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## Monitoring the Tourism Impact of a Cultural and Religious Event: A Case Study in Northern Portugal

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# Monitoring the Tourism Impact of a Cultural and Religious Event: A Case Study in Northern Portugal

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The Pilgrimage of Our Lady of the Agony (*Romaria de Nossa Senhora d'Agonia*), in the north of Portugal, draws hundreds of thousands of visitors. Fernandes and Sampaio (2014) suggest that through the years, this event has served to connect residents and visitors alike with the heritage of the region in which the Pilgrimage has become what is arguably one of the biggest regional icons. However, no field research has ever taken place to confirm these claims.

In 2014, a pilot study was carried out using a questionnaire as a basis to evaluate the impact of this event in various sectors - environment, culture, economy and tourism. This paper analyses the results from the perspective of tourism. A total of 490 usable questionnaires were collected using a randomly selected sample of residents and visitors alike, which resulted in a sample of 159 residents and 331 visitors. The question is whether visitors are obtaining more knowledge regarding the texture of culture and understanding (Cohen, 2004) and a meaningful experience, which is highly valued in today's society.

Overall, results suggest that the event attracts essentially the local / regional market and has difficulty attracting foreign tourists with 90% of respondents being domestic residents and 38% residing in the Viana do Castelo geographical area. Findings are expected to lead to a more detailed study, building on the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology applied for the pilot study and possibly extending it to the policy context as well as service providers and the planners of the pilgrimage and processions.

**Key Words:** Pilgrimage, event, tourism, impact, *festa*

## Introduction

Events that feature local history, artists, writers and craftspeople are essential for attracting visitors to a particular destination (Fernandes, 2013). Special events such as festivals and other cultural manifestations may contribute to social identity and can be seen as a way of remaking and reanimating spaces and social life (Picard and Robinson, 2006), whilst they are strongly anchored in local traditions and lifestyles and result in higher attractiveness for tourists who seek a more genuine contact with local culture. As such, events require much planning in order to create a sense of transporting people in time, place and mood, of being stimulated in the most pleasurable way - sensations and memories that experiences create can enhance the appeal of the area and provide more reasons to visit and simultaneously, a deeper sense of belonging both for tourists and residents.

Portugal has a strong and deeply rooted tradition of ethno-religious events, especially in the North, and particularly in the Minho region, which is probably a reflection of both the current and ancestral living culture. Minho is considered a cultural and religious tourism destination, not only due to the amount of religious sites and events that occur in the region, but especially because of their preserved identity and appeal (Richards and Fernandes, 2007).

One of the oldest and most recognized events is the Pilgrimage of Our Lady of the Agony (*Romaria de Nossa Senhora d'Agonia*), which is known as one of

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the most important religious events (*Festa*) of the country, highly connected to the tradition and identity of Viana do Castelo, the city where it takes place (Maughan and Moura, 2015). The *Festa* integrates several activities, ranging from a more religious nature to an ethnographic one, with a religious procession and an ethnographic parade, artistic performances, shows, some carnival inspired puppets called ‘*cabeçudos*’ and ‘*gigantones*’, along with a craft fair and other popular attractions. The *Festa* takes place over a number of days in August and it is possible to date its roots back to the XVIII century (1722).

In 2013, the *Festa* was awarded with a ‘Tourism Interest Declaration’ which is assigned by the National Tourism Authority to projects or initiatives that by their localization and characteristics, constitute a relevant support to tourism or a motive of attraction to the areas where they take place.

Considering the relevance of the *Festa*, and the advances in international academic research on cultural and religious tourism, a substantial lack of knowledge about the real effects of this particular event on the region is evident. The objective of this research, therefore, is to carry out a pilot study to test a methodology with the intention of improving the approach for a second, much broader, phase of research. The aim of this paper is to identify the socio-cultural and economic impacts generated by the *Festa* from a tourism perspective and whether it meets the needs and expectations of today’s experience seekers.

## Literature Review

### *The interrelation between tourism and religion*

Religious travel is not a recent phenomenon, being long established as a motive for undertaking journeys. It is acknowledged throughout the body of literature that religiously or spiritually motivated travel, including tourism related to religious sites and festivals, pilgrimage or spirituality has become widespread, and is considered an extremely important sector of the international tourism market, having grown substantially in recent years (Timothy and Olsen, 2006; Richards and Fernandes, 2007). In this sense, Cohen (2001) suggests that religious tourists form a new category between pilgrims and tourists. In his study he conceptualizes religious tourists as the type of tourist who assumes an ambivalent position, both being capable of engaging in worship, and experiencing this type of tourism’s transformatory effects, or simply observing.

