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# Festival do Bacalhau: The Success of a Redevelopment Strategy Supported in Innovation

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## Abstract

As a result of globalization, destinations were forced to compete among themselves. Of all the products created for this purpose, events stand out, with very positive impacts on the economic, social, political, tourism, urban and environmental levels, with particular relevance in the tourism sector, in which they began to hold a central role. Among these events we can highlight festivals, which are increasingly used to promote tourism and boost the local economy, while also contributing to the marketing of the location, to liven up attractions and locations, and act as catalysts for other forms of development. In such a competitive and cluttered events market, knowing and understanding the various stages of its life cycle can be of great importance in developing effective strategies to make events sustainable and profitable, but also to foresee and anticipate challenges, namely helping to better understand which alternative paths can be followed at a given time. This report, supported by a case study, presents, and describes the redevelopment process of “Festival do Bacalhau” (Codfish Festival) in Ílhavo, Portugal, an important asset of the tourism development and promotion strategy of this territory. This renovation, supported in innovation, allowed to amplify the positive impacts of the festival, both in terms of benefits for the partners and the local economy, and in strengthening the visibility and notoriety of the Municipality of Ílhavo in the tourism market, as well as preventing its decline.

**Keywords:** Festivals; Events Life Cycle; Innovation; Sustainability; Ílhavo

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Planned events are, according to Getz (2008), spatio-temporal phenomena, each one being unique due to the interactions that take place between the place, the people, and the organization. Shone and Parry (2004) perceive events as phenomena arising from non-routine occasions that pursue leisure, cultural, personal, or organizational objectives, occurring outside the normal activity of daily life, and whose purpose is to enlighten, commemorate, entertain or challenge the experience of a group of people.

The growing number of events, which are unique and differentiating proposals of the territories against the competition (Getz & Page, 2016), has been assumed as an important inducer and promoter of tourism activity in destinations, attracting visitors, generating huge revenues, helping to combat seasonality and enliven places (Getz & Page, 2016), but also to spread a positive image and diversify its cultural offer (Mikkonen & Lahovuuo, 2020). For this reason, events gained a central place in the tourism system (Getz & Page, 2016) and have emerged in a salient position namely in marketing plans (Fredline & Faulkner, 2000; Nadotti & Vannoni, 2019).

Among these supporting tools for place marketing, we find events such as local festivals (Chang, 2006), increasingly used to promote tourism and boost the local economy (Felsenstein & Fleischer, 2003). But, according to Getz (2010), the main functions of festivals go far beyond attracting tourists (to specific locations and combating seasonality) or supporting place marketing (including creating the destination's image and branding). They also include the enlivenment of attractions and sites (Andersson & Getz, 2008) and act as catalysts for other forms of development, while being important for urban policies (Rofe & Woosnam, 2016), to halt the decline of a geographical area and positively regenerate its image (Grappi & Montanari, 2011; Uriarte et al., 2019). Falassi (1987) also highlights their function in periodically renewing the life flow of a community and its institutions' legitimacy, plus they can act as meeting points (Quinn, 2005).

Events are created with a purpose, and what was formerly the domain of individuals or community initiatives has evolved into the domain of professionals, given that they have gained too much importance to be left to amateurs (Getz, 2008), due to their important tourist, economic, social, and cultural benefits (Blešić et al., 2014).

As the event matures, there is a professionalization of the staff, with the hiring of specialized people for areas such as marketing, finance or programming (Larson, 2011). Event management has thus become a rapidly growing field of study and professional practice dedicated to the design, production, and management of planned events.

In such a competitive and disordered market as the one we live in (Holmes & Ali-Knight, 2017), the professionalization of events management and the mastery of all its components emerges naturally as a requirement for its success. In this context, knowing and understanding the various phases that events go through throughout their existence is of great importance in developing effective strategies to make them more profitable and sustainable (Beverland et al., 2001).

Taking as a starting point theory related to the events' life cycle, and the role of innovation for their rejuvenation and increased attractiveness, combating their decline, the author focused his research on a specific event, "Festival do Bacalhau de Ílhavo", aiming to understand how the changes introduced in its organization in recent years configure an innovation strategy, with a view to the redevelopment of this event. The author followed a qualitative, exploratory case study approach (Takahashi & Araujo, 2020), using observation and analysis of documents from secondary sources and content analysis (Bardin, 2016).

