

Event Impact Assessment and Community-Based Tourism: The Case of a Portuguese Music Festival MEOsudeste

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Abstract: **Background:** As integral components of the event industry, music festivals significantly impact local communities and encompass social, cultural, economic, political, physical, and environmental dimensions. We may perceive this impact as either positive or negative. As event tourism continues to grow in importance, there is an increasing need for evaluation methodologies that promote sustainable development through more participatory approaches.

Research objectives: This article examines how impact assessment methodologies, grounded in action research, can enhance community engagement and support the principles of Community-Based Tourism (CBT).

Research design and methods: Drawing on evidence from research conducted on the MEO Sudoeste music festival in Odemira, Alentejo/Portugal, the study explored the potential of this notable event to foster community involvement, despite its limited adoption of the CBT paradigm.

Results: The findings emphasize the importance of collaborative evaluation processes in balancing benefits and costs and supporting informed decision-making for large-scale tourism events.

Conclusions: Collaborative evaluation contributes to improving the long-term sustainability of large-scale tourism events.

Keywords: events tourism, community-based tourism, action research, MEO Sudoeste

JEL Codes: L83; Z32; O35

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1. Introduction

Music festivals, as products embedded within the broader event industry, music festivals generate various types of impact on local communities, which we may perceive as either beneficial or detrimental. This impact is multidimensional and encompasses sociocultural, physical, environmental, political, and economic dimensions (Van Niekerk, 2016; Yeoman et al., 2014, cited in Séraphin et al., 2018). Given the breadth and interconnection of these effects, it is essential to consider how event development, particularly in the context of hallmark events, can integrate effective strategies for community engagement. It is equally important to recog-

nize the potential of local communities to act as active and participatory stakeholders, rather than passive recipients of the event's outcomes.

As an expanding field within the tourism industry, event tourism likewise necessitates critical reflection on the types of event formats that require promotion to ensure a close, effective, and sustainable relationship with the host territory. In this regard, the adoption of an impact assessment methodology grounded in participatory research, i.e., incorporating reflective input from both community members and event organisers, assumes particular significance. Such a methodology facilitates the continuous adaptation of planning and management strategies based on empirical evidence, while enabling the collective identification and evaluation of the event's costs and benefits with precision and depth.

In this context, we examined how event impact assessment methodologies applied in territorial contexts can foster the integration of attributes characteristic of the alternative tourism development model promoted by Community-Based Tourism (CBT). While CBT emphasizes local participation, empowerment, and sustainability, such principles are often absent in large-scale commercial events. Accordingly, this research draws on empirical evidence from a case study of the MEO Sudoeste music festival, one of Portugal's longest-running and most widely publicised festivals, with more than two decades of activity. The event, held annually in August in the municipality of Odemira, in the Alentejo region of Portugal, provides a relevant context for examining how impact assessment practices might support a shift towards more inclusive and community-oriented approaches in the management of hallmark events.

2. Literature Review

The importance of planning and developing community-based tourism

The last decades brought competitive dynamics of globalization and worldwide capitalist expansion and the phenomenon of mass tourism, which privileges immediate and large-scale profit, often failing to respect local resources, leading to the need for new models of tourism planning and management based on sustainability (Pinheiro, 2015). The concepts of alternative and sustainable tourism development include principles such as the promotion of social inclusion, ecological preservation, improvement of quality of life (Pinheiro, 2015), and practices of self-sufficiency, autonomy, and empowerment of local communities in decision-making (Amaral, 2013).

We may see the numerous consequences of mass tourism and the attitudes of residents in host communities toward this type of tourism as a kind of appeal to increase public participation and, in particular, to develop a planning approach that would be more focused on community participation (Keogh, 1990; Huybers, 2007). This is because most of the generated impact, whether positive or negative, occurs precisely at the level of the destination community (Sharma, 2004), while residents become an essential "ingredient" for the "atmosphere of hospitality" of that destination (Simmons, 1994). This fact led some researchers to emphasize the need to decentralize tourism development and integrate it into the community's general objectives. Murphy (1985, cited by Amaral, 2013) was one of the first promoters of this perspective in his work *Tourism. A Community Approach*, in which he emphasizes the need for each community to relate tourism development to local needs. Already in 1985, Murphy considered that the community-based approach to tourism development planning allows for harmonizing social relations between tourists and the host community, which can be particularly positive in terms of social impacts in these territories. He further advocates adopting an ecological per-

spective in tourism planning and implementing planning systems that integrate tourism into community objectives and strategic plans, thereby ensuring the flexibility needed to adapt to economic and market changes.