This concept and the link between tourism and religion is indeed defended by many authors including Raj (2008) and Nolan and Nolan (1992) who support a symbiotic relationship between pilgrimage and tourism. Furthermore, Liutikas (2014), in his study about Lithuanian valuistic journeys, argues that religious sites are now considered heritage places which both the ‘curious tourists’ and spiritually motivated pilgrims seek out. People increasingly visit sites of religious significance for reasons not related to faith or spiritual needs, such as recreational or educational interests (Hughes *et al.*, 2013), or solely for their desire to travel, express their values and enrich their identity (Liutikas, 2014). As Nolan and Nolan (1992) claim, if a tourist is half a pilgrim, then a pilgrim is half a tourist.

Religious tourism is, notwithstanding, the prime activity of some destinations such as major pilgrimage sites, providing also an important foundation to the basic tourism product even outside those destinations, given that they can generate significant numbers of visitors. In this sense, different authors recognize the great economic potential of both the religious tourist and those not travelling directly for religious purposes but who visit religious sites (Timothy and Olsen, 2006; Richards and Fernandes, 2007).

### *What are ‘half pilgrims and half tourists’ looking for?*

Over the last few years, there has been a shift in the market towards new elements, for the development of tourism in destinations. As such, more intangible elements, or experiential elements by their nature, are being consistently used by destinations as a differentiation element, capable of injecting destinations and tourism products with competitive advantages (Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Whelan and Wholfeil, 2006). The importance of the experiential dimension of tourism is hence becoming more and more manifest, and experience development has become central to destination marketing practices, having a fundamental impact on the success of products and destinations. This is due to their potential to influence a tourist’s satisfaction and perception of value. The creation of experiences will thus have an impact on consumer behaviour in terms of revisiting a destination and spreading positive word-of-mouth (Ritchie and Tung, 2011). It is argued that in today’s environment of ever more sophisticated consumers, those who deliver memorable customer experiences consistently create superior value and competitive advantage (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003; Morgan, 2006).

As such, places recognize the need for a new approach on managing destinations - with the focus on delivering experiences. One form of delivering experiences is through events. Moreover, the range of potential event experiences that can be designed is truly broad, from leisure and entertainment to the spirituality of religious rituals (Getz, 2008).

Along with promoting social interaction, events encompass a variety of features such as arts and crafts, performances and demonstrations, creating a participatory experience for the visitor (Goldblatt, 1997). Because deeper and more meaningful experiences are sought by visitors who are increasingly changing their role and actively participating and engaging in experiences, the individual becomes the protagonist of the experience (Prentice and Andersen, 2007; Ohrsdka-Olson and Ivanov, 2010; Richards, 2011). Timothy and Olsen (2006) suggest that indeed religious tourism can provide these more authentic, spiritual and deep experiences. In fact, in their search for experiences, the more secular visitors to religious sites do not want to hear about the religious doctrine. Instead, it is necessary to create an inclusive environment that fosters a sense of belonging and tells stories about people connected to the places. Hughes *et al.* (2013) explore the need for devising interpretive experiences that appeal to different senses and designing a range of ways in which visitors can become personally involved in on-site activities, particularly at sacred places that are used by the local community.

The economics of events, in general, is also of great importance for destinations, due to their ability to attract visitors and investment, stimulate cultural consumption among residents and fuel destination revitalization, development or regeneration. This holds true for religious travel or events given that apart from the devotional aspect, even pilgrims cannot be differentiated from their tourist counterparts, since they share the fundamentals of travel - leisure time, income, and social sanctions for travel - and in most instances the same infrastructures (Smith, 1992).

Religious events or pilgrimages are thus said to have the potential to become a great source of income, by stimulating local revenue.

In addition to their economic impacts, it is important to emphasize the contribution by events, to the preservation and re-creation of traditional arts and crafts and local culture. As places of worship are nowadays seen as tourism resources that can be

commodified for travellers interested in cultural and historic sites or places that symbolize for example nationalistic values and ideals (Timothy and Olsen, 2006; Getz, 2007), religious elements are then sought after for both their spiritual dimension, and other recreational, educational and cultural purposes (Hughes *et al.*, 2013). Thus, the development of events will then diversify the offer available to the tourist, allowing at the same time the destination to retain its inherent cultural values by acting as facilitators in learning about cultural heritages, ethnic backgrounds, and local customs (McKercher *et al.*, 2006) and lifestyles. The value of both the personal and cultural experience is increased with the opportunity to observe and participate in religious activities (Levi and Korcher, 2009).

