

Concept Paper

House of Golden Records: Portugal's Independent Record Stores (1998–2020) †

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† The title refers to the Golden Records, two phonograph records included aboard Voyager 1 and Voyager 2, both launched in 1977. The records intended to communicate a story of our world to extraterrestrials, with pictures and songs, such as Johnny B. Goode, the Brandenburg Concerto, as well greetings and several traditional songs from all over the world.

Abstract: In this article, we explore the importance of Portuguese independent record stores by highlighting their role as catalysts of scenes and sociabilities, specifically in the major cities of Lisbon and Porto. We examine how these stores can be understood not only as spaces of consumption, but also as places where rituals are enacted and communities of taste are built. We focus on several levels of analysis: the emergence of a new economic rationale based on curation and collecting, the vinyl revival and the stores' complex relationship with the technological and digital revolution. The methodology used is ethnographic analysis, with observations carried out in ten stores, complemented by interviews with owners and customers. We demonstrate that record stores began to offer not only objects for purchase, but experiences associated with cultural objects and new cultural practices based on the valorization of the object and craftsmanship, as well as the phenomenon of curation in the cultural world. We then analyse independent record stores as spaces of resistance against the dematerialization of music. The emergence of a new aspirational economy is explored, based on curation and on being in the present, rebuffing the Veblenian rationale of ostentation. In music scenes, curation demands legitimacy, so in the independent record stores studied, curation strategies are developed on three levels: spatial, individual and local. In the third section, we examine independent record stores as spaces of rituals because they combine the existence of a totem, the relevance of a space loaded with symbolic density and the presence of social actors who carry out the rituals in this symbolic space—that is, social actors with subcultural capital in the music scene(s). In the last section, we dissect the relationship between independent record stores and their local context, exploring issues of local curation, in particular, the legitimacy associated with belonging to a specific place.

Keywords: independent record stores; curation; post-Veblenian aspirational economy; vinyl; community of tastes; Portuguese musical scene



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1. Introduction

In this article we explore the importance of independent record shops in Portugal, aiming to fill a gap in the sociology of culture that is more concerned with more “cultivated” forms of culture. From our perspective, record shops are an extremely rich object of sociological analysis: the shops are places where we can analyse specific scenes and sociabilities, specifically in the big cities of Lisbon and Porto, and examine how these shops can be understood not only as spaces of consumption, but also as places where rituals are performed, and communities of taste are constituted. But not only, since in the nightclub shops it is possible to study a new and profound change at the economic level, with the emergence of a post-Veblenian aspirational economy, i.e., a new economic logic based on curation and collection, which puts into question the old economic logics of *homo economicus* and economic rationality.

Before proceeding with our analysis, it is important to establish a framework for our object of study. If we go back to the origins, reasons and purposes behind its creation, we can identify a range of options ranging from the need to fill gaps in the market (AnAnAnA) to the need to make a difference in the commercial sector of the city (Musak), going through the strong musical taste embodied in a fanzine (AnAnAnA), a strong involvement and personal taste in music (Carbono, Discolecção, Flur, Muzak and Louie Louie), the need to constitute an offer of second-hand records and vinyl (Carbono, Louie Louie e Muzak), the existence of an informal experience of buying and selling records at underground and alternative fairs [1] (Discolecção), the need for investment in the emerging DJ market or, even, the offer of music niches that do not exist in the traditional commercial circuit (Raw Material). Within the subgenre of pop rock, the different stores have chosen to specialize in important subgenres with the intent to attract specific market niches. We have AnAnAnA's commitment to experimental music and alternative rock, Flur's link to new trends in dance music and experimental music, with its anchoring in the 60s and 70s of the 20th century and progressive rock of the Discolecção. In terms of human resources [1], we can delineate three profiles: a set of stores like Discolecção and Muzak that have a minimum degree of formalization and are staffed solely by their owners; a medium-sized profile where the staff number six to eight (Carbono, Flur, Louie Louie, Matéria Prima); and, finally, there is the case of Jo-Jo's, which given its persistence over time, presents a more complex organizational profile, namely due to the existence of two profiles at the same time—the virtual store and the physical store. It should be noted that except for Discolecção and Muzak, all the stores have been focusing on online sales, sales by postal mail and on promoting new launches and sales through a weekly newsletter.

The methodological approach, which spanned 2009–2021, is ethnographic analysis, using direct observation of ten stores (six in Lisbon and four in the city of Porto) and 30 semi-structured interviews with 12 owners and/or managers and 18 customers [1,2], followed by a content analysis¹. As far as the methodological process is concerned, we should mention that the participants were selected on the basis of a snowball sample arising from a long-term study of the Portuguese alternative rock sub-field between 1980 and 2010. The record shops and their social actors integrate this subfield, as we have demonstrated on several occasions [3]. In other words, based on the interviews carried out, we selected the ten most relevant record shops, both in terms of the content analysis that was subsequently carried out on the interviews and in terms of geographical specificities. Let us note that six shops were selected in Lisbon and only four in Porto, something that has to do with territorial, cultural, and social specificities of the Portuguese cultural, creative and urban fabric. Regarding the content analysis, we carried out a traditional reading analysis of the interviews using general framework analysis and then used the NVivo software to synthesize the most frequent themes, categories, and sub-categories. Thus, our interview script focused on two major themes, namely, the perception of consumption, tastes and accommodations of social agents within the cultural field and in relation to the urban fabric as well as music in ways of life and everyday connections.