The paper is organized as follows: the introduction is in the first section, which is followed by a literature review conducted on the events' life cycle and on the innovation processes applied to events. In the third section the methodology is explained, in the fourth the results are presented, and in the fifth they are discussed. The paper ends with the conclusions and some suggestions directed namely to event's organizers, in order to boost the development of innovation processes.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

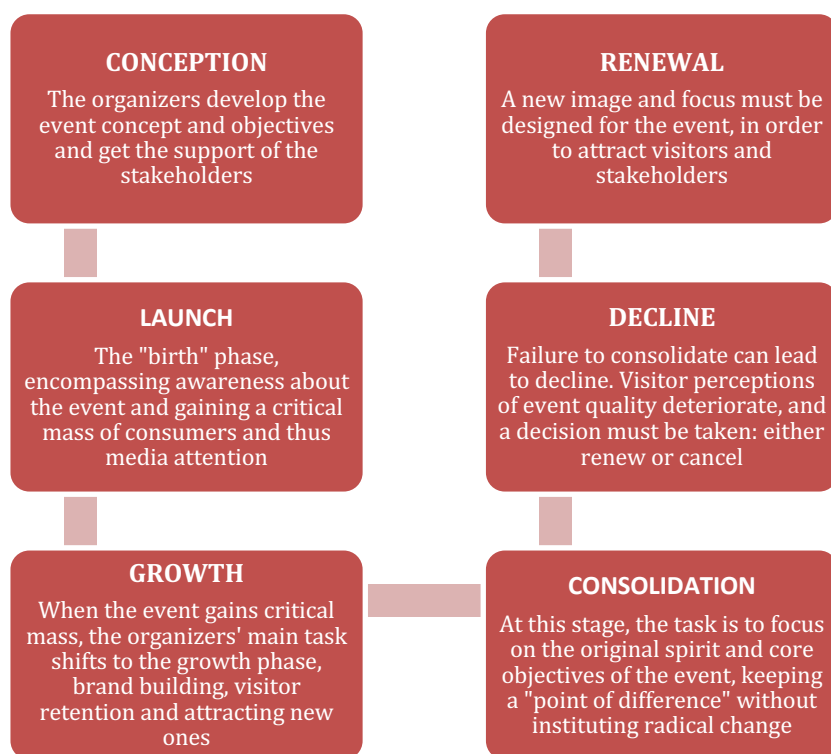
### 2.1. THE FESTIVALS AND EVENTS LIFE CYCLE

The awareness and understanding of the various phases that events pass through reveals to be a factor of great importance for their sustainability (Beverland et al., 2001), in the short, medium, and long term. It allows to foresee and anticipate the challenges, which will change according to the phase the event is in (Frisby & Getz, 1989), and to prepare for when the crisis arrives, helping, namely, to better discern which alternative paths can be followed at each moment (Holmes & Ali-Knight, 2017).

The literature and studies related to event management have been mainly based on theories and models usually applied to tourism in general (Getz & Page, 2016). One such case is Butler's TALC ("Tourism Area Life Cycle") model, one of the most widely cited and applied theories in the tourism literature (McKercher, 2005), which extends the product life cycle to the development cycle of tourism destinations (Uysal et al., 2012).

Although this is a seminal model, which has, since its release about four decades ago, influenced many researchers, it has not been free from criticism, its validity and usefulness having been questioned over the years, so it is advisable to understand it as a useful theoretical framework rather than a rigid model (Holmes & Ali-Knight, 2017). Although Butler's model can be transposed to many of today's events and festivals (Holmes & Ali-Knight, 2017), the fact that they possess unique characteristics then advises the development of new theories and models (Getz, 2008), focusing mainly on new possible trajectories, but without necessarily losing sight of the one suggested by Butler. This is also stated by authors such as Beverland et al. (2001) or Holmes and Ali-Knight (2017), whose models will be briefly presented hereafter.

