

# Co-Creating Experiences in Cultural Events: The Case of Three Portuguese Festivals

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**Abstract:** Experience co-creation has received much attention in tourism, events, and festivals literature. Often shared and consumed collectively, those experiences positively affect visitors' satisfaction, the volume of expenditure, and levels of happiness, being essential for businesses, attractions, and destinations. As add-ons, co-creation experiences can play a significant role in diversifying and differentiating the supply of cultural events while contributing to fostering events and festivals as tools of territorial development. Within this context, this exploratory research aims to analyse the characteristics of co-creation experiences developed in three cultural events. Considering participation and personalisation as two relevant dimensions of experience co-creation, this paper analyses how they can be applied in the context of cultural events. The study follows a comparative approach, describing three cases of cultural events on the central coast of Portugal (Aveiro region). The methodology was based on participant observation and documental analysis of secondary data, namely the events and festivals characteristics, cultural programs, websites, and promotional materials. Major results indicate that two of the three events analysed have better conditions for the participation of visitors and the local communities, mainly due to the considerable number of activities that provide active participation and learning. On the other hand, one of the festivals fosters better conditions for the personalisation of services and experiences compared to the others, mainly due to the venue's characteristics and the way the program is designed. In that sense, the paper highlights the potential for the inclusion of co-creation experiences in events and festivals, providing a set of good practices for events and festival organisers and other tourism agents such as tourism businesses, tourism professionals, and local communities.

**Keywords:** Co-creation, Experiences, Festivals, Events, Portugal

## 1. Introduction

Events are an important motivator of tourism and figure prominently in the development and marketing plans of most destinations (Getz, 2008, 2022). Events, festivals and the arts are inextricably linked to tourist activity (Gelder and Robinson, 2011; Smith, 2016), consisting of a form of tourism that attracts thousands of visitors off-season and tourism income, encouraging economic prosperity, development and regeneration of venues, enhancing pride of the locals and their culture while promoting destinations through media exposure (Carvalho, Costa and Ferreira, 2015; Richards, 2015; Richards, Marques and Mein, 2015; Richards, King and Yeung, 2020). In the discourse of value creation and co-creation, Ramaswamy, (2009) sees events as an 'engagement platform' due to their capacity to unite organisations with desired stakeholders under processes of co-creation.

As tourism experiences are at the core of tourism praxis, co-creation processes have been relevant in tourism studies (Campos *et al.*, 2016, 2018; Shaw, Bennett and Kottasz, 2020; Monteiro, Marques and Sousa, 2022). The value of experiences is enhanced as the tourist is part of that co-creation process. It is from a standpoint of more or less active involvement of the customer that the discussion on the co-creation process (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003, 2004) gains special importance in tourism (Binkhorst and den Dekker, 2009). This was influenced by the perspective of the prosumer (Toffler, 1980; Ritzer, 2019) which involves the interrelationship of production and consumption where it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish one from the other (Ritzer, 2019). This perspective consists of understanding tourism under an experience network of co-created experiences (Binkhorst and den Dekker, 2009) arguably applicable to events and festivals.

Building on the four key dimensions of co-creation in the tourism experiences model of Carvalho, Kastenholz and Carneiro, (2021), participation, personalisation, interaction, and engagement, the authors focused this research on the analysis of three cultural events in Portugal, concerning the first two dimensions of co-creation, allowing a better understanding about these recent themes in tourism literature. The authors followed a qualitative design and an exploratory-multiple case study approach (Yin, 2015; Takahashi and Araujo, 2020) using observation and document analysis from secondary sources and content analysis (Bardin, 2016). Finally, data triangulation was applied. The paper is organised as follows: the first section delves into the literature review about co-creation processes in tourism studies and co-creation experiences in cultural events and festivals. The methodology is presented in section two and section three details the results and discussion. Finally, the authors present the conclusions and practical advice for event organisers to boost the development of effective co-creation events and further provide personalised experiences in such events.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Co-Creation Process**

The way tourists engage in their experience holidays is a symptom of today's travellers gaining more power and control over what goes into the nature of tourism products as tourism experiences (Prebensen, Chen and Uysal, 2018a). The integration of real-time consumer intelligence, dynamic big data mining, artificial intelligence, and contextualisation can transform service co-creation by mobilising resources in the tourism ecosystem (Buhalis and Sinarta, 2019). Based on the theory of value creation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Prebensen, Chen and Uysal, 2018b; Chen, King and Suntikul, 2020; Akaka, Koskela-Huotari and Vargo, 2021; Liu *et al.*, 2022), research on value theory in services can be divided into three major categories: a focus on value as an outcome ('value determination/capture' category), that conceptualisation of the value creation processes (the 'value creation' or 'valuing' category), and no distinction between the terms but rather a holistic perspective (the 'value co-creation category') (Gummerus, 2013).