To give a broad overview of the socio-demographic data of our interviewees, we can state that it is a relational space dominated by the 30-year-old generation, closely followed by 40-year-old generation. It is clearly a masculine group, which corresponds to the gendered nature of the space of alternative rock in general, and which in Portugal assumes almost exclusive values from the point of view of the male presence, at least with regard to the older generations. It is a group with strong academic skills, given that most of the interviewees have a university degree. At the same time, professional resources are markedly important, as the overwhelming majority of respondents are specialists in the intellectual and scientific professions. Over the last few decades, the music world has changed profoundly, and record stores have had to keep up with that evolution. Since the 1990s, large companies such as Amazon have appeared, illegal downloads and software such as Napster have proliferated and the reality of streaming platforms has become all-pervasive. The business strategy of record stores has had to change [4]. As we will

see, record stores started to offer not only objects for purchase, but also experiences with those cultural objects, with different layers of meaning associated with stories and new cultural practices based on the valorization of the object and craftsmanship, as well as the phenomenon of curation in the cultural world [5]. With this in mind, the scientific and analytical scope of this article is the demonstration of and reflection on the elements and trajectories that lead to record shops being seen as ritualistic places of consumption and fruition, that is, we intend to demonstrate that, despite living in an era of profound dematerialisation of music and musical consumption, record shops remain as central spaces of assimilation, dissemination, consumption and even, in some cases, of artistic-musical production. Thus, record shops emerge as a kind of subfield of action.

This article is structured as follows. The first section starts with theoretical background. In the second section, we analyse independent record stores as spaces of resistance against the dematerialisation of music. We explore the emergence of a new aspirational economy based on curation and on being in the know that rebuffs the Veblenian rationale of ostentation. In music scenes, curation demands legitimacy, and in the independent record stores studied, curation strategies have been developed on three levels: spatial, individual and local [6]. This section analyses individual and spatial curation. In the third section, we examine independent record stores as spaces of rituals in line with the work of Durkheim [7] because they combine three central issues: the existence of a *totem*, which in this case is vinyl; the relevance of a space loaded with symbolic density; and the presence of social actors who carry out the rituals in this symbolic space—that is, social actors with subcultural capital in the music scene(s). In the last section, we explore the relationship of independent record stores with their local context in terms of venues, other record stores and nightlife spaces. We should also note, albeit briefly, that the following sections are the result of a theoretical-empirical intersection that, in turn, meets the cementation of a grounded theory, from which a shuttle between theory and data, as well as their subsequent analysis, is presupposed. We examine local curation—that is, the legitimacy associated with belonging to a specific place, as in the case of Lisbon, which is now understood in the specialized media as a mandatory stopping point for crate-digging and as the gateway for African music to Europe [8].

2. Conceptualization

The persistence of independent record stores is closely entwined with the perseverance of vinyl. Discourses on the resurgence of vinyl are well known, usually accompanied by statistics indicating how sales have grown significantly. However, these numbers explain little or nothing about vinyl. We can only understand this reality if we observe vinyl as a cultural object that has absorbed a range of symbolic narratives and has become prominent in the new aspirational economy. Vinyl also needs to be seen as an iconic signifier with growing cultural and symbolic value, both within and outside the musical field [6,9].

This leads us to another question. The persistence of vinyl cannot be explained by economic reasons, and it cannot be explained solely through the narrative of nostalgia of post-industrial societies or ageing baby boomers [10]. We must also see this cultural fruition as a strategy of cultural distinction and, above all, as an instrument of identity-projection [11]. It has become an object that is perhaps obsolete but increasingly distinguishes true music lovers. Following a Durkheimian approach, we can see that inherent in these processes are rituals and collective experiences that maintain and reinforce a sense of belonging. These rituals require at least a sacred space and a totem. In this analysis, the sacred space is the record store and the totems are vinyl records [12]. A feedback cycle is created: actors consume these cultural goods in a ritualized process, in a place loaded with symbolic density, such as record stores, thus reinforcing their sense of difference and belonging to a community that shares distinct cultural tastes and dispositions.

A few factors are needed for this to work entirely. A store and a random cultural object are not enough. First, the totem must be regarded as something different: vinyl is not unique, yet in the face of the intangibility of the digital, it becomes special and (relatively)

exclusive. Because it is considered ‘obsolete’ and ‘outdated’ by the public, it carries a distinctive meaning, accentuated by the fact that virtually all current editions are limited or produced as a small run [13]. Second, the totem has to entail some difficulty and requires a certain dexterity. Vinyl does this: it is not enough to press a button for the music to start; a whole process is implied for it to be enjoyed, which is a (sub)-ritual. Third, the totem has to communicate a sense of belonging, a (historical) narrative of one community, which in this case is vinyl’s ability to point out historical milestones of a certain music scene, be it underground, punk or jazz [14]. All this makes vinyl an unparalleled subcultural totem. On the other hand, actors with high subcultural capital need to exist in the places of celebration, the record stores, and be recognized as such by other members of the local music scene—that is, individuals with subcultural skills and knowledge to guide both regular customers and neophytes. As we will see, several employees of these stores, besides being *music lovers*, are also actors with subcultural trajectories, who are making a living in these places and translating their subcultural capital into professional careers [15,16]. These actors are essential for independent record stores, where their knowledge is highly valued. In other words, it is not enough to have the place and the object; it is also crucial to have someone to ‘guide’ the ritual.