Beverland et al. (2001), in a study concerning wine events in Australia and New Zealand, identify 6 phases in an event's life: (i) conception, (ii) launch, (iii) growth, (iv) consolidation, (v) decline, and (vi) renewal.



**Figure 1 - The six phases of an event's life cycle**

**Source: Author, adapted from Beverland et al. (2001)**

Holmes and Ali-Knight (2017), on the other hand, in a more recent study, illustrates how events and festivals grow, develop and decline throughout the stages of their life cycle, identifying seven possible trajectories not foreseen in previous models, especially in Butler's aforementioned TALC, which the authors consider does not take into account the fact that festivals and events are temporary, temporal and flexible phenomena, but also in Beverland et al. (2001).

**Table 1 - Seven trajectories of festivals and events life cycle**

Trajectories	Indicators	
Accelerated development	Rapid increase, between event cycles, of:	
	Budget	Number of volunteers
	Duration of the event	Number of participants
	Number of attractions	Sponsorship / financing
Continued growth	An increase in more than one cycle of:	
	Budget	Number of volunteers
	Duration of the event	Number of participants
	Number of attractions	Sponsorship / financing
Survival	The event neither increases nor decreases in terms of:	
	Budget	Number of volunteers
	Duration of the event	Number of participants
	Number of attractions	Sponsorship / financing
Redevelopment	Substantial change in the name / location / theme of the event	
Hiatus	The event is temporarily halted, but there are plans to continue it in subsequent cycles	
Decline	A reduction in more than one cycle of:	
	Budget	Number of volunteers
	Duration of the event	Number of participants
	Number of attractions	Sponsorship / financing
Cancellation	The event is stopped permanently, with no plans to hold it in the future	

**Source: Author, adapted from Holmes & Ali-Knight (2017)**

Holmes and Ali-Knight (2017) argue that the trajectory of an event can be influenced by external and internal factors, such as the governance model, budget and funding source, media coverage, ticket sales, host community predisposition, weather, natural disasters, economic situation, and government support. Thus, many times, the trajectory experienced is not the trajectory chosen by the organization and the path the event follows escapes its control, deviating from the upward path that all organizers desire. But, according to the same authors, this may also result from an organization's own decision. A small event, for example, may deliberately choose not to grow and just survive. Similarly, the cancellation of an event may also be a natural and purposeful decision, and not necessarily a negative or unwanted one, which contradicts the natural perspective of placing an event simply on success or failure.

But how can we know what stage of life an event is in? This is not a simple task. According to Frisby and Getz (1989), it was initially thought that this could be determined through analysis of indicators such as the age of the festival, number of visitors, budget, organizational structure, and degree of management sophistication. But this is not correct, for it is possible to find festivals that are quite old, but with low budgets, low number of visitors, or with very low levels of complexity in its management model.

The models presented, namely the one by Holmes and Ali-Knight (2017), shed some light on this subject, since they identify indicators that may help to better situate the events, being, as already mentioned, tools that allow to foresee and anticipate the challenges, which differ according to the stage the event is at (Frisby & Getz, 1989), and prepare them for when the crisis arrives (Holmes & Ali-Knight, 2017). Although the largest and

most well-known events try to stay in the consolidation phase of their life cycle, most are not successful and continue to decline (Stone, 2009). In line with these thoughts, Litvin and Fetter (2006) defend an inevitable decline of events, following a similar path to the one predicted in Butler's model, depending on managers, even so, to seek ways, at the first signs of decline, to refresh and rejuvenate or even periodically reinvent their offer (Brooker & Joppe, 2016), a process that involves the creation of new ideas in parallel with their adaptation to social trends, in order to seduce their visitors again, as well as attract new ones (Larson, 2011).

The process of rejuvenation does not necessarily need to occur only as a response to periods of stagnation or decline (Holmes & Ali-Knight, 2017), but can occur at other stages, intentionally and strategically in the form of innovation. However, as festivals mature and come to be seen as an institution, and thus no longer need to justify their value and existence, it becomes more difficult to make changes, and the preference is for stability and continuity (Larson, 2011).

