DIGITALOBS 02

TRENDS IN THE FCT PROJECTS

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TRENDS IN THE

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PROJECTS

Abstract

This study analyses the trends in the Foundation for Science and Technology's (FCT) annual calls for R&D Projects in All Scientific Domains - Scientific Research & Technological Development Projects -, for the period of 2020 to 2022, focusing on Communication and Media. It examines the typology and distribution of projects, priority themes, scientific results, evaluation panel composition, and principal investigators' profiles.

The study highlights the importance of addressing emerging themes and the benefits of learning from feedback, creating synergy among researchers, and giving a second chance to well-evaluated projects. The results can help researchers and institutions identify collaboration opportunities and align their projects with FCT priorities.

Keywords

COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA	PEX - EXPLORATORY RESEARCH PROJECTS
R&D - SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH & TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN ALL SCIENTIFIC FIELDS	FCT
	FUNDING

Introduction

Communication and Media is a scientific field that focuses on examining the processes, effects, and consequences of communication and media in society. It delves into how information, messages, and content are transmitted, interpreted, and shared among individuals and groups, to understand their influence on culture, social interactions, and public opinion.

The field of Communication and Media is multifaceted and constantly evolving. The advent of digital communication tools and artificial intelligence presents new challenges to communication and media. As the influence of media and social communication becomes more and more pervasive in our lives, researchers and professionals in this field must stay updated on the latest trends and developments. They need to critically assess the impact of media on society at large while also reflecting on ethical issues, diversity, and plurality in the media environment.

Communication and Media is a scientific area that is part of the FCT annual call for R&D Projects in all scientific fields. Their annual call for R&D Projects aims to increase competitiveness, foster innovation, and contribute to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

R&D projects	individual or co-promoted	36 months	250,000

In 2021, FCT introduced a new type of Exploratory Research Project (PeX). This change follows suggestions from the scientific community and aims to promote exploring ideas or concepts considered to have parameters of originality and potential for innovation (FCT, 2021).

PeX projects	individual projects only	18 months (+ 6 months)	50,000

R&D project proposals in all scientific areas are evaluated annually by independent panels of experts, most of whom are affiliated with foreign institutions and recognised for their experience and merit. The panels are structured by scientific field, area and sub-area and are made public during the call.

Each proposal undergoes a rigorous evaluation and is classified based on its scientific merit and innovative character, the scientific merit of the research team, the feasibility of the work program and its contribution to accumulating knowledge and skills. FCT publishes the results of calls for proposals on its website to ensure research funding processes' transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Methodology

This study conducted by the Digital Media Observatory (DigitalObs) aimed to analyse the trends in Communication and Media projects eligible for funding in FCT's R&D Projects calls from 2020 to 2022. The analysis covered project typologies, funding distribution, prioritised themes, scientific results, and evaluator profiles.

The study analysed the results of calls for tenders, information on the composition of the evaluation panels, and the Curriculum Vitae of the researchers responsible for the projects eligible for funding. This information is officially shared on the FCT website.


The results of this study can help researchers and research centers to identify potential collaboration partners, identify research gaps and refine the objectives of their future projects to align them with FCT's priorities and thematic areas.

Results

The total number of projects submitted in all fields (R&D Projects) is high, but the rate of approved projects is low, with only around 10% eligible for funding (Figure 1).

Graph 1. Total number of IC&DT and PeX projects submitted and approved for funding

