

WHY (NOT) BELONG?

Determinants of membership in sociological associations: evidence from Portugal

Madalena Ramos

Iscte — University Institute of Lisbon, Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology (CIES-Iscte),
Lisbon, Portugal

Paula Urze

NOVA School of Science and Technology; Centre for the History of Science and Technology
(CIUHCT), Caparica, Portugal

Pedro Abrantes

Universidade Aberta;LE@D — Laboratory of Distance Education and eLearning, Lisbon, Portugal

Alexandra Aníbal

Lisbon City Council, Municipal Directorate for Culture, Lisbon, Portugal

Abstract Professional associations have played a central role in shaping professional status and autonomy, though their composition and relevance vary across contexts. This article examines associativism among Portuguese sociologists. Based on an online survey of 873 sociology graduates, it analyses sociodemographic, educational and professional factors associated with membership. Results show that affiliation is more frequent among older sociologists, men and PhD holders. It is also higher among those whose work matches their training, civil servants and professionals linked to academia, including grant-holders, researchers and teachers. The findings reveal a divide between academic and non-academic sociologists, with associations mainly attracting those in academic contexts. This pattern reflects a university culture that values associativism, while professionals outside academia perceive fewer tangible benefits. The article concludes with strategies to strengthen inclusiveness and relevance.

Keywords: professional associations, professions, identity, sociology, scientific community, Portugal.

Porquê (não) associar-se? Determinantes da filiação em associações de sociólogos: evidência a partir de Portugal

Resumo As associações profissionais têm desempenhado um papel central na construção do estatuto e da autonomia das profissões, embora a sua composição e relevância variem entre contextos. Este artigo analisa os fatores que influenciam o associativismo dos sociólogos portugueses. Com base num inquérito *online* a 873 diplomados em Sociologia, examinam-se os fatores sociodemográficos, educativos e profissionais associados à filiação. Os resultados mostram que esta é mais frequente entre sociólogos mais velhos, homens e doutorados. É também mais elevada entre profissionais cuja atividade está alinhada com a formação académica, funcionários públicos e pessoas ligadas ao meio académico, como bolseiros, investigadores e docentes. Estes resultados revelam uma divisão persistente entre sociólogos académicos e não académicos, com as associações a atrair sobretudo quem trabalha em contextos universitários. O artigo conclui discutindo formas de reforçar a inclusividade e a relevância das associações sociológicas.

Palavras-chave: associações profissionais, profissões, identidade, sociologia, comunidade científica, Portugal.

Pourquoi (ne pas) adhérer? Déterminants de l'adhésion aux associations sociologiques: données à partir du Portugal

Résumé Les associations professionnelles ont joué un rôle central dans la construction du statut et de l'autonomie des professions, bien que leur composition et leur pertinence varient selon les contextes. Cet article

examine les facteurs qui influencent l'engagement associatif des sociologues portugais. A partir d'une enquête en ligne auprès de 873 diplômés en sociologie, il analyse les facteurs sociodémographiques, éducatifs et professionnels associés à l'adhésion. Les résultats montrent que celle-ci est plus fréquente chez les sociologues plus âgés, les hommes et les titulaires d'un doctorat. Elle est aussi plus élevée parmi ceux dont l'activité correspond à leur formation, les fonctionnaires et les professionnels du monde académique, comme les boursiers, chercheurs et enseignants. Ces résultats révèlent une division persistante entre sociologues académiques et non académiques, les associations attirant surtout ceux qui travaillent à l'université. L'article conclut sur les moyens de renforcer l'inclusivité et la pertinence des associations sociologiques.

Mots-clés: associations professionnelles, professions, identité, sociologie, communauté scientifique, Portugal.

¿Por qué (no) afiliarse? Determinantes de la afiliación a asociaciones sociológicas: evidencia desde Portugal

Resumen Las asociaciones profesionales han desempeñado un papel central en la construcción del estatus y la autonomía de las profesiones, aunque su composición y relevancia varían según los contextos. Este artículo examina los factores que influyen en el asociacionismo de los sociólogos portugueses. A partir de una encuesta en línea a 873 graduados en Sociología, se analizan los factores sociodemográficos, educativos y profesionales asociados a la afiliación. Los resultados muestran que esta es más frecuente entre sociólogos de mayor edad, hombres y doctores. También es más elevada entre quienes tienen una actividad alineada con su formación, los funcionarios públicos y los profesionales del ámbito académico, como becarios, investigadores y docentes. Estos resultados revelan una división persistente entre sociólogos académicos y no académicos, ya que las asociaciones atraen sobre todo a quienes trabajan en la universidad. El artículo concluye discutiendo formas de reforzar la inclusividad y la relevancia de las asociaciones sociológicas.

Palabras-clave: asociaciones profesionales, profesiones, identidad, sociología, comunidad científica, Portugal.

Introduction

The rise of professional bodies which require highly codified knowledge and provide distinct status and some level of autonomy in relation to their members is a key feature of modern societies (Abbott, 1988). This movement includes both normative and ideological elements (Evetts, 2003) and relies on specialised institutions, initially nationwide, recognised and influencing state agencies (Brudney and Hebert, 1987), and increasingly integrated into international organisations (Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2012). Universities play a central role, especially in training and certifying new members, but collective bodies with territorial coverage have also been crucial, despite the complex relations between them (Park, Sine and Tolbert, 2011; Nerland and Karseth, 2015).

