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Sustainability and accessibility at music festivals: the Vodafone Paredes de Coura Festival

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Abstract. This study delves into the relationship between tourism, events, sustainability, and accessibility, specifically focusing on the Vodafone Paredes de Coura festival as a significant case study. The research investigates integrating sustainable and accessibility measures into the festival's organization. A survey was conducted among festival-goers to gauge their perception of the study's theme. The results underscore the importance of sustainability and accessibility in the tourism and events industry and highlight festivals' potential economic, social, and cultural benefits. These benefits, which include increased revenue, improved community relations, and enriched cultural experiences, are significant and should inspire the audience about the positive impact of sustainability. The study provides valuable insights for event organizers and tourism stakeholders to enhance festival sustainability and accessibility practices, thereby contributing to a more sustainable future.

Keywords: events, tourism, sustainability, accessibility, festival, Paredes de Coura.

1 Introduction

The relationship between tourism and events has grown significantly in recent years, with events playing a crucial role in bringing venues to life and generating a positive image of the destinations. At the same time, destinations increasingly recognize events, particularly music festivals, to attract mass visitors, stimulate investment, and create a favourable image in the media. Music festivals, in particular, have emerged as a popular tourist product that attracts thousands of participants and is closely linked to tourism activity [3]. The primary goal of this study is to delve into sustainability in tourism and events, with a specific focus on music festivals. The Vodafone Paredes de

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Coura festival was chosen as the case study. A questionnaire was used to assess the level of integration of sustainable and accessibility measures in the festival's organization. This approach allowed us to analyse the adoption of sustainable and accessibility practices and identify areas for improvement. The study also highlights the growing importance of sustainability in tourism and events, recognizing the significant role that festivals, such as Vodafone Paredes de Coura, can play in promoting positive change. It underscores the potential benefits of adopting environmentally and socially responsible practices in the festival industry, such as attracting more visitors, enhancing the destination's image, and creating a more optimistic future for the festival industry.

2 Literature Review

In the post-COVID-19 era, global tourism is vitally important for economic recovery. However, the industry has faced unresolved challenges since the pandemic, particularly the need to shift to a new tourism model focusing on healthy and sustainable growth. Simply measuring the number of tourists is no longer enough to assess the success of a tourism model. Instead, priority should be given to offering high-quality tourism experiences that minimize environmental impact, maximize economic and socio-cultural benefits, improve the well-being of tourists and visitors, and improve the standard of living of residents [2].

Despite the potential positive impacts, recent research suggests that the tourism sector is less sustainable than ever, with economic, socio-cultural, environmental, technological, and political implications for destinations [4]. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent an inclusive and comprehensive approach, merging global, economic, social, and environmental development agendas. They emphasize the need for accelerated global, local, and individual sustainability action, as highlighted by the Decade of Action announced in 2019 [4]. While the SDGs provide a common framework, their implementation allows different strategies for each country. Each signatory prioritizes human rights, equality, inclusion, and environmental sustainability. Sustainable tourism is a prominent topic in the academic literature, especially in recreation and leisure studies. This research is driven by recognizing the environmental, socio-cultural, and political injustices and implications of travel decisions and the right to travel [4]. Sustainable tourism aims to balance the economic, environmental, and socio-cultural benefits and the costs of tourism development to improve the quality of life of the destination's residents while conserving the environment, nature, and heritage for future generations. The implementation of sustainability in the tourism sector then involves raising awareness, integrating sustainability into strategic agendas, and applying various measures, identifying environmental, economic, voluntary, sociocultural, and planning and regeneration tools for sustainable tourism policies. Sustainability efforts aim to manage ecological capacity through preserving cultural heritage, water quality assurance, visitor monitoring, park and facility maintenance, engagement with residents and communities, comprehensive planning, and air quality management [12].

