

Aquatic Event(S) in the Cultural and Nautical Diversity of a Destination

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Abstract: Events are important drivers of attractiveness for tourist destinations. All types of events represent an opportunity for projection for the territory where they are developed. The holding of events has been a strong strategic bet to boost tourism and local economies. The impacts arising from the events affect not only the local community, but the entire territory. Therefore, the events sector has been playing a fundamental role in terms of the attractiveness and competitiveness of tourist destinations. The contribution is notable above all in the impetus given to the creation and development of new tourist products seen as a necessity for the holding of events and the territory where they are held. The development of events leads to investment in spaces conducive to practices associated with the realization of events and the improvement of infrastructure conditions, ending up being catalysts for a “territorial renewal”. It can also lead to awareness of the protection of heritage resources through the promotion of cultural and tourist activities that design these spaces, contributing to a greater knowledge and attractiveness of these resources. In this sense, we intend to present a case study related to the event – “Wakeboard Open Days”. Event related to nautical tourism and carried out geographically in the Central region of Portugal and in a territorial scope linked to the river Zêzere, Medio Tejo. The main objectives of this study are the approach to wakeboard combined with nautical tourism and the verification of the impacts of this practice in the territory where the event is held. To achieve both objectives, a quantitative analysis was carried out. From the preliminary results, some reluctance on the part of residents about knowledge of the wakeboard modality is identified, with practical implications for verifying social impacts, among others. Therefore, there is a need for greater interaction between all managers of the territory to increase the quality of the nautical tourist offer. This study will contribute to a greater perception of the need to expand knowledge about the impacts of this event on the territory, valuing it through fluvial-nautical practice.

Keywords: events, nautical tourism, wakeboard, territory, tourist destinations

1. Introduction

The promotion of territories through the holding of events is increasingly used as a way for regions to differentiate themselves in a dynamic of territorial competitiveness. Also, to boost your events or activities to achieve a greater impact on the tourist development of that territory.

The Central region of Portugal, where the Medio Tejo and the river Zêzere are integrated, the geographical area that we intend to present in this study, is a privileged space for the practice of aquatic modalities linked to the river resource.

The Medio Tejo region has taken advantage of this resource to promote wakeboard activity and specifically the “Open Days Event”. This is an event promoted by Intermunicipal Community of the Medio Tejo. The international dimension event has boosted the region's tourism development. However, the development of the territory will have to be based on a joint and constant strategy between the various stakeholders of the territory.

The experience linked to events has shown that any event that aims to attract tourists in their relationship with the destination and with the residents, and with companies and a whole set of stakeholders involved, always ends up generating impacts. The perception of these impacts comes from the interaction of tourism with the various sectors of economic activity and, consequently, with various social, cultural, environmental aspects, etc.

At a time when the economy in Portugal is going through a difficult period, it is essential that tourist destinations innovate and develop cultural and tourist products so that they become differentiators in the competition between territories for the type of tourism they offer to their visitors.

One of the tourist products that has been developed is nautical tourism with the wakeboard event in the Central region of Portugal, Medio Tejo, known for its connections to the river (Zêzere river) and on a more touristic side associated with nautical tourism, with a modality such as wakeboard, already with great expression at an international level. As a tourist offer, it values not only the Medio Tejo region, but also boosts this product as a national and international reference in the wakeboard aquatic modality. This context, together with the intention to understand the impacts that the event brought to the region, justifies the choice of the theme presented in this study.

Events are used as a lever for the territory with the purpose of attracting more visitors and contributing to socio-economic development, and can cover various levels at the social, economic, sporting, urban scale. Events are public celebrations (Getz 1997). They serve for people to come together to celebrate, venerate, remember, socialize, and demonstrate (Yeomann et al, 2006). They are specific rituals designed and consciously created to mark special occasions (MacDonnell et al, 1999). In the case of nautical tourism, it can be characterized by tourists who relate to water, whether by sea or river, focusing especially on an activity that provides leisure (Gračan et al, 2018).