There has been a progression in value research from the more traditional, managerially-oriented features-and-benefits approach, that has dominated much of service marketing, to the more collaborative value perspectives that view the customer as a co-creator establishing that within this emerging co-creation perspective there is a paucity of research that focuses on C2C, as opposed to B2C, co-creation processes (Rihova, 2013). Co-creation process resonates with the S-D logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Akaka, Koskela-Huotari and Vargo, 2021) in tourism consumption, where the roles of producers and consumers are entwined pointing to the creation of value jointly and reciprocally, in interactions between providers, their settings, consumers or between consumers through the integration of resources and the application of skills (Prebensen, Chen and Uysal, 2018b). This is important due to the shift in recent literature towards the priority of notions of participation, engagement and experience in tourism and events (Crowther and Orefice, 2015).

Also termed specialised consumption (Richards, 2009), "the prosumption outlook" (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010; Ritzer, 2019) provides meaning, challenges, and the "craving" for co-created experiences where the tourist plays an essential role (Carvalho, Costa and Ferreira, 2019). Searching for authenticity (Wang, 1999; Richards, 2020), and engaging experiences, tourists participate in the construction of narratives (Binkhorst and den Dekker, 2009) influenced by the extent to which interaction takes place between tourists and the setting (or intangible place or the experience environment) as well as the interaction between local communities and (Chen, Prebensen and Uysal, 2018; Prebensen, Chen and Uysal, 2018b).

This process consists in an approach that places the human in the centre and considers tourism as an experience network in which several stakeholders co-create to engage in tourism experiences (Binkhorst and den Dekker, 2009; Prebensen, Chen and Uysal, 2018a).

### **2.2 Co-Creation in Cultural Events**

Co-creative and co-creation events have been gaining recent attention from researchers (Crowther and Orefice, 2015; Richards, Marques and Mein, 2015; Mucha, 2022). Given the challenging environment of concerned employees, customers, clients, tourists and benefactors, events represent a refreshingly intimate, and crucially participative space characterising the co-creative ability of events (Crowther and Orefice, 2015). When organised in creative networks (Richards, 2011; Booyens and Rogerson, 2015; Duignan *et al.*, 2018) they can act as tools for territorial development, tourism destinations growth and knowledge spillovers (Podestà and Richards, 2018).

Creative events constitute one of several modes of creative tourism (Carvalho, Costa and Ferreira, 2019; Richards and Duxbury, 2021), where the everyday life of destinations becomes present in event venues and

experiences requiring the creative use of spaces and innovation in events design (Cardoso, Silva and Fernandes, 2015; Richards, Marques and Mein, 2015). Co-creation experiences present in events remain an understudied area of research with few exceptions (Geus, Richards and Toepoel, 2016; Carvalho, 2020; Richards, King and Yeung, 2020; Sterchele, 2020). In recent research about cultural and creative festivals and events, Carvalho, (2020) acknowledges that such events constitute opportunities for the development of co-created tourism experiences (Campos *et al.*, 2016). In search for experiential knowledge, many tourism sectors promote “co-production” in which the visitor takes an active role by directly engaging in events (Carson and Pennings, 2017) and experiences for all event organisers, participants and local communities, before and during the organisation of the event (Carvalho, Costa and Ferreira, 2015).