There has been a growing interest in understanding the environmental impacts of events and festivals in the last ten years. This has led to developing an ISO 20121 International Standard for Sustainable Event Management, establishing organizations such as A Greener Festival and the Sustainable Event Alliance, and introducing software tools such as Julie's Bicycle Creative IG (Industry Greening) Tools, among others. Festivals have focused on addressing the local environmental impacts of their activities and operations, such as increased use of renewable energy, waste minimization and recycling, water conservation, and noise and light pollution, minimizing traffic congestion and pollution in their local area [10]. Festivals can serve as important catalysts to promote environmental awareness, effectively conveying educational messages to their audience through various means, such as signage (posters), shows, and interactive sessions [8]. Organizers and stakeholders increasingly recognize the need to integrate sustainability principles into their events and are interested in assessing their initiatives' environmental, social, and economic impacts [13]. When it comes to events like music festivals, there's a particular focus on understanding your ecological footprint. The studies examined the consequences of festivals on the environment, including issues such as resource consumption, air pollution, waste generation, water use, and energy consumption. The impact of festivals on surrounding ecosystems is also a concern; for example, the accumulation of garbage and contempt by participants causes water and environmental contamination, putting animal habitats and vegetation at risk [8]. Many music festivals still need help in complying with environmental regulations. One reason is understanding how consumer practices contribute to environmental impact. In addition, there are barriers such as limited stakeholder support, time constraints, control of venues and participants, and availability of sustainable suppliers and resources. As festivals involve multiple parties and organizations, festival management teams must establish the right relationships to work towards their sustainability goals [8]. The events industry recognizes the importance of sustainability, but there is a need for ongoing research and collaboration to address environmental impacts and implement sustainable practices effectively.

Event tourism involves travelling to a particular destination to participate in conferences, festivals, exhibitions, sports competitions, and concerts. It implies the displacement of individuals or groups with the predominant intention of attending or actively participating in these events [6]. According to [3], event tourism is not a recent phenomenon. What is new is the importance of event tourism, evident in the increasing number of special events in recent years. A growing number of tourist destinations see events as attracting large-scale visitors, stimulating investment and returns, and generating positive media coverage for the region. Promoting "Tourism for All" is carried out to develop awareness-raising and training actions for companies and organizations and support projects that promote universal accessibility and the enjoyment of the tourist offer, namely, adaptation and improvement operations of infrastructures, equipment, and tourist resources. Events as qualifying assets add value to the territories' offering [15]. Thus, it is intended to encourage the existence of an inclusive tourist offer, supporting the promotion of events that are increasingly adapted to all audiences [14].

The desire for unique experiences is growing more and more. Music festivals meet this demand and have become prominent places in contemporary tourism, acting as cultural attractions. According to [5], festivals are emerging worldwide as a dynamic and growing sector in the tourism industry, with significant economic importance due to their socio-cultural and political impact on the local community. Festivals are integrative scenarios simultaneously at the local, trans-local, and virtual levels [5]. They are then significant events that revolve around the central theme of the music but also offer activities and amusements that go beyond the music, providing participants with a complete experience [1]. In this way, music festivals are not only significant sources of revenue, with the top 10 world festivals generating \$259 million in 2017, but also contribute to the sustainable development of communities. In the Portuguese panorama, music events, such as concerts or festivals, were among the most popular in 2019. Currently, this continues to be the standard of the cultural practices of the Portuguese, and the pop/rock genre is the most appreciated and frequented. In 2019, 3,380,900 tickets were sold for music events/festivals/concerts, and 5,597,662 tickets were offered. This figure corresponds to 18 million in box office revenues [9]. The distinctive nature of music festivals allows them to attract people for many reasons [1]. Festivalgoers vary significantly from one event to another, particularly in their motivations. Some participants prioritize the music, while others seek social interactions [11]. In their study, they identified seven key aspects that motivate individuals to participate in events: the interest in socializing, the opportunity to create family bonds, the novelty of the event, the chance to escape and relax, the excitement and entertainment it offers, the opportunity for cultural exploration, and specific motivators, such as the food or the theme of the event.