However, if the sites and activities become over commercialized, the perceived spirituality of the place may diminish and the tourist experience suffers. Levi and Kocher (2009) argue that if these dimensions are well managed, authentic experiences of sacred places and the spiritual culture of a region can promote sustainable tourism and benefit both the tourist and the community.

## Research Design

In 2014, a pilot study was carried out involving investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. The overall perspective adopted by this study was to recognize that the development process takes place within a particular milieu and is designed to achieve particular outputs and outcomes. The research adopted a case study approach. Yin (1984:23) defines the case study research method as

*an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.*

Because issues may arise which demonstrate a necessity to explore further specific themes and / or in another way, Stake (2000:438), for example, refers to the advantage of this approach as 'the study of the particular', which encompasses the nature, historical backgrounds, physical settings as well as socio-cultural contexts of a specific case. As such, within the case study a quantitative methodological approach was used based on a survey questionnaire as the source of evidence to evaluate the impact of the event in various sectors - environment, culture, economy and tourism.

A total of 490 usable questionnaires were collected using a randomly selected sample of residents and visitors alike, which resulted in a sample of 159 residents and 331 visitors.

The questionnaire design consisted of twenty-one questions, beginning with closed questions related to sources of information consulted before and during the visit and how they booked the trip, followed by motivation, forms of consumption patterns and finally a group of core closed questions intended to measure and compare the responses of employment and socio-demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, and place of residence. Questionnaires were available in English, Portuguese and French. Translations were carried out by foreign language academics at the Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo.

A database was established using Keynote which allows the scan of completed forms. Careful attention was paid to safeguarding that all three language versions were accommodated in exactly the same template, i.e. ensuring that converting the English text into Portuguese etc. did not require different layouts. The first step was coding the answers provided by the respondents and grouping together things that were similar in order to detect patterns in the data. Data entry often involves errors, therefore, the researchers evaluated stability and consistency for measured items before proceeding any further. This was done by checking for suspicious and invalid cases, variables and data values in the active dataset.

While for the purposes of this paper, the data analysed is restricted to the survey questionnaire, other data collection techniques were also used during this pilot study, specifically, face-to-face interviews and observation. This approach formed a triangulation of research techniques within a social context and facilitated direct contact with people, which permitted the researchers to hear and observe places, objects, symbols, people, activities, behaviours, verbal interactions, situations and events. Such methods allowed a more in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning of this event to the diverse visitors and facilitated the researchers to determine the impact of the event on other sectors such as culture and environment.

The results of primary data presented in this study are based on the analysis of questionnaire data. To accomplish the proposed objectives, diversified data analysis procedures were used namely descriptive

statistics and inferential statistics. Whilst the analysis in this paper mainly focuses on descriptive statistics, an inferential analysis was conducted in order to explore the existence of differences between groups of visitors. Three groups of respondents were obtained based on the place of residence (Viana do Castelo; other city; other country). Non-parametric tests were applied, specifically the Kruskal-Wallis Test, which allows comparisons between the scores on some continuous variable for three or more groups. In this case the test was applied in order to gain insight on visitors' expenditure patterns.

Whilst it was hoped to be able to present solid findings and recommendations from the study, the primary objective was to organize a first phase (pilot) that could be improved on for a second phase of a full study of the *Festa*. Particularly the pilot was undertaken to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology applied in 2014 - testing an instrument that could be expanded later. Notwithstanding that objective, insights from this case study are intended to directly influence local policy, practice, and future research.

It is expected that a bigger study will incorporate new tools and procedures with similar audiences but, across all aspects of the *Festa* - hence it was important to carry out this pilot study to determine how well such research could be carried out in the cultural and physical context of Viana do Castelo. A larger study would extend to the policy context, local businesses (hotels, shops/restaurants, craft traders, entertainment attractions, venues, etc.) and not just the visitors, which was the focus in 2014.

## Results and Discussion

### *Profile of respondents*

The majority of the respondents were aged between 30 to 59 years old (55%), or over 60 years (33%), meaning that the *Festa* attracts especially people of higher age segments. This is in line with other research studies carried out, e.g. Richards and Fernandes (2007), which claim that the age profile of visitors to religious sites, in the North of Portugal, is older. This might be due to the inner nature of the event, still strongly connected with religious doctrine and ancestral traditions of the region. However, it can also be explained by the lack of use of social networks and other media, more appealing to younger segments. Another possible explanation is related to the lack of innovation of the activities proposed, which could be a restraint to the attraction of new segments. Most of the

respondents have their residence in Portugal (90%), slightly over one third of which live in the municipality of Viana do Castelo (38%).