In many cases, they have a state monopoly on legitimate practice in some professional categories, meaning that all of those who want to perform these roles have to become members of (and to be accepted into) the professional bodies or associations (designations vary according to the country), in spite of variations between statist, corporatist and liberal countries (Loveridge, 1983). The cases of law and medicine were paradigmatic, and were followed most recently by many other professions. In other cases, such as sociology in many countries, this closure is not apparent, but associations (or societies) have been founded to promote, develop and regulate its practice, often combining the scientific and the professional dimensions. Since participation in those associations is usually voluntary, our article

is focused on the following question: What leads sociology graduates to join scientific/professional associations? Or, in other terms, which groups tend to stay apart and why?

To answer this question, we provide an international literature review and an overview about the sociologists' associativism in the context of the development of this field in Portugal, followed by the methodology and main findings of a national survey conducted among sociology graduates. We then discuss the implications of these results in light of the existing research. The aim of our contribution is to foster debate on the current state of sociology and inform strategies for its future development.

Like other modern sciences and professions, the development of sociology was interwoven with the upsurge of collective bodies of people devoted to this field. Frequently, such groups assumed the shape of national associations, although their consolidation was complex and varied considerably between countries, and has been increasingly influenced by global dynamics (Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2012). As noted by Barbeito Iglesias (2021), although the first embryonic associations and societies of sociologists emerged in Europe towards the end of the nineteenth century, supporting the dissemination and institutionalisation of sociology as a scientific discipline, they faced many difficulties in their institutionalisation and attraction of the different agents dedicated to this field. In turn, the American association, formed in the early twentieth century, once professorships at various universities had been firmly established, was dominated from the very beginning by the academic dimension of sociological work, gaining considerable dynamics and organisation. With the central role of the United States in the world, especially following World War II, this model dominated the expansion of sociology and the emergence of international associations dedicated to this subject. A survey conducted among the management structures of forty European national sociological associations allowed this diversity to be mapped, both in terms of foundation date (one is a hundred years old, others only emerged in the twenty-first century) and in terms of the member profile and association size (Agodi *et al.*, 2015).

The first national sociological associations emerged in the early twentieth century, with the Sociological Society of London founded in 1903 and the American Sociological Association established in 1905, followed by the German Sociological Association in 1909; most others were created after the Second World War, with some only emerging in the twenty-first century.

Although there is some connection with democratisation processes, numerous singularities exist. For example, although France played a foundational role in the development of Sociology, a unified national association emerged only with the French Sociological Association in 2002. This late institutionalisation reflects the historical organisation of French sociology around influential intellectual schools and journals — such as the Durkheimian circle around *L'Année Sociologique*, and later networks structured by publications like *Revue Française de Sociologie* and *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* — as well as powerful research institutions such as the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique and the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, which long provided alternative frameworks for

organising the discipline. The creation of the association in 2002 made it possible to provide a common professional platform, strengthen national coordination, and represent French sociologists more effectively in international forums such as the International Sociological Association.

Despite this heterogeneity, a common tendency in these associations is that they mainly consist of university professors, while most sociologists carry out their professional activities outside academia (Agodi *et al.*, 2015). As concluded by Siza (2019) on the Italian case, the dominant pattern in Europe appears to be that, despite the fact that much of the work performed by sociology graduates occurs outside academia, the emergence of the sociological community as a collective person is “equivalent to the academic community and to its interests” (p. 382). There has been a lively debate on public sociology and on the publics of sociology in the United States, led by successive presidents of its powerful and dynamic national association. Some associations have developed specific programmes to promote diversity among their members (Torrecilha, 2014). Yet this challenge remains apparent to the extent that Rowell (2010) highlighted the issue that even sociologists teaching at community colleges tend to be silenced and distanced from associative structures and dynamics despite their important role in promoting a “public sociology”.

In Spain, the analysis of data from the Study of the Professional Situation of Sociology in Contemporary Spain, conducted by Guilló Girard and Gordillo (2016), identified four key variables for sociologists belonging to a professional association: socio-professional placement, academic qualification, age and sex. It was found that men who are older, have better socio-professional positions, and who hold a master’s or doctorate are overrepresented compared to other groups, leading the authors to conclude that the association has been more focused on consolidating and legitimising (academic) careers rather than facilitating professional entry and integration. These traits are especially evident in the scientific and professional associations, and structures created during transitions to democracy. In contrast, the professional “*colegios*”, corporate structures inherited from dictatorship, involve a broader and more cross-sectional participation of diverse profiles. Still, as stated by Fernández-Esquinas (2019), some key current challenges of this (multisector) profession imply a strong interface between the university and the professional domain.

According to the above-mentioned European comparison, the (relative) exceptions at that time appeared to be Portugal and Greece, rather small countries with large sociological associations and a more heterogeneous professional profile (Agodi *et al.*, 2015). The authors explain this by noting that sociology emerged at the end of the twentieth century as a “prestigious science-profession”, during a period of democratic consolidation following several decades of authoritarian repression. Looking at Argentina and Brazil, where these processes were also more recent and linked with later democratisation, Blois (2014) identified four common traits. First is the emergence of more recent research focused on the growth and establishment of the discipline within academia, as well as the influence of its leading figures, overshadowing the positive contributions made by sociologists working

outside academic settings; second, university institutions have trained sociologists directed towards academic performance (teaching and research positions), and do not disclose the placements and performance of the sociologists working outside academia, thus contributing to a representation of recent graduates ranked as “first-class” (academic) and “second-class” (non-academic); third, despite having regulated the profession through national law requiring the registration of each sociologist, the fragility or insignificance of the professional associations for non-academic members persists, due to low membership and irregular activities compared to the more stable associations consisting of academics; fourth, and lastly, the configuration of the professional field means that academic jobs have greater autonomy, but are often “closed in themselves”, while the non-academic field is “connected” to the needs of organisations and social actors, yet limited in its levels of autonomy. Carrera’s (2019) article on the history of sociological associations in Argentina provides valuable insights by framing the analysis within the context of power struggles. These struggles are shaped, on one hand, by the political and social environment of each historical period, and on the other hand, by competing efforts to define and contest what it means to “be a sociologist”.