3. Theoretical Framework

Record stores have had to reinvent themselves. We could talk about the strategies that each store has implemented, such as creating online stores or advertising on social media, but that would only tell half the story. We are facing a revolution in the fields of economics and taste. Andjelic [5] argues that we are in a post-Veblenian aspirational economy. If, for Veblen [17], status comes from the display of wealth, today status is linked to factors such as ethics, wellbeing, morality and concerns about the local. It is no longer about the ownership of an object, but rather possession of knowledge—the ability to know where things are made, whether they are made sustainably, what their story is, and so on. It is the need to be *in the know*. Money—always necessary—is not the key element of this new economy. A brand that only gives us economic status is no longer valuable: it also needs to give social, cultural, moral and even environmental status.

In this post-Veblenian aspirational economy, the forms of distinction also change. Bourdieu’s [18] classic work argues that social agents of dominant classes have internalized perception schemes that make them prefer established cultural practices and goods. More recently, Tony Bennett et al. [19] have demonstrated how established cultural styles have shifted in contemporary societies towards omnivorous forms of cultural consumption. However, these studies only focus on the aesthetic dimension and lack any analysis of the moral dimension of established cultural forms. Baumann, Kennedy and Johnston [20] consider that in order to analyse current cultural consumption patterns, we have to take into account factors such as the ‘moral signaling’ inherent in certain cultural choices. The aesthetic dimension remains, but it must be analysed together with the moral dimension. According to Puetz [21], cultural tastes are a way for actors to establish aesthetic and moral barriers. One of the main moral dimensions is the increasing valuation of the local and the material, which partly explains the survival of independent record stores. This refers not only to the value of the object that is made to last, such as vinyl, an almost handcrafted object, but also the less tangible value of its purchase in small, local, independent stores anchored in a community [22].

Andjelic [4] tells us that the most important aspect is to know *what* to buy, to show that we are *in the know*. This is easier said than done, especially in an age of abundance brought about by the internet and social media [23]. Which record should one buy among the millions available? What songs should one listen to among the millions on Spotify? The answer is curation: a key task in this post-Veblenian aspirational economy. It is a filtering process based on an appraisal of what is culturally and morally consecrated [24]. For those who do not want to fly blind, it is crucial to turn to these new cultural mediators, namely record stores and record store owners.

At this point, we have to ask: what is curation and what activities does it encompass? For Hracs and Jansson [25], it is one of those concepts that almost all of us understand to a point, but the definition of which is difficult to definitively establish. However, we can say that the idea of curation has changed in recent times. It has been usually linked to art, museums, preservation and archiving, but today it means practices such as the selection, evaluation, presentation and approval of cultural goods [26]. In the world of music, the development of new digital technologies, the spread of digital piracy and subsequent appearance of streaming since the 1990s have revolutionized the way music is produced, distributed and consumed. Musical curation, like curation in other areas, has gained importance and become a form of distinction and of social and economic competition among various actors. New forms of curation have emerged, such as social media and algorithms, which compete with the traditional forms, such as record stores and specialized magazines. It would be a mistake to see only simple dichotomies here: the relationship between physical and digital space is not exclusive since physical spaces such as record stores can accomplish digital curation through their websites or social media pages [27].

Independent record stores in the post-Weblenian aspirational economy ultimately become seals of quality. The very size of the stores serves as a filter as the limited space means that store managers have to make decisions about what they can sell. Furthermore, customers can visit, look around, rummage through records, and talk to the employees and other customers. Analyses of curation sometimes neglect the fact that curation is only possible if it is associated with legitimacy based on the possession of subcultural capital. This legitimacy may have three levels: spatial, individual or local. The first level depends on the reputation and history of each record store. There are stores that achieve prominent status within local and national scenes, so their cultural goods immediately bear a seal of quality. This status may be explained by the store's history, which makes consumers see it as a middle ground between a store and a museum; on the other hand, it may refer to the appreciation of its status as a promoter of a specific musical genre, as expressed by the following interviewees:

People have fewer and fewer record consumption habits, but AnAnAnA² is still an important name in music distribution. Even if people don't go to the store to buy the record, the fact that they know it is distributed by AnAnAnA is usually synonymous with quality. (Martinho, 42 years, non-university educated, record store employee, Lisbon metropolitan area).

Where you see alternative record stores you think spirit of adventure and love of music. It often means good prices, a wide offer within their music labels, service by connoisseurs. But don't talk about easy money. It was a gamble and a challenge, but it's going well. (Lourenço, 49 years, university graduate, record store owner, Porto).

Tubitek helped the musical education of many people, who spent hours in the store with us. We shared conversations about music and bands. It was a constant exchange of ideas . . . We have a fantastic variety of albums and special editions, back catalogue, with things that disappeared years ago, but we still have it. There are people who go to Fnac³, don't find what they want, walk down the street and they're in Tubitek⁴. People come into the store and are amazed by the variety. (Pedro, 51 years, university graduate, record store owner and customer, Porto).

This new economy, especially in music scenes, is concerned primarily with symbolic capital. This implies continuous, meticulous work to ensure that the message is received in a certain way, that it is perceived as 'cool' and subculturally legitimate. There are barriers that cannot be crossed, otherwise stores and the music scene run the risk of becoming 'symbolically polluted' [28]. As one record store customer in Lisbon told us:

Sometimes they are a tourist trap. They have a poor and overpriced selection of vinyls. The most critical thing is sometimes the service—very unfriendly, not geared towards the

customer's taste, stuck-up in matters of taste, quite elitist even. (Valério, 58 years, middle school, record store customer, Lisbon).

