

Precarious organizing and beyond: the case of arts and construction industry

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Methodology

- Secondary data analysis
 - Eurostat (Labour Force Survey; Cultural Employment; Industry, trade and services)
 - INE – Portuguese National Statistics Institute
 - Unions Reports
- Interviews with key informants
- Digital Ethnography

The Construction industry

- **Labour-intensive** sector
- Providing “employment for those with **little education or skill**, many of them from the poorer sections of society” (ILO 2001)
- **Highly fragmented production process**, based on “long and complex **subcontracting chains** as well as of the use of agency workers, self-employment and transient employment” (Danaj & Sippola 2015)
- Unskilled, low-wage and and physically demanding/ insecure jobs
- High **labour mobility** in face of immobile products

The Construction industry in Portugal

- **Mobility as a mode of regulation** (Marques et al 2021): internal mobility through daily or weekly commuting & cross-border mobility (often alternating with other activities particularly related to family farming) – associated to a certain kind of “nomadism” (Pinto and Queiroz, 1996)
- Increased fragmentation and flexibilization of the construction industry, through a **division of labour based on subcontracting chains**, resulting in increasingly temporary, mobile and insecure employment
- **Labour shortage**: “Portugal is in need of 100.000 workers since a large part of its workforce is abroad” (interview with Portuguese Construction Union, September 2020)
- **Illegality**: “In the field of construction in Portugal, we think that 40% of workers are illegal, it is not precarious, it is illegal!” (interview with Portuguese Construction Union, September 2020).

The Arts sector

- **Highly qualified** professionals
- Labour **hyper-flexibility**, “as if the art was a fermenting principle of capitalism” and the artist an exemplary figure of the new worker, functional to the global economy (Menger 2003)
- **Precarity as a mode of regulation**: various atypical forms of performing artistic work – self-employment, freelancing, part-time, flexible work arrangements, unwaged work – associated with instable, insecure, intermittent work and the **absence of social protections**
 - existence of a reserve army of artistic labour
 - widespread image of the ‘artistic self’ and artists’ belief that they consciously choose uncertain and underpaid working conditions, for offering autonomy, freedom and self-responsibility (Loacker 2013)
 - the process of differentiation of the artistic labour market, with enormous inequalities in terms of success and remuneration, leading to an apology of inter-individual competition
- **Lack of traditional forms of workers’ organization** (unions)

The Arts sector in Portugal

- **Structural precarity** has been chronically exposed, including “invisible” non-creative professionals in the art worlds (mediators, operators, technicians) - absence of government response and illegality related to bogus self-employment
- Reference private cultural institutions took advantage of the crisis to advance **neoliberal agendas of cuts and dismissals**.
- **Growth of collective structures** (union, social movements, associations, collectives), which relates to:
 - The process of decentralizing responsibilities in the artistic domain that were traditionally assumed by the public sector
 - Precarity and lack of options in terms of wage labour.

Comparative macro Outlook

Mobility and absence of a stable workplace

Table 1. Persons in in Construction, Arts and Total Employment by main Place of Work (% , Portugal 2019)

