities the network assures in order to be able to keep on carrying on their creative work.

This network structure, although with different configurations, is not original in European terms and there are examples of television national markets where similar situations can be found (Windeler & Sydow, 2001; La Torre, 2014). What is original in this case is not only the longevity of the process, as the figures depict, but also its resilience. In the second part of the study, we questioned the actors' self-reflexivity in search of further explanations for how this culture emerged and became so stable.

Exploratory research: the views of the actors

During our qualitative exploratory stage, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 32 individuals that represented the different professional profiles in the industry and operated, with different levels of responsibility, at different positions scattered along the value chain. They were all questioned on several topics related to their perceptions of the production culture in place and how it came to emerge. In general, all interviews focused on:

- Personal trajectory of the interviewee;
- Perceptions about the main factors that contributed along the years to audiences' engagement with the consumption of *telenovelas*;
- Main features of the Portuguese *telenovela* that distinguish it from other fictional genres, like the Brazilian *novela*;
- Perceptions about the production culture in place and its positive and negative elements;
- Identification of the factors that justify the success of the Portuguese *telenovela*;
- Identification of the main traits of the evolution of the Portuguese *telenovela* and challenges it will face in the future.

The outputs of these interviews were then analysed resorting to several qualitative techniques. Firstly, we coded all interviews using the same codebook and measured the frequency of words and references in all interviews. Table 6 presents the results of this codebook and the frequency of the main words mentioned throughout the interviews.

Table 6 – Codebook Interviews

| NAME | FILES | REFERENCES |
|-------------------------------------|-------|------------|
| 1. Attitudes | 32 | 194 |
| Positive | 32 | 143 |
| Negative | 13 | 42 |
| Neutro | 5 | 9 |
| 2. Characteristics | 32 | 1447 |
| Current topics | 6 | 12 |
| Audience | 11 | 31 |
| Audiences leadership | 7 | 14 |
| Elderly | 7 | 10 |
| Low socio-economic level | 1 | 1 |
| Youth | 2 | 4 |
| Daily TV program | 5 | 8 |
| Emotional connection | 12 | 27 |
| Exaggeration drama | 1 | 1 |
| Human aspects (people, talent, etc) | 15 | 86 |
| Actors elenco | 14 | 26 |
| Good-looking actors | 6 | 9 |
| Older experienced actors | 0 | 0 |
| Youth or new actors | 4 | 7 |
| Good leadership | 1 | 1 |
| Production team | 8 | 10 |
| Talent | 3 | 9 |
| Music | 11 | 19 |
| National Portuguese product | 9 | 16 |

| NAME | FILES | REFERENCES |
|--|-------|------------|
| Novela as an acting school for actors | 4 | 6 |
| Prime-time | 7 | 9 |
| Production model - massive production with reduced costs | 11 | 40 |
| Realism | 10 | 24 |
| Scenarios | 13 | 50 |
| Exterior scenarios (landscapes, natural) | 11 | 33 |
| Interior scenarios | 9 | 15 |
| Script writing | 13 | 47 |
| Small market | 2 | 5 |
| Story | 16 | 306 |
| Author stories | 3 | 6 |
| Good story, plot | 8 | 20 |
| Happy stories | 2 | 4 |
| Intense stories | 8 | 13 |
| Long stories | 10 | 13 |
| Portuguese story | 11 | 23 |
| Shorter stories - less episodes | 5 | 13 |
| True stories | 9 | 14 |
| 3. Evolution | 32 | 1120 |
| Different platforms (net, web, mobile, etc) | 7 | 17 |
| Future | 15 | 108 |
| Growth circle | 11 | 83 |
| Decline | 7 | 17 |
| Progression | 11 | 66 |
| Internationalisation | 5 | 10 |
| Investment | 11 | 40 |
| Advertising investment | 7 | 7 |
| Economic investment | 2 | 3 |
| Educational | 2 | 2 |

| NAME | FILES | REFERENCES |
|---|-------|------------|
| Financial management | 1 | 6 |
| Innovation | 0 | 0 |
| International investment | 1 | 1 |
| Investment (new ways) | 5 | 10 |
| Low investment | 2 | 2 |
| Political changes (incentives, fundings, benefits) | 1 | 5 |
| Market competition | 8 | 18 |
| Organisation | 14 | 190 |
| Fast scene dynamics | 9 | 32 |
| Seasons | 5 | 11 |
| Serialisation | 9 | 34 |
| Star system | 8 | 13 |
| Success | 14 | 198 |
| Technical aspects | 13 | 50 |
| Innovation, technology | 7 | 9 |
| 4. Producers | 11 | 45 |
| NBP | 0 | 0 |
| Plural | 1 | 4 |
| SP | 0 | 0 |
| TV Globo Brasil | 10 | 41 |
| 5. TV Channels | 16 | 261 |
| Public TV Channels | 1 | 1 |
| RTP | 14 | 68 |
| SIC | 11 | 58 |
| TV Globo Brasil | 10 | 41 |
| TVI | 14 | 93 |