It is not surprising that residents and domestic visitors make up a sizeable proportion of the respondents, particularly since studies show that the number of foreign visitors surveyed at religious sites are lower than for cultural sites in northern Portugal (Richards and Fernandes, 2007; Matheson *et al.*, 2014). The numbers reinforce the idea that the *Festa* has a very strong attendance by local residents and some degree of inability to attract tourists from abroad. Table 1 identifies the profile of the respondents.

### Organisation of the Visit

There is a strong incidence of repeat visits, with more than 50% of the participants claiming that during the past ten years they have been to the *Festa* between six and ten times. It is essential for events to have the capacity to attract both new and repeat visitors. Matheson *et al.* (2014) emphasise that repeat visitors are critical in ensuring festival sustainability.

Data show that 36% of the respondents have known about the event from direct contact and only 23% learned about it from the media. In effect, results show a reduced use of digital communication mechanisms, given a large proportion of respondents heard about the event through traditional methods such as word-of-mouth. Table 2 illustrates the main findings related to previous visits and information sources used by the respondents.

**Table 1: Profile of the Respondents**

	Total	
	N (Frequency)	% (Valid Percent)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	214	46,5
Female	246	53,5
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age Group</b>		
<=16	7	1,6
17-24	35	8,2
25-29	31	7,3
30-44	109	25,5
45-59	125	29,3
60-64	55	12,9
65-74	56	13,1
75+	9	2,1
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>427</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Origin</b>		
Viana do Castelo	159	37,7
Elsewhere in Portugal	220	52,1
Abroad	43	10,2
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Full time paid employment	195	44,1
Part time paid employment	9	2
Unemployed / seeking work	29	6,6
Full time education	32	7,2
Self-employed	49	11,1
Retired	117	26,5
Full time parent or carer	11	2,5
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Dependent children</b>		
Yes	127	30,1
No	295	69,9
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 2: Previous Visits and Information Sources**

	Total	
	N (Frequency)	% (Valid Percent)
<b>Previous visits</b>		
First time	103	22,9
2-5 times	111	24,7
6-10 times	236	52,4
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>First hear about the event*</b>		
Local press	64	6,3
Social media	102	10,1
Word of mouth	174	17,2
Tourism literature/office	27	2,7
From an artist/participant	10	1,0
Local radio	70	6,9
Television	109	10,8
A poster or flyer	91	9,0
An email or e-flyer	24	2,4
Municipal council	49	4,9
Direct from the Festa eg Website	29	2,9
Been before / family / local tradition	167	16,5
Other	94	9,3
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>1010</b>	<b>100</b>

\*Multiple response question

Analysing how participants first hear about the event, apparently there has been little effort carried out on the promotion of the *Festa*, which can be linked to its non-tourism origin, or to an absence of knowledge about the potential positive impacts generated by tourists, especially in economic terms, which would probably motivate a higher investment in promotion. Thus, the primary purpose of the *Festa* is not tourism-related.

Richards and Fernandes (2007) in their study argue that family and friends were the main source of information used. However, nowadays:

*in order to encourage and develop repeat visitation, appropriate marketing channels need to be sought and sustained'* (Matheson *et al.*, 2014:29).

Considering the transport mode, more than 78% of the respondents used their own car and only 11% used public transport. These results are not surprising, considering the high percentage of visitors that have their residence in the region.

The majority of the respondents attend the *Festa* with family (56.9%) or with family and friends (18.9%), but always in small groups with less than five people. These results confirm the findings of other research studies to religious sites in the north of Portugal and the changing characteristics associated with the mode of travel and transport (see for example, Richards and Fernandes, 2007; Fernandes *et al.*, 2015).

**Table 3: Mode of Transport and Composition of the Groups**

	Total	
	N (Frequency)	% (Valid Percent)
<b>Mode of Transport</b>		
Train	19	4,4
Taxi	2	0,5
Plane	1	0,2
On foot	52	12,1
Car	326	76
Bus or coach	25	5,8
Boat	2	0,5
Bicycle	2	0,5
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>429</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Composition of the groups*</b>		
Friends	152	27,2
Family	383	68,6
Alone	23	4,1
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>558</b>	<b>100</b>

\*Multiple response question

### *Motivation and consumption*

In spite of the religious nature of the *Festa*, results suggest that most of the participants attend the event due to non-religious motives, with 42% declaring their main motivation is 'to have fun', or that they 'like the general atmosphere' (more than 50%). The religious motivations were noted by only 16.3%. A total of 26.4% of the respondents referred to their interest in 'knowing more about Viana do Castelo history' or 'learning more about local culture' (25.4%). Also interesting, is the percentage of people that 'like to support local events' (24%) which may be linked to their increased awareness of preserving local traditions and reinforcing local identity. Core reasons for attending the *Festa* are shown in Table 4.