One of the most important trends in the world economy in recent decades has been the increasing importance given to innovation. But what is innovation? A definition is given by Dosi (1988): "Innovation consists in the search for and discovery, experimentation, development, imitation, and adaptation of new products, new production processes, and new organizational models" (p. 222, apud Lundvall and Lundvall, 1997).

In the events industry, innovation can be interpreted as the process through which new products and services, new processes and new ideas are created, ranging from programming, financing, marketing, or service provision, besides the managing itself, and for this purpose stakeholders, employees and volunteers should be involved (Carlsen et al., 2010).



**Figure 2 - Types of innovations in events**

**Source: Author, adapted from Carlsen et al. (2010)**

Mackellar (2006), in a study on gastronomic festivals, identified six types of innovations that the organizers of the festivals carried out in cooperation with external actors: social, marketing, services, processes, organization and management, and products.

Redevelopment in festivals, particularly through innovation, can be understood, on one hand, as a means to entice their visitors again and to attract new ones (Larson, 2011), to capture media attention (Hjalager, 2009), or to maintain the interest of stakeholders in general (Brooker & Joppe, 2016), and, on the other hand, to renew them at the first signs of decline (Brooker & Joppe, 2016) and thus prolong their life.

But, whatever the point of view, innovation increases the value of the event, has positive impacts on brand building, loyalty, attracting new visitors and repeat visits (Van Niekerk, 2017). The importance of repeat visits for the success of an event is emphasized by authors such as Larson (2009), who argues that festivals that do not innovate are at risk of failing to motivate repeat visits, or Ramely et al. (2019), who advises that special attention should be paid to their program, which should be appropriate to the visitors' profile, to the facilities, for example regarding accessibility for people with special needs, to entertainment, particularly in events that do not have this focus, and should also be strongly linked to the destination and local communities.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted using a qualitative design and an exploratory case study approach (Takahashi & Araujo, 2020). The study involved the analysis of an event held annually in the Municipality of Ílhavo, Portugal, chosen based on a convenience sampling, taking into consideration the geographical criterion (Municipality of Ílhavo) and scope (free participation festival).

The study employed observation and documentary analysis of secondary sources, such as the official programs, media news, official reports and speeches, website, and promotional materials from the editions until 2019 (due to the COVID19 pandemic, the festival did not take place in 2020 and 2021). To understand the context in which the event was developed, the collected data was systematized and analyzed through content analysis, and no software was used in this process (Bardin, 2016).

#### ÍLHAVO MUNICIPALITY

Ílhavo is located on the central coast of Portugal and forms part of the so-called Ria de Aveiro, an extensive mass of salt water which strongly marks its presence in this territory. Tied not only to the Ria, but also to the Sea (Atlantic Ocean), Ílhavo has in this physical connection, but also social, cultural, and emotional, its main characteristic, which distinguishes it from the others, above all due to its unique history, strongly linked to cod fishing, a true icon of Portuguese gastronomy and culture. This fishing, with mythical features, was for a long time carried out by line in small wooden boats in the icy and dangerous North Atlantic seas.



Figure 3 - Ílhavo Maritime Museum



Figure 4 - Ship Museum  
Santo André



Figure 5 - Cod Fishing Vessel

#### FESTIVAL DO BACALHAU

*Festival do Bacalhau* was first held in 2008, organized jointly by the Municipality of Ílhavo and the *Confraria Gastronómica do Bacalhau* (Codfish Gastronomy Fraternity), and hosted at the renovated Oudinot Garden, on the bank of Ria de Aveiro, where the Ship Museum Santo André (former ship of the Portuguese codfish fleet) is anchored, located in the city of Gafanha da Nazaré. In its first edition, the festival received about 150,000 visitors (CMI, 2008).

*Festival do Bacalhau* appeared, in a proclaimed manner, as an important mean to promote and differentiate Ílhavo Municipality from other territories, using, for such, its gastronomy and especially the codfish culture,



aiming to affirm itself as the biggest national reference. The festival was the heir and next step of another event, the "Tasquinhas do Bacalhau" (Codfish taverns), which, for a decade, took place in the center of the town of Ílhavo, but which needed a new venue in order to grow.