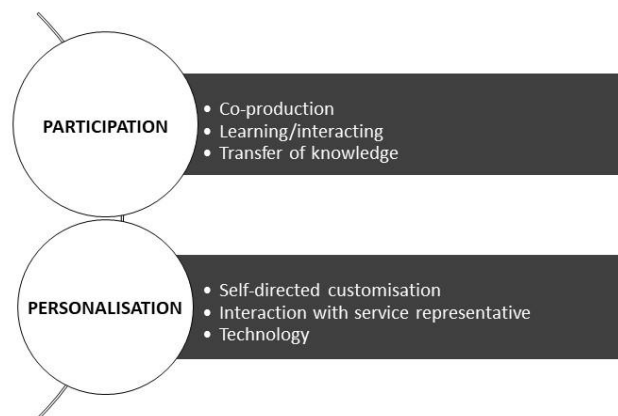
According to Carvalho, (2020) workshops have been identified as creative strategies present in several events and festivals and can be used to boost local creativity, the development of cultural and creative capital of both organisers and event participants surpassing events/festivals' economic outputs. Such event experiences can function as “hands-on experiences” and creative workshops ((Richards, 2010; Carvalho, Costa and Ferreira, 2015; Brunner, 2016), fostering participation and involvement in the co-creation process while delivering a distinctive experiential layer to cultural events and festivals.

### 2.3 A Framework of Co-Creation key Dimensions

Carvalho, Kastenholz and Carneiro, (2021), in their research, focused on co-creation in tourism experiences (see Figure 1), and identified four key dimensions relevant to the promotion of captivating and immersive experiences: participation, personalisation, interaction, and engagement.

**PARTICIPATION:** the active participation of tourists in the experience leads to immersion and satisfaction. Active participation happens when the tourist is allowed to actively participate in one or more activities during the consumption experience, as proposed by Minkiewicz, Evans and Bridson, (2014), who refer to it as co-production. Participation allows the tourist to be partially responsible for the creation of his experience, showing interest in learning and interacting with others and with the experience environment, as well as transferring his knowledge.

**PERSONALISATION:** personalisation is of great importance because it reinforces in the eyes of the visitor the idea of uniqueness and novelty of his experience, contributing to making it more memorable. Minkiewicz, Evans and Bridson, (2014) relate personalisation to choices that are made by visitors, supported by technology and employees. Visitors choose the specific components of the experience that best suit their particular interests and, in this way, tailor their experience, using interactions with staff and information they have been previously provided.



**Figure 1: Participation and Personalisation Dimensions of Co-Creation of Tourism Experiences (own Elaboration, Adapted From Carvalho et al., 2021)**

**INTERACTION:** is at the heart of the tourist experience (Campos *et al.*, 2018), with the various actors in the destination, such as other tourists, local agents and the local community, as well as with the physical environment and digital technologies. It is crucial for the creation of value in the context of co-created tourist experiences, contributing to their overall satisfaction with the experience, as well as their immersion in the destination and local culture, with a trend towards the promotion of highly engaging experiences, focused on the authenticity and identity of the territories.

**ENGAGEMENT:** the engagement of tourists in the experience goes beyond their physical participation, being associated with a state of cognitive and emotional immersion, involving personal reflection regarding the experience and the learning outcomes obtained.

If tourists as consumers bring in various types of personal resources such as time, money, knowledge, previous experience and learned skills (Page and Connell, 2020), the characteristics of destination settings, event/festival venues, the aesthetic or functionality of a cultural setting or ambience can influence the interaction between the provider sphere and the costumer role (Prebensen, Chen and Uysal, 2018a). Such venues of opportunity can be delivered by events and festivals (Richards, Marques and Mein, 2015) with co-creation experiences present.

### 3. Methodology

This research was conducted using a qualitative design and an exploratory-multiple case study approach (Yin, 2015; Takahashi and Araujo, 2020). The study involved comparing three cultural events held in Portugal with an in-depth exploration of participation and personalisation as core dimensions of co-creation experiences (Carvalho, Kastenholz and Carneiro, 2021). The cases were chosen based on convenience sampling, considering three different criteria: 1. Geography - being held on the coast of the Aveiro region; 2. Reach and relevance - open events related to cultural elements and traditions; 3. Periodicity - annual, taking place during the tourist high season.

The study employed observation and document analysis from secondary sources, such as the events' cultural programs, websites, and promotional materials. To understand the context in which the events were designed, the data collected was systematised and analysed using content analysis, and no software was used in this process (Bardin, 2016). Then, data triangulation allowed comparing and contrasting the different dimensions analysed to get insights into what extent and how those events co-create experiences.