These results are in line with the literature (for example, Liutikas, 2014) that pilgrimages extend beyond religious requirements. Similarly, Richards and Fernandes (2007) refer that in religious sites in the north of Portugal, pilgrimage as a motivation for the visit accounted for just over 10 percent of responses. This could be an indicator that the relations between religious events, pilgrimage, visits to religious sites and the overall related activities are increasingly changing their patterns. Tourists have an increasingly broader spectrum of interests, where religious motives may be more or less relevant depending on the place and time of the event or destination. In fact, the

**Table 4: Reasons for Attending the Event**

	Total	
	N (Frequency)	% (Percent of cases)
I like the overall atmosphere	263	54,3
I like to support local events	116	24,0
I am visiting the area	64	13,2
I wanted to spend time with family/friends	113	23,3
To experience something new	53	11,0
To learn about Viana's history	128	26,4
To learn about local culture	123	25,4
To share with others	78	16,1
I am interested in history/folklore	97	20,0
I have attended before	145	30,0
Religious motivation	79	16,3
To have fun	202	41,7
Other	45	9,3
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>1506</b>	<b>311,2</b>

Multiple response question

concept of religion may be sometimes very close and indistinct from a more comprehensive sense of spirituality and self-discovery. The least referred motivation (from the options available) was 'to engage in something new'. This apparently contradictory result obtained in the field research can be explained by the high number of repeat visitors, but can also suggest a lack of innovation in the event's planning.

As suggested by the literature, this kind of events has a strong potential for generating impacts and reinforcing the tourist attractiveness of the host area, mainly due to its capacity to create a sense of belonging through tourists' engagement in experiences and activities. However, the results suggest that the more traditional activities are the ones respondents seek most - a sense of nostalgia for the past and / or desire for emigrants to maintain a cultural link to their native country and / or region. Although it is possible to observe an interest about local history and culture, there are few expectations about the possibility of engaging in something new.

Considering the accommodation chosen, more than 65% of the participants stayed in their own homes, which is also not surprising if we consider the percentage of people that live in the vicinity of Viana do Castelo. Less than 14% stayed in hotels, camping parks or other accommodation units, which reinforces the idea that the event is mainly attended by residents and that tourists, by definition, are only a small minority. The length of stay by non-residents is between two and five days with respondents from outside Portugal declaring that they stayed in Viana do Castelo nine or more days (42.9%). It should be noted that the *Festa* takes place in the month of August,

during the peak period of tourism in Portugal. Therefore, for tourists, the *Festa* is not necessarily the reason for the visit to the region. Attending the *Festa* is often a decision taken once at the holiday destination. Nevertheless, data confirm the general trend regarding attendance at this kind of event, with visitors from foreign countries staying longer than the ones from neighbouring cities or regions.

The results suggest that the ethnographic parade is the central activity, being referred to by more than 75% of the participants (Table 6). Considering the activities in which the visitors intended to participate, 'having a meal' (56.4%), 'have some drinks' (47%), 'visiting craft stores/ local culture exhibitions' (46.6%) and 'visiting churches or religious sites' (46.2%) were the

	Total	
	N (Frequency)	% (Valid Per- cent)
<b>Length of Stay</b>		
I live here	151	37,6
1	78	19,4
2-5	81	20,1
6-8	21	5,2
9+	71	17,7
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Type of accommodation utilised</b>		
At home	245	65,7
BandB / Hotel	51	13,7
With friends/family	62	16,6
Camping / caravan	15	4,0
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>373</b>	<b>100</b>