More than just friction between science and profession (especially as the very definition of these concepts has also varied according to the time and context), there appears to be endemic friction. On one side, there is an academic perspective, which tends to exclude the practice of sociology — on the grounds of it being “impure” — that does not make explicit and systematise its theoretical and methodological frameworks, performed under the hierarchical dependence of government power or private centres. On the other side, we find a practical perspective, in which the proximity with intervention precisely precludes compliance with these requirements but permits compliance with the ideal of socially useful science via activity that is closer to the population and/or more able to influence policies.

Studies on engagement motivation on professional associations have identified both public and private incentives, exploring how they vary according to countries and professions (Hager, 2014), while tensions between professionalism and organisational standards were also pointed out as an increasing issue, in different countries (Noordegraaf, 2011). And some authors have even suggested the end of professions as a sociological category (except a few functions related with expert assistance to single clients), considering the neoliberal global pressures for occupational de-regulation (Kurtz, 2022).

In a more generalist study on associativism in modern societies, Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas (2001) concluded that engagement with civic associations is discouraged in “statist” societies, but encouraged in “corporate” societies, in which belonging to a professional collective could be a requirement for practising that profession. Nevertheless, at the end of the twentieth century, the authors found a tendency of international convergence towards the Anglo-American model of liberal origin, according to which belonging or not to associations is understood as an individual right, with no direct implications at a professional level. Another international comparison focused on the development of voluntary associations has revealed the

key role of state expansion and openness and the relevance of other factors, such as wealth, education and globalisation (Schofer and Longhofer, 2011).

New challenges have also been addressed in the literature on sociological associations. For instance, looking especially at European and American countries, Barbeito Iglesias (2021) underlies some threats, such as fragmentation of the cognitive and methodological bases, its “porosity” to other subject areas and the dispersal of the work activities performed by sociologists. Focusing on the Global South, Kais (2020) has also added other issues, such as the unplanned expansion of higher education under neoliberal policies, the conflicts between different sociological associations often related to political divides or the growing claim that sociology is not able to address local circumstances, since it is dominated by European and North American theories and authors. Against this backdrop, this paper aims to map the associativism of sociologists in Portugal and identify the explanatory factors behind this phenomenon, seeking to answer the question: What leads sociology graduates to join scientific/professional associations?

Sociological associations and the development of Sociology in Portugal

To answer this question, it is important to begin by placing it within the context of the development of the scientific and professional field in Portugal and the role of professional associations in this framework, drawing on the existing literature on the subject. Several authors agree with the view that the restrictions imposed by the corporatist Portuguese state installed in 1933 (*Estado Novo*) meant that the institutionalisation of Sociology only took place after the 1974 revolution, in a process strongly marked by a concern for scientific legitimacy, epistemological self-reflexivity and the construction of a disciplinary space, but also closely linked to the emerging dynamics of democratisation, modernisation and European integration (Baptista and Machado, 2010; Lopes *et al.*, 2020; Machado, 1996 and 2024; Mauritti, Silva and Saleiro, 2025; Pinto, 2004; Silva, 2016). The authors tend to associate this phenomenon with the notable growth in demand for sociological knowledge from public bodies and private entities during the last two decades of the twentieth century. Founded in 1985, it was in this context that the Portuguese Sociological Association (APS) and the Portuguese Association of Professionals in Sociology of Industry, Organisational and Work (APSIOT) emerged (Kovács and Moniz, 1986).

During this period, António Firmino da Costa (1988) recognised the existence of two ways of relating science and the profession among Portuguese sociologists: a “culture of dissociation” which he considered to be in decline at the time, contrasting with a “culture of association”, on the rise, based on cooperation between scientific research and professional domain, with a more pluralist and integrated approach, valuing the combination of theoretical, methodological and operational knowledge, within a setting of professional autonomy. This was the dominant framework for the successive leaderships of the Portuguese

Sociological Association, which, incidentally, ultimately prevented the fragmentation of the association observed elsewhere and which also appeared possible, in the early stages, in our country.

The diversity and continuity of the activities promoted by the APS — ranging from congresses, conference series and thematic debates to the production of foundational documents, studies on career paths and technical training initiatives — precisely reflect this “culture of association” identified by Firmino da Costa. By linking spaces for academic discussion with initiatives geared towards the profession and public engagement, as well as by consolidating instruments of regulation and disciplinary reflection, the Association has contributed to strengthening the internal cohesion of the community and establishing Sociology within an institutional ecosystem that is still taking shape. Publications such as the Code of Ethics (1992), studies on professional domain and, from 2012, the electronic journal *SOCIOLOGIA ON LINE*, constituted milestones in this strategy of integrating science and the profession. APSIOT, too, through its national and international meetings and the journal *Organizações & Trabalho*, followed this logic of disciplinary strengthening. Thus, sociological associativism in Portugal emerges not merely as an organisational response, but as a tangible expression of a substantive orientation that prioritises cooperation, professional development and public visibility of the discipline.

In this regard, Baptista and Machado (2010) also relativise an alleged opposition between the scientific and professional extremes, arguing that the diversity of activities that has characterised sociologists in Portugal can be organised into four standard types: the “academic-theoretical”, the “charismatic”, the “empirical” and the “professional”. A recent study on professional placements, skills and identities (Abrantes *et al.*, 2022) points to a wide variety of contexts, professional categories and representations of Sociology, although the relationship between categories and representations is tenuous, as is the influence of the generation and the training institution.