Conventional mass tourism, which has typically developed through centralized decision-making by external authorities, is now in decline. Largely, this shift results from tourists' changing profile, who are becoming more demanding and conscious of environmental and social issues. Consequently, local stakeholders are assuming a more prominent role in managing tourism within their regions. Such a context has led to the emergence of local and community forms of intervention in tourism development and planning (Gómez et al., 2015).

The literature supports the idea that there are several factors (economic, social, cultural, and political) that led to the emergence of CBT, particularly in rural areas (Sansolo & Bursztyn, 2009), namely:

- Global pressures from the tourism market: rural and indigenous communities face market pressures on their natural and cultural resources as a result of the control of environmental NGOs that encourage these communities, considering CBT a viable option for preserving their natural resources;
- The need for communities to overcome more fragile economic situations;
- The relevant role of micro and small enterprises in local economic development and in the diversification of national tourism supply. Tourism businesses bring socio-economic benefits by mobilizing resources, generating wealth, and distributing income to local economies. However, if they grow rapidly, they can generate exacerbated competition, contribute to the deterioration of natural resources, and reduce the quality of services provided to customers.

Thus, CBT arises within the paradigm of alternative development and as a counterpoint to mass tourism. It is based on planning instruments grounded in community/territory involvement (community-based planning) with tourism potential. In this paradigm, the process of tourism development implies considering the totality of the subsystems that constitute the tourism system (elements of regional tourism, such as transport, accommodation, promotion, attractions, and information) to avoid conflicts between tourism subsectors (Gunn, 1994; Timothy, 1998). However, this is not a task. The implementation of community-based planning constitutes a response to the deficiencies of that systemic approach (Amaral, 2013). Thus, CBT is configured as a new approach to tourism planning that provides local communities with the alternative of inserting themselves into the tourism development process in their spaces by adopting an active and decisive role (Pinheiro, 2015). In more fragile territories, such as traditional communities (e.g., rural, fishing, islands, and indigenous), CBT can stimulate and elevate economic status, because it promotes the construction of basic infrastructures and cultural and recreational attractions, which clearly benefits the residents' quality of life and fosters the preservation, respect, and valorization of their local culture (Lee & Jan, 2019).

According to Pinheiro (2015), innovation contributes to the competitiveness of destinations and plays an important role in resolving disputes between public and private management of the tourism sector. In this context, Pinheiro (2015) considers CBT a social innovation that meets the needs of local development. Moreover, Nunes and Menezes (2017) consider CBT a way of structuring a tourist destination that focuses on social, cultural, and economic development, strengthening self-management of local agents in the territory and mobilizing communities around a common good, by fostering income creation and giving more visibility to different local productions. Throughout the process of tourism development and planning, the leading

agent will be the community itself, defined as the set of people who cohabit in a given territory, thus including owners and entrepreneurs, residents, and local government authorities (Monteiro & Deville, 2007, cited by Amaral, 2013).

According to Yanes et al. (2019), CBT is not an instrument of tourism development that the local community can easily decide upon and then implement. Other entities/organizations, particularly public bodies (public policy), must first recognize the local community's power. This is possible through the development of partnerships with the stakeholders of the community.

Thus, the local community's participation in the decision-making process of tourism development is foundational to tourism sustainability. Within the paradigm of community-based planning, participation will only be possible in a regime with fair democratic rules and where tourism expansion does not occur beyond what the citizens of a given community really want and can control. This implies that community involvement in the political planning process and in the decision-making process itself is based on a bottom-up decision-making model, in an integrated development logic that seeks to solve collective problems through actions coordinated by various agents (Gómez et al., 2015).

However, this process is not always easy. Some obstacles that justify its complexity include institutional issues (Sharma, 2004; Telfer & Sharpley, 2008), community's lack of knowledge of the activity (Moscardo, 2008), lack of local leaders and control by external agents (e.g., tour operators, marketing consultants), which gives them dominance over the activity, gaining power over the tourism development process. Among the obstacles, Mathieson and Wall (2006) also name the lack of homogeneity of communities (something already mentioned by Taylor, in 1995), many involved actors, the fact that tourism experiences are differentiated, and the absence, in many countries/communities, of political and administrative tradition that enhances or facilitates this type of process.