The Aveiro region is located on the central coast of Portugal, composed of eleven municipalities (Figure 2), covering an area of approximately 1,690 km<sup>2</sup>. Water is a distinctive and unifying element of the region, as the proximity to the sea and a vast lagoon area (Ria de Aveiro) influences its history, culture, and economy. Nowadays, traditional activities such as fishing (especially cod fish), salt production, and lagoon transport coexist with the rise of tourism. Several events are held in the region, referring to these cultural aspects and sustaining a territorial strategy anchored in the sea and tourism (Teixeira Costa and Veríssimo, 2020). In this sense, the events in the territories bordering the Lagoon and the sea were identified, being chosen the three most relevant (Table 1): Festival dos Canais (Canals Festival), Festival do Bacalhau (Cod Festival), and Romaria do São Paio da Torreira (Saint Paio from Torreira Pilgrimage).



**Figure 2: Map of the Aveiro Region (CIRA, 2022)**

“FESTIVAL DOS CANAIS” (FC) is an event that takes place in the city of Aveiro, since 2016. It is a celebration of the city's history and culture, focusing on the canals that run through the city. The festival includes a variety of activities, led by artists and companies from various countries on several continents and aimed at various audiences, invited by the organisation to actively participate (CMA, 2016, 2022a). It is held nearby the main tourist spots and attracts a large number of visitors. It holds the EFFE Label, a European quality label for festivals that stand out for their work in the arts, community involvement, and international projection (CMA, 2022b).

“FESTIVAL DO BACALHAU” (FB) is an annual event that takes place in the municipality of Ílhavo, more exactly in the town of Gafanha da Nazaré, since 2008. Ílhavo is known for cod fishing, developed especially from the 19th century on. The municipality is still known for its cod fishing industry and gastronomy, so the festival celebrates this tradition. It includes various cultural initiatives, from which stands out a gastronomic exhibit with cod fish typically prepared by local associations. The festival receives about 150,000 visitors annually (CMI, 2008).

“ROMARIA DO SÃO PAIO DA TORREIRA” (SPT) is the largest and most famous pilgrimage in the Ria de Aveiro region. The event takes place in Torreira, a village of 3500 inhabitants in the municipality of Murtosa, known for its seafood and bathing area. It is a popular second-home tourism destination that, during the festival, welcomes more than 100,000 pilgrims per day. The event combines popular religious rituals and fishing culture.

#### 4. Results and discussion

Of the four core dimensions of co-creation experiences proposed by Carvalho, Kastenholtz and Carneiro, (2021), the focus was on participation and personalisation, as it was understood that, given the characteristics and meaning of each of the four dimensions, the methodology used would be more appropriate to the analysis of these two.

Through the lens of participation and personalisation, evidence of the drivers of each of them was analysed in the events: co-production, learning/interacting, and transfer of knowledge in the first; and self-directed customisation, interaction with service, and technology in the second. The existence and intensity of each of these driving factors differ from event to event, with direct impacts on the characteristics and level of co-creation that each enables.

**Table 1: Description of the Cases**

	<b>Festival dos Canais (FC)</b>	<b>Festival do Bacalhau (FB)</b>	<b>São Paio da Torreira (SPT)</b>
<b>Type</b>	Urban-artistic festival	Gastronomic-cultural festival	Religious-popular festival
<b>Location</b>	Aveiro	Ílhavo	Murtosa
<b>Duration</b>	7 days (July)	5 days (August)	7 days (September)
<b>Total number of activities</b>	167	126	23
<b>Activities allowing active participation</b>	64 (38%)	71 (56%)	4 (17%)
<b>Variety of activities</b>	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
<b>Target audience diversity</b>	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
<b>Concentration level of the event venue</b>	Dispersed	Concentrated	Semi concentrated
<b>Entrance</b>	Free	Free	Free

"Festival dos Canais 2022" (FC) included a total of 167 activities, divided into 8 artistic areas: music, dance, exhibition, artistic installation, theatre/street theatre, contemporary circus, workshops (covering different subjects), and performance. These activities, with free participation, took place in 27 sites throughout the city, most of them in the open air, from morning to late at night.

Unlike FC, "Festival do Bacalhau 2022" (FB) took place in a single venue, a large riverside park located on one of the banks of Ria de Aveiro. The entrance to the site and the participation in the activities were free of charge. The festival program included 126 activities, running from morning to late at night: workshops/games (covering different subjects), cooking demonstrations musical performances, sports activities, street animation, exhibitions, guided tours, gastronomic contests, antique bicycles tours, handicraft show, and a codfish market, among others.