FCT – R&D projects | 2020 - 2022
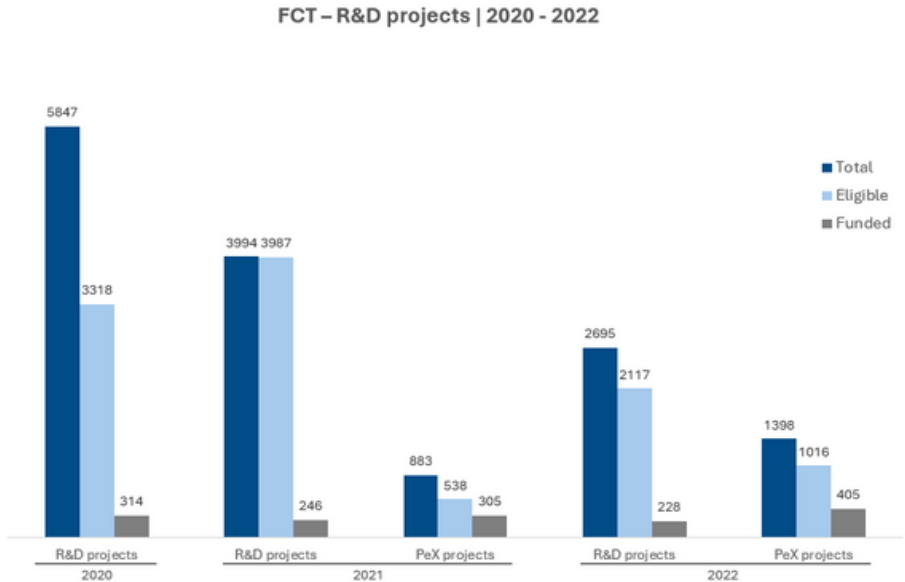
There has been a decrease in the number of R&TD projects submitted, as well as in the number of approved R&D projects, which may be due to stricter rules for Principal Investigators (PI) in 2021, preventing them from being responsible for ongoing projects or PI/co-PI of another application in this call.

FCT introduced Exploratory Research projects (PeX) in 2021. In the first year, 883 PeX projects were submitted; the following year, the number increased to 1398. The approval rate for PeX projects was 56.6% in 2021 and 39.9% in 2022.

Many projects were ineligible for the call for tenders due to not meeting all requirements (around 43.25% in 2020).
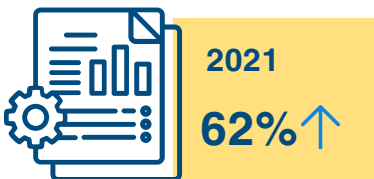
Communication and Media Panel

Communication and Media is a broad field with diverse topics. This FCT call is categorised into 5 sub-areas: Journalism, Information Sciences (social aspects), Documentary Sciences, Media and Sociocultural Communication, and Other Sub-Areas of Communication Sciences. Projects in this area often intersect with education, health, and information technology.

Graph 2. Total number of IC&DT and PeX projects in the field of Communication and Media

Media & Communication Panel | 2020 - 2022
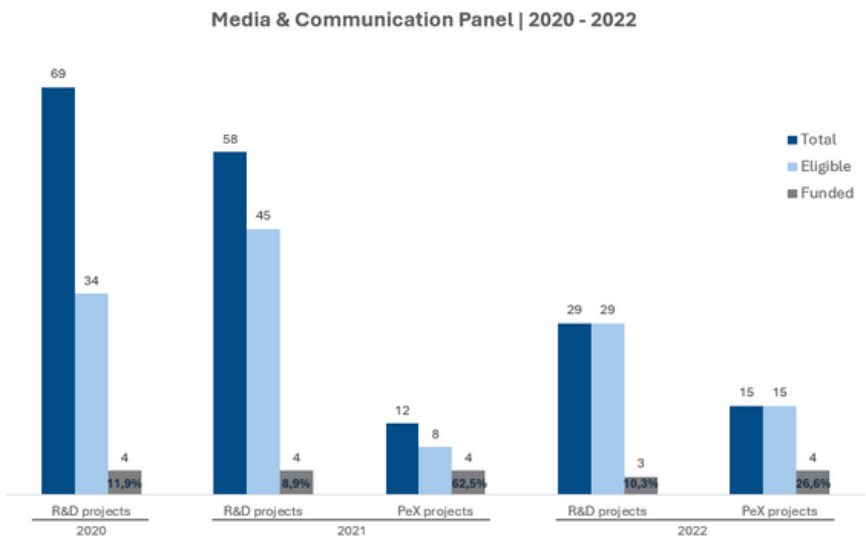
The approval rate for R&D projects is around 10-11% low. Only 4 projects were funded in 2020 and 2021, and 3 projects in 2022. There has been an increase in PeX projects submitted, with a higher approval rate. In 2021, 62% of eligible projects were approved, and in 2022, the approval rate was 26.6%.

Approval rate of eligible projects

R&D projects in the field of Communication and Media

In the Communication and Media panel, a total of 11 R&D projects were approved for funding during the period in question: Lusófona University (4 projects), University of Minho (3), University of Coimbra (2), University of Aveiro (1) and University of Beira Interior (1).