Furthermore, the challenges are also evident when considering the compatibility of the approach with the profile and assumptions of so-called event tourism, particularly large-scale events. Mathilda Van Niekerk (2016) and Ian Yeoman et al. (2014) (cited by Séraphin et al., 2018) argue that, due to the growing expansion observed in the event tourism sector, it is essential to record and monitor the impacts generated by them, whether positive or negative, in their various dimensions: cultural, social, economic, environmental, and political. Similar to what happened with mass tourism in an earlier phase, there is always the risk of minimizing the medium/long-term negative effects and amplifying the immediate positive effects. In addition to the organizational typology and obstacles that may exist, event planning shared and participated in by the community also constitutes an option and a winning path in terms of sustainability. In this sense, it is important to consider methodologies of event impact assessment in the territory, whose rationale is based on the paradigm of alternative development, embodied through the model advocated by CBT.

Events, music festivals, and their multiple impacts

Among the various economic activities, tourism constitutes one that best personifies the era of the experience economy (Oh et al., 2007), with the events sector excelling in the creation of products based on this objective.

Events have taken on growing and significant importance in the context of tourism and the tourist experience, with different typologies, dimensions, and impacts. As highlighted by the World Tourism Organization (2014, 2017), the events market has become a highly specialized segment and increasingly relevant for the tourism sector. Getz (2008) argues that events con-

stitute "an important tourism motivator" and "a prominent feature in the marketing plans of most destinations." In fact, events have become "travel opportunities that broaden consumption, ... promoting the host core and defining new strategies for product development and marketing" (Carneiro & Fontes, 1997, p. 71). Whatever the event, it can function as a strategic tourism marker of a destination, with its image directly associated with it and vice versa.

Events are temporary occurrences of limited duration that aim to promote something to their target audience and assume a concept, a plan, an organization, and a manager (Carneiro & Fontes, 1997; Neves de Jesus, 2015). Since it is difficult to construct a single typology of events that encompasses the entire variety of occurrences ranging from the Olympic Games to conferences, fairs, festivals, and many others, Getz (2008) grouped them according to their "value and potential impact." He distinguished them into:

- mega-events;
- hallmark events, large events with high status/visibility/value;
- regional events;
- local events.

For Maciel (2011), events, taking music festivals as an example, are a "vibrant and living showcase of places" (p. 18), capable of improving the profile of a destination through "positive dissemination of information, particularly of an informal nature" (p. 18). One of the main attracting factors of such an event is that in a short period of time, they concentrate a large number of activities, not only related to music, which promote socializing and fun. For Sarmiento (2007), festivals also have the added value of boosting cultural tourism, making it more active and bringing it closer to younger generations.

Currently, the music industry and its respective festivals constitute a system that generates millions and attracts a growing number of spectators/festival-goers. "Much more than music and entertainment, summer festivals are symbols of economic and cultural transformation. They transform cities, boost businesses, attract tourists, and place the country (Portugal) in the international spotlight" (Mirra, 2024, p. 1). Since 2015, with an interregnum in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance and number of festivals have grown significantly, multiplying across various points of the country and throughout different months and seasons of the year. Strategic partnerships between organizers and major brands and sponsors have consolidated, supply has professionalized, dividends have increased (in 2015, ticket revenues were around 44 million euros, rising to about 99 million euros in 2019 (INE, *Estatísticas da Cultura*, 2017, 2020), and Portugal has strengthened its position as a destination within the so-called "music tourism." According to the Portuguese Association of Music Festivals (APORFEST, 2025), 405 festivals are scheduled to take place in Portugal in 2025, including 33 first editions.

Currently, evidence confirms that there are several effects and impacts associated with the holding of music festivals, particularly those which, due to their size and scope, fall within the so-called group of hallmark events.¹ In addition to enriching tourist attractiveness, scholars see them as instruments valorizing culture, heritage, and economic dynamics of the places and territories where they take place, increasingly forming part of local and regional public action plans (Saúde et al., 2019).