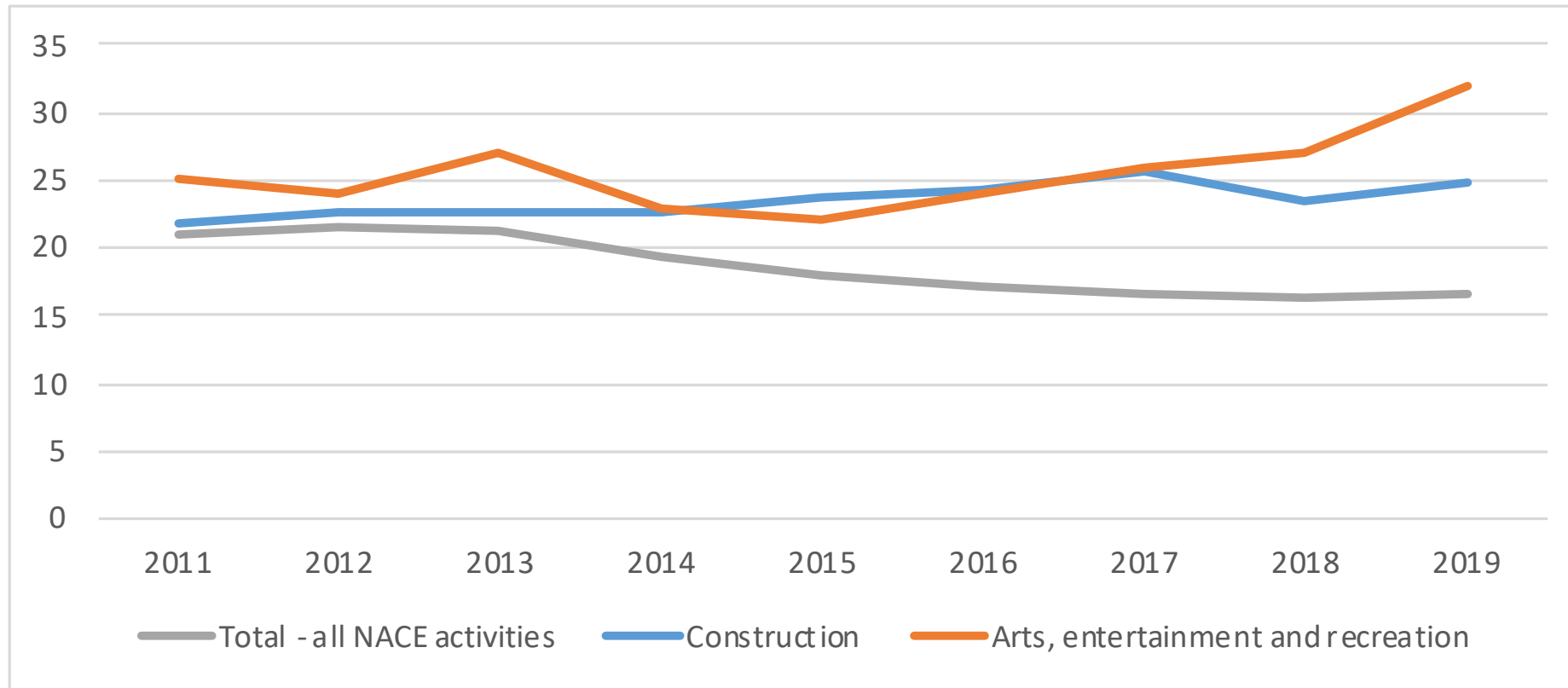
ECONOMIC ACTIVITY	WORKPLACE					No Response
	Employer's Premises or Own Premises	Home	Clients' Place	Not Fixed or Other		
Total - All Nace Activities	78,0	2,3	8,3	7,3	4,0	
Construction	23,9	-	54,3	15,7	5,6	
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation; Other Service Activities; Activities Of Household And Extra-Territorial Organizations And Bodies	79,4	3,7	10,7	3,2	3,0	

Source: Eurostat

► Literature shows the importance of having a stable workplace for the development of solidarities and the formation of political subjects.