Table 1. R&D projects approved in the field of Communication and Media

| Year	Project Name I R&D	Reference	University	Research centre
2020	MyGender: Mediated young adults' practices: advancing gender justice in and across mobile apps	PTDC/COM-CSS/5947/2020	Univ. of Coimbra	ces Centro de Estudos Sociais
	MediaTrust.Lab: Local Media Lab for Civic Trust and Literacy	PTDC/COM-JOR/3866/2020	Univ. of Beira Interior	LABCOM COMUNICAÇÃO e ARTES
	ByOu: Study on children/young people's experiences and expressions of the media	PTDC/COM-OUT/3004/2020	Univ. of Minho	CECS
	Climate Futures and Just Transformations: Young People's Narratives and Political Imaginaries	PTDC/COM-OUT/669/2020	Univ. of Minho	CECS
2021	Migrations, media and activisms in Portuguese language: decolonising mediascapes and imagining alternative futures	PTDC/COM-CSS/4049/2021	Univ. of Minho	CECS
	Glocal feminist movements: interactions and contradictions	PTDC/COM-CSS/4049/2021	Lusófona Univ.	CICANT
	Youth, News and Digital Citizenship	PTDC/COM-OUT/0243/2021	Lusófona Univ.	CICANT
	Curiositas: Peeping Before Virtual Reality.	PTDC/COM-OUT/4851/2021	Lusófona Univ.	CICANT
2022	Sexual Violence in Portuguese Mediascape	2022.03964.PTDC	Univ. of Coimbra	ces Centro de Estudos Sociais
	POLARISCOPE: Platform for the Co-creation and Visualization of Collective Memories	2022.04424.PTDC	Univ. of Aveiro	DigiMedia
	Games Inclusion Lab: Participatory Media Creation Processes for Accessibility	2022.07939.PTDC	Lusófona Univ.	CICANT

Five projects were developed in partnership with 10 Portuguese organisations and only one project partnered with four European universities. The remaining five projects did not present the partnerships in the application.

Five projects developed in partnership with 10 Portuguese organizations

5 universities	**2** higher education institutes	**2** associations	**1** library network
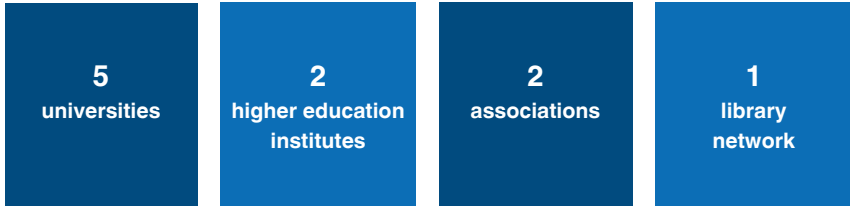
These 11 winning projects belonged to 5 research units. The Centre for Research in Applied Communications and New Technologies (CICANT) had 4 funded projects, followed by the Centre for Communication and Society Studies (CECS) with 3 projects, the Centre for Social Studies (CES) with 2 projects, and the Communication and Arts Research Unit (LabCom) and the DigiMedia with 1 project each.

The team's merit is one of the evaluation criteria, and the latest FCT evaluation of the research units was consulted. Based on the evaluation, two winning research units (CES and CECS) were rated "excellent", two research units (DigiMedia and LabCom) were rated "very good", and CICANT, with the highest number of approved projects, was rated "good".

It was also observed that some research units submitted multiple projects with similar themes but did not receive funding. Therefore, there is a need for researchers from the same unit to collaborate and strengthen their projects to increase the chances of approval.

Project themes

The Communication and Media projects cover various themes:
- gender issues (3 projects),
- media literacy and citizenship (3 projects),
- the preservation of memory and cultural heritage (3 projects),
- climate issues (1 project),
- accessibility of games (1 project).

It is worth noting that 4 projects specifically target young audiences.

Word clouds of project abstracts for 2020, 2021, and 2022 show an evolving and adapting landscape in Communication and Media projects, reflecting society's changing needs and challenges.

Trends were observed in the thematic focus over time: it shifted from youth-related themes in 2020 to social issues like gender and migration in 2021, and finally to themes centred around violence and inclusion in 2022.