"Romaria do São Paio da Torreira 2022" (SPT) took place in the streets of Torreira beach (Murtosa), noting the concentration of activities mainly in two connected avenues that, in turn, linked the Ria to the Sea, where some activities also took place. The program included 23 activities, with free participation, from late afternoon:

musical performances, religious activities (masses and procession), a fireworks show, boat races, boat decoration contest (Moliceiros), among others.



Figure 3: Festival dos Canais

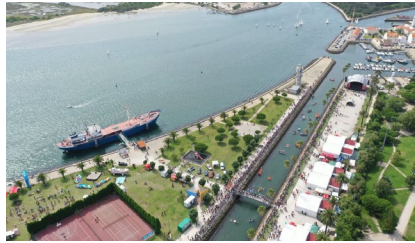


Figure 4: Festival do Bacalhau



Figure 5: Romaria do São Paio da Torreira

#### 4.1 Participation

The active participation of visitors in FC was possible in all 34 workshops, through prior registration or on-site. In three of the street theatre plays, spontaneous interaction with the audience was favoured. One of the music/theatre performances sought to stimulate attentive listening and interaction with babies and small children, with no need for prior registration. The local community was specially invited to join community projects, with the necessary early planning and registration, due to the need for training and rehearsal moments: one of the musical performances ("Fanfarra dos Canais"); one of the theatre plays; and the photographic laboratory, which was the basis for one of the exhibitions.

This means that festival participants, whether tourists, visitors or residents, were allowed to actively participate in 64 activities, which represents more than 38% of the total event's activities (Table 1). By their characteristics, both learning/interaction and knowledge transfer were visible mostly in the workshops, but also in "Fanfarra dos Canais", theatre play, and photo lab.

In FB, the active participation of visitors was possible in all 48 workshops/games, as well as in 13 of the 14 sports activities, participation in which was free in some cases or by prior registration or on-site in others. Of all the cooking demonstrations four allowed the active participation of children and young people, with a chef guiding them, with prior registration or on-site. In the remaining cooking demonstrations the public could interact with the guest chefs. Visitors could also freely participate in the antique bicycle ride, having to use their bicycle, as well as in the gastronomic competition, with prior registration and application. The "Memory Cabin" consisted in collecting and recording memories related to cod fishing, shared in an interview with visitors who had somehow participated in it.

Thus, the active participation of visitors was possible in 71 activities, which represents about 56% of the total (Table 1). It can be affirmed that, in the case of the workshops/games, both learning and knowledge transfer was evident. In the cooking demonstrations there was mostly learning, while particularly in "Memory Cabin" there was mostly a transfer of knowledge. In addition, a greater variety of activities compared to FC emerges as a facilitator of greater active participation.

Both in FC and FB, the free attendance at the activities, as well as the possibility, in the vast majority of cases, of registering at the place, and not beforehand, also emerge as important motivating factors for the active participation of visitors, independently of their nature.

In SPT, active participation was only possible in the boat races, as well as in the contests, but reserved for members of the local community and not for visitors. Members of the local community and visitors could join the religious procession, especially those who were fulfilling a pledge. In all other activities, the role of visitors was mainly contemplative, not conducive to active participation. It can then be concluded that the opportunity for co-creation, despite being free, is very low in this event, particularly for people who do not belong to the local community.

#### 4.2 Personalisation

Both FC and FB's large number of activities, variety and target audience diversity, coupled with the fact that they run from morning to late at night and were free of charge, allowed visitors to more easily choose what best suited their interests, free time and financial resources. On the contrary, the limited number of initiatives in the SPT and its lesser diversity and greater concentration in time made it difficult to adapt.

Regarding the event venues, the unique site of FB was properly delimited and marked, and to some extent also the venue of SPT facilitated the recognition, choice and access to activities. In the case of FC, the geographical dispersion of the activities, coupled with limited identification and publicity of them, led to many people, especially tourists, not realising they were in an event area, making this task difficult.

All events were previously promoted mainly through the Internet. However, it is noted in the case of FC the use of a greater number of digital media. Facebook posts allow the researchers to notice in FC and FB a remarkable interaction between potential visitors and the organisation over the weeks before its start, both in the gradual disclosure of the initiatives and in answering questions. In all cases the language used was Portuguese. None of the events had a mobile application (app).

