

ONSeries Lisboa Shows Portugal's Broadcasters Rising to the Digital Challenge

By Martin Dale



Credit: SPI Netflix

The first edition of ONSeries Lisboa (Nov. 25-26) brought streaming platforms, international broadcasters and co-producers to Lisbon for a two-day event that showcased Portugal's new TV series aimed at the international market.

Nuno Artur Silva, Portugal's secretary of state for cinema, audiovisual and the media emphasized the economic potential of the country's audiovisual sector and cited Spain's public policy to create an audiovisual hub as an example to follow. For every €1 (\$1.1) spent on audiovisual productions, €4 (\$4.5) is generated for the domestic economy, he stated.

The country's greater commitment to TV series is a direct result of public policy that aims to complement the country's prowess in auteur cinema and telenovelas.



Key steps that have increased investment in series include the reorientation of pubcaster RTP in 2015 to produce series rather than telenovelas, reinforcement of subsidy support for audiovisual production, launch of a cash rebate scheme in 2018 and transposition of the E.U.'s Audiovisual and Media Services Directive in 2021, placing investment obligations on streaming platforms operating in Portugal.

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As of January 2022, streamers will be taxed 1% of their profits and will have to invest 4% in original Portuguese productions.

Portugal's two main private broadcasters, SIC and TVI, have implemented their own streaming platforms – OPTO and TVI Player.

Brazil's Globo, Latin America's biggest media company, began to roll out its paid streaming platform, Globoplay, in late October in Portugal and over 20 other European countries, and is increasingly developing content aimed at the international market.

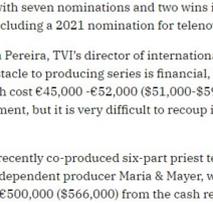
"The current situation in Portugal is very exciting," says Inside Content's Geraldine Gonard, producer of ONSeries Lisboa and of Conecta Fiction in Spain. "It reminds me of Spain just over five years ago, when Spanish series were beginning to catch the interest of international audiences and suddenly exploded."

Portuguese broadcasters and producers are teaming up with co-producers, streaming platforms and foreign broadcasters, especially with their Iberian neighbor Spain, to build international circulation and profile.

RTP took a minority stake in Netflix's first Portuguese original series "Gloria," launched on Netflix with a massive street advertising campaign. According to SPI, the show's producers, it has achieved excellent results in Portugal and has performed well in Brazil as well as in Luxembourg and France, where there are large Portuguese emigrant communities.

"Gloria" upped the international visibility of Portuguese production and of RTP, but its deal structure, which gives Netflix's exclusive rights for the first 12 months after which RTP can broadcast the series free-to-air in Portugal, is not a model that pubcaster wants to pursue, according to RTP's programming director, José Fragoso.

RTP has backed several minority co-productions with Spain, primarily noir thrillers, with narrative and main characters linked to both countries. These include Seasons 1 and 2 of "Dry Water," "Drought," and the upcoming "Silent Cargo."



Fragoso explains that these series, filmed in Spanish and Portuguese, have enjoyed solid domestic ratings, slightly below Portuguese language series, but with a major upside in terms of viewing on the free streaming platform RTP Play and in terms of international circulation.

Leading private broadcaster SIC launched paid streaming platform OPTO in November 2020. According to Francisco Pedro Balsemão, CEO of the Impresa Group, the move has built a new revenue stream with an international reach, that appeals in particular to younger audiences.

To date, OPTO has 20,000 subscribers, 5,000 outside Portugal and 200,000 registered free users. Balsemão is confident that the subscriber base will expand substantially over the coming months, based on the existing catalogue of over 5,000 hours and 10 original fiction series, which include racy thriller "The Club," now in its third season, and upcoming documentary series "Futre," about Portuguese soccer star Paulo Futre.



The Club Credit: OPTO/SIC

"This is the dawn of new golden age of production of fiction in Portuguese," suggests Balsemão. "ONSeries is all about this. We are here to seize the day."

Vanessa Tierno, director of acquisitions & format management at SIC, explains that OPTO offers two key advantages – greater access to younger viewers and a new direct-to-consumer platform for international viewers.

"We are experts in making telenovelas," affirms Tierno. "Through our original content for OPTO we can diversify our offer to include higher-end series where we can be more experimental."

TVI, part of the Media Capital group, is launching an ambitious expansion strategy in the wake of the group's recent acquisition by a group of shareholders from the north of Portugal, led by empresario Mário Ferreira.

Media Capital has just announced that it will concentrate all its divisions, including telenovela powerhouse Plural Entertainment, in a new media city to be built on the outskirts of Lisbon. Last week it relaunched and rebranded its news cable TV channel as CNN Portugal and has an aggressive growth strategy.

Plural is Portugal's biggest producer of telenovelas, producing 600 hours of fiction per year, with seven nominations and two wins in the International Emmy awards, including a 2021 nomination for telenovela "Destiny."

Margarida Vitória Pereira, TVI's director of international acquisitions, says that the main obstacle to producing series is financial, since the ratings for telenovelas, which cost €45,000-€52,000 (\$51,000-\$59,000) per hour, justify the investment, but it is very difficult to recoup investments on series.

TVI nonetheless recently co-produced six-part priest temptation series "The Sin" with independent producer Maria & Mayer, whose funding included around €500,000 (\$566,000) from the cash rebate scheme.

ONSeries included a presentation of Globoplay by its head of marketing, Marcela Parise.

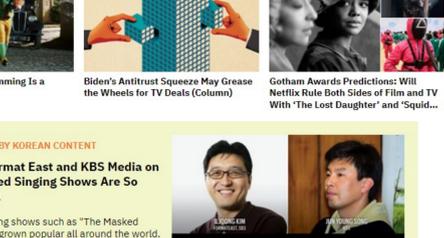
Parise stated that the European launch of Globoplay has already generated strong subscriptions, above all from Brazilians living in Europe.

Parise highlighted the strengths of Globo's catalogue including films, kids programming and 20,000 hours of telenovelas.

Having released 30 original productions in 2021, Globoplay is planning 40 new series for 2022. Parise emphasized that the streamer's growth highlights the need for co-productions with Europe.

Globoplay's flagship series for 2021 is "Hidden Truths II," released exclusively on the streamer on Oct. 22, whose cast includes Portuguese actress Maria de Medeiros.

"Hidden Truths responds to what the market was asking for," says Parise. "If you look at the success of series such as Netflix's 'Sex/Life,' audiences are responding well to sexy stories. We aim to offer relevant stories that meet market demand."



Silent Cargo Credit: Ubar Films

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