2020

2021

2022

Figure 1. Word clouds of the abstracts of the winning R&D projects in 2020, 2021 and 2022

Scientific and technological product

As well as developing theoretical knowledge, all the projects have planned to develop scientific-technological products, such as digital platforms (6 projects), digital laboratories (2), applications (1), virtual reality (1), and school media (newspapers, TV, radio, blogs) (Table 2).

Table 2. Scientific and technological products + Description

media trust. lab

Local Media Lab for Civic Trust and Literacy

FEM GLOCAL

Glocal Feminist Movements

JustFutures

ClimAct-Hub platform

bYou

School media

POLARISCOPE

Platform for the Co-creation and Visualization of Collective Memories

GameIN

Games Inclusion Laboratory, GameIN Portal and Game Kit

mygender

MyGender Knowledge Platform
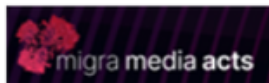
YND YOUTH, NEWS DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

YouNDigital app

UnCoveR

Collect, map and examine media's representations of sexual violence

CURIOSITAS

First immersive media in virtual reality

migra media acts

Decolonising mediascapes

In summary, the Communication and Media panel funded diverse scientific projects submitted by universities. These projects covered topics such as gender issues, media literacy, cultural heritage, and climate change, focusing on young audiences. They aimed to develop theoretical knowledge and scientific and technological products like digital platforms and virtual reality.

PeX projects

Regarding PeX projects - Exploratory Research projects, a total of eight projects were approved: Lisbon University Institute (2 projects); Lusófona University (2); New Lisbon University (2); University of Minho (1) and University of Algarve (1). Only one approved PeX project had a partnership with a Portuguese university.

Table 3. PeX projects approved in the field of Communication and Media

Year	Project name I PeX	Reference	University	Research centre
2021	JUSTENERGY: Intersections of right-wing populism and (un)just rural energy transitions in Portugal as communicative and socio-spatial practices	EXPL/COM-CSS/1510/2021	Univ. Institute of Lisbon (ISCTE-IUL)	CIS ..iscte Centro de Investigação e Intervenção Social
	Youth engagement with Sustainable Development Goals: the choice of moral arguments in the news for use in debate	EXPL/COM-JOR/1534/2021	Univ. of Minho	CECS centro de estudos de comunicação e sociedade
	Censorship(s): an analytic model of censorial processes	EXPL/COM-OUT/0831/2021	New University of Lisbon	INSTITUTO DE HISTÓRIA CONTEMPORÂNEA
	PlayersAll: media agency and empowerment	EXPL/COM-OUT/0882/2021	Lusófona Univ.	HEI-Lab
2022	On & Off: atmosferas de des/conexão	2022.01282.PTDC	Lusófona Univ.	CICANT
	Autonomous Stores: Sociotechnical Infrastructures, Imaginaries and Data Governance	2022.02730.PTDC	New University of Lisbon	INSTITUTO DE HISTÓRIA CONTEMPORÂNEA
	PROPS: Interactive Narratives Propose Pluralistic Discourse	2022.04406.PTDC	Univ. of Algarve	CIAC. CENTRO DE INVESTIGAÇÃO EM ARTES E COMUNICAÇÃO
	HERIC 2D - Health Risk Communication: Design and digital communication of official public health sources to guide citizens in pandemic situations	R2022.06008.PTDC	Univ. Institute of Lisbon (ISCTE-IUL)	CIS ..iscte Centro de Investigação e Intervenção Social

The eight funded PEX projects were allocated to six research units. The Centre for Research and Social Intervention (CIS) and the Institute of Contemporary History (IHC) were awarded two projects each. Centre for Communication and Society Studies (CECS), Human-Environment Digital Interaction Laboratory (HEI-LAB), Centre for Research in Applied Communications and New Technologies (CICANT), and Centre for Research in Arts and Communication (CIAC) each received one funded project. Therefore, the winning projects were distributed more equitably between the research units.

The PeX projects' themes actively tackled pressing issues, including the COVID pandemic, health communication, sustainable development, populism, radicalisation, hate speech, and rural communities' problems. The word clouds generated from the abstracts of the winning PeX projects in 2021 and 2022 illustrate these themes' evolution (Figure 1), demonstrating their dynamic nature and emphasising the need for continued empirical research and development.