As mass events that mobilize producers, sponsors, suppliers, and festival-goers, among others, festivals naturally influence the routines and dynamics of the places and communities where they are held. There are effects at the level of economic activity, insofar as the pres-

¹ According to the typology of Getz (2008) and/or of Bowdin et al. (2011).

ence of a significant additional number of visitors increases the volume of sales and purchases in local commerce (restaurants, accommodation, supermarkets, shops, companies supplying goods and services), as well as potentially generating price inflation and real estate speculation. At the level of the labor market, festivals also influence the dynamics of supply and demand, associated with the processes of construction and/or improvement of infrastructures necessary for the holding of the event and/or during its assembly, realization, and dismantling. Economic activity has a direct and indirect impact, in the short and in the medium/long term, clearly standing out among the latter those underlying the consolidation of the place/territory in the tourism market through association with the image/brand of the festival (Davies et al., 2013).

In addition to economic impacts, music festivals also influence the sociocultural dynamics of local communities, allowing and/or broadening the range of opportunities for access to cultural and leisure activities, for sharing and cultural exchange with organizers, musicians, festival-goers, and other visitors. Furthermore, through the dissemination of the image and local identities, they act as drivers of improved community self-esteem and self-identification with local customs and traditions (Pavlukovic et al., 2017). Conversely, depending on the size and type of the event, we may note changes in daily routines, traffic congestion, increased noise, more waste, more confusion, and a greater sense of insecurity, which in some cases may generate discomfort and discontent among the population. Among the types of impact that generate the most criticism, environmental impact stands out, due to noise, visual, atmospheric, and waste pollution resulting from the gathering of thousands of visitors/festival-goers in a delimited space in a short period.

Events, and in particular music festivals, influence the territorial dynamics of the local communities/territories. They constitute important markers of the economic, social, cultural, tourist, and even urban activity of the places, with more positive and/or negative externalities depending on the matrix and organizational model followed, as well as how much the community and the music tourism market accept the product.

In this sense, it is important to consider events, particularly certain types of festivals, as an instrument of tourism planning that, given the model they advocate, can allow local communities to become involved in the process of tourism development of their spaces by adopting an active and decisive role. The community that hosts the event should (also) be an active element in the event management and operationalization, as a shaping agent of its sustainability and its social, cultural, tourism, economic, and political meaning.

Evaluating Impacts through Action Research in Community-based Tourism

The ontological nature of CBT implies that we must always consider its construction with an effective involvement of communities as the guarantee of achieving the project in its entirety. Based on this assumption, scholars consider it essential that the development of any tourism project or event, with these attributes, be accompanied by processes that can better dimension its multiplier effects, namely studies that can evaluate and estimate in the short, medium, and long term the impact of the event at the community level. This concern, visible in scientific production since the 1970s (Frey, 1994; Getz, 2008; Getz, 2010; Saayman & Saayman, 2006), assumes relevance as it generates important outputs to support political decision-making, given the growing integration of "tourism products" in municipal, regional, and national public action plans.

The dimensions in impact studies that we should consider involve an extensive typology of effects, and there is consensus that these require analyzing through a combined methodological approach that gathers information on the direct and indirect impacts generated, in the short, medium, and long term, of an economic, social, cultural, and environmental nature (Saúde et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2015). In a logic that prioritizes the understanding of these various dimensions, scholars have developed methodological instruments that make it possible to measure the perception of the social and cultural costs/benefits generated. One that stands out among them is, e.g., the Festival Social Impact Attitude Scale (FSIAS) developed by Thomas Delamere (Delamere, 1998). This instrument measures the induced social and cultural benefits through a set of items that allow for the evaluation of perceptions regarding how the event (festival) influences community life, identity, and well-being, and estimates, from the respondents' opinion, what can alter the community's quality of life. Along the same lines, other proposals focus on the analysis and description of impacts on the opinion of the community, organizers, and stakeholders involved in the event, but where the concern stands out not only with the description and technical measurement but also with returning the assessed results to the stakeholders (Saúde et al., 2019).

Sociocultural impact assessment models inherently rely on methodological designs that operationalize them. Within the CBT framework, it is essential to adopt approaches that strengthen the connection between the tourism product and local community dynamics. The Finnish Event Evaluation Tool developed by Pasanen, Taskinen, and Mikkonen (2009) is particularly valuable in this regard, as it considers multiple perspectives throughout a project's lifecycle: from planning and execution to conclusion.