In events, when it comes to consolidating a positive image of the region, an integrated management is necessary, based on the destination brand management. The organization of events is a fundamental element to increase the attractiveness of the region with effects on the respective reputation and image of the destination (Guerreiro 2008). Also due to the contribution of sociocultural factors related to the preservation and recovery of traditions, infrastructures and old values that could otherwise fall into oblivion (Marques et al, 2021).

Events can leverage the promotion of the destination and attract tourists, and social, cultural, environmental, political, economic, and sporting factors are considered fundamental to achieve this attractiveness (Horne 2007).

On the one hand, studies (Gratton, Shibli and Coleman 2006), have demonstrated the importance of the relationship between the number of tourists and the economic impact attributed to a given event. On the other hand, other studies (Mathieson and Wall 1982), relate not only the economic impacts, but also the environmental, cultural, and social ones. In addition, tourist projection can be reinforced through nautical activities, making these a key part in the revaluation of territories (Romero de La Cruz et al, 2020).

Events related to nautical tourism must include entrepreneurs and public entities (municipalities, associations, among others), with the aim of promoting their products.

It is understood that in this study from these dynamics it is possible to perceive the central objective of this study, from a case study, centred on the event "Wakeboard Open Days". The main objective is to understand the practice of wakeboard combined with nautical tourism and to verify the possible impacts of this practice in the territory where the event is held.

There is a need for greater interaction between all the managers of the territory to increase the quality of the nautical tourist offer. In this sense, this study contributes to a greater perception of the practice of nautical tourism observed from the aquatic modality of wakeboard and to a better perception of the impacts of this event in the territory, valuing it through the fluvial-nautical practice.

2. Cultural and nautical diversity of a destination: The Medio Tejo Region

The Center region has a coast with beaches, both coastal and river, as well as several rivers, dams, and marinas. At the same time, it has a wide cultural and natural heritage with a diversity of resources and locations suitable for the practice of nautical activities. There is an immense territorial potential for the development of tourist products associated with nautical tourism. This territorial reality constitutes a growing opportunity for development and dynamism for the central-interior regions.

The Medio Tejo, Center region of Portugal, sub-region that integrates the NUTS III of the district of Santarém, in addition to presenting a forest and agricultural area, has five rivers that pass through this territory, namely, the rivers Tejo, Zêzere, Nabão, Almonda and Alviela. This region of the Medio Tejo includes the municipalities of Vila de Rei, Ferreira do Zêzere, Sardoal, Sertã, Abrantes and Tomar.

This region has an important cultural, natural, historical and architectural heritage. The region has good infrastructure, accessibility conditions and companies recognized for their nautical services. It is considered to add value to the territory and has been fundamental for the development of the territory, thus contributing to social progress, to the regional and local economy, as well as to the increase in nautical tourism activity.

Associate to nautical tourism, the cultural diversity of the territory can also contribute to generate an awareness of the preservation of heritage, both tangible and intangible, understanding that this is the heritage that distinguishes and affirms it individually (Toselli 2006). In fact, contemporary society involves actions aimed at the protection, conservation, interpretation and dissemination of the heritage and cultural diversity of each region, as they constitute an important challenge for the sustainable development of the territory.

The Castelo de Bode Nautical Station is a centre for activities linked to the Castelo de Bode reservoir for the development of a whole network of water activities associated with nautical tourism. It is understood that nautical tourism is promising for the development of the Center region, with special emphasis on the aquatic modality of wakeboard and a diversified set of tourist products related to nautical tourism, with the main objective of creating a tourist offer capable of make the Medio Tejo destination the biggest in terms of national and international attractiveness. For reasons of competitiveness between tourist territories, it is essential that destinations are prepared to adapt and update their portfolio of events (Sol et al, 2017). The Medio Tejo external market reached a very favourable peak (since 2020) as the practice of unique sports, which led to better levels of tourism, in nautical terms (Centro 2020).