The three events also used paper materials for the dissemination of the program and description of each of the activities, including more comprehensive brochures in the case of FC and FB. However, in all three cases, they were available only in Portuguese, which naturally made it difficult for people who did not understand the language, namely tourists, to access them. In the particular case of FC, the fact that the program brochure did not include a map of the city with the venue duly marked, made it difficult for interested visitors to understand and access them.

Activities focused on a single location, the existence of an information desk and the constant circulation of staff members in FB, were important to tackle visitors' doubts. In the case of FC, this information could be found mainly in the tourism office, located near the activity sites, but it required the knowledge of its existence and the purposeful visit to this service. In SPT it was not possible to find an information desk or easily identified staff members.

**Table 2: Analysis of the Case Studies**

		Festival dos Canais	Festival do Bacalhau	São Paio da Torreira
<b>PARTICIPATION</b> Co-production (CP) Learning/interacting (LI) Transfer of knowledge (TK)	Activities allowing active participation of tourists/visitors (CP)	✓	✓	✗
	Activities allowing active participation of the local community (CP)	✓	✓	✓
	Community projects (CP)	✓	✓	✗
	Activities that enable learning/interacting (LI)	✓	✓	✗
	Activities that enable knowledge transfer (TK)	✓	✓	✗
	Activities with previous registration (CP)	✓	✓	✗
	Activities with on-site registration (CP)	✓	✓	✗
	Activities without registration (spontaneous participation) (CP)	✓	✓	✓
<b>PERSONALISATION</b> Self-directed customisation (SD) Interaction with service (IS) Technology (T)	Free participation in the activities (SD)	✓	✓	✓
	Activities throughout the day (SD)	✓	✓	✗
	Adequate signage of the initiatives' spaces (SD)	✗	✓	✗
	Dedicated website (T)	✓	✗	✗
	Social networks (T)	✓	✓	✓
	Mobile App (T)	✗	✗	✗
	Paper-based dissemination media (SD)	✓	✓	✓
	Bilingual communication materials (SD)	✗	✗	✗
	Information desk at the venue (IS)	✗	✓	✗
	Available and easily identified staff (IS)	✗	✓	✗

## 5. Conclusions

Using an exploratory multiple-case study approach, the present paper provides an in-depth analysis of participation and personalisation as critical dimensions of co-creation experiences in events. For that purpose, three cultural events on the central coast of Portugal were analysed. Results evidence the identification of participation and personalisation elements in all the contexts analysed, although implemented at different levels.



Overall, it was observed that the events provide better conditions for the active participation (co-production) of tourists and local communities and enhance their environment by providing activities that foster active participation, learning/interaction and knowledge transfer. In the vast majority of cases, free attendance at the activities and the possibility of registering on sight, not beforehand, emerge as significant motivating factors for visitors' active participation.

Regarding personalisation, the number of activities, free attendance, variety of sessions in terms of time and target audience diversity allow visitors to choose those best suited to their interests, free time and financial resources more easily. Besides, the existence of an information desk, promotional material in different languages and staff members to orient visitors could also influence the personalisation dimension.

Finally, the venue's characteristics and the program design are aspects related to participation and personalisation. If, on the one hand, events held in one venue facilitate the recognition, choice and access to the activities, on the other hand, decentralised events allow a greater territorial dynamisation, widening the possibilities of participation.

In summary, evidence from this analysis shed light on the relevance of co-creation experience in events, reinforcing the idea that they contribute by diversifying and differentiating the supply of events, fostering participation and involvement of visitors, while delivering a distinctive experiential layer to cultural events and festivals.

Extending the contribution of the present research, the good practices and limitations described can help event managers, tourism agents, local communities and other stakeholders orient planning towards co-creative and co-creation events. Furthermore, the checklists provided facilitate the implementation and execution of co-creation experiences by considering participation and personalisation as competitive aspects of cultural events and festivals.

Given that this study analysed only participation and personalisation, future studies can consider expanding the research to analyse all four dimensions proposed in Carvalho, Kastenholz and Carneiro (2021) framework. Moreover, the study was based solely on one region in Portugal, and the analysis was restricted to a qualitative approach; thus, other studies may consider expanding the geographical reach, adding a quantitative analysis, for example, with the application of a survey to visitors.

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