Figure 2. Word clouds of the abstracts of the winning PeX projects in 2021 and 2022

Some PeX projects include a scientific-technological product, such as the Digital platform for engaging young people with the Sustainable Development Goals (Green Choice Project, University of Minho); the Virtual Reality game Village Druid, which harnesses the potential of games in therapy (PlayersAll Project, Lusófona University); or educational tools focusing on the social challenges of hate speech (PROPS Project - Interactive Narratives Propose Pluralist Discourse, University of Algarve). However, due to the project's short duration, only the development of a prototype or model is planned in most cases.

Principal Investigators

The project's evaluation criteria include assessing the scientific merit of the researchers. For this study, the Observatory team analysed the CVs on the Ciência Vitae platform to gather information about the researchers' qualifications, experience, and publications. Upon analysis, it was found that all Principal Investigators (PI) of the R&D projects are senior researchers, with an average of 11 years after obtaining their doctorate. They have participated in research projects funded by various sources such as FCT, Erasmus+, and Feder.

In the PeX projects, one of the researchers is a junior category, with less than five years after obtaining their doctorate. The average time since obtaining a doctorate is approximately eight years. According to FCT's Ciência Vitae page, all the PI in the PeX project have participated in research projects as researchers or co-IRs. However, only two have PI experience in previous projects.

Evaluation Panel

After analysing the evaluators' lists for the Communication and Media panel of the R&D projects competition, it was found that 34.7% of the previous year's jury members were retained, ensuring consistency in evaluation criteria. This trend was also observed in the Art and Education fields.
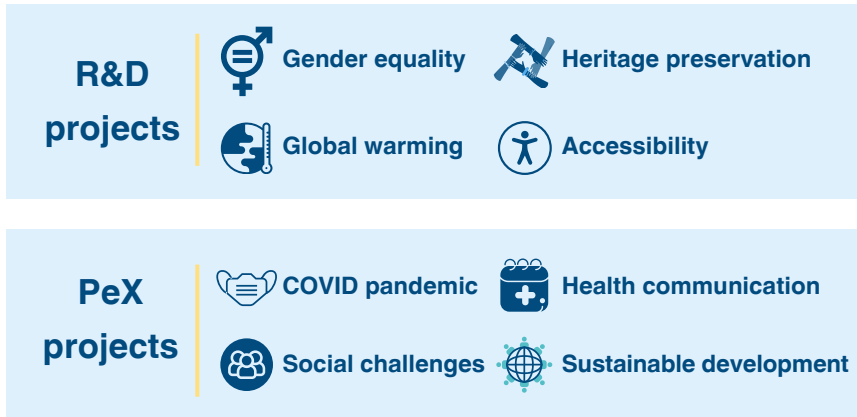
23 evaluators
(from most represented to least)

Italy **Sweden** **United Kingdom** *4 each*	**France** **Spain** *3 each*	**Denmark, Austria** **Finland, Estonia** **Romania** *1 each*

In 2022, three eligibleg projects had also been submitted in 2021 but did not meet the funding requirements. However, the teams incorporated the evaluators' suggestions and won the competition the following year. This highlights the importance of accepting constructive criticism and using it to enhance work, as well as the teams' dedication and commitment to achieving positive outcomes.

Conclusion

This study aims to provide essential information about R&D and PeX projects in Communication and Media. Thus the results show that while R&D projects focus on global societal issues, small projects are an opportunity to germinate innovative ideas that serve as a seed for the development of longer-term projects.

R&D projects
- Gender equality
- Heritage preservation
- Global warming
- Accessibility

PeX projects
- COVID pandemic
- Health communication
- Social challenges
- Sustainable development

During this research, it was also observed that some research units present several projects but do not get funding. To increase acceptance chances and secure funding, the study emphasises:

the importance of cohesion and flexibility between members of research units, which is crucial for developing solid projects;

the act of recovering previous projects in order to improve them as well as the understanding of the evaluation panel when applying, in order to adapt proposals accordingly;

the attention to detail of technical and formal aspects when filling in forms and submitting documentation, as well as ensuring all team members have updated CVs on the platform;

the planning, since t's advisable to avoid submitting the project in the last few days to ensure that technical problems don't affect the application process.

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