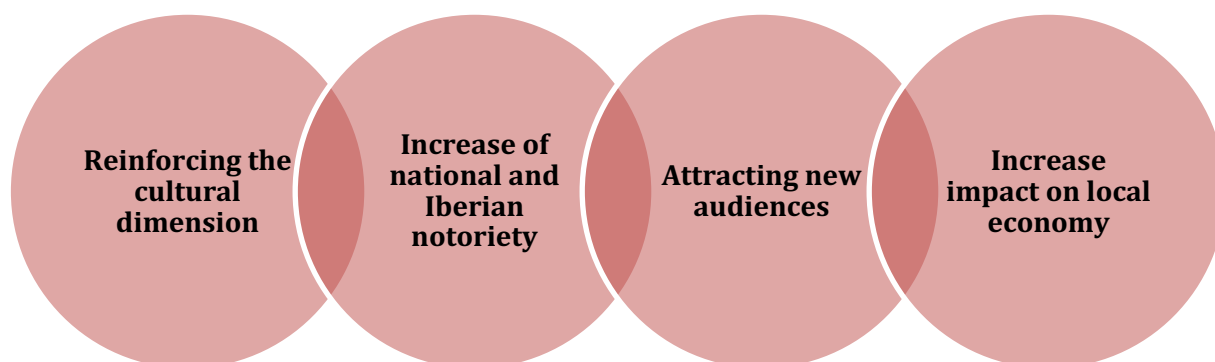
In the following editions, the festival underwent slight changes in its structure, program, and management model, without, however, escaping its basic model.

#### **4. RESULTS**

##### **THE BEGINNING OF A NEW CYCLE**

The festival has experienced, since its beginning, a remarkable success, measured and disclosed mainly through the number of visitors, assuming itself as a precious element for the promotion of the municipality, its gastronomy, and many other tourist assets, besides being an extraordinary source of income, especially for the many partner associations.

Despite this success, justified, as mentioned, mainly by the high number of visitors, and very much based on the effort demonstrated by the organization in punctuating each of the editions with some new features, from 2014, with the change in leadership of the City Council, a new management strategy of the festival was defined for the following years, with the intention of promoting a significant renewal, fostering innovations at various levels. This strategy was based on four fundamental pillars.



**Figure 6 - Pillars of *Festival do Bacalhau* renewal strategy**

**Source: Author**

Thus, this decision to renew the festival arises, on the one hand, from the perception that the ambition and goals of the festival could be broader, increasing and expanding its importance regarding its economic impact and the promotion and positioning of the territory, within the framework of a territorial strategy anchored in the sea and tourism (Teixeira Costa & Veríssimo, 2020). But, on the other hand, due to the fact that other very appealing festivals were emerging in the region, which clearly competed with it, which, coupled with the fact that a certain stagnation was being noticed, its future sustainability could be at risk.

To achieve these goals, profound changes were introduced in the following areas: (a) management; (b) spatial organization and infrastructure; (c) program; (d) promotion; (e) partnerships; and (f) monitoring and evaluation.