	Total	
	N (Frequency)	% (Percent of cases)
<b>Activities within the festa</b>		
Procession to the sea/ fishing quarter	220	46,7
The flower carpets in Ribeira	228	48,4
Sanctuary of Our Lady of the Agony	178	37,8
Folk dance/music events	197	41,8
Parade of masks and giants	261	55,4
Costume parades	173	36,7
Crafts fair/stalls	189	40,1
Ethnographic parade	354	75,2
Funfair	121	25,7
Other	59	12,5
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>420,4</b>
<b>Other Activities</b>		
Go for a drink	220	47,0
Go for a meal	264	56,4
Go shopping	150	32,1
Visit local art/craft stalls/ shops	218	46,6
Visit friends/family	97	20,7
Attend other arts events	130	27,8
Visit a museum	134	28,6
Visit a church/religious space	216	46,2
Visit indoor/outdoor markets	145	31,0
Try local food/drink	191	40,8
Visit other parts of Minho	82	17,5
Hike/walk in the country	109	23,3
Go to the beach	123	26,3
Water sports	51	10,9
Other	36	7,7
<b>Total Count</b>	<b>2166</b>	<b>462,8</b>
Multiple response question		

most popular. This is clearly in line with the results obtained in the motivations section, and reinforces the literature review, in relation to what concerns the changing market of religious tourism and the type of experiences in which tourists expect to engage. It also raises attention of the need and opportunity to further develop the portfolio of activities available for the *Festa* attendants. It is suggested that this would not only contribute to enhanced visitor satisfaction but also stimulation of the local economy.

Data also show that higher spending is registered in food and beverage: ‘having a meal’ and ‘having some drinks’ are rated as the main activities pursued by visitors. Several authors argue that gastronomy related activities are increasingly one of the most important and valued components of the visitor’s experience (Chang *et al.*, 2011; Kivela and Crofts, 2005).

Shopping registered high scores thus contributing to some of the highest impacts on the local economy, considering the reduced leakage effect. However, in order to deeply understand and evaluate the economic impact of the *Festa*, it would be necessary to integrate more detailed questions in the research.

Not surprising was the significant difference registered ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the expenses of visitors from outside Viana do Castelo and the ones that are resident in the municipality, especially concerning items such as food and beverage, accommodation, shopping or transport. Visitors from other regions or countries spent more whilst the residents from Viana do Castelo spent less.

### **Main Perceptions of the event**

Perceptions regarding the relationship between the *Festa* and Viana do Castelo’s cultural identity are the ones with the highest scores, followed by the sense of security (Table 8). These results reinforce the cultural dimension of the *Festa* and the rationale that events can help preserve cultural identities of the community. The literature often points out the importance of such events as elements in the diversification of tourism supply, inducing tourists to take part and increase their knowledge and interaction with cultural heritage and

local traditions (see for example McKercher *et al.*, 2006). For the destination, events are of great importance for the preservation and valorisation of their cultural values, once they become part of the destination’s identity.

Considering the evaluation of artistic elements, the results suggest that they are not new to the participants, which again, can be explained by the lack of innovation of those elements, or at least, that the visitors do not perceive innovation. In fact, as previously stated, only 11% of the respondents expected to experience something new. As repeat visitors, they are used to seeing the same activities year after year. This perception can be viewed as a weakness of the *Festa*. The lack of innovation can contribute to a lower attractiveness and possibly even to a decrease in the number of repeat visits and lower loyalty level. Even considering the high number of repeat visitors (more than 50% have attended at least six times over the past ten years), the lack of attractiveness for the younger segments together with the lack of innovation could compromise its future sustainability.

In effect, and in accordance with the literature, an innovation culture should be established in designing events and experiences. When talking about innovation in tourism, Hjalager (2002) defends that in some cases, adaptation and further development of existing structures are mandatory. Dwyer and Edwards (2009:326) in their study support this statement, further noting that ‘strategic drift’ is often caused by a resistance to change (on the part of the organizers). This is one of the issues that should be further explored in future field research. Results suggest that the management and planning of the event should be deeply studied in order to identify opportunities for improvement.

Finally, results about the statement ‘I have a more positive view of Viana’ (Table 8) support Matheson *et al.*’s (2014) prevailing position that events have the capacity to shape a destination’s image, and make them more attractive to the tourist.

**Table 8: Main Perceptions**

	Total	
	N (Frequency)	Mean
The artistic elements of the Festa are new to me	367	2,89
I rarely get to enjoy outdoor arts of this quality	356	3,13
I have a more positive view of Viana	363	1,70
I would recommend the Festa to other people	400	1,22
The Festa is part of the cultural identity of Viana do Castelo	393	1,13
I have felt safe whilst at the Festa	399	1,14