Independent work and bogus autonomy

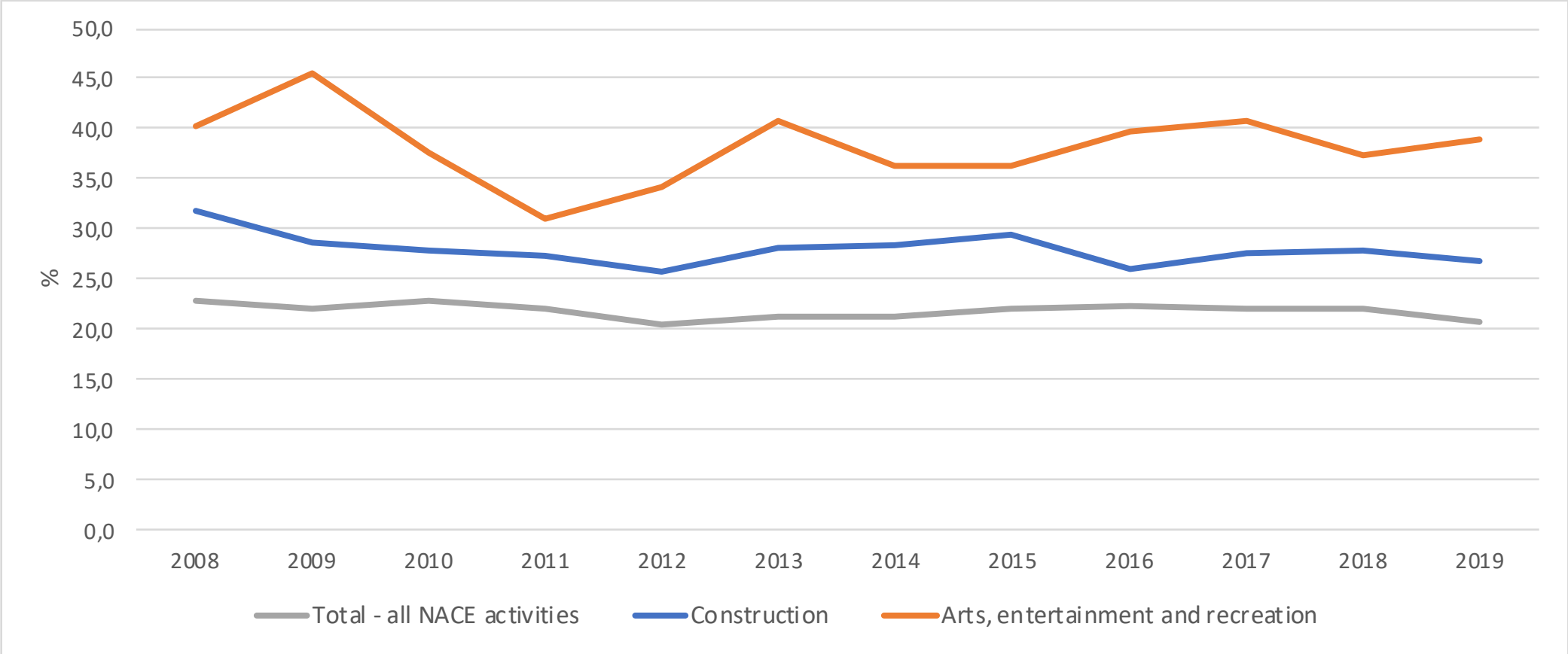
Fig. 1. Share of the Self-employed in Construction, Arts and Total Employment (% , Portugal 2011-2019)