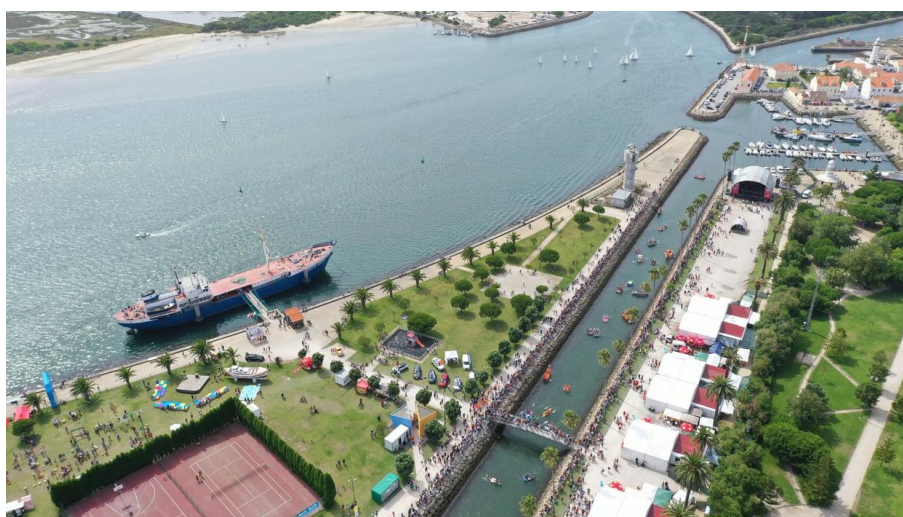


**Figure 7- Intervention areas of *Festival do Bacalhau* redevelopment**

Source: Author

## MANAGEMENT

An effective coordination team was created, with a clear structure and well-defined missions, composed exclusively of City Hall employees with expertise in the territory and with experience in other major, complex events. The structure included functions such as general coordination, administrative services, programming, artistic productions, logistics, public relations, communication, cultural programming, sports, environment, sponsorships and partnerships, and tourism promotion.



**Figure 8 – *Festival do Bacalhau* air photo**

## SPATIAL ORGANIZATION AND INFRASTRUCTURES

*Festival do Bacalhau* aimed, from that moment on, to leverage and take due advantage of the numerous qualities of the venue, so the precinct was reorganized, allowing the creation of new routes, new dynamics, and new uses, enhancing these attraction factors, namely through a more harmonious layout of the various



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equipment and punctuating the entire festival area with both informative and scenographic elements. A plan for the gradual improvement of the physical conditions was also implemented, for example concerning infrastructures, services, parking, cleaning, and selective waste collection, accompanied by several environmental awareness campaigns.

#### PROGRAM

The programming was one of the most visible and impactful changes in this new cycle, which became more diversified in its nature, target audience, time and place, but, at the same time, more connected to the territory, its history, culture and community. To this end, new programming spaces were created, especially for children and families, or other existing ones were improved, such as the Museum Ship Santo André. The goal was to achieve new audiences and their increased presence throughout the various hours of the day, with positive effects, for example, regarding the number of served meals at lunchtime and other expenditures.

#### PROMOTION

It was the organization's objective to promote a deep and visible change in the festival's global branding, adopting a new logo and new graphic design materials, highlighting the essence of the festival. New communication channels and strategies were defined. For the first time, a specialized company was hired to measure and evaluate the media impact.

#### PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships were established and deepened with associations, business, and other public and private entities, national and international, but especially with the community itself, in the form of collaboration, performance and promotion of activities, supply of products and/or services, support or sponsorship.

Aiming to open the doors of the festival to other countries and cultures, using codfish as the link of this connection, thus obtaining benefits for the festival itself, but also for the municipality and all the public and private entities that operate in it, the concept of a guest country was created for each edition.

#### MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Regular feedback from the event's various stakeholders was one of the main concerns of this new cycle. Regularly collecting the opinions of staff, associations, suppliers, other partners, and the public was seen as a valuable tool for correcting errors or shortcomings, validating the options made and defining future innovations.

Several quantitative indicators, such as the number of visits to the ship museum, entries to the pavilions, number of meals served, participation in initiatives, among others, were also collected and interpreted in a rigorous and systematic way. For the first time a visitors' study was contracted, which allowed to obtain very useful information, namely about the profile, motivations, and behaviour of the visitors.

### 5. DISCUSSION

As previously explained, the purpose of the organization was to renew the event not because it was in its decline phase, but mainly because it was understood that it was important to set new goals, in order to, among other benefits, enhance its positive impacts, increase its attractiveness and face the growing competition. It is important to note that, at the time, there was little data that would allow a solid and reliable assessment of the festival. The most common indicators used until then were limited to the number of visitors (obtained mainly by perception, because, as the event was free admission, the number of admissions was not counted), the number of meals served and the amount of cod and derivatives consumed.

Thus, we may consider that this decision is in line with what is stated by Holmes & Ali-Knight (2017), when they point out that the process of renovation of an event does not necessarily have to arise only as a response to periods of stagnation, or even decline, and may occur at other stages, intentionally and strategically, in the form of innovation.