3 Case Study - Vodafone Paredes de Coura Festival: contextualization and methodology

The Paredes de Coura Festival, now known as Vodafone Paredes de Coura, has existed for 30 years in the Taboão River Beach. This festival has allowed the development of the municipality of Paredes de Coura and neighbouring municipalities, such as Ponte de Lima, Vila Nova de Cerveira, and Valença. When the festival takes place, people from all over Portuguese territory and foreigners visit Paredes de Coura and the neighbouring municipalities, which allows for the development of economies, albeit seasonally, through the exploration of commercial spaces such as restaurants, small retail stores, and grocery stores on an individual basis [10].

Since 1993, the Paredes de Coura Festival has been held in August, with three music stages that host concerts throughout the day. In addition to the activities sponsored by the brands, the festival offers a diverse range of attractions suitable for people of all ages and musical preferences. With a particular focus on independent rock, the event features international and national artists, providing a platform for emerging local bands to perform in front of a large audience [7]. The festival has been growing in terms of programming and improving the infrastructure on site. It is a cult festival known for its charisma and quality musical offer. Throughout its history, the Paredes

de Coura festival has been increasingly recognized for its potential for local development. This significant contribution is recognized not only by the Municipality of Paredes de Coura, one of the festival's main partners, but also by the citizens and, above all, by the local commerce of the village. In addition to visiting the festival, tourists become attracted to the region and start visiting it outside the context of the festival. The central axis of this event is music. Still, all the other elements in the venue are incorporated to maintain the atmosphere, appeal to nature, and conserve the environment [10].

For the elaboration of this article, a methodology was followed based on a first review of the literature, using scientific articles on sustainability in tourism and events, as well as on festivals, their motivations, and market segments. Subsequently, secondary data were collected for information collection. Additionally, a quantitative approach was employed by administering a questionnaire, allowing primary data collection from the Vodafone Paredes de Coura festival participants. The questionnaire was carefully prepared through the virtual platform Google Forms, integrating clear and concise questions. It comprises a comprehensive set of 24 items, encompassing open-ended and closed-ended question formats. The questionnaire was divided into three sections to ensure a comprehensive topic exploration. Section 01 contains the socio-demographic issues of the sample. This section aims to collect essential information about the profile of the respondents, including age, gender, academic qualifications, country of residence, frequency of participation in festivals per year, and number of times they have previously participated in the Paredes de Coura festival. Section 02 has questions related to visitor behaviour. They collected information on visitor behaviour, including aspects such as the mode of travel, type of transport, length of stay in the region, length of visit to the festival, and types of accommodation chosen. Section 03 aimed to analyse visitors' perceptions regarding the event's sustainability. The research was carried out in Portugal, with the participants of the festival being the target audience of this research. Data collection occurred from May 31 to June 24, 2023, resulting in 56 completed questionnaires. The questionnaire was distributed through online links and shared among potential groups of participants through the popular social media platform Facebook and personal contacts. Unfortunately, we could not obtain a more significant number of responses, possibly because there is a proliferation of questionnaires for the most diverse subjects, so few people have answered.

4 Analysis of the Results and Discussion

The analysis of the participants' sociodemographic characteristics reveals an interesting view of the profile of the participants in the festival (Table 1). When analysing the data, we found a great diversity of participants regarding age, gender, academic qualifications, country of residence, and festival attendance habits. Regarding age, the sample of respondents covers several age groups, with a notable concentration in the 46-55 age group, representing 25% of the sample. This is followed by the age groups of 36-45 years, 23.2%, and 56-71 years, 19.7%. The 15-25 age group represents

14.3% of the participants, while the 26-35 age group represents 12.5%. It should be noted that a small percentage of participants (5.3%) should have mentioned their age. In terms of gender, most participants in the festival identify themselves as female, constituting 66.1% of the sample. On the other hand, male participants represent 33.9%, showing a relatively balanced gender representation.

Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics. Source: Own elaboration.