The results from the previous tables show three things:

The “characteristics” of the genre and the production culture that supports it, along with the “evolution” of both, are clearly the dominant topics in all interviews independently of the position of the actor. In the case of the “characteristics” of the genre and the production culture, that are regarded as synonymous by most interviewees, the human aspects, the emotional connection with the audience, the music, the massive production model, the scenarios and the story, are clearly referred to as the key aspects that mould this production culture and the genre in question. In the case of “evolution”, the growth circle, investment, the organisational model, technical aspects and the past success of the genre, are mentioned as the key descriptors. If we cross these results with the fact that most of the people interviewed had a positive attitude towards the genre and the production culture it entails, we conclude the sample depicted had high levels of self-awareness, similar to those verified for other creative industries in much larger markets such as the USA (Caldwell, 2008). If we cross this with the fact that references to the institutional side of the culture are much less frequent – the producers and the broadcasters –, we can conclude these people have a high sense of their value: they are aware that without their work this culture would not exist. In our view, the outcome of this is the reinforcement of the closeness of the networked structure the culture depicts and that we previously identified, and the reinforcement of the implementation of mechanisms that support the production of social capital of the bonding type (Damásio, 2011). What this means is that since this people seem to know exactly what the production culture needs to deliver as outcomes in order to consolidate itself in the context where it exists – the TV market in Portugal – they will tend to reinforce the existing production mode and daily keep on working around the same propositions. This is what explains that, at the same time, massive production and good stories are regarded as easily and desirably compatible.

Massive production is the production mode that the sample assumes as the key economic factor that supported the emergence of the production culture, due to the economies of scale it allows. These economies of scale result in economic advantages for the broadcasters, while the high quality of the stories – assumed by the sample as a quality of the genre –, is the other key factor mentioned. This second factor is also highly important because it allows for the easier engagement of the genre with local audiences. These two features each concern a different dimension the production culture has to relate itself with: on one side the institutional stakeholders, and on the other side, the audiences. After this initial analysis, we performed a word frequency query, and extracted the “cloud of words” represented in Figure 1. This cloud highlights the same topics as the previous tables and gives us a visual notion of how they contribute to the understanding of the genre depicted by the people that take part in the production culture. This cloud of words is a self-representation of the key elements of the culture.



Figure 1 – “Cloud of words” extracted from word frequency analysis

We then proceed with a text search query in order to identify the elements the interviewees mentioned as reasons for the success of the genre in Portugal. Figure 2 depicts the main factors that were mentioned. It is significant that the reasons for success put forward are exactly the same as those already mentioned as the main traits of the genre: a) dramatic elements – the nature of the stories, the actors, the music, the scenarios; and b) organisational elements – massive production model; quality of the human resources; ability to engage with local audiences. In relation to this, the only explanation for the actual success of the format that was put forward, and that has no relation with the disruptive moments identified in the previous stage, was the reference to a structural change in the process of conceiving the narrative structure in relation to the production workflow. All the domestic *telenovelas* produced before the success of the early 2000s were closed narratives: in other words, the entire *telenovela* had been shot, edited and completed before the first episode was screened. This meant that there was no possibility whatsoever of responding to audience or critical reactions to the product, writing in new issues at short notice, developing characters this way or that according to audience feedback – all standard features of soap operas everywhere. With the next generation of *telenovelas* this changed completely and they became open-ended. In other words, they are still in production when they go on air. Research mechanisms were put in place by the broadcasters and the producers that constantly test audience reaction to the narrative and the direction of a particular *telenovela* can be changed at short notice in response to this feedback. This resulted in greater freshness and a much more expansive nature of the new products. This was clearly a feature of the production mode that became crucial for the emergence of the production culture, by allowing it to prove it was able to produce successful products. Considering this, the participants do not regard success as an outcome of this production culture, but as a condition for its emergence and consolidation. This is extremely relevant, because it is this that constantly impels all participants in the

network to replicate what they have done in the past in order to assure their future stability. The culture then tends to close upon itself in search of stability instead of risking innovation. Participants were also very clear in advancing another reason for the emergence of this specific culture: the need to “fight” the Brazilian products. This is in line with the idea put forward by previous studies (O’Donnell, 2004; Paixão da Costa, 2003) that considered that the success of the localisation of *novelas* in Portugal was a direct consequence of the previous dominance of international formats that was overcome by a local popular public sphere (Buonanno, 2009) the participants clearly assume they represent. Figure 2 highlights the main reasons for success mentioned by the participants.