Independent record stores are more than just places where people can buy music: they are small communities of taste. Success or failure is based on social ties and bonds of friendship, which build a specific identity for each store, at the same time highlighting a distance from economic relationships. The stores are based on a social rationale of participation in an interwoven fabric of musical and social relations. When the members of a music scene feel a barrier has been crossed—for example, that a store is more concerned with selling to tourists—the reaction is quick and merciless, as shown by the above quote.

As mentioned previously, these stores also engage in curation strategies outside the walls of the shop. The best-known means to do this is via digital strategies, such as the creation of a website, a social media presence, blogs and newsletters, among others. We can also mention more 'classical' strategies, which may involve collaboration with specialized magazines or radio programmes. These strategies are used in conjunction with curation in the physical space, which highlights how the idea of a sharp divide between the physical and the digital is too simplistic:

Money is made, but there are much more profitable businesses with less effort ... A few years ago, having a record store meant ordering records from a record company, waiting for them to arrive, cataloguing and displaying them. Not today. Today, there's a much more complex job involved in making a record available on the internet: you have to post all the information, the cover, the line-up, the 30-s track, the synopsis of each album. All that work has to be done in the background. (Delfim, 50 years, non-university educated, record store owner, Porto).

It's not with online commerce that we get by, but with online promotion. We only update the site once a week: when we launch the newsletter, we post the newsletter articles on the site ... the internet is very important, and we put excerpts of the tracks online so people can listen to them. That didn't used to happen before and I think it's important for people to have an idea. It's not only through the text that you get an idea of the record. Listening to it clarifies everything. (Rui, 52 years, university graduate, record store customer, Lisboa).

Stores make use of new digital technologies to spread their subcultural credibility internationally and participate in the global economy. In a country with high rates of emigration, such as Portugal, a market opportunity has opened up. Delfim tells us that much of Jo-Jo's ⁵ sales are made to the Portuguese diaspora in France, Canada and the United Kingdom. On the other hand, as mentioned in the two previous quotes, the internet complements this work. Customers go to the site, obtain an idea of the catalogue and arrive at the store 'prepared'.

The second level of legitimacy is individual. Stores and venues have a history that can be transformed into subcultural legitimacy. In many cases, some stores become synonymous with certain music genres. Techno? Carpet & Snares ⁶. Rock'n'roll in Lisbon? T'N'T ⁷. However, legitimacy takes different forms depending on the customers. There is a legitimacy for non-regular clients, for tourists who know the stores through the media, which for example, may list the top five or ten of the best record stores to visit (which we can call meta-curation or a curation of curation). Any employee of one of these stores gains legitimacy just by being behind the cash register. Furthermore, there is legitimacy that comes from belonging to the local music scene, which appeals to other members of the scene. Here it is necessary to be recognized in the music scene, to hold subcultural capital, as this is what gives its bearer their status [13].

Curation gains importance if it takes place in person. Customers seek the suggestions of store employees due to their subcultural trajectory, their belonging in the music scene as DJs, members of a band, or simply being a music lover recognized by their peers [15,16]. Our field research found open relationships, especially among the regular customers, that involved joking, discussions and lots of advice. The stores, and these employees and

owners specifically, are understood to be information hubs or music libraries. It is also interesting that in the interviews we conducted with record store owners or partners, they all had a subcultural trajectory and were recognized as important agents in the scene [1]:

There are sellers who go out of their way to find the record we want. There are even some who are like a human Spotify and suggest something we don't know, but that they somehow guessed we'd like (and they're never wrong). Or they just talk and give us kilograms of wisdom about the Lisbon punk scene of the 1980s. (Tomé, 45 years, middle school, record store customer, Lisbon)

As we can see, curation is the ability to become a 'human Spotify', someone whose subcultural capital means they are able to convert an immensity of musical possibilities into suggestions appropriate to each customer. However, it is also the ability to establish connections between the cultural goods they sell and a story, endowing them with broader meanings anchored in stories and mythologies of Portuguese youth subcultures. Even if they do not find what they are looking for, the customer is always left with 'a different experience', and experience is the essence of the new aspirational economy, as we have seen. These experiences can be extended to the various employees in the stores, especially if they have a subcultural background, either as DJs or musicians.

This is partly explained by the ability to convert subcultural capital into subcultural or DIY careers [3,16]. Many members of subcultures choose jobs that allow them more time for their creative passions over greater economic comfort. Similarly, we can see here the combination of a bohemian lifestyle, love of the work and a reflexive strategy to deal with the precariousness of the labour market.

Finally, individual legitimacy is a double-edged sword for individual record stores, especially when dealing with customers who are members of the music scene. In many cases, a customer's connection is made with the employee, who welcomes them, gives them suggestions again and again, and with whom they end up developing a friendly and reciprocal relationship. However, when the employee decides to leave their job, this can create problems for the record store. When they decide to quit their job and open a record store themselves, the situation is even more critical. As one of our interviewees admitted, the departure of two employees meant that an entire clientele went with them. Consequently, the store had to review its entire musical offering and specialize in other musical genres to not compete with the store where the two former employees now worked.

Filipe was a long-time customer of ours. When the other employee left, we spoke to Filipe, and he said he would love to work with us. We already knew each other quite well, and we thought it would be an added value for the store because we'd be able to keep our clients. (Martinho, 42 years, non-university educated, record store employee, Lisbon)

4. The Independent Record Stores as a Space for Collective Rituals

As mentioned in the state-of-the-art section, independent record stores can be understood as ritualistic spaces. We now intend to focus on the totem: the vinyl. What led to the recovery of this object? It is undeniable that today there is an appreciation of the past [29,30]. This is not surprising: the past has never been more present in our daily lives. This promotes romantic readings of the past, which is seen as a golden age where there was a real authenticity and engagement between fans and music.