Sociodemographic Characteristics	N	%
Age		
15-25	8	14,3
26-35	7	12,5
36-45	13	23,2
46-55	14	25
56-71	11	19,7
No Response	3	5,3
Gender		
Female	37	66,1
Male	19	33,9
Education		
Primary education	4	7,1
Secondary education	19	33,8
Higher education	33	58,9
Country of Residence		
Portugal	53	94,6
Germany	2	3,6
France	1	1,8
How many festivals do you attend per year?		
None	8	14,3
1-2	41	73,2
3-4	5	8,9
5 or more	2	3,6
How many times have you participated in the Vodafone Paredes de Coura festival?		
1-2	10	17,9
3-4	8	14,3
5 or more	35	62,5
No Response	3	5,3
Total	56	100

The level of education of the participants reveals an interesting distribution. A significant proportion, 58.9%, completed tertiary education, which indicates a base of participants with a high level of education. In addition, 33.8% of the participants completed secondary education. The overwhelming majority of participants (94.6%) are residents of Portugal, reaffirming the popularity of the festival with the local community. In addition, a small representation of participants (3.6%) comes from Germany, and an even smaller contingent (1.8%) comes from France. Regarding the frequency of festivals, the data indicate that most participants (73.2%) attend 1 or 2 festivals per year. On the other hand, a notable part of the sample (14.3%) does not attend any festival, which reveals a potential opportunity for growth in attracting new participants. We note that a substantial majority of participants (62.5%) have already participated in the festival five or more times. This means a high level of loyalty and

engagement with the event. In addition, 17.9% attended 1 or 2 times, which indicates a continuous flow of new attendees. 14.3% attended 3-4 times, demonstrating a consistent interest in the festival experience. These sociodemographic analyses provide vital insights to understand the target audience better and adapt event planning to meet the needs and preferences of attendees. Analysing the behaviour of festival participants offers valuable information about their choices and habits related to participation in the event. By examining the data, several important observations can be made about how visitors commute to the festival, their means of transport, their accommodation choices, and the length of their stay (Table 2). Regarding participation in the festival, most participants (85.7%) prefer to be accompanied, which highlights the social nature of the event. A smaller percentage (8.9%) chooses to go alone.

Table 2. Visitor behaviour. Source: Own elaboration.

Visitor behaviour	N	%
How to go to the festival?		
Alone	5	8,9
Accompanied	48	85,7
No Response	3	5,3
Transport Used		
Public transport	1	1,8
Private transportation	41	73,2
Afoot	11	19,6
No Response	3	5,3
Type of Accommodation		
Own home	37	66,1
Local Accommodation	4	7,1
Festival Camp	12	21,4
No Response	3	5,3
Time spent in the region		
1-2 days	5	8,9
3-4 days	5	8,9
5-6 days	7	12,5
7-8 days	5	8,9
More than 8 days	31	55,4
No Response	3	5,3
How many days do you participate in the festival?		
1-2 days	11	19,6
3-4 days	17	30,4
5-6 days	9	16,1
7-8 days	16	28,6
No Response	3	5,3
Total	56	100

Regarding transport, the data reveal that most festivalgoers (73.2%) use private transport to get to the venue. This can include personal vehicles or carpooling. A significant part (19.6%) choose to travel on foot, which may indicate the proximity of the festival site. Only a tiny fraction (1.8%) use public transport. Regarding accommodation, a significant percentage of participants (66.1%) choose to stay in their own homes, which suggests a high level of local participation. A smaller percentage (7.1%) choose to stay in local accommodation. Many attendees (21.4%) prefer to

camp at the festival site, embracing the immersive experience of the on-site camping facilities. Analysing the length of stay in the region, the data shows that a substantial part of festival participants (55.4%) extend their visit by more than eight days, indicating a desire to explore the region and enjoy activities other than the festival itself. A notable number of participants (12.5%) stay 5-6 days, while an equal proportion (8.9%) choose to stay 1-2, 3-4 or 7-8 days. As regards the duration of participation in the festival, the data show a relatively even distribution between the different periods. The largest group (30.4%) attends the festival for 3-4 days, closely followed by those who stay for 7-8 days (28.6%). Participants who attend the festival for 1-2 or 5-6 days represent 19.6% and 16.1%, respectively. Understanding visitors' behaviour regarding the company, transport, accommodation, and length of stay allows for developing personalised experiences and services that improve the festival experience and attendee satisfaction. Regarding the participants' opinions on the sustainability actions observed during the festival, a significant majority (76.8%) consider the festival environmentally friendly, while 23.2% disagree. In addition, concerning sustainable practices, most participants noted using recyclable materials. They recognized the presence of incentives to promote sustainable behaviours during the event, representing 78.6% and 76.8% of responses, respectively. Regarding waste reduction measures during the festival, only 28 respondents (50%) answered the question. The use of recyclable and reusable cups stands out, representing 57.1%. Other measures include the presence of portable ashtrays, recycling bins (eco-points), efforts to reduce food waste by donating leftovers to institutions, awareness posters, water reuse, and incentives. However, it should be noted that 21.4% of respondents need to learn or believe there are incentives to reduce waste at the festival.