Source: Eurostat; INE

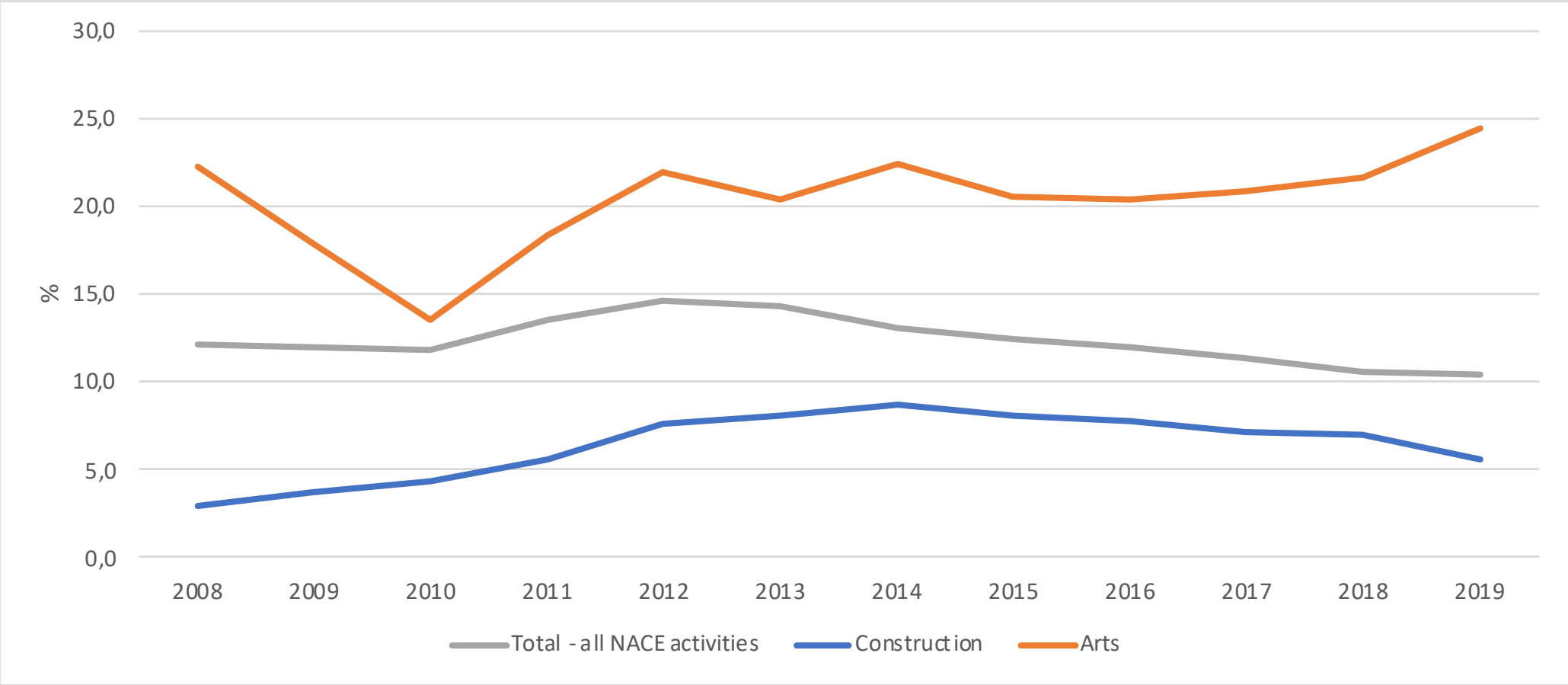
Temporary nature of employment relations

Fig. 2. Share of Temporary Employees in Construction, Arts and Total Employment (% , Portugal 2008-2019)