Vinyl responds to this romantic vision of the past. As Andjelic [5] explains, regarding the post-Weberian approach, contemporary cultural consumption also places more importance on the stories and experiences that an object offers us than its actual price. What consumers gain with vinyl is an entry into a specialized mode of musical consumption, a community of tastes that frames vinyl fruition practices as having a higher social status because it implies being able to express musical sensibilities in innovative ways [31].

For Hayes [9], this is a response to the constant novelties of the music industry. There is a need to create alternative modes of consumption that imply a deeper appreciation of music, which cannot be dissociated from the search for materiality in an era of musical

digitalization. It is the aesthetic beauty of the cover, naturally, but also the experience itself and the demand for attention. One has to take the record out of its sleeve, listen to the record, hear the little noises that the vinyl player makes when it plays the record, turn it over, put it back. These aspects are associated with the issue of vinyl consumption as a ritualistic practice and, as an integral aspect of this experience, a passion for the imperfections [9]:

I think vinyl is an important element for purists and the new generation is also picking up on vinyl a little bit, interestingly. I'm not sure what the reason is, but I think it might be the cult of the object. It's a big, beautiful thing. Normally vinyl editions, nowadays, are beautifully made, they're special. You open them up and they have a lot of information. It's not only about the music itself, but also more about the object. (Mateus, 42 years, non-university educated, record store customer, Porto)

Vinyl started to reappear with the spread of the CD. That is, the CD, from the moment it entered the large supermarkets and was treated not as a cultural product, but as a product for the masses, certain music lovers hated that. They don't like to mix things, a CD can't be bought in the same shopping cart as potatoes and milk, even though it is an effective purchase, something the buyer needs. Music stores, just like bookstores, have always been seen as proper spaces, worthy of culture, where people look for and feel good listening to the record, reading the book. (Bernardo, 45 years, university graduate, record store customer, Porto)

Legitimacy is a fundamental condition of this experience. Delfim tells us about the cultural devaluation of buying music in the same place you buy potatoes; we can also talk about the devaluation of downloading entire albums on Spotify. Vinyl, on the other hand, is about taking a step back and focusing on one of the main ideas of the new post-Weberian economy: that less is more. It is about seeking a greater engagement in the experience of listening to music [31].

It seems a good time to talk about the sacred space in which the ritual is performed, which is the independent record store, a space with its own language and practices. With a greater or lesser history in the music scene, such stores serve as a repository of popular music history [4,32]. One of the best ways to observe these aspects is through the aesthetics of the stores, the way they seek to create an 'authentic' atmosphere [1]. These independent stores cannot compete in price with chains such as Amazon or Fnac, so they have to offer something different. In this case, they are places where experiences are had and rituals are performed.

Record shopping is a multi-sensory experience, and this refers partly to the aesthetic layout of the stores. First, we always have background music, which in many cases signals the musical specialization of the store; second, we have the crates full of records, stacked against the walls, scattered on the floor, everywhere. These crates are arranged in different ways and are sought after by different types of consumers [6]. Take the case of Carbono⁸. Right at the entrance, the walls are covered in vinyls, band posters and stickers; there are record players and a coffee machine. Then we have a store full of crates—both of vinyls and CDs—divided by labels: punk, African, soundtracks and so on—very broad labels. At Flur, the aesthetic is more organized. It is a large, well-lit space, with vinyl crates on the left, all separated by very specific musical genres, such as Canadian bands, bands from São Tomé and so on, with the rarest and most sought-after vinyls displayed in rows of three on the wall; to the right there are CD crates.

Generally, the most expensive LPs are displayed on the walls or on the highest crates; however, for a crate-digger, the gems are in the crates on the floor or even in the attics. It is here that one sees collectors spending hours squatting quietly looking for finds and bargains. It is not possible to listen to these cheaper LPs before buying them, so some subcultural capital is required to evaluate them. As the crates are rarely organized and a bit of everything appears, it is also possible to see the cohabitation of the physical and the

digital. When customers discover an LP that catches their eye, but they do not know the musician or band, they search quickly on their smartphone, read about the band, listen a little, then consider whether this new acquisition is worth having.

Andjelic [5] sees collectionism as one of the main activities of aspirational markets. A collection is not just the accumulation of LPs, but a narrative, where the symbolic value of the objects is related to the stories and adventures they (the collectors/customers) have had in building the collection. Straw [33] does not speak of collections, but rather of music libraries that are essential to the identity construction of a real fan. These libraries are used as a basis for social interactions among actors who share a common interest. In counterpoint to the traditional economy, the value of each object is socially constructed by a community of music lovers.

In the stores we analysed, it was mainly in *Discolecção*⁹ in Lisbon and in *Matéria Prima*¹⁰ in Porto that we found the biggest focus on the collectors' market. There is a concern in these two stores with meeting the specific needs of this group of consumers—be it rare records, special and limited editions, or all the merchandise that exists around music collecting, such as t-shirts, figurines, magazines and books, music memorabilia and so on [34].