We may further enhance this perspective when we combine it with participatory action research, defined as the "systematic collection of information to promote social changes" (Bogdan & Bicklen, 2013, cited by Traqueia et al., 2021, p. 38). Action research integrates participation, reflection, empowerment, and emancipation, fostering transformation (Berg, 2001, cited by Traqueia et al., 2021). Kemmis et al. (2014) highlight two relevant models: technical action research, focused on improving outcomes, and critical action research, aimed at emancipating individuals and groups from unsustainability or injustice. By privileging interactive and participatory dynamics, this methodology engages participants in reflection and action throughout the project, promoting informed and responsible involvement.

The process involves describing the context, planning and implementing changes, observing outcomes, reflecting on processes, and adjusting subsequent actions (Guerra, 2000; Kemmis et al., 2014). When combined with technical monitoring in collaboration with participants and external research teams, it ensures methodological rigor, manages deviations from high participant involvement, and supports a deeper understanding of CBT project dynamics. This iterative approach encourages meaningful community engagement while aligning events with sustainable practices.

This article draws on our two prior studies. The first one from 2017 assessed the economic and sociocultural impacts of the MEO Sudoeste Festival on the municipality of Odemira. The second one from 2018 examined how festival participation influenced the destination images (DI) of the region developed by visitors. Both studies underscored the importance of engaging stakeholders, particularly festivalgoers and the local community, to generate nuanced insights into the festival's operations, impacts, and improvement opportunities.

Building on these findings, this text reflects on how a large-scale music festival such as MEO Sudoeste, currently not aligned with CBT principles, could integrate community participation

and, critically, adopt participatory action research in future assessments of its socioeconomic and cultural impacts. In doing so, it highlights the added value of methodologies that actively involve local communities, demonstrating how such approaches can enhance understanding, promote sustainable practices, and foster closer alignment between large-scale events and the objectives of CBT. These do not currently integrate the attributes of CBT, but can incorporate elements of community involvement in future editions.

3. Research Approach and Data Informing the Chapter's Reflection

This article explores how a large-scale music festival such as MEO Sudoeste could incorporate community participation and, importantly, employ participatory action research in future assessments of its socioeconomic and cultural impacts. Such an approach would enhance engagement between festival organizers and local stakeholders, fostering the sustainability and long-term resilience of the tourism product. The discussion draws on findings from our two prior investigations. The first one examined the festival's effects on the socioeconomic and cultural dynamics of the host territory, while the second investigated how participation in the festival influences the destination images (DI) of the region developed by festivalgoers.

The 2017 impact study commissioned by the municipality of Odemira represented the first comprehensive assessment in many years of the festival's socioeconomic and cultural effects on the territory and its community. The study aimed to characterize and evaluate the socio-cultural impacts as perceived by various stakeholders, while also measuring the festival's economic impact. To capture these multiple dimensions effectively within the study's timeframe, we employed a participatory mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques.

We designed the information-gathering process to generate insights that would provide an almost real-time understanding of the event and its various dimensions. We collected data before, during, and after the 2017 edition of the festival using the following techniques:

- Direct observation of the event and the surrounding community context's dynamics;
- Participant observation through staying at the event for three days, sharing the performance venue and campsite with festivalgoers and the organization;
- Indirect observation through:
 - (i) interviews with the festival organization, officials of the Municipality of Odemira, local actors with privileged relations and knowledge of the history and dynamics of the event in the territory, and entrepreneurs with preferential links with the festival organization and/or whose location favored greater impact;
 - (ii) questionnaires applied to representative samples of: festivalgoers (residents and non-residents of the municipality of Odemira), the resident population of the municipality, and entrepreneurs located in the municipality.

For the analysis of qualitative data resulting from direct participant observation, interviews, and the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, we applied a thematic categorical content analysis (Bardin, 1991).

The employed research strategy combined direct participant observation with consultations of both festivalgoers and members of the local community. It allowed us to collect diverse data and comprehensively assess the economic, social, and cultural impact generated by the festival (Saúde et al., 2019).

