

Chapter 20

Is Vodafone Paredes de Coura Festival (Portugal) a Sustainable Event? The Festivalgoers' Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to explore the sustainability of the Vodafone Paredes de Coura Festival, in Portugal, from the perspective of its attendees. By assessing the awareness, perceptions, and behaviors of festivalgoers regarding the festival's sustainable practices, the study provides insights into the effectiveness of these initiatives. The empirical component of the research involves the application of a structured questionnaire to a sample of festival participants. The questionnaire addresses key areas such as waste management, transportation, energy use, and communication of sustainable practices. The recommendations from this research are intended to inform festival organizers and policymakers on how to further develop and promote sustainable practices, contributing to the broader goals of environmental stewardship and sustainable tourism development.

INTRODUCTION

The growing concern with the environmental impact of cultural events, particularly large-scale festivals, has driven debates on the need to integrate sustainable practices into the sector. These events, in addition to their undeniable cultural, social, and economic value, also have a significant ecological

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footprint due to intensive resource consumption, waste generation, and emissions associated with the movement of large audiences (Abounaga et al., 2024; British Council, 2023). In this way, the role of festivals in contemporary society has transcended their traditional function as mere platforms for entertainment and celebration. Today, festivals are increasingly perceived as multifaceted spaces that blend cultural enrichment, community engagement, and innovative practices, including sustainability. In this context, sustainability has become a central concern for festival organizers, participants, and stakeholders. Modern audiences not only demand exceptional experiences but also expect these events to align with their values, particularly when it comes to environmental and social responsibility (Mair & Smith, 2021). Festivals are therefore being reimagined as “living laboratories”, where concepts such as resource efficiency, circular economy principles, and eco-friendly practices can be tested and refined (Future Festival Tools, 2022; Economia Circular, 2023; Suharto & Jamali, 2023; Gohoungodji & Amara, 2024).

The Vodafone Paredes de Coura Festival stands out as a pioneering example of this evolving paradigm. Established in 1993 as a grassroots initiative driven by a passion for music and community, it has grown into one of Portugal's most iconic and respected music festivals. Held annually in the picturesque natural amphitheater of Paredes de Coura, the event has consistently demonstrated a unique ability to harmonize the natural environment with the power of music, creating an immersive and unforgettable experience for attendees. Over its three-decade history, the festival has not only gained national and international acclaim but also embraced sustainability as a defining characteristic of its philosophy.

This study aims to delve into the sustainable practices implemented at the Vodafone Paredes de Coura Festival and assess their effectiveness, acceptance among festivalgoers, and potential for further evolution. These practices include measures such as promoting shared and cooperative mobility, utilizing biodegradable materials, and encouraging waste reduction through reusable items like cups and merchandise. The festival has also introduced infrastructural improvements, such as connecting sanitary facilities to the local sewage network and expanded its offerings with innovative accommodations like luxury glamping options. These initiatives reflect a broader commitment to creating an environmentally responsible and socially inclusive event.

The methodology employed for this research involved a comprehensive survey distributed through multiple channels during and after the festival. By employing tools such as direct participant engagement, QR-coded flyers in the festival grounds, and online outreach via social media, the study sought to maximize response rates and capture diverse perspectives. Data analysis, conducted using statistical tools such as SPSS, highlights key patterns and trends, offering insights into the perceptions of attendees regarding the festival's sustainable practices. Ultimately, the study not only evaluates the current state of sustainability at the festival but also provides recommendations for enhancing its impact and ensuring its alignment with the values of an increasingly conscious audience.

In an era where sustainability is no longer a luxury but a necessity, festivals like Vodafone Paredes de Coura represent a powerful intersection of entertainment and environmental stewardship. By exploring the successes and challenges of its sustainable initiatives, this study contributes to a broader understanding of how festivals can act as catalysts for positive change, inspiring participants to carry these values into their daily lives and communities. In fact, this study offers valuable contributions to both academic literature and practical event management. Academically, it enriches the discourse on sustainable event management by providing a detailed case study of the Vodafone Paredes de Coura Festival, showcasing innovative strategies and their effectiveness in fostering environmentally and socially responsible practices. Practically, it serves as a resource for festival organizers and stakeholders, presenting actionable insights into sustainable practices that can enhance operational efficiency, audience satisfaction, and

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