The vast majority of our customers are music collectors and I think that specialized stores work more and more with this type of customer. We have been having an increase in vinyl sales precisely because the collector likes that beautiful object. Sometimes the collector buys the CD and buys the vinyl. The CD is to listen to, and the vinyl is to keep and to enjoy . . . I think that most of our customers are collectors. (Martinho, 42 years, non-university educated, record store employee, Lisbon).

I'm a collector, I've never got rid of a single record I've bought. I used to record a lot of music on the radio and didn't buy music and I've never been in the habit of buying singles. I am a vinyl fan, I have never created a relationship with CDs, I only buy them as a last resort. I buy music at Flur and on the internet and in stores and I also buy whenever I travel; I've been to New York or London for music. It is always a factor to be considered when choosing trips. (Rafael, 44 years, DJ, attended university, record store customer, Lisbon)

Going back to the link between the object and digital, some customers put aside this crate-digging practice and go directly to what they want. We found that this is because they first visit the store's website or Discogs, an important tool for the crate-digger, which allows them to discover the store's stock, prices and reviews. If some customers spend their time alone looking for records, many more use the stores as social spaces for a community of tastes. This can be seen in the interactions they establish with the staff and other customers, and in the discussions they have about music that involve musical advice about bands, novelties, vinyls and even about other record stores worth a visit. Note that these interactions are two-way: it is not uncommon for customers to give advice to storekeepers, be it about new bands, records to be had or collections for sale. If Hendricks [35] is right when talking about a ritualistic dimension in entering a store, choosing a record and going home to listen to it, we think this is only half the story, as we cannot ignore the close ties that are generated in these spaces. 'Musicscapes' are created here, since the regular visits to these stores, the purchase of vinyls and the conversations about music are all materialized manifestations of a community of tastes based on an idea of authenticity [35].

Like any ritualistic space, record stores have to have visual appeal. We can understand this just by looking at the walls of the stores, with photographs of bands, posters of concerts or tours, and LPs on the walls. Jansson and Hracs [24] look at walls as an archive of popular culture and knowledge. They are also a way of transmitting a form of subcultural capital, of musical embodiment. Many are filled with albums; others serve as a framework for the owners' biographical soundtrack [36]. At *Muzak*¹¹ in Porto, the aesthetics are very elaborate. One part of the walls is lined with wallpaper imitating a forest, in a yellow tone

as if it were a sunny day, in which there are records on a lower level, looking as if they are on the floor of the forest, while other records have been placed on the branches of the trees. The idea is of a psychedelic picnic or the dream of any vinyl collector. On the other hand, the walls of Porto Calling¹², also in Porto, are decorated with references to favourite bands; Louie Louie's walls are covered in posters, concert news and newspaper clippings. If Porto Calling is concerned with creating a more specific environment closely linked to rock'n'roll, Louie Louie¹³ is interested in emphasizing the store's discographic diversity: there are posters as disparate as Ramones and Madonna. As we noted in a previous study [2], this is a strategy that first, acts as an extension of the records on sale, and second, creates a familiar environment, as if a person were in their bedroom, adorned with the posters of their favourite bands.

As such, we can look at the stores as ritualistic spaces of a community of tastes. This community is motivated only in part by nostalgia and the (re)discovery of the appeal of vinyl: the tactile pleasure of the experience of putting the music on the turntable and displaying the collection [37]. In our research, both customers and employees often highlighted that these stores made them feel 'at home'. This sense of belonging is built by the historicity of the space and the feeling of nostalgia and tradition, as well as the idea of an independent record store in this day and age, with second-hand vinyls and turntables being a symbol of resistance against digitalization and the massification of music [38]. Regular customers would be able to find the rarest records on eBay or any other website, but they would lack the sense of authenticity that stores provide and the sense of belonging offered to them by conversations, discussions and advice among customers, collectors, staff and owners [1].

5. The Place of the Independent Record Stores in the Portuguese (Trans)Local Music Scenes

We have addressed the issue of individual and spatial curation. In this section, we look at local curation. Certain places have an association with certain cultural values or practices. Bartmanski and Woodward [12] found that Berlin has become a city to visit on the global music circuit and has quickly become a stopping point for tourists and electronic music collectors. Through multiple references in the specialized or generalist media the city has become associated with a 'seal' of quality and authenticity. This is a case of local curation because if the city has a seal of quality, then what it sells or exhibits must have quality. It is interesting how this local curation, which depends greatly on the musical history of each city, also depends greatly on what we may call 'meta-curation'—that is, the valorization by the media that establishes a global curation 'championship'. If we look at some of the specialized media, there are extensive lists of the best cities or the best stores to visit for record collecting or for vinyl collectors.

In the Portuguese case, although we are analysing Lisbon and Porto, the Portuguese capital draws the most attention and a more internationally recognized local curation, as can be gauged by the number of media articles on this reality. Lisbon has quickly become an indispensable stopping point for any vinyl lover. This has occurred on two levels: first, there is the association of Lisbon with the possibility of discovering 'gems' at low prices—that is, it is an appealing place for tourists and collectors from the United States or Northern Europe with greater purchasing power compared with the Portuguese standard of living; second, in a twist of post-colonial irony, Lisbon—the former capital of the empire—is associated by the foreign media with African and Brazilian music. The Portuguese capital is the place to visit if you want to discover what is new in terms of African music and in the search for rarities, especially from the former Portuguese colonies [8]. On the other hand, the city of Porto, which is not associated with this post-colonial dimension, is still part of the global DJ circuit. This means that record stores that specialize in electronic music, such as Musak, may have a niche on which to concentrate. Portuguese record stores have taken advantage of this by developing strategies to capture this sudden interest of tourists with high purchasing power: their websites are translated into English; in many cases, their

presence on social media is in English; the spaces themselves have advertising in English; and practically all the employees and store owners are fluent in English.