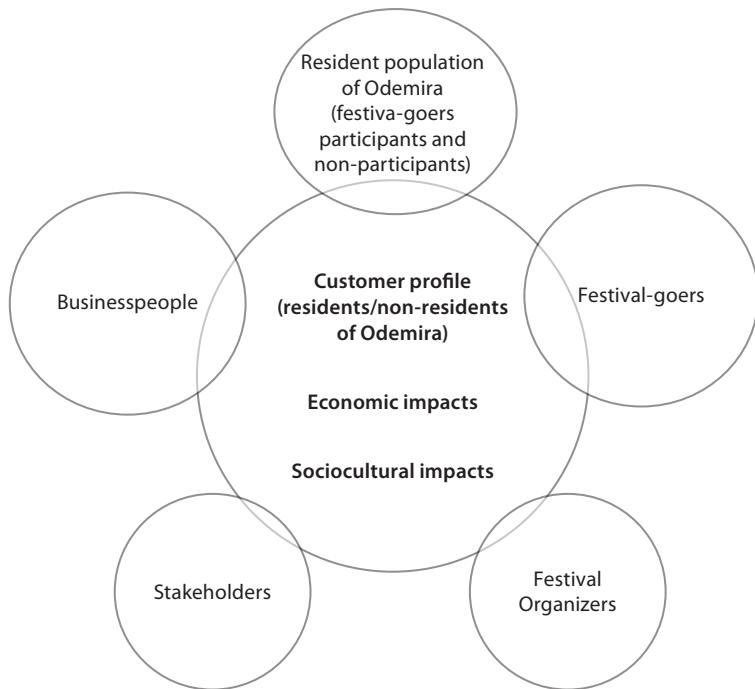


Figure 1. Dimensions of analysis and sources of information collection

Source: own elaboration.

We investigated how festival participation influences the destination images (DI) in 2018. Using a probabilistic and representative sample of festival participants who did not reside in Odemira, the study assessed how their participation in the 2017 edition of the festival shaped the DI they constructed and shared about the region. For the analysis of the collected data, we applied descriptive and inferential statistics to the quantitative information. Meanwhile, we used thematic categorical content analysis for the qualitative data. This direct consultation provided valuable insights into the festival's role in shaping the tourism image and brand of Odemira among visitors who travel specifically to the destination to attend the event (Saúde & Rodrigues, 2020).

4. Results and Discussion

The MEO Sudoeste festival is one of Portugal's oldest and most widely covered music festivals, having been active for more than 20 years. It takes place annually every August, although the organizers cancelled it in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The festival is held at Herdade da Casa Branca, located in the parish of São Teotónio within the municipality of Odemira (NUTS III Alentejo Litoral, district of Beja) (for localization, see Figures 2, 3, and 4).



Figure 2. Map of Portugal

Source: TUBS, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons. No changes made.

The festival was inaugurated in 1997 and has developed into a significant tourist event. Various sponsorships enhanced this transformation, shaping the festival's identity and communication style. According to the producer, the festival attracted around 200,000 attendees in recent years (2017, 2018, and 2019). It is closely linked to the image of its host region, Zambujeira do Mar/Southwest/Alentejo Litoral, classifying it as what Getz (2008) describes as a hallmark event.

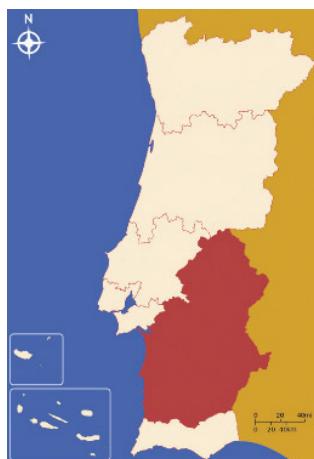


Figure 3. Map of the Alentejo region

Source: Petnog, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons. No changes made.



Figure 4. Map of the Alentejo Litoral region

Source: Tschubby, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons. No changes made.

This festival embodies the characteristics of a major event, marked by its regular occurrence, large scale, and operational complexity. Furthermore, it is included in the municipal cultural program as a key event aimed not only at young residents of the municipality but also at attracting festival tourists to Odemira.