The results of both the “word frequency analysis” and the “text search query” were then used to produce a number of

concept maps that synthesise the main concepts that describe the views of the interviewees. Due to the extension of these outputs, we have opted for only presenting here two examples (Figures 3 and 4) that we think are representative of the type of ideology and understanding the professionals interviewed for this study depicted and that are aligned with the results of the previous tables. Once again, positive references are highly dominant and the relevance of the genre for local audiences and the sustainability of the industry in the country is highlighted. Clearly the participants consider this production culture to be highly relevant for the existence of audiovisual production in the country and they see it as the only viable production model because it is the one that exhibits the characteristics local audiences value and is considered to be economically sustainable by other institutional actors (i.e. broadcasters).



Figure 2 – Text search query – reasons for success

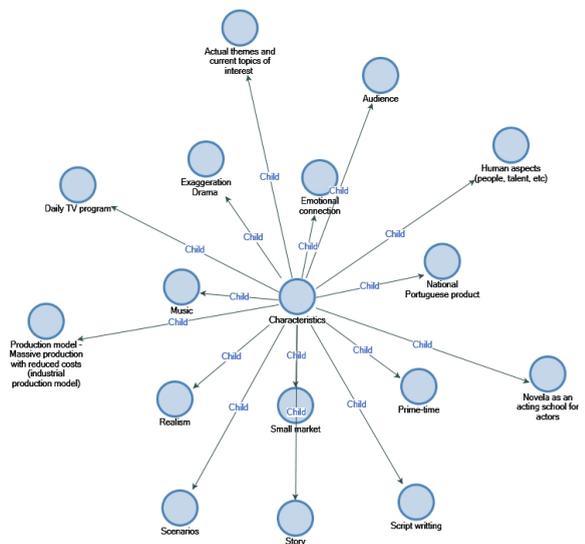


Figure 3 – Concept Map – Main characteristics of the production culture

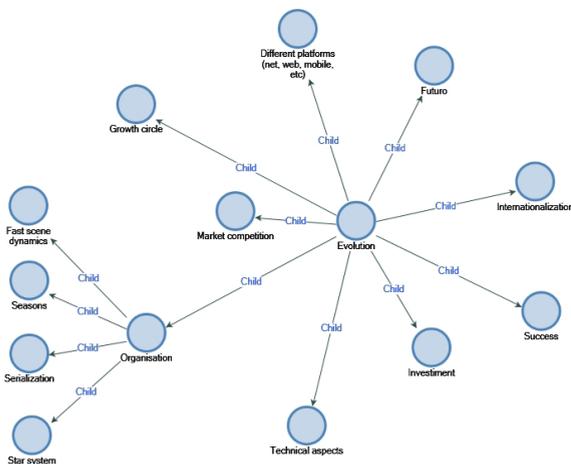


Figure 4 – Concept Map – Main evolutionary factors

The two main topics explored during the exploratory stage were the characteristics of the production culture and the genre, and the past and future evolution of the genre and associated culture. Our goal was to collect and evaluate the perceptions participants had in relation to these two topics in order to assess their level of self-awareness, and their understanding of the main traits of the production culture and the ideology it entails. Positive references were dominant in all interviews and all participants clearly think of themselves as part of a distinctive production culture that successfully articulates dramatic and organisational elements in order to deliver the content the market demands. Complementarily, they also believe the future evolution of the culture must be assured due to the relevance it has for the local society and internationalisation is regarded as a key component of the future development of the industry. It is relevant to mention that internationalisation efforts started back in 2004/2005 with the first sales of Portuguese content to foreign markets, and are nowadays an important constituent of the industry: Portuguese production companies have recently bought production companies in South America, and Portuguese *tele-novelas* are regularly sold to those markets. Tables 8 and 9 isolate the references that were mentioned positively by the

interviewees in relation to each one of these key aspects. These positive references summarise the main traits that mould the ideology of the production culture: ability to produce drama content that is relevant to local audiences in a massive production mode that is profitable and sustainable in the context of a small local market.