Source: Eurostat

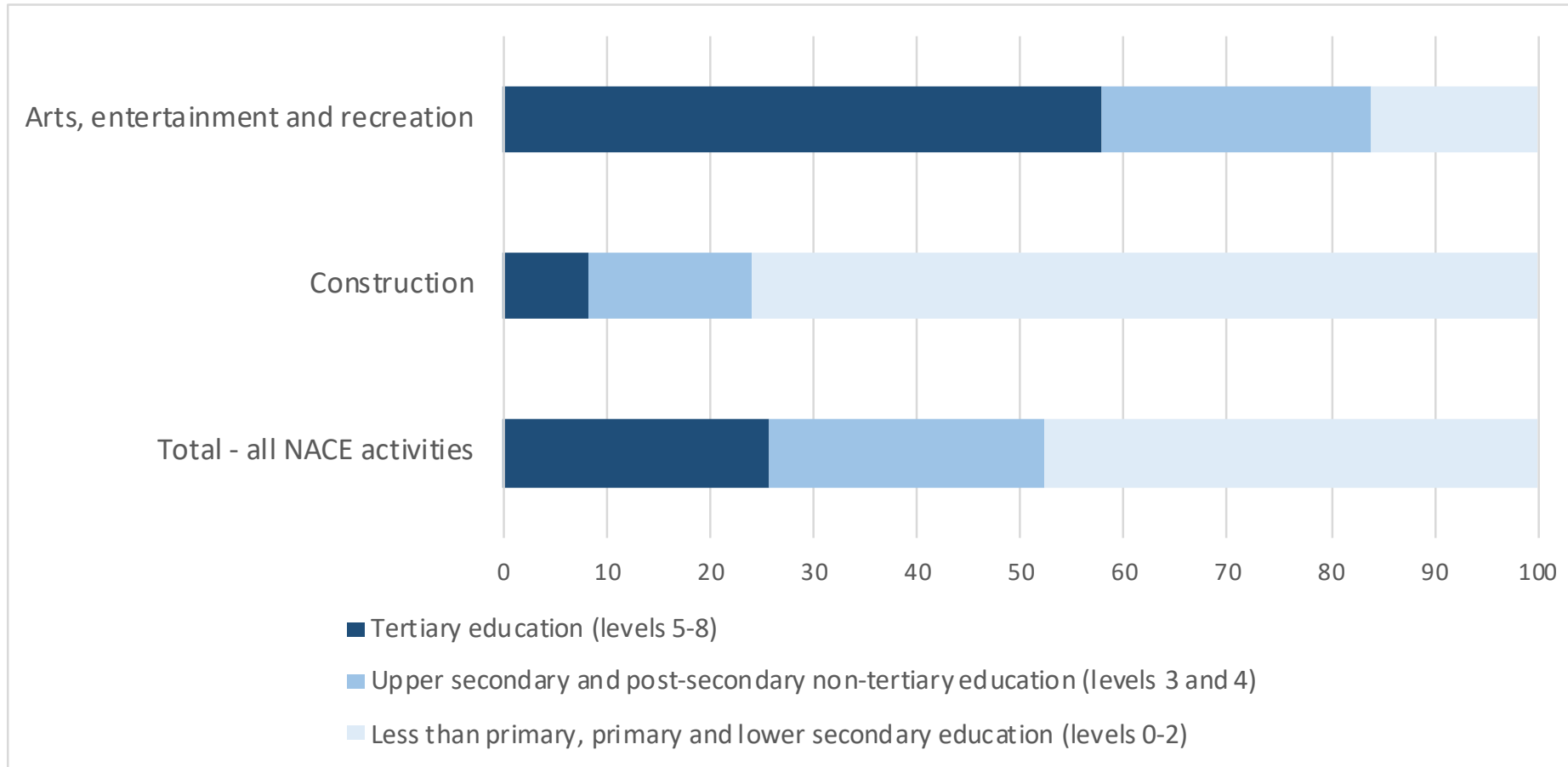
Fig. 3. Share of people working part-time in Construction, Arts and Total Employment (% , Portugal 2008-2019)



Source: Eurostat

Education

Fig. 4. Level of Educational Attainment in Arts, Construction and Total Employment (%; Portugal 2017)