The Medio Tejo region has a unique cultural diversity. A favourable context, given that society, which is increasingly diversified, it is essential to guarantee harmonious interaction between people and groups with both plural and dynamic cultural identities (Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, article 2, UNESCO 2002). The sustainable management of cultural and nautical tourism is essential for tourist destinations that promote it, and it is crucial to value existing resources allied to the dynamics of cultural empowerment for the development of this territory (Lopes et al, 2022).

In this sense, the promotion of nautical tourism with a view to valuing and sustaining the cultural, natural, and scenic resources of the Medio Tejo, requires investments that focus on intelligent economic development and the reinforcement of activities linked to the networked water-river resource.

In this way, it will be possible to create favourable conditions for the settlement of people and ensure sustainable prosperity for the territory.

3. Methodology

The main objective of this work is to understand the impacts of the “Wakeboard Open Days” event, Zêzere river, Medio Tejo Center region (Portugal). To obtain a better understanding of the reality of cultural, social, economic, and environmental impacts, data were collected through an individual and anonymous questionnaire, consisting of closed-ended questions, with residents and participants in this study, present in four (4) river beaches of the Medio Tejo: Aldeia do Mato (Abrantes), Lago Azul (Ferreira do Zêzere), Trízio (Sertã) and Fernandaires (Vila de Rei).

In relation to cultural impacts, we tried to understand the attribution given, by degree of importance of the event for the territory, at three (3) levels: *i*) appreciation of traditional techniques and preservation of cultural heritage; *ii*) community involvement in the event and, *iii*) non-characterization of heritage and loss of local identity. Regarding the economic impacts, these were also given degrees of importance, at three (3) levels: *i*) job creation; *ii*) increased consumption of local products and *iii*) attraction of new investments and business development.

As for social impacts, the three (3) levels assigned are: *i*) decreased security; *ii*) improving the development of structures (accessibility, leisure, tourist entertainment, etc.), and *iii*) improving the quality of services. Finally, in terms of environmental impacts, the three (3) levels assigned are: *i*) dissemination of natural landscapes and environmental conservation, *ii*) environmental awareness and awareness, and *iii*) air, soil, and water pollution.

The data collection period of this study took place during the months of June and July (2021), in four (4) river beaches prepared with cable parks for the practice of the aquatic modality of wakeboard (river beach of Aldeia do Mato – Abrantes, river beach of Lago Azul – Ferreira do Zêzere, river beach of Trízio – Sertã and river beach of Fernandaires – Vila de Rei). Data collection took place during the “Wakeboard Open Days” event, from which 232 valid questionnaires were collected.