Table 8 – Positive references – Characteristics

| CHARACTERISTICS |
|--|
| 1 : Actual themes and current topics of interest |
| 2 : Human aspects (people, talent, etc) |
| 3 : Technical aspects |
| 4 : Daily TV programme |
| 5 : Emotional connection |
| 6 : Good-looking actors |
| 7 : Production model - Massive production with reduced costs |
| 8 : Music |
| 9 : National Portuguese product |
| 10 : Prime-time |
| 11 : Exterior scenarios (landscapes, natural) |
| 12 : Interior scenarios |
| 13 : Script writing |

Table 9 - Positive references – Evolution

| EVOLUTION/ PROGRESS |
|---|
| 1 : Different platforms (net, web, mobile, etc) |
| 2 : Internationalisation |
| 3 : Investment |
| 4 : Market competition |
| 5 : Fast scene dynamics |
| 6 : Seasons |
| 7 : Serialisation |
| 8 : Star system |

Conclusions

In this paper we looked at television drama production in Portugal between 1999 and 2017 and focused our attention on a specific genre – the *telenovela* – and the production culture that emerged in the country in this period as a direct consequence of the localisation of this television genre. Instead of focusing our attention on the reception side of the process, we concentrated our analysis on the production side and looked at the perceptions and attitudes of the people that make the television content, and the key outcomes resulting from their activities. The main traits of the localisation of the *telenovela* genre in Portugal were identified as being the production mode and the dramatic qualities of the genre. On the one hand, the production mode it promotes is highly attractive, due to economic reasons, to the institutional structure, while, on the other hand, the dramatic qualities of the genre and its adherence to local themes – besides the use of local music, actors and scenarios – explain its success amongst the local audiences. Our analysis showed that the localisation process allowed for the emergence and consolidation of an original local production culture that is based on a closed network of actors that share a number of dependencies amongst them. Issues of scale were clearly relevant in this context – i.e. the size of the market and related institutional structures – and structural dynamics were clearly much more relevant than the dramatic qualities of the genre in assuring its success – it was only when institutional conditions were in place that “success” was assured. Two explanations were put forward for this: structural changes in the market in terms of ownership and power dynamics, and the ideological argument that reunited the different actors in the market around the desire to overthrow the “otherness” represented by international – Brazilian soaps – TV content. Results show this production culture is co-evolutionary in the sense that the development of the organisations that integrate it is highly dependent on the competitive and institutional environment.

This structural model allowed for the “success” the sample is so proud of, but also created a number of challenges for the future: is the massified mode of production sustainable? How can the closed network be transformed in order to promote creativity and innovation and still be profitable? How can the existing mode of production be adapted to other genres and formats, such as high quality series in order to diversify the production landscape? All this are complex challenges our research pointed out and that need stronger attention in the future.

The production culture that emerged in the studied period around the production of this television genre is recognised by the ones that participate in it as original and bound by national circumstances. Results show that a process of self-mythologising is in place (Caldwell, 2008) symbolised by a rhetoric of “success” and self-legitimisation. This production culture tends to promote stability via the production of bonding social capital and works towards the reinforcement of its norms and values.

Our research highlights the need for production studies to focus not only on the views of the actors in the field but also on the co-evolution of industry structures and (inter-) organisational practices. Industry practices shape network practices and vice versa and, in the case of television, structural changes can impel changes in content production and associated practices. This production culture is defined by shared views, norms, and practices, namely a positive appreciation of its characteristics and outcomes by the ones that integrate it. Thus, new or newly accentuated practices do not simply diffuse and penetrate the industry. The structures dominating the field set their own practices and implement a co-evolutionary model that implies individual actors and institutions are co-dependent on each other.

This production culture takes the form of a close network of dependencies and, to assume its domination, actors must not only assure the control of the means of production but, more importantly, that they are the ones setting the ideology of the culture. This is only possible due to the size and scale of the market. Scale represents a core factor that explains the emergence of this production culture, a conclusion that goes in line with recent studies focusing on other European markets (McElroy, Nielsen, & Noonan, 2018). The research showed the actors are aware that the small size of the market was a positive factor impelling the emergence of the local production culture, but they are also aware that its future sustainability is highly dependent on its ability to reach new international markets.

The Portuguese television market is a small one with a small number of stakeholders involved and barriers to entry are clearly very high. This situation has contributed to the development of a strong sense of bonding social capital between all actors in the sector (Damásio, 2011) who constantly search for stability and the maintenance of their positions. This was another factor supporting the emergence of the studied production culture. We postulated the explanation that the main cause for the emergence, and later success, of this specific production culture, is not related to the localisation of content – i.e. adaption to local “taste” with local stories, actors, music and so forth. The emergence and consolidation of this production culture is a direct consequence of the development of a network based on the convergence of interests between the institutional side of the structure – the distribution represented by the broadcasters –, and the production side, represented by the production professionals. The first needed a product to fight the transnational content – in this case represented by the Brazilian *novela* –, and the second group wanted to affirm itself as being able to deliver a content that met the taste of local audiences. The result was the emergence of a production culture in the form of a closed network anchored to a small number of elements, namely a

specific production mode centred on massive production and the intensive production of drama with a local flavor.

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