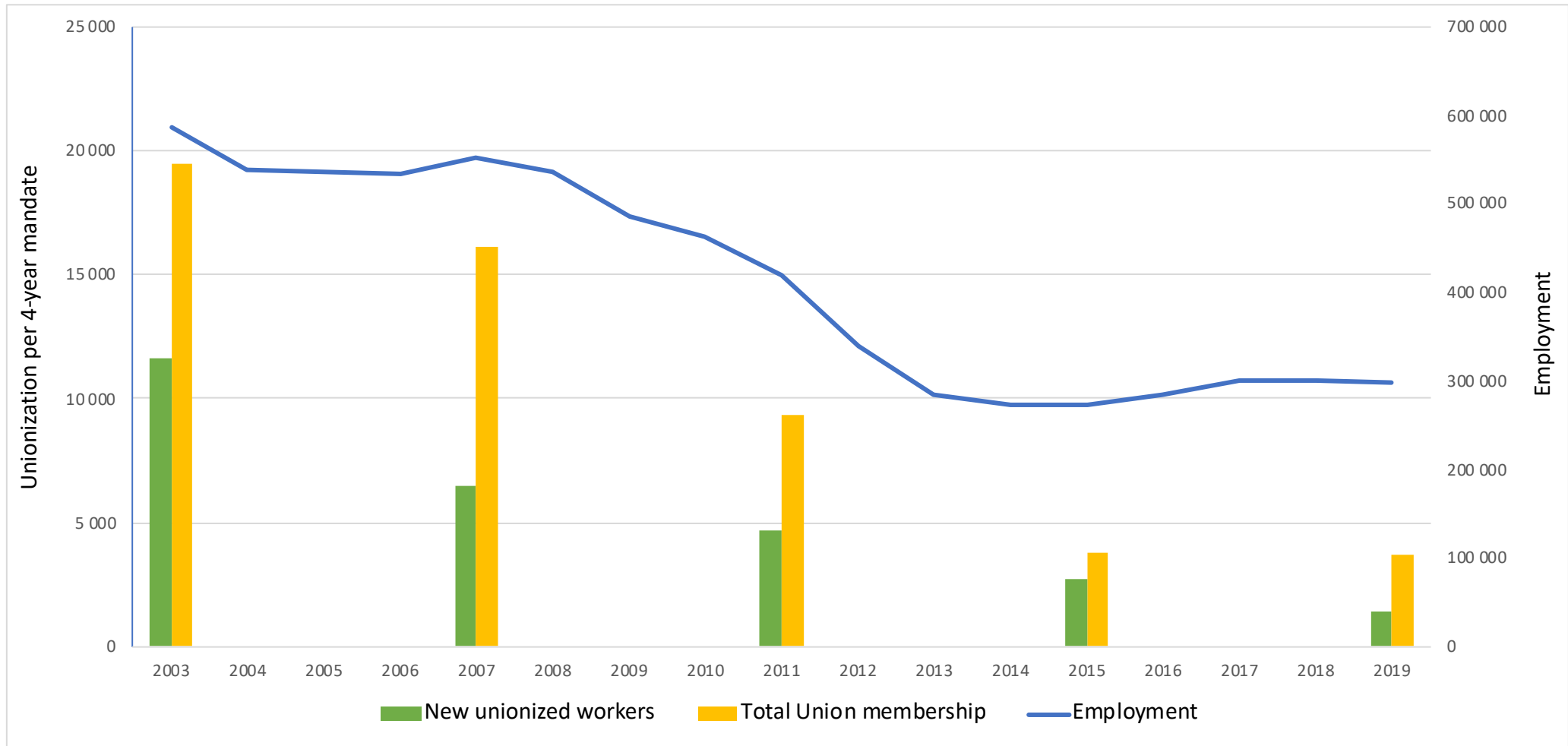


Source: Eurostat 2017, INE 2018

Collective Organization and Action

Decrease of Unionism in Construction

Fig. 5. Evolution of Unionization in the main Portuguese Construction Trade Union (CGTP-IN)



Source: CGTP Activity Reports; Eurostat LFSA_EGAN

Social-movement unionism in the Arts



- New union CENA-STE since 2011
- Different formal and informal collective organizations
- Mutual support systems between organizations and workers to address the basic survival needs
- Grants created by more consolidated organizations to aid other workers in the field at times of crisis
- Inter-organizational collaboration - Sharing space and other resources between organizations
- Protest and collective action
- Different forms of cooperation and struggle that go beyond the arts field, through the collective organizing of precarious workers as a whole (e.g. 'Inflexible Precarious').

Concluding Remarks

- Despite representing two distinct sectors of the workforce, they present a set of similarities that challenge the possibilities of workers' organisation and mobilisation:
 - the temporary, project-based nature of work,
 - the precarious employment arrangements, often informal/ illegal;
 - the mobile nature of work activities, not linked to a fixed workplace.
 - associated to precarious organizing
- These workers and their organizations make a dense case for observing simultaneously the **ongoing transformations and precarization processes in the world of work** and, on the other hand, **contemporary forms of workers' collective organization**, as well as the challenges and constraints they face.
- **Next steps:** In-depth analysis of collective forms workers' organization.

Thank You!

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