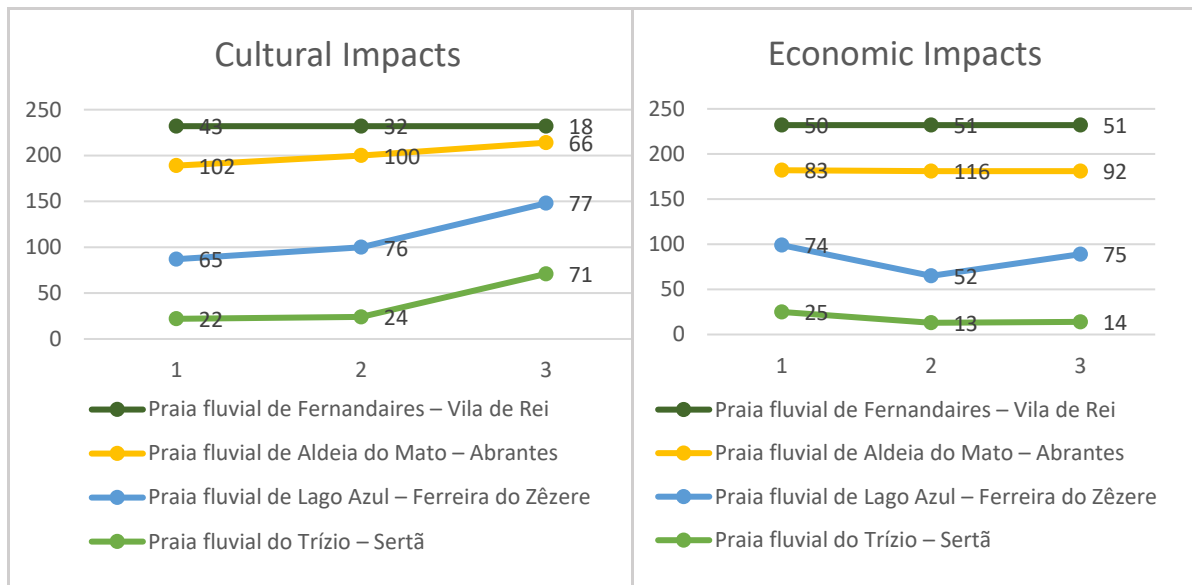
4. Results

To analyse the cultural, economic, social, and environmental impacts of the “Wakeboard Open Days” event on the territory, the residents and participants of this study were asked about these impacts, at the above-mentioned levels. The results for the cultural impact (Graph 1), suggest in the logic of the residents and participants that on the river beach of Sertã, holding the event has benefits, however only 22% consider that through this event traditional techniques can be valued and contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage. Also, only 24% of respondents consider it important to involve the community in the event. 71% believe that this type of event contributes to the non-characterization of the heritage and loss of identity of the place.

On the river beach of Ferreira de Zêzere, 77% consider that the event contributes to the non-characterization and loss of identity of the place. Therefore, 76% consider community involvement essential, but only 65% believe that the event brings benefits to the territory, through the enhancement of traditional techniques and preservation of cultural heritage.

Graph 1

Graph 2



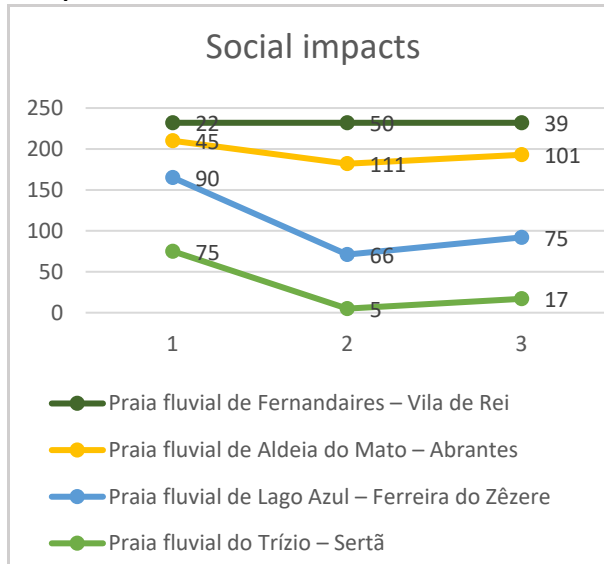
A curious result was obtained on the river beach of Abrantes, as most respondents, 102%, consider that the event presents appreciation benefits, as well as 100% also consider that community involvement is important. Already 66% observe that the event may contribute to the non-characterization of the place and to the loss of identity of the territory. On the river beach of Vila de Rei, a small percentage, 18% say that the event contributes to the non-characterization of the heritage and loss of identity of the place, 32% consider the involvement of the community important and 43% believe that the event can enhance the techniques traditions, as well as contributing to the preservation of cultural heritage. From the economic impacts (Graph 2), this study obtained interesting results in the four river beaches studied.

On Sertã river beach, 25% of respondents consider that the event is important for job creation, 13% believe that the event will increase the consumption of local products and 14% say that the event will attract new investments and business development for the territory. On the river beach of Ferreira Zêzere, the result is interesting, since 74% of the respondents believe that the event is important for job creation, 52% only mention that there may be an increase in consumption of local products, and that a considerable percentage, 75% also have the perspective that the event will lead to new investments and business development.