We receive many foreigners, too. Many of our editions in the store are sold to foreigners. Foreigners come in, see that the store specializes in that type of music, and ask for Portuguese experimental music. We recommend our editions, obviously, and they always end up buying them. (Martinho, 42 years, non-university educated, record store employee, Lisbon metropolitan area)

Almost all the international DJs that visit Porto come here . . . Incredible as it may seem because it's already on their agenda. The DJ circuit is still more or less operating in Porto and they always end up coming here. But most of the vinyl stores, not only here in Portugal but also in Europe and the USA, don't really cultivate this DJ aspect. We clearly do. This area underneath here is practically all dedicated to this type of music and is very successful. (Raul, 57 years, university graduate, record store owner, Porto)

However, stores are still walking on thin ice by adopting these strategies. There has to be a balance between regular customers and tourists. When the former feel there is an increase in prices in an attempt to anticipate the tourists' requests, a reaction is noted. We recall the previous quote from Valério accusing a Portuguese record store of being a 'tourist trap', of having absurd prices considering Portuguese standards of living. In other words, if stores do not strike a balance between these two groups of customers, they run the risk of becoming 'symbolically polluted' in the local music scene [28].

So far, we have discussed local curation created by the media and with a focus on the globalization of music tourism [39]. However, we cannot ignore local curation associated with presence in a local scene. As in the Berlin case, there are clusters in Porto and Lisbon with a high concentration of cultural and musical offerings: record stores, cafés and bars, publishing houses and so on. Areas such as Bairro Alto ¹⁴ in Lisbon or Galerias Miguel Bombarda ¹⁵ in Porto serve as curation sites for subcultural or cosmopolitan cultural practices. This raises a question: if many stores are concentrated in only one area, will this not provoke competition and rivalry? We did not find that this was the case in the Portuguese reality, but rather, resulted in a division of the musical offerings. If we follow an ideal-type approach, we find two main types in Lisbon and Porto. The first is stores that invest in having everything—all musical genres, novelties and oldies, vinyls and CDs, new and second-hand records. This is the case of Carbono, in Lisbon, and Jo-Jo's and Louie Louie, both in Porto. The second is stores that specialize and focus on markets, whether a certain musical genre or only vinyl. The strategy is to concentrate only on a niche, and hence not compete with the large stores such as Fnac or Amazon, or with the other independent record stores. We have the case of Tabatô Records ¹⁶, which specializes in African music, Glam-O-Rama ¹⁷, dedicated to metal music, and Porto Calling, which only sells vinyl. In essence, these stores seek to be intimate spaces for lovers of each of these musical genres, and to appeal to different tastes and ways of listening to and buying music [12,35]:

In terms of range, it should be noted that this store sells *fado* and Portuguese popular music, John Cage, Beethoven, it is a wide-ranging store because it has to be that way . . . we cannot be elitist because today the public is a wider public, of all styles, including our emigration, which is already an interesting part of our sales, namely France, Canada, the United States, England, Brazil too. (David, 53 years, record store employee, Porto)

What is going to happen—and we are already starting to see this in terms of the chain stores—is a reduction in the supply of records. Fnac has been gradually reducing its offerings. Just this week it made some changes in Chiado and reduced the records section; the big chains will probably stop selling records and small, specialized stores will appear in various cities—for example, in Lisbon in the last two years, while before there was only Carbono, Flur, AnAnAnA,

Simbiose and King Size, which later closed, Cognoscitiva has appeared, Vinyl Experience¹⁸ in Bairro Alto, Matéria Prima, Trem Azul¹⁹. Three or four other small stores have appeared. The small stores are becoming more specialized, and they have to know how to specialize because if they all have the same things it is also complicated. (Martinho, 42 years, non-university educated, record store employee, Lisbon)

The fact that Rua do Almada is so well stocked has helped a lot, and in my opinion has been good for everyone. It's a question of healthy competition, and even more spaces should appear. Whoever visits one store ends up visiting the others, particularly on Saturdays, which is the busiest day, with many tourists, especially Galicians. (Lourenço, 49 years, university graduate, record store owner, Porto)

Consequently, we found that competition between Portuguese record shops is non-existent. It was possible to verify the existence of friendly relationships between several record shop owners, guided by frequent visits to each other's shops to chat or buy records of specific music genres from each independent shop. There is, therefore, no perception of commercial competition, which would be extremely harsh in a small cultural market such as Portugal, and in a small geographical space of usually one or two streets.

On the other hand, to increase their visibility as well as to create synergies with other spaces of the local scene, record stores have strategies to either increase their clientele or 'reward' their most loyal customers. We can see this in the concern to establish relationships with relevant cultural institutions, such as the Serralves Museum²⁰ in the city of Porto, and partnerships with local bars and bands. In many cases, there is a kind of flyer 'exchange', in which the bars put flyers in the record stores and vice versa. In addition, initiatives such as Record Store Day happen regularly, as well as performances, live concerts and exhibitions, among other events. Certain stores realize that it is necessary to simultaneously appeal to a wider audience, but without ever alienating their most loyal audience. Louie Louie, for example, regularly invites some of its regular customers to play music in the store and exhibited a private record collection with some of the rarest Portuguese records.