The limited response rate to the question on waste reduction measures may indicate a need for more awareness or attention from participants regarding these specific initiatives. Improving communication and engagement strategies is essential to ensure that attendees are well-informed about the sustainability efforts undertaken during the event. This could increase their involvement and support for waste reduction practices. The high percentage of participants who recognized using recyclable and reusable cups as good indicates a positive reaction to more environmentally friendly alternatives. This suggests that the festival organizers have successfully implemented sustainable practices, contributing to waste reduction and resource conservation. However, the finding that a significant proportion of respondents need to learn or believe in the existence of incentives to reduce waste raises concerns. This observation again highlights the need for better communication and transparency in disseminating the festival's efforts in this area. By clearly demonstrating the measures taken to encourage waste reduction, organizers can engage participants more and improve their perception of the festival's commitment to sustainability. Overall, while there are positive indications of waste reduction initiatives at the festival, more efforts should be made to increase awareness, understanding, and participation among attendees to maximize the impact of these sustainability measures.

Festival participants prioritize waste reduction and recycling (43.6%) as the most urgent sustainable behaviours. They also highlight the importance of conscious consumption of resources, the increase in the use of recyclable materials, and local in-

volvement (12.7%, 14.5%, and 12.7%, respectively). Encouraging sustainable practices and promoting awareness are considered vital. Although sustainable transport and adequate waste collection have less recognition (3.6% and 1.8%, respectively), addressing these aspects can significantly reduce the festival's environmental impact. The focus on waste reduction, recycling, conscious consumption, recyclable materials, local engagement, and sustainable practices will bolster the festival's sustainability efforts. The analysis of the participants' responses indicates that the majority (71.4%) of respondents perceived a genuine concern of the festival's organizers and communicators to raise awareness of sustainability issues during the event. This finding suggests that efforts were made to prioritize and emphasize sustainable practices throughout the festival. However, it is worth noting that a significant proportion (26.8%) of participants felt that sustainability needs to receive more attention and focus. This highlights a potential area for improvement in ensuring that sustainability initiatives are effectively communicated and emphasized to all festival attendees. While most participants acknowledged the organizers' concern for sustainability, a notable portion still thinks more could be done.

Regarding the accessibility of communication, the analysis of the participants' responses reveals that the majority (82.1%) of respondents considered the festival's communication accessible to all participants. However, it is essential to recognize that a significant minority (16.1%) of the participants felt that communication was inaccessible. Regarding accessibility for people with reduced mobility, a small percentage (3.6%) of participants chose not to answer, indicating a potential lack of knowledge or uncertainty. Among those who responded, the results show that 60.7% of the participants consider the festival accessible to people with reduced mobility, which indicates positive efforts in this area. However, a considerable proportion (35.7%) of participants expressed a different perspective, suggesting that there may be room for improvement in providing appropriate solutions for individuals with mobility difficulties. More than half of the participants (53.6%) answered that bathrooms are not accessible to people with reduced mobility or other types of limitations. These findings highlight the importance of continuous evaluation and the implementation of inclusive practices to ensure that the festival is accessible and welcoming for all participants, regardless of their specific needs or limitations.