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In the events industry, innovation can be seen as the process by which new products and services, new processes and new ideas are created, encompassing programming, financing, marketing, or service provision, in addition to the organization itself, and stakeholders, employees and volunteers should be involved (Carlsen et al., 2010).

Returning to the areas where changes were introduced (management; spatial organization and infrastructures; program; promotion; partnerships; and monitoring and evaluation), with a view to the renewal of the festival, but especially to what was described at the beginning of this chapter, and as it is clear to us that, given what was mentioned above, there was the involvement of stakeholders, employees and volunteers, we can find evidence in all the points mentioned by Carlsen et al. (2010).

**Table 2 - Crossing the areas of innovation in a festival proposed by Carlsen et al. (2010) and the innovation actions in *Festival do Bacalhau***

Areas	Examples
Program	Increase in the quantity and diversity of initiatives Creation and structuring of new spots in the venue for the initiatives Extension of the festival's timetable Increase of the cultural component in the program Involvement of partners, residents and visitors New initiatives in each edition (while maintaining a basic structure)
Financing	Increasing the value of support and sponsorships Creation of new revenue sources (e.g. merchandise sales) Greater control over expenses
Market	Target Audience Enlargement (children, young people and families) New national and Iberian market Product launch by the partners Product launch by the organization (e.g. Faina Maior sparkling wine) Change in the festival's identity Internationalization Reinforcement of promotion, through the diversification of channels
Service	Search for new suppliers to replace existing ones Search for new suppliers for new products and services (whenever possible with national notoriety) Broadening the range of services provided by the organization
Organization	New management team Clear organization chart Constant feedback Increased attention to evaluation and monitoring

**Source: Author**

Given also what has been said about the objectives of festival renewal, namely by:

- (i) Larson (2011) - to seduce their visitors again and to attract new ones;
- (ii) Hjalager (2009) - to capture the media's attention;
- (iii) Brooker & Joppe (2016) - maintain the interest of stakeholders in general,

we understand that, for what was explained, the strategy followed, and the results achieved meet the mentioned objectives.

The positive results obtained at the beginning of this process, consolidated in the following editions, seen in rigorous quantitative indicators such as the sustained growth in the overall number of visitors, the number of visitors in specific settings and activities, the number of meals served, the amount of cod and derivatives served, or the financial return to associations, but also in qualitative indicators, such as the very positive results of the partners and visitors satisfaction surveys, or the visitors' survey, confirm the success of the strategy.



Figure 9 - Street Entertainment



Figure 10 - Live painting  
(Vista Alegre)



Figure 11 - Play Pier



Figure 12 - Codfish Faces



Figure 13 - "Pasteleira's" Tour



Figure 14 - Show cooking

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Through the approach of case study, this article described and analyzed an example of the implementation of an innovation strategy in an event, with the objective of promoting the redevelopment of *Festival do Bacalhau de Ílhavo* (Ílhavo's Codfish Festival), which takes place annually.

It was found that innovations could be implemented at several levels, such as program, financing, market, service, and organization, according to Carlsen et al. (2010).

The positive effects of this strategy were felt in the very first year, and consolidated in the following years, visible both quantitatively and qualitatively.

As explained, the aim of the organization was to promote the renewal of the event not because it was in its decline phase, but because it was understood that it would be important to confer new objectives to it, in order to, among other benefits, enhance its positive impacts, increase its attractiveness and combat the growing competition. To this end, innovation was used.

In conclusion, this seems to us to be an example of good practice in the use of innovation in the process of redevelop an event, in this case a festival, and can provide a good basis for supporting event organizers, public entities, businesses and tourism sector organizations, local communities and other stakeholders during the process of planning and managing events.

Since this study focused mainly on the model proposed by Carlsen et al. (2010), it would be important that future studies focus on other models of innovation in events, and on other events of different natures. Similarly, it would be important that, given that this study was based on a qualitative approach, future studies should apply a quantitative methodology, for example by conducting surveys to visitors.

It is also suggested that a longitudinal study on the profile, motivations, and behaviour of visitors to *Festival do Bacalhau*, based on the one carried out in 2014, could verify the perception and impact of changes in a longer term.

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