However, it is undeniable that new challenges have arisen in this process of institutionalising the discipline. The successive obstacles to the recognition of sociologists’ qualifications for teaching in primary and secondary education (Almeida, 1999) and a view of university teaching as an extension of scientific practice have made it difficult for the teaching activity itself to be understood as the link between science and profession (Machado, 1993). In higher education, moreover, the focus on competitiveness, internationalisation and responding to the immediate needs of the productive sector has led to a logic of competition, intensification and specialisation that has undermined the ability of Sociology to assert itself (Silva, 2022). In this regard, the diversification of educational programmes within the “social” sphere and the establishment, in some cases, of professional bodies, has increasingly put pressure on the professional integration of sociologists in certain spheres where they have been present since the 1980s (Lopes *et al.*, 2020; Mauritti, Silva and Saleiro, 2025). As Gonçalves (2024) states, the full institutionalisation of Sociology occurs when it manages to establish stable educational pathways, define relatively clear professional boundaries, and secure legitimacy in the public sphere and within the organisations in which its professionals operate.

Although more recent authors have not focused their analyses on this dimension, it is not unreasonable to think that, while on the one hand these processes pose challenges to sociologists' associative participation, on the other hand, the role of collective organisation could be fundamental in the aforementioned alignment between training, profession and public recognition.

In this sense, Santos Silva's (2024) reflection reinforces the importance of mobilising the sociological community in the face of the challenges facing the field of sociology in Portugal, calling for collective action aimed at strengthening and consolidating the discipline as a scientific and professional field.

Materials and methods

Study design and participants

This study draws on data from a questionnaire survey conducted among sociology graduates in Portugal at the bachelor's, master's and doctoral levels. The sample was obtained through contact lists provided by the Portuguese Sociological Association (APS) and the Portuguese Association of Professionals in Sociology of Industry, Organisations and Work (APSIOT), as well as snowball sampling. Although not statistically representative, the diversity of participants provides a robust basis for exploring professional associativism among sociologists in Portugal.

Data collection

Data were collected online using the Qualtrics platform between November 2019 and February 2020. The questionnaire included sections on sociodemographic characteristics, educational trajectories, professional activities, job conditions, professional identity and association membership. Respondents were also asked to evaluate the activities of the APS and APSIOT; in this article, the analysis focuses specifically on the data concerning associativism.

Measures and variables

The dependent variable was association membership, encoded dichotomously (0 = never affiliated; 1 = currently or previously affiliated). Independent variables included:

- Gender (0 = male; 1 = female).
- Age (in years).
- Further education after graduation (0 = no; 1 = yes).
- Professional identification as a sociologist (0 = no; 1 = yes).
- Professional profile (0 = professional/non-academic; 1 = academic).
- Professional activity aligned with original training (0 = no; 1 = yes).

- Level of satisfaction with main job function (6-point Likert scale, 1 = not at all satisfied to 6 = very satisfied).
- Type of employment contract: categorical variable with six categories. The reference category (0) was “permanent public sector employment contract”. The other categories were: 1 = “fixed-term/temporary public sector contract”; 2 = “permanent private sector employment contract”; 3 = “fixed-term/temporary private sector contract”; 4 = “research grant holder”; and 5 = “service provision contract (freelancer/self-employed)”.
- Legal sector of employment: categorical variable with three categories. The reference category (0) was the public sector, with the other categories being: 1 = private sector and 2 = third sector (non-profit/social economy).

Statistical analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics characterised the sample, while binary logistic regression was employed to identify factors predicting association membership. All predictors were entered simultaneously using the “Enter” method.

Model significance was assessed using the Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients, and model fit was evaluated with the Hosmer-Lemeshow test. Predictive performance was examined through overall accuracy, sensitivity (correct identification of members), and specificity (correct identification of non-members). Odds ratios (OR) with 95% confidence intervals (CI) were reported for all predictors.

Sample

The sample included 873 sociology graduates from all regions of Portugal, including the autonomous regions of Madeira and the Azores. Participants were predominantly female (67%), with ages ranging from 21 to 74 years (mean (M) = 45.1; standard deviation (SD) = 11.6). More than half (54%) were aged 45 or older.

The majority reported employment outside academia (70%), while 77% had pursued further education beyond their initial degree (master’s, doctoral, or post-graduate studies).¹

For the logistic regression analysis, only respondents who answered the question on association membership were included, resulting in a sub-sample of 639 individuals. This explains the difference between the overall sample size and the number of cases used in the predictive models. While the sample was not probabilistic and therefore not representative of all sociology graduates in Portugal, it provides valuable insights into the characteristics, professional trajectories and associative behaviours of this population.²

1 We do not have access to a full characterisation of the APS and APSIOT members as a whole; the available data refer solely to the members included in our sample. For a characterisation of the graduates who are APS and APSIOT members, see Abrantes *et al.* (2022).

Results

Among those who answered the membership question (sub-sample size (n) = 639), more than half (52.4%) were not affiliated with any professional association at the time of the survey, although a significant portion (17.1%) had been affiliated in the past.³ Of those affiliated, 89% were members of the APS and 13.2% of the APSIOT, with some belonging to both. The lower APSIOT membership is hardly surprising, in view of its highly specific nature. Some graduates are also members of other professional associations, particularly the Portuguese Association of Demography, the European Sociological Association and the International Sociological Association.

Table 1 summarises the main characteristics of the members of the APS and APSIOT. APS members have an average age of 49 years ($SD = 9.9$), are mostly women (62%), and are geographically concentrated mainly in the Lisbon region (51%), followed by the North and Centre of the country. Their qualifications are above graduate level (91%). Professional profiles predominate (73%). Most work in the public sector (around 79%) and have relatively stable employment relationships, with permanent public administration contracts standing out (approximately 49%).