Finally, it is important to point out that the narrative of musical 'itineraries' in geographical groupings does not always work as one might think. For example, Flur, is located in a privileged area of Baixa/Chiado, with well-known and popular restaurants and bars, and close to emblematic places such as the Lux. However, we have to question whether its location in a Lisbon cultural 'itinerary' such as the Lux benefits the shop because when Flur is open, Lux is closed and vice versa; the rhythm is different.

6. Conclusions

In a post-Weblenian aspirational economy, in which the demonstration of wealth is replaced by the demonstration of knowledge, record stores have managed to reinvent themselves. These stores existed long before the emergence of these new cultural and moral sensibilities, and have always been a space of intense sociability for members of the local scenes, but they have recently experienced a relegitimization. They have stopped selling simple cultural objects and started to engage in the curation of cultural objects loaded with stories, both collective and individual. They are seals of quality. They have started to sell experiences to their clients, felt as authentic rituals. These practices carry a lot of nostalgia and idealization about a golden age when music was more 'real', but this is not just a reaction against the digital. Record stores are not the last stronghold of musical luddites against the digital; instead, what we can see are practices inserted into a post-digital culture in which streaming coexists with the valorization and recovery of the analogue, of a musical know-how that wants more than to simply press a button or have millions of songs available on a mobile phone. In our field analysis, we saw customers and collectors spend hours crate-digging, looking for a lost 'gem' among all those vinyls, but always with the help of the smartphone connected to Discogs to help them separate the wheat from the chaff. Like practically everything nowadays, the stores are intermediate

and hybrid spaces between the physical and the digital. It is impossible to analyse this reality if we view these two dimensions as dichotomous.

In this research, we also found that, despite the growth of the curation phenomenon in the cultural world [40], there is still an appreciation of personal interactions—that is, not everyone can be a curator: curation requires legitimacy. While the spatial and local dimensions of this phenomenon are important, the individual dimension cannot be replaced by digital applications or software. Recommendations by actors with high subcultural capital are crucial for the success and distinction of record stores; however, as we saw in Martinho's quote, they are a double-edged sword: if these individuals abandon the store, and in the worst-case scenario go on to open another store, customers may leave with them. It is interesting, as noted by Jansson and Hracis [24] for the Swedish case, how streaming platforms have already started to have this concern and partner with record stores and actors with legitimacy in the scene to periodically create playlists. Although we still have no news of the same trend happening in Portugal, it is still an acknowledgement by these platforms of how necessary it is to individualize curation through recognized actors in the musical field. Basically, it is a strategy to avoid the information overload so typical of these platforms.

Finally, the greatest difficulty for record stores today, if we discount phenomena such as gentrification or increasing rents, is the difficult balance that needs to be maintained between regular customers and 'sporadic' customers, such as tourists or neophytes. As we mentioned, record stores are symbolically dense spaces, with the display of vinyls and posters on the walls, the employees with subcultural capital and so on, and all this can be intimidating for those entering, or considering entering, the store for the first time. Although many of the stores studied focus on just one niche, this does not mean that they do not want to increase their audience, hence the strategies to attract more people, such as partnerships with bars and cafes, the translation of websites and in-store advertising. As we saw above, if this is not done carefully, the stores may lose part of their subcultural legitimacy and end up symbolically polluted with the accusation of being a 'tourist trap' with stupefying prices. Perhaps this balance, between the regular and the new (or tourist) customer, between appealing to the local scene and the new wave of music tourism, is the next big issue in the ongoing struggle for survival of independent record stores in Portugal.

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Notes

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² A record store located in Lisbon, Portugal.

³ A large French retail chain specializing in selling cultural and electronic products.

- 4 A classic independent record store located in the city of Porto. It opened in the 1980s, and during that decade and the 1990s, it became a crucial place of the musical scene of the city. It closed in 2000 and reopened in 2014.
- 5 A record store located in the city of Porto. Founded in 1978, it became one of the classic record stores in the city and the country. It closed in 2017.
- 6 A record store founded in 2014 and located in Lisbon; it specializes in electronic music. It is also a label group and distribution company.
- 7 A record store located in Lisbon, which specializes in rock'n'roll music. It opened in 2013.
- 8 One of the best-known record stores in Portugal. Founded in 1993, and located in Lisbon, it initially specialized in second-hand records.
- 9 A small record store located in Lisbon, which specializes in selling second-hand vinyls.
- 10 Located in Porto, Matéria Prima is a record store that sells records, books, magazines and zines, and curates music events.
- 11 A record store established in 2000, in the city of Porto. It specializes in selling mostly second-hand records (both vinyl and CDs).
- 12 A record store based in Porto, specializing in vinyl records.
- 13 Established in 2004, in the city of Porto, this record store has a diverse portfolio, dealing with vinyl and CDs, brand new and second-hand.
- 14 Bairro Alto could be defined as Lisbon's party district, with its streets packed with bars.
- 15 A street that has dozens of art galleries and the main cultural neighbourhoods of Porto.
- 16 A record store based in Lisbon and specializing in Portuguese and tropical Groove.
- 17 Opened in 2013, this record store in Lisbon specializes in metal music.
- 18 Established in 2001, in Lisbon, its portfolio reflects the personal tastes of the owner, spanning genres from punk to funk to rock music and its sub-genres.
- 19 A now-defunct record store, based in Lisbon and dedicated to jazz music.
- 20 Serralves is a contemporary art museum located in Porto, designed by Álvaro Siza Vieira; it is one of the most important and most visited cultural institutions in Portugal.

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