The Municipality of Odemira (Figure 5) consists of 13 parishes, each with distinct sizes and geographical characteristics. The parishes of Vila Nova de Milfontes, Longueira/Almograve, and São Teotónio, along with the locality of Zambujeira do Mar, which has been part of São Teotónio since 2013, are situated in the Alentejo Litoral/southwest region (Figure 3) (Saúde et al., 2019). According to the 2021 census, São Teotónio is home to 29.4% of the municipality's total population, which amounts to 8,694 inhabitants (INE, 2021).

In 2019, approximately 46% of all hotel establishments in the NUTS III Alentejo Litoral region were located in Odemira (INE, 2020). The total revenues from tourism activities in this area amounted to €14.427 million, which represented 22.6% of the total revenue reported for NUTS III Alentejo Litoral, according to the latest data from INE dated 2019. These figures highlight the significance of the tourism sector in this region. Each summer, the residents of this territory, particularly those in Zambujeira do Mar, due to its proximity to the festival site and its strong branding, prepare to meet the direct and indirect demands of increased tourism.

The structured presentation of information throughout the study enabled the timely dissemination of selected results to the contracting entity – the Municipality of Odemira – and to institutional partners. The research team shared these results in multiple settings, including restricted meetings with municipal teams and broader forums open to public participation. These forums included presentations and discussions at the municipal social council, progress evaluation forums, the final presentation of conclusions, and a book launch.



Figure 5. Map of the Odemira Municipality

Source: Gazillion, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons. No changes made.

The evaluation of the festival's sociocultural and economic impacts revealed that, even in the absence of CBT attributes, the MEO Sudoeste festival is far from a neutral presence, generating a range of effects on the local community over the years. For the purposes of this reflection, we highlight the following key impacts, derived from data collected among the resident population. The findings indicate that the majority (Saúde et al., 2019):

- "I like to interact with the festival collaborators/organizers/artists;"
 - "The festival is an opportunity to try out new ideas and projects;"
 - "The festival guarantees opportunities for the development of new experiences and activities for residents of the municipality of Odemira."

The examples presented illustrate an existing yet constructed relationship between the community and the festival, one that nonetheless requires greater sustainability. In recent years, the festival has shifted toward a highly centralized, site-contained model that concentrates entertainment activities alongside the musical program; this shift has increased the festival's distance from the broader community. Nevertheless, whether through the substantial influx of festivalgoers traversing the territory, engaging with the local circuit to Zambujeira do Mar and surrounding beaches, or through the direct and indirect sociocultural and economic effects generated, the MEO Sudoeste festival has remained a transformative presence for the host community. The results underscore the strong connection between the festival and its territory, a relationship that not only shapes its image and branding as a commercial product but has also significantly influenced community dynamics over the past two decades. In particular, the festival has enhanced the region's profile and value as a tourist destination. Recognizing the festival's role in promoting and consolidating the image of the territory as one of its most positively perceived effects, we sought to deepen the interpretation of its sig-

nificance by exploring and characterizing the DI constructed by festivalgoers regarding the Odemira region, as well as their intentions to revisit (Saúde & Rodrigues, 2020). The data collected showed that (Saúde & Rodrigues, 2020, p. 372):

- 85.2% of festivalgoers stated that they began to have a different and more positive image of the region after participating in the 2017 edition of the festival;
- 88.5% stated that they would like to spend holidays in the region again;
- 90.2% have already recommended or will recommend visiting the territory to family/friends;
- The images identified by festivalgoers focused on the existence of good, beautiful and/or excellent beaches. Young people did not highlight distinctive elements associated with the touristic and sociocultural identity of the territory.

The results demonstrate that participation in the festival fostered the creation and sharing of more positive images of the territory among festivalgoers and strengthened their intentions to revisit and recommend the destination. Moreover, based on the shared image attributes, we may conclude that festivalgoers highlighted a very small number of characteristics and resources of the territory (beach, sunset, entertainment/fun, MEO Sudoeste), revealing the lack of reference to other elements that construct the material and immaterial heritage and identity of the region. The shared images were entirely “glued” to those exploited and promoted by the event marketing (Saúde & Rodrigues, 2020). Besides enriching and deepening the results found in the study developed in 2017, the additional data obtained identify more issues for reflection on the dynamics of the event and its relationship with the surrounding territory and community.

Impact assessments that incorporate a participatory research approach offer the significant added value of measuring and identifying the effects generated by an action, project, or event through iterative reflection and observation with the target audience and key stakeholders. They also have the potential to serve as guides for continuous improvement if integrated into action-research, shared, and collaborative processes.