APSIOT members are slightly older, with an average age of 51 years ($SD = 8.2$), but show a similar profile in terms of qualifications (92.5% with postgraduate training), gender distribution — also predominantly female (64%) — and mainly professional profiles (70%). Territorial concentration is even more pronounced in Lisbon (62.5%). Although the public sector remains predominant (around 67%), there is a relatively higher presence in the private sector (33%) compared to the APS. Employment contracts are mostly permanent public administration contracts (56%).

Those who are not members of any professional association refer to lack of knowledge or insufficient information as their main reason (36%), followed by the perception that membership offers no benefits (24%).⁴ Lack of interest and cost of membership fees were also indicated as reasons (19%).

2 According to the 2001 Census, 6,901 individuals reported having completed a higher education degree in sociology. Between the academic years 2001/2002 and 2019/2020, an additional 10,926 individuals graduated in sociology, based on data from the Survey on the Registration of Enrolled and Graduated Students in Higher Education (DGEEC/MEC), bringing the total number of graduates during this period to 17,827. If we consider the most recent year for which data are available (2022/23), the estimated cumulative total of sociology graduates by the end of 2023 rises to 19,413.

3 As the questions about associativism were not mandatory, the number of answers varies according to each question.

4 Multiple answer question. The percentage relative to the total answers is presented.

Table 1 Sociodemographic and professional characteristics of APS and APSIOT members

		APS		APSIOT	
		N	%	N	%
Gender	Female	167	62.1	25	64.1
	Male	102	37.9	14	35.9
	Total	269	100.0	39	100.0
Further education after graduation	Yes	246	90.8	37	92.5
Region of residence	North	45	16.7	4	10.0
	Centre	39	14.5	4	10.0
	Lisbon Metropolitan Area	136	50.6	25	62.5
	Alentejo	13	4.8	2	5.0
	Algarve	20	7.4	1	2.5
	Madeira	11	4.1	4	10.0
	Azores	5	1.9	0	0.0
	Total	269	100.0	40	100.0
Professional profile	Professional	198	73.1	28	70.0
	Academic	73	26.9	12	30.0
	Total	271	100.0	40	100.0
Type of employment contract	Permanent public sector employment contract	121	48.8	20	55.6
	Fixed-term/temporary public sector contract	44	17.7	4	11.1
	Permanent private sector employment contract	40	16.1	8	22.2
	Fixed-term/temporary private sector contract	14	5.6	2	5.6
	Research grant holder	22	8.9	1	2.8
	Service provision contract (freelancer/self-employed)	7	2.8	1	2.8
	Total	248	100.0	36	100.0
Legal sector of employment	Public sector	195	79.3	24	66.7
	Private sector	39	15.9	12	33.3
	Third sector (non-profit/social economy)	12	4.9	0	0.0
	Total	246	100.0	36	100.0
Age, mean (standard deviation)		48.5 (9.9)		51.0 (8.2)	

Source: Survey of Professional Competencies and Practices of Sociologists (APS/APSIOT 2020).

The Portuguese Sociological Association (APS)

Among APS members (N = 271), about three quarters are familiar with this association's activity. When questioned about the activities (from a supplied list, see figure 1) that they consider are being accomplished satisfactorily by the APS,⁵ more than 90% point to the boosting of scientific communication and debate (the holding of sociology

5 Multiple answer question. The percentage relative to total APS members is presented.

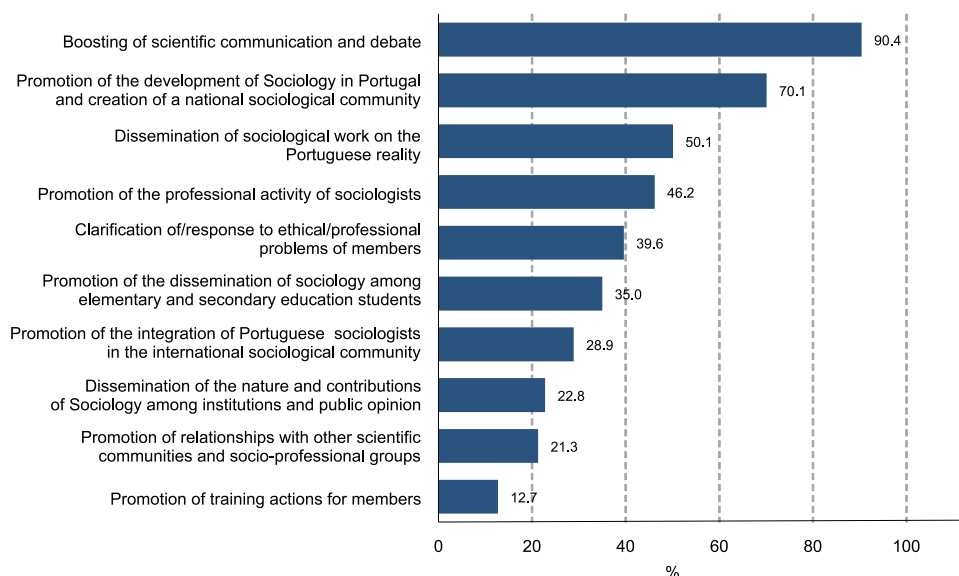


Figure 1 Activities undertaken satisfactorily by the APS (% agreement; N = 271)

Source: Survey of Professional Competencies and Practices of Sociologists (APS/APSLOT 2020).

congresses and meetings). A large majority (70%) also expressed satisfaction with the APS' role in fostering the development of sociology in Portugal and in creating a national sociological community bridging the academic and non-academic professional domains. Half of the respondents further indicated that the dissemination of sociological research on Portuguese society is satisfactorily undertaken by the APS. In turn, the lower percentages of respondents who indicated the promotion and dissemination of sociology and the professional activity of Portuguese sociologists in elementary and secondary education, other institutions, public opinion and the international community, suggest room for improvement. A minor set of members pointed to the APS' engagement with ethical issues, with inter- and transdisciplinary dialogue, relations with other scientific communities and professional groups, and the promotion of training activities for members — highlighting areas of activity that could be further strengthened.