Only about 50% of respondents answered the open-ended questions. Regarding the most prominent sustainable action at the festival, reusing the cups stood out as the most prominent sustainable practice. Participants recognized the effectiveness of this measure in reducing the use of disposable cups. However, a critical remark regarding the lack of reimbursement for the cups raised concerns about the true motivations behind the initiative (Fig. 1). Other sustainable actions mentioned by the participants included recycling, maintaining cleanliness throughout the festival grounds, using mobile toilets, practicing conscious consumption of resources, and waste collection. The absence of plastic cups on the floor and the constant cleaning of the festival area were also highlighted as positive aspects. Awareness messages near the camping areas and along the river were essential to promote sustainable behaviours among the participants. It is important to note that these opinions reflect individual perceptions and may vary based on personal experiences during the festival.

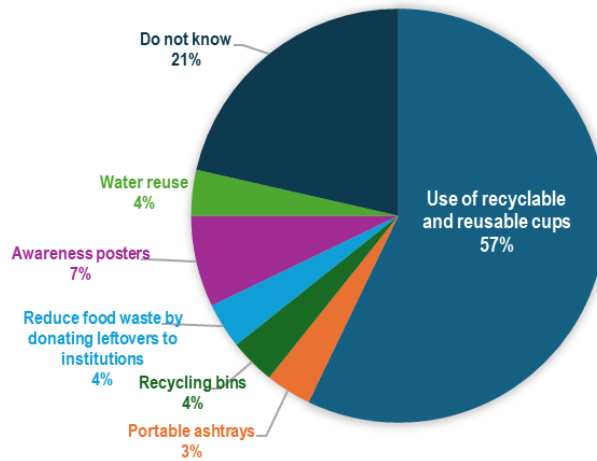


Fig. 1 - Waste reduction measures during the festival. Source: Own elaboration.

There are several areas related to sustainability that participants felt needed to be adequately addressed during the festival. Among them, the following stand out: after the event, there was often waste that remained in the festival grounds and surrounding areas, which indicates a lack of immediate and complete cleaning; the need for greater awareness and education regarding the waste of resources, stressing the importance of conscious consumption and the reduction of waste production; the excessive use of drinking water in showers and washbasins raised concerns among participants who suggested measures to minimize water consumption, such as implementing water-saving practices and exploring alternative irrigation methods for the festival area; the need for better management and sustainability practices related to the use of vehicles by festival organizers; Although recycling was recognized as a positive action, some participants considered that there could be improvements in recycling facilities and processes, both in the festival grounds and in the camping areas; accessibility for people with reduced mobility, suggesting the placement of platforms next to the stages and alternative routes to facilitate movement and enjoyment of the festival experience; Attendees expressed a desire for a more comprehensive and holistic sustainability strategy that encompasses all aspects of the festival, including behind-the-scenes operations. They emphasized the importance of taking radical and fundamental measures, such as eliminating single-use plastic bottles and implementing sustainable practices throughout the event's production process. Overall, these responses indicate areas where attendees believe the festival could improve its sustainability efforts and address specific environmental concerns more effectively.

5 Final Considerations

The post-COVID-19 era highlights the vital role of global tourism in economic recovery. However, the sector faces unresolved challenges requiring a shift to a new model

prioritizing sustainable growth. In line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), sustainable tourism addresses pressing issues such as environmental protection and overall well-being. Implementing sustainability involves awareness-raising, strategic integration, and measures encompassing environmental, economic, socio-cultural, and planning aspects. Music festivals are popular in contemporary tourism, attract visitors, drive economic growth, and contribute to community development. Ensuring the sustainability of festivals requires standards, organizations, and tools for environmentally responsible practices. To overcome challenges such as consumer behaviour, stakeholder support, resource availability, and time constraints, more research is needed to promote sustainability in the events industry.

The administration of questionnaires and the analysis of the results provide valuable information about the profiles of the participants, allowing adjustments in the planning of the festival and the overall improvement of the event. They also highlight areas for improvement, namely in communication on sustainability and accessibility of information, which can be improved to increase participant engagement and satisfaction. In conclusion, adopting sustainability in the tourism sector is essential for well-being and long-term positive change. By adopting sustainable practices, festivals and the tourism industry can contribute to a more sustainable and responsible future.

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