In the specific case of the studies developed about the MEO Sudoeste festival, we collected relevant information that allowed us to determine results that one could, and should, use to:

- improve/optimize the event planning and organization: its compatibility with community life and identity; provide benefits generated at the level of capitalizing on the touristic and economic potential of the territory;
- minimize environmental effects: the social and physical distancing of the community from the event, with direct benefits, among others, for its compatibility with the current dynamic of tourism supply in the territory;
- improve the future sustainability of the event underlying the exploration of other program paths that go beyond the exclusive focus, in recent years, on a certain type of music and a certain type of audience, i.e., young people, under the “amusement park” format.

One may leverage the festival’s strong evaluative standing to support a transformation of its attributes, enhancing its sustainability within the host territory. In this context, an impact assessment methodology grounded in participatory research principles, i.e., returning results to both the community and organizers, assumes particular significance. Such an approach enables the collective, as both participants and beneficiaries, to identify in detail the economic, sociocultural, and environmental costs and benefits of the event, while fostering active community involvement in shaping its development, in alignment with the objectives of CBT. The findings in both studies underscore the multiple benefits of integrating action-research

methodologies into event impact assessments, particularly when these processes are shared and collaborative with local communities, regardless of the event's typology. The community should remain central, even for events that use the territory merely as a venue-considered not as a passive backdrop but as a vital asset whose identity, dynamics, perceptions, preferences, critiques, and expectations are essential to the event's sustainability. An event cannot be truly sustainable if it operates independently of the community in which it occurs. Instead, its planning, execution, and evaluation must actively engage and reflect the lived experiences of residents.

5. Conclusions

The incorporation of participatory research methodologies aligned with the principles of the CBT approach into event impact assessment processes – enriched by structured moments of collaborative discussion designed by the evaluation team (whether external, internal, or mixed) – constitutes a key strategy for enhancing the sustainability and contextual relevance of tourism events. By systematically integrating the perspectives and perceptions of diverse stakeholders throughout the different stages of an event (before, during, and after), such a methodology fosters a more balanced, inclusive, and informed approach to event management.

Drawing on the benefits and added value generated by the two studies conducted on the MEO Sudoeste Festival, which allowed for the identification of a wide spectrum of direct and indirect impacts, as well as areas in need of improvement and adjustment, the empirical evidence underscores the necessity for event impact assessments to adopt a participatory approach capable of informing and guiding the event's ongoing enhancement. Such an approach requires a systematic orientation of inquiry toward key questions, including which actions should be prioritized in future editions based on findings from previous evaluations and how these actions can be effectively implemented. It also asks how local communities, drawing on their perceptions and lived experiences of the event, can actively participate in its planning and development, and, more broadly, how can an event rooted in a profit-oriented business model evolve – without compromising its legitimate economic objectives – into a platform for genuine community engagement and a catalyst for sustainable practices benefiting the populations directly affected by its impacts?

Therefore, emphasizing the importance of adopting a continuous and participatory methodological approach to impact evaluation is crucial. One can foster a genuine communicative space only by maintaining sustained involvement of participants and community members, rather than relying on isolated or sporadic assessments (Kemmis et al., 2014), endowing large-scale events with community-based attributes. Such an approach may contribute to a paradigm shift in event planning and development, transforming major festivals like MEO Sudoeste into genuinely sustainable tourism experiences that respect and enhance the communities in which they take place.

The findings are based on two studies of a single festival within a specific cultural and geographic context, which readers must consider when reflecting on the results' generalizability. Furthermore, while participatory methodologies provide rich qualitative insights, they are under the inherent influence of the perspectives and engagement levels of the stakeholders involved, which may influence the potential added value of such approaches. Despite these limitations, the principles and reflections derived from this research offer valuable guidance for

applying participatory and CBT-aligned approaches in other contexts, while underscoring the need for context-specific adaptation and ongoing evaluation.

Overall, this article underscores the potential of participatory action research to strengthen community engagement, enhance event sustainability, and advance the broader objectives of CBT. By systematically integrating these approaches into event impact assessments, organizers can design events that are not only economically viable but also socially responsible and closely connected to the communities and territories in which they take place.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research took place without any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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