Among the activities presented above, the two considered most important in APS intervention coincide — albeit in reverse order — with those that the majority of members assessed as being satisfactorily implemented: the promotion and dissemination of sociology in Portugal and the creation of a national sociological community, referred to by 74% of the members; and the boosting of scientific communication and debate, mentioned by approximately 55%. Activities aimed at enhancing the visibility of sociology — both as a science and a profession — across different spheres of society, emerged in a secondary position, with values ranging from 33% to 35%.



Figure 2 Skills associated with training in sociology

Source: Survey of Professional Competencies and Practices of Sociologists (APS/APSIOT 2020).

For respondents with APS membership, around 20% do not identify professionally as a sociologist — substantially lower than that among non-members of the associations (39%) or the total respondents (31%) — with the majority classifying themselves as a “lecturer/teacher” and “civil servant/senior officer” (both 22.6%) or “other profession not linked to the social sciences” (15.8%) or as a “manager” or “researcher” (both 11.2%). Non-identification as a sociologist rises to double among those who are not members of the APS, with the majority of self-classifications being “civil servant/senior officer” (25.8%), “other profession linked or not to the social sciences” (respectively, 17.6% and 13.2%) and “administrative/technical assistant” (9.6%).

Despite a strong identification with other, perhaps broader, professional areas, APS members frequently apply skills associated with their sociology training — such as diagnosis, planning, problem-solving, teaching, research and analytical reflection (figure 2). Nevertheless, four fifths of respondents indicated they were not employed in positions explicitly defined as having a sociologist role.

Furthermore, almost 100% of this same group considers that there are areas of intervention in Portuguese society that benefited from the work of sociologists. More than half of these respondents have more than ten sociologist colleagues (in about two thirds of the organisations).

We also observed a notable difference among the professional groups in which the sociologists were classified: although the concentration primarily occurs among specialists in intellectual and scientific activities and middle-level officers and professions, the figures vary considerably when comparing members, 71.1%

and 17.3%, and non-members, 45.1% and 32.3%. In other words, the higher the degree of professional differentiation, the greater the likelihood of APS membership, indicating that members are presumably the most highly qualified.

The Portuguese Association of Professionals in Sociology of Industry, Organisations and Work (APSIOT)

Only forty APSIOT members responded to the questionnaire. Among these, the activities conducted by the association were well known to the majority (two thirds).

For half of the respondents, national meetings are conducted satisfactorily, although only 40% gave the same rating to international meetings. Just 15% believed that the publication of the journal *Organizações & Trabalho* [Organisations & Work] is achieved satisfactorily (figure 3). When asked to identify which APSIOT activity is the most important, members referred to the organising of both national and international meetings.

It should be mentioned that the APSIOT's emblematic meetings are the national ones, as the international meetings only began in 2014.

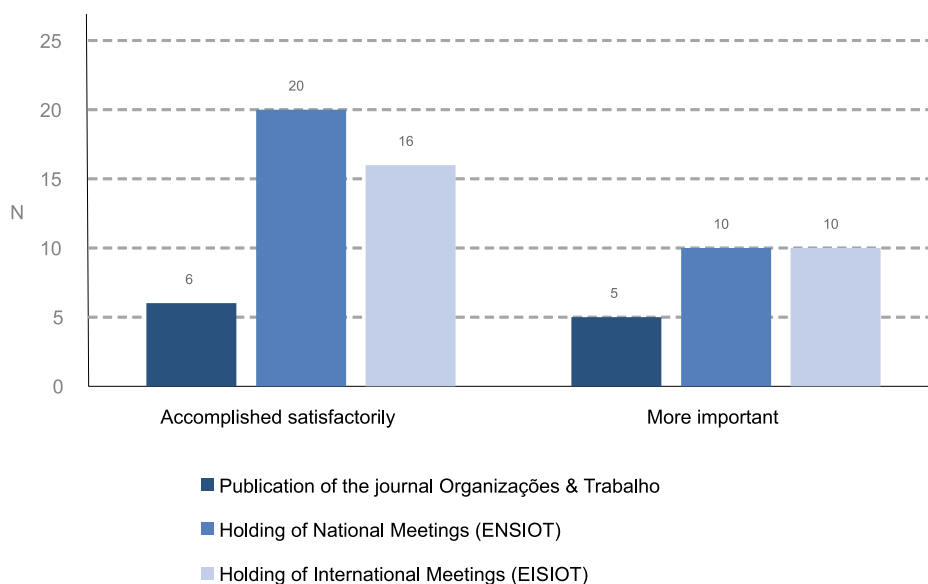


Figure 3 Activities undertaken by the APSIOT

Source: Survey of Professional Competencies and Practices of Sociologists (APS/APSIOT 2020).

Reasoning behind sociologists' tendency towards associativism

To understand whether the trends reported in the literature are also experienced in Portugal, we tested the relationship of associativism with a series of factors, some common to those selected by Guilló Girard and Gordillo (2016), but also others, linked to training and professional placement, such as age, gender, professional proximity to the training area, continuity of training, identification as a sociologist, professional profile, employment relationship, satisfaction with duties performed and the main tasks carried out associated with training in sociology.

Table 2 presents the results of the binary logistic regression predicting association membership among sociology graduates.

The model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(14) = 128.57$, $p < 0.001$, with a Nagelkerke R^2 of 0.29, indicating a moderate explanatory power. The Hosmer-Lemeshow test suggested good model fit, $\chi^2(8) = 7.52$, $p = 0.481$. The overall classification accuracy was 70.1%, with a sensitivity (correct identification of members) of 73.7% and a specificity (correct identification of non-members) of 66.9%.