1= Agree Strongly; 5= Disagree Strongly

<b>Table 7: Participants' Expenditure</b>			
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>MR</i>
<b>Event</b>			
Viana do Castelo	159	26,53	212,85
Other City	220	21,61	209,62
Other Country	43	34,65	216,12
Total	422	24,79	
<b>Kruskal-Wallis test results</b>	<b><math>\chi^2 = 0,146</math> df= 2 p=0,929</b>		
<b>Food and Beverages</b>			
Viana do Castelo	159	26,39	183,13
Other City	220	38,08	226,45
Other Country	43	53,42	239,93
Total	422	35,24	
<b>Kruskal-Wallis test results</b>	<b><math>\chi^2 = 14,707</math> df= 2 p=0,001</b>		
<b>Accommodation</b>			
Viana do Castelo	159	1,00	195,82
Other City	220	20,23	221,77
Other Country	43	25,63	216,97
Total	422	13,54	
<b>Kruskal-Wallis test results</b>	<b><math>\chi^2 = 16,931</math> df= 2 p= 0,000</b>		
<b>Shopping</b>			
Viana do Castelo	159	16,16	195,79
Other City	220	22,90	221,31
Other Country	43	23,49	219,41
Total	422	20,42	
<b>Kruskal-Wallis test results</b>	<b><math>\chi^2 = 6,020</math> df= 2 p= 0,049</b>		
<b>Transports</b>			
Viana do Castelo	159	3,82	184,66
Other City	220	12,01	231,44
Other Country	43	17,21	208,71
Total	422	9,45	
<b>Kruskal-Wallis test results</b>	<b><math>\chi^2 = 19,854</math> df= 2 p= 0,000</b>		
<b>Crafts</b>			
Viana do Castelo	159	7,03	205,48
Other City	220	6,22	212,87
Other Country	43	7,86	226,78
Total	422	6,69	
<b>Kruskal-Wallis test results</b>	<b><math>\chi^2 = 2,598</math> df= 2 p= 0,273</b>		
<b>Others/ Art</b>			
Viana do Castelo	159	0,92	207,93
Other City	220	1,23	212,95
Other Country	43	0,51	217,29
Total	422	1,04	
<b>Kruskal-Wallis test results</b>	<b><math>\chi^2 = 1,523</math> df= 2 p= 0,467</b>		
<b>Others</b>			
Viana do Castelo	159	1,45	208,24
Other City	220	2,40	212,44
Other Country	43	5,14	218,77
Total	422	2,32	
<b>Kruskal-Wallis test results</b>	<b><math>\chi^2 = 1,670</math> df= 2 p= 0,434</b>		
N = cases. M=mean.; MR=mean Rank; $\chi^2$ = Chi-square; df= degrees of freedom; p= significance level			

## Main Findings and Conclusions

This paper presents the results and discussion of a pilot study undertaken in 2014 on the tourism impacts of the Pilgrimage of Our Lady of the Agony (*Romaria de Nossa Senhora d'Agonia*, in Viana do Castelo, Portugal). Data were analysed in light of the scientific research published on the subjects of cultural and religious events planning, development and impacts evaluation. According to the literature there is a shift in the contemporary market towards new elements for the development of tourism in destinations. As such, more intangible or experiential features are being consistently used by destinations as differentiation elements, capable of injecting destinations with competitive advantages (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003). As noted by Whelan and Wholfeil (2006), some of the constructive features regarding events and event-marketing, are their experience-orientation, and interactivity. When talking about events the consumer is more likely to take on active roles in experiences aimed at influencing their emotions, rather than being simply a passive subject. Events even provide a stage for social dialogue and participative interactions and activities. Within events, it is the prevailing position in the literature that cultural and religious events can become a privileged theme around which these event experiences could be created, in order to foster tourism development. This is particularly true for the north of Portugal, given that studies unveil a great potential for religious tourism development within this region (Richards and Fernandes, 2007).

Results of the profile of the sample indicate that the public is comprised primarily of female visitors aged between 45 and 59 years, and most respondents visit the event along with family or groups of friends. Contrary to the literature which suggests that the majority of religious tourists travel in organized groups, the strong regional and local nature of this event may explain the small nature of the groups. It is also of note that the number of young people attending the event is rather small (less than 10%), which, as previously pointed out, should be the subject of future reflection.

It is important to note that the attendees are in the main, repeat visitors. A large proportion of respondents heard about the event through word-of-mouth communication, family or following previous visits (77%). This result shows a high degree of loyalty towards the *Festa* and the reduced importance given to more formal communication mechanisms, such as e-flyers, or otherwise.

The results can also be interpreted as indicators of the local / regional nature of the event and its difficulty in attracting foreign tourists, which was also strengthened by the origin of visitors', since about 90% of the respondents live in Portugal, and of these, 38% reside in Viana do Castelo. The need to adopt new media strategies and increase the use of digital marketing to reach new segments of the tourist market is therefore underlined.