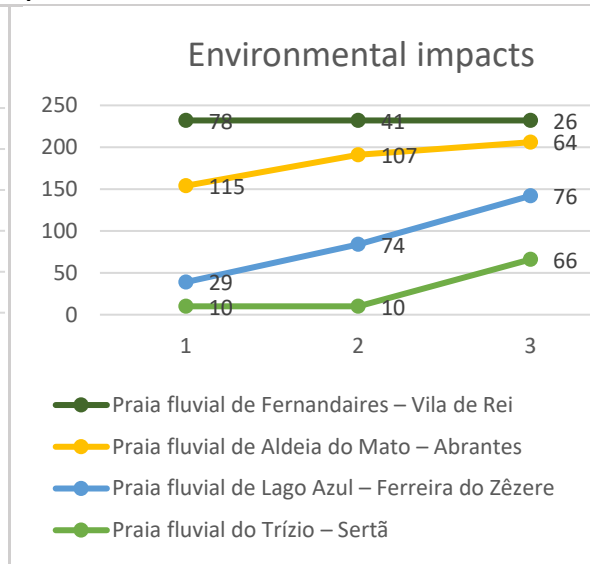
In this question, the same happens with the answers obtained in the river beach of Abrantes, since 92% have a similar perspective. 116% consider, therefore, that there is also an increase in the consumption of local products and 83% say that the event will contribute to job creation. The social impacts (Graph 3) revealed equally interesting results of future verification, related to safety. 75% of the respondents from the Sertã river beach consider that the event contributes to reducing the safety of the place. Only 5% believe that holding the event can contribute to an improvement in the development of structures (accessibility, leisure, tourist entertainment, etc.), with 17% mentioning that it can serve to increase the quality of services in the region in a global dynamic.

Similarly, on the river beach of Ferreira Zêzere, the results also point to a decrease in safety, with 90%. Already 66% believe that the event contributes to an improvement in the development of structures (accessibility, leisure, tourist entertainment, etc). A very representative percentage, 75% consider the increase in the quality of tourist services. On the river beach of Abrantes, only a small percentage, 45% consider there is a decrease in safety, 111% mention that the event contributes to an improvement in the development of structures (accessibility, leisure, tourist entertainment, etc). 101% refer to an increase in the quality of services in general. On Vila de Rei beach, only 22% say that the event takes place, reduces safety, 50% of respondents indicate the event's contribution to an improvement in the development of structures and 39% mention that it can increase the quality of services.

Graph 3



Graph 4



For the environmental impacts (Graph 4), on the Sertã river beach, 10% of the respondents consider that the event promotes the dissemination of natural landscapes and the conservation of the environment. Although 10% believe that the event can contribute to environmental awareness and awareness, 66% say that the event contributes to air, soil, and water pollution. The answers obtained on the river beach of Ferreira Zêzere indicate that 29% consider that the event promotes the dissemination of natural landscapes and the conservation of the environment, and the curious result obtained on this river beach is that 74% consider that the holding of the event provides environmental awareness and awareness and 76% point to an increase in air, soil and water pollution. A result obtained at Abrantes beach with a high percentage, 115%, is that the event promotes the dissemination of natural landscapes and the conservation of the environment. 107% environmental awareness and awareness and 64% air, soil and water pollution. In Vila de Rei beach, regarding the dissemination of natural landscapes and conservation of the environment, 78% of respondents attribute high importance to this level. 41% for environmental awareness and awareness and 26% for air, soil and water pollution.

5. Discussion

In this study, we started from the idea that events are fundamental for tourist destinations. It is since a tourist destination combines all the services, products and experiences existing in the place (Buhalis 2000). They generate positive and important impacts for destinations, by attracting more visitors and tourists, by contributing to the increase in consumption of the same at the place of the event, increasing the number of stays in the tourist destination, as well as counteracting seasonality (Getz 2008).

The present study, as already mentioned, aims to analyse the impacts (cultural, social, economic and environmental) of the event “Wakeboard Open Days”, river Zêzere, Medio Tejo, in the Center region (Portugal). The four (4) river beaches of the Medio Tejo studied resulted in relevant information for future discussion on the impacts in relation to this event.

The discussion about the context under study is important since some studies have pointed to destinations as winning bets through the holding of events with the aim of attracting more visitors, promoting the positioning of the destination in the tourist market (Getz and Page 2016). The events end up becoming catalysts for the tourist development of the territory.