Several predictors were significantly linked to association membership. Older graduates were more likely to be members, with each additional year of age increasing the odds of membership by 7% ($OR = 1.07$, 95% CI [1.05, 1.10], $p < 0.001$). Graduates with further education beyond their initial degree were more than three times more likely to belong to an association ($OR = 3.48$, 95% CI [2.10, 5.75], $p < 0.001$).

Professional identity and academic affiliation also emerged as important predictors. Those identifying as sociologists ($OR = 1.94$, 95% CI [1.21, 3.12], $p = 0.006$) and those with an academic professional profile ($OR = 1.93$, 95% CI [1.21, 3.10], $p = 0.006$) were nearly twice as likely to be association members. Similarly, graduates whose work aligned with their initial training had higher odds of membership ($OR = 2.11$, 95% CI [1.19, 3.73], $p = 0.010$).

In line with these findings, the composition of the associations' governing bodies also points to a strong academic presence. An analysis of the available data on the APS (table 2) and APSIOT (table 3) indicates that, despite certain periods in which non-academics have had some representation within the governing bodies, these bodies are predominantly composed of academics.

Employment conditions also played a role. Research grant holders were more likely to join associations ($OR = 2.37$, 95% CI [1.03, 5.47], $p = 0.042$), whereas those employed in the social sector were significantly less likely to do so ($OR = 0.28$, 95% CI [0.09, 0.84], $p = 0.024$).

Table 2 Logistic regression predicting association membership among sociology graduates

Predictor	B	OR (Exp(B))	95% CI for OR
Gender (female)	0,253	1,288	0.84–1.98
Age	0,063	1.065***	1.04–1.10
Professional activity aligned with original training (yes)	0,745	2.106*	1.19–3.71
Further education after graduation (yes)	1,247	3.480***	2.08–5.82
Professional identification as a sociologist (yes)	0.660	1.935**	1.21–3.09
Academic professional profile (yes)	0.655	1.925**	1.21–3.07
Level of satisfaction with main job function	0.068	1.070	0.90–1.27
Type of employment contract ^(a)			
Fixed-term/temporary public sector contract	0.153	1.166	0.67–2.03
Permanent private sector contract	-0.027	0.974	0.38–2.50
Fixed-term/temporary private sector contract	0.361	1.435	0.49–4.22
Research grant holder	0.861	2.365*	1.03–5.42
Service provision contract (freelancer/self-employed)	-0.623	0.536	0.17–1.74
Legal sector of employment ^(b)			
Private sector	0.207	1.230	0.49–3.07
Third sector (non-profit/social economy)	-1.270	0.281*	0.09–0.85
Constant	-5.637	0.004**	

Model statistics: χ^2 (14) = 128.57, $p < 0.001$; Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.29$; Hosmer–Lemeshow χ^2 (8) = 7.52, $p = 0.481$; overall accuracy = 70.1%, sensitivity = 73.7%, specificity = 66.9%.

Reference categories (0): ^(a) permanent public sector employment contract; ^(b) public sector.

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

Table 3 Participation of non-academics in APS governing bodies (%)

Term of office	Management	Governing bodies
1986/88	0.0	0.0
1988/90	0.0	11.8
1990/92	0.0	13.0
1992/94	0.0	20.0
1994/96	20.0	20.0
1996/98	20.0	20.0
1998/00	0.0	6.7
2000/02	0.0	6.5
2002/04	12.5	13.2
2004/06	25.0	12.8
2006/08	25.0	9.5
2008/10	30.0	11.1
2010/12	30.0	10.0
2012/14	10.0	4.8
2014/16	0.0	2.4
2016/18	10.0	4.3
2018/21	10.0	10.4
2021/23	10.0	6.7

Source: Authors' own creation, based on APS records.

Table 4 Participation of non-academics in APSIOT governing bodies (%)

Term of office	Total governing bodies
2001/02	31.3
2003/04	37.5
2005/06	31.3
2006/07	62.5
2008/09	50.0
2010/11	68.8
2012/13	56.3
2014/15	25.0
2016/17	18.8
2018/19	25.0
2020/21	25.0
2022/23	18.8

Source: Author's own creation, based on APSIOT records.

Discussion

This study provides new insights into the factors shaping professional associativism among sociologists in Portugal. The results indicate that age, further education, professional identity, academic affiliation and alignment between professional activities and initial training are all positively associated with association membership. Conversely, professionals working in the social sector were less likely to join professional associations, while those employed under fixed-term contracts in the private sector showed a higher probability of membership.

The strong relationship between further education beyond the graduate level and association membership suggests that individuals investing more heavily in professional development tend to value collective representation networks. Ongoing education often takes place in academic settings where professional associations are highly visible and institutionally supported, which helps explain why the academic environment emerges as a key driver of associative engagement.

Professional identity also plays a critical role. Explicitly identifying as a sociologist is associated with a higher likelihood of joining professional associations, underscoring the importance of identity construction in shaping professional engagement. Similarly, the higher membership rates among academic sociologists reflect the institutional culture of universities, where conference participation, collaborative research projects and publishing activities often encourage or even expect professional association membership as part of scholarly practice and career development. In line with this, the composition of the associations' governing bodies — largely dominated by academics — also points to the central role of academia in structuring participation in these organisations.

Employment conditions further influence membership patterns. The greater likelihood of membership among those with research grant suggests that professional

associations may be perceived as spaces of symbolic protection or recognition in contexts marked by greater professional uncertainty. In contrast, the lower level of engagement among sociologists working in the social sector may point to organisational or cultural barriers to participation, a finding that warrants further investigation.