Since the majority of the public returns home after the visit, only a small portion of the respondents use accommodation facilities in the area. Moreover, those who stay in Viana do Castelo, stay mainly in friends or relatives' houses, and only 14% opt for hotels and other forms of accommodation.

Findings confirm that the average stay of respondents in Viana do Castelo is short, revealing a reduced economic impact on the city related to spending on accommodation. But statistics show that the hotel occupancy rate is rather high at this time of the year. As such, the main motivation to visit this region, particularly at this time of the year, appears to be unrelated to the organization of the *Festa*.

Based on the intentions of respondents, expenditures incurred on meals and purchase of regional products may have a more significant impact. Yet, considering the spending profile of religious tourists (Fleischer, 2000) it would be expected that the impacts of the event on the local economy would be higher.

Considering the motivations for visiting the event, around 54% of respondents noted that they like the general atmosphere of the event, particularly related to the cultural entertainment. The cultural dimension of the pilgrimage, along with the desire to know more about local history and culture, are also strong motivators for the visit, and are far more valued than its religious dimensions. This is not surprising since it is frequently argued in the literature that pilgrimage is changing its traditional form, and expanding beyond religious practices. Many social and cultural influences thus arise as core motivations for engaging in these events (Liutikas, 2014).

Analyzing visitors' perceptions, it is manifest that the event is perceived as retaining most of its elements over the years, which can be interpreted as lack of innovation in the format of the program and experiences developed. The event faces one of the major problems of this type of product's development, which is the conservation vs. innovation paradox.

Conserve tradition for the 45-59 year old segment looking for a return to the 'good old days'? Or, innovate to motivate the youth segment of the market currently at about 10%? According to the data, it can be inferred that, in spite of being rooted in culture and local / regional traditions, and having a high degree of attendee loyalty, the event is not balancing the needs and satisfaction of the different segments of the market.

It will be important for organisers to consider the introduction of new experiences and innovative elements that will allow the event, among other things, to attract younger and more dynamic audience segments. Particular emphasis should be placed on promoting engagement in local lifestyles, since there are many entertainment seeking people but few opportunities for meaningful human interaction. For instance, according to Hughes *et al.* (2013) experiences are defined by what visitors bring with them, namely their thoughts, motives, beliefs and preferences, and therefore, in more religious settings the spiritual or more cultural visitors' needs should be addressed, since they require different types of experiences.

Further diversification of the program appears to be warranted in order to distance the destination from 'mass tourists' and attract 'special interest tourists'. In this sense it is suggested that the *Festa* organization balance the religious with the secular, since

*focusing on spiritual topics to the exclusion of aesthetic, historic and/or artistic aspects will have limited visitor appeal (Hughes et al., 2013:218).*

Destinations need to manage sacred and cultural spaces and activities to meet the needs of the changing tourist market and the evolving nature of pilgrimage. According to the literature, well thought out planning of an event should avoid over commercialization that contradicts the needs and expectations of the 'special interest tourist' and experience seekers. It is suggested that the changes proposed would ensure the long term sustainability of the *Festa*, and help improve the economic benefits for the local economy and the building of self-esteem and pride for the community.

## Recommendations and Future Research

Having finished this preliminary analysis, further research should be carried out in order to deepen the conclusions and findings regarding the *Festa*. It is hence expected that a bigger study will incorporate new tools and procedures with similar audiences but across all aspects of the *Festa*. Further study should ideally extend to the policy context, and local businesses (hotels, shops/restaurants, craft traders, entertainment attractions, venues, etc.); not just the visitors which was the focus in 2014. Additionally, the next version of the questionnaire should encompass specific questions on local context relating to the emigrant segment and the nostalgia factor.

Given the importance of the internet as a vehicle of information, further studies should take into consideration online reviews and feedback to enhance the offer during the event and possibly increase the opportunities for human interaction and more enriching experiences. Build it accordingly and they will stay!

Finally, considering the preliminary results obtained in this pilot research as well as the literature and other studies referred to in this article, it is imperative to emphasize the fact that tourism destinations where cultural / religious events take place should be increasingly aware of the challenge they are facing or will possibly face in the near future, with the continuously changing patterns of tourism preferences and expectations and the ever-changing profile of religious tourists. Such changes give rise to a new set of opportunities, namely, the innovation of the event and the increased participation of local communities; increased positive impacts could lead to improved benefits for local economies. However, as confirmed by the data, those challenges and opportunities can only be faced and optimized through ongoing and regular research on the characteristics of the *Festa* and of its visitors.

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