From the point of view of holding the event “Wakeboard Open Days” about cultural impacts, it is evident the important importance attributed to the enhancement of traditional techniques and preservation of cultural heritage, highlighting the river beaches of Aldeia do Mato (Abrantes), with 102% followed by the river beaches of Lago Azul (Ferreira do Zêzere) and the river beach of Fernandaires (Vila de Rei), with 65% and 43%, respectively. With a lower percentage, comes with 22%, the river beach of Trízio (Sertã). Which means that events offer the opportunity for tourists to get to know the local culture and lifestyle of the places where they are held (Deng and Li 2014).

About community involvement in the event, the river beaches of Aldeia do Mato and Lago Azul have the highest percentages, 100% and 76% respectively. Followed by the river beaches of Fernandaires with 32% and Trízio with 24%. On the other hand, on the river beach of Lago Azul, respondents consider that the event contributes to the non-characterization of the heritage and loss of local identity, 77%, followed by a very close percentage, 71% for the river beach of Trízio and of 66% for the beach of Aldeia do Mato.

In fact, the participation of the local community in activities related to the aquatic modality, in areas favourable for its development, is very positive due to the adhesion of the community itself. The increase in volunteering and community cooperation may increase, contributing to the strengthening and appreciation of traditions (Kim, et al. 2015). Regarding the economic impacts on the territory, it is positive to consider the “leverage effect” (Nicolas 2015). The analysis showed that in terms of economic impacts, job creation was considered important on the river beach of Aldeia do Mato, with 83%, followed by the river beach Lago Azul, with 74%. For the river beaches of Fernandaires, 50% and Trízio, 25%, job creation is of lesser importance. The attribution of the same percentage degree of importance on the increase in the consumption of local products is attributed by the respondents of the beaches Aldeia do Mato, 116%, Lago Azul, 52%, Fernandaires, 51% and Trízio, 13%. As an economic impact arising from the events, they create visibility for new investments and create favourable conditions for the promotion of local commercial activities (Allen et al 2002).

There is a growing tendency for competent institutions to support the management of events, mainly through the creation of infrastructures for holding them in their places of operation, thus realizing their objective of capturing more and more events (Dredge and Jamal 2015), which promote investments in the territory where a particular event takes place. The attractiveness for new investments and development of companies in the territory was considered of extreme importance, judging by the percentage attributed by the respondents to the river beach Aldeia do Mato, 92%, followed by the river beaches Lago Azul, 75%, Fernandaires, 51% and with residual relevance, 14% for the river beach Trízio. It means that tourist activity, based on the holding of events, can bring several positive impacts to the destination.

The perception that visitors have of a tourist destination where an event takes place can influence their decision to participate or not in a particular event (Deng and Li 2014). The analysis of the social impacts revealed that the participants of this study considered a general decrease in security when the event took place. On the river beaches Lago Azul, 90% and Trízio, 75%, a high percentage of respondents considered that there was a decrease in safety. Also, the river beaches of Aldeia do Mato, 45% and Fernandaires, 22%, appear very close in terms of percentage. Regarding improving the development of structures (accessibility, leisure, tourist entertainment, etc.), the river beaches that stand out in terms of importance were Aldeia do Mato, 111% and Lago Azul, 66%. Fernandaires, 50% and Trízio, with only 5%. Respondents from the Aldeia do Mato river beach, also considered a considerable increase in the quality of services through this event, with 101%, followed by the river beaches Lago Azul, 75%, Fernandaires, 39% and Trízio, 17%. It means that the holding of the event can be a catalyst in the development and improvement of existing conditions and can also increase the tourist experiences of visitors during their stay at the destination (Allen et al 2002).