These findings correspond to a pattern observed in international studies on the subject, reflecting the current challenges facing professions in the face of the de-regulation policies of global capitalism (Kurtz, 2022), but also the power dynamics within the scientific and professional communities themselves (Agodi *et al.*, 2015; Blois, 2014; Carrera, 2019; Guilló Girard and Gordillo, 2016). In some countries, this process has, in fact, led to the fragmentation of scientific and professional organisations of sociologists, with incremental effects on associativism, but evident obstacles to collaboration and collective representation. In the Portuguese case, by contrast, the “culture of association” has prevailed (Costa, 1988; Baptista and Machado, 2010) in organisational discourse and collective representations, albeit with effective limitations on the mobilisation of certain types of sociologists, as evidenced by the results of this study.

Conclusions

This article contributes to the understanding of professional associativism among sociologists in Portugal by examining their practices, motivations and representations. In Portugal, sociology only gained visibility in the last quarter of the twentieth century, strongly associated with the democratisation process that followed the 1974 revolution (Pinto 2010). In this scenario, two professional associations were founded: the Portuguese Sociological Association (APS) and the Portuguese Association of Professionals in Sociology of Industry, Organisations and Work (APSIOT). Both adopted an inclusive approach, encouraging the participation of sociologists working across various sectors and organisations.

Despite historical and structural differences in the formation of professional sociological associations in Europe, a common pattern emerges: most of these structures are mainly made up of academics, although the professional work of sociologists goes well beyond the university setting. A similar trend is also evident in Latin American countries such as Argentina and Brazil, where associations tend to favour the consolidation of academic careers, to the detriment of integrating professionals from other areas. Portugal and Greece stand out as partial exceptions, with comparatively stronger associations and greater diversity in the professional profiles of their members. This phenomenon can be understood in light of historical contexts in which sociology was valued as an academic discipline and a relevant social and political practice during democratic transition processes.

Based on data from a recent survey of sociology graduates, the analysis showed that association membership is more frequent among older generations, men, individuals with a doctoral degree and those whose professional activities are closely aligned with their initial training. Membership is also strongly associated with further education beyond graduation, professional identification as a

sociologist and employment in academic settings such as teaching, research or public service roles. Indeed, both national associations mainly bring together professionals with academic backgrounds, reflecting institutional and contextual factors that reinforce sociological identity and help explain why these profiles show higher levels of associativism. Conversely, job satisfaction, work conditions and the specific tasks performed do not appear to significantly influence engagement with professional associations.

The distinction between academic and professional profiles remains equally relevant. The academic setting continues to play a key role in shaping sociological identity and fostering associativism, while professionals outside academia show less engagement. This points to the need for associations to make greater efforts to include and represent these professionals.

Ultimately, the academic environment serves as the primary space for association membership. In this setting, membership is frequently encouraged, regarded as valuable in the curriculum and considered an indicator of active participation in the scientific community. Additionally, access to research networks, scientific events, publications and collaboration opportunities, often facilitated by the associations themselves, strengthens the involvement of sociologists connected to academia. Conversely, associativism also arises as a response to situations of increased professional vulnerability, such as fixed-term contracts in the private sector. This suggests that associations are seen as places of symbolic protection or attempts to gain professional recognition.

This dual role of associations, as spaces of recognition and protection, helps to explain broader patterns of engagement within the profession.

Taken together, these findings reveal the persistence of a divide between academic and non-academic sociologists — a pattern also observed in other European and Latin American contexts (Guilló Girad and Gordillo, 2016; Blois, 2014; Siza, 2019). To address this gap, professional associations could consider strategies such as:

1. *promoting membership as a mechanism for professional recognition and advocacy*, particularly in contexts where the role of sociologists is less visible;
2. *creating thematic networks and working groups* tailored to non-academic professionals, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange across sectors;
3. *providing training and professional development opportunities* aligned with applied fields such as public policy, social intervention and consultancy, thereby increasing the practical value of membership.

However, the effective implementation of these strategies depends on a deeper understanding of the underlying dynamics shaping participation. Further research is needed to understand the causes and consequences of these trends. It is particularly important to explore the obstacles that hinder the participation of sociologists working outside academia from participating in associations within the field, as well as the conditions required to enhance their involvement. We consider this is an important path to follow for promoting associativism and the development of sociology as a diverse professional and scientific discipline.

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Madalena Ramos. Full professor, Iscte — University Institute of Lisbon, integrated researcher, Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology (CIES-Iscte), Lisbon, Portugal.

E-mail: madalena.amos@iscte-iul.pt

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3117-4498>

Contributions to the paper: conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, validation, visualization, original writing, review and editing.

Paula Urze. Associate professor with habilitation, NOVA School of Science and Technology; integrated researcher, Interuniversity Center for the History of Science and Technology, (CIUHCT), Caparica, Portugal.

E-mail: pcu@fct.unl.pt

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0705-0302>

Contributions to the paper: conceptualization, investigation, methodology, visualization, original writing, review and editing.

Pedro Abrantes. Assistant professor, Universidade Aberta; Researcher, *LE@D* — Laboratory of Distance Education and eLearning, Lisbon, Portugal.

E-mail: pedro.abrantes@uab.pt

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9572-9563>

Contributions to the paper: conceptualization, investigation, methodology, visualization, original writing, review and editing.

Alexandra Aníbal. Memory and Intangible Cultural Heritage Unit coordinator, Lisbon City Council, Municipal Directorate for Culture, Lisbon, Portugal.

E-mail: alexandra.anibal@cm-lisboa.pt

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4834-2344>

Contributions to the paper: conceptualization, investigation, methodology, visualization, original writing, review and editing.

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