Finally, environmental impacts were also considered in this study. The dissemination of natural landscapes and conservation of the environment were considered highly important by respondents from the river beach Aldeia do Mato, 115%, Fernandaires, 78% and with less representation the river beaches Lago Azul, 29% and Trízio, 10%. Also, in relation to the importance of holding this event for environmental awareness and awareness, the river beaches Aldeia do Mato, 107%, Lago Azul, 74% and with a lower percentage the Fernandaires beaches, 41% and Trízio, 10%. Air, soil, and water pollution on the river beaches Lago Azul, 76%, Trízio, 66%, Aldeia do Mato, 64% and, finally, Fernandaires, 26% were also mentioned.

Tourist destinations increasingly face intense competition processes (Hildebrandt and Isaac 2015). This happens because more and more, visitors, before choosing their destination of choice, look for information about these destinations and compare these different destinations that have similar characteristics. Therefore, tourist destinations seek to differentiate themselves from the competition (Aarstad et al 2015). With this discussion under analysis, we sought to contribute to a better understanding of the cultural, economic, social, and environmental impacts existing in a tourist destination whose cultural diversity and nautical activity characterize it, and the results achieved were focused on a specific event "Wakeboard Opens Days", which can be replicated in other events of the same territorial scope.

6. Concluding remarks

Through this study it was evident the confirmation of the results on cultural impacts at levels *i*) the enhancement of traditional techniques and preservation of cultural heritage and *ii*) the involvement of the community in the event are the most representative on the river beach Aldeia do Mato (Abrantes). It was also confirmed that level *iii*) non-characterization of heritage and loss of local identity was the most representative for the river beaches Lago Azul (Ferreira do Zêzere) and Trízio (Sertã). This study made it clear that the economic impacts are perceived, firstly, at level *ii*) increased consumption of local products, followed by *iii*) attracting new investments and business development, and only then at level *i*) job creation.

These levels are referenced by respondents from the river beach Aldeia do Mato (Abrantes) and *iii*) attraction of new investments and business development, mentioned by the river beach Lago Azul (Ferreira do Zêzere).

It was also possible to confirm in terms of social impacts that levels *ii*) improvement in the development of structures (accessibility, leisure, tourist entertainment, etc), and level *iii*) increase in the quality of services were considered the most representative for respondents from the Aldeia do Mato, river beach (Abrantes) and level *i*) decreased safety for the river beaches Lago Azul (Ferreira Zêzere) and Trízio (Sertã).

This study also concludes that in terms of environmental impacts, levels *i*) dissemination of natural landscapes and environmental conservation and *ii*) environmental awareness and awareness were representative for the river beach Aldeia do Mato (Abrantes). Level *i*) dissemination of natural landscapes and environmental conservation, was for the river beach Fernandaires (Vila de Rei) and *iii*) air, soil, and water pollution for the beach Lago Azul (Ferreira Zêzere).

The conclusions of this study highlight the locations of the Medio Tejo, such as Abrantes, Ferreira do Zêzere, Sertã and Vila de Rei. In these locations, the river beaches have a cable park – an infrastructure equipped for the practice of wakeboard water activities. The "Wakeboard Open Days" event took place in these structures. Respondents from Abrantes, in relation to cultural impacts, show a greater concern for issues of valuing traditional techniques and preserving cultural heritage. They also mention that there is an increase in the consumption of local products, regarding the economic impacts related to the realization of this event.

As for the social impacts, they also mention the improvement in the development of structures (accessibility, leisure, tourist entertainment, etc.) and, about environmental impacts, they understand that the event contributes to the dissemination of natural landscapes and conservation of the environment. Respondents from Ferreira do Zêzere, on the other hand, point out as cultural impacts, the non-characterization of heritage and loss of local identity, and they understand that the fundamental economic impact for the region is the attraction of new investments and the development of companies.

However, as a social impact, they foresee a decrease in safety and at the environmental level, they mention the increase in air, soil, and water pollution. Respondents from Sertã point out as the most relevant cultural and

social impacts, the non-characterization of heritage, loss of local identity and decreased security, respectively. Vila de Rei and its respondents believe that the dissemination of natural landscapes and conservation of the environment, as an environmental impact, is fundamental. It is understood that the main results confirmed in this study may provide important information related to the impacts of the "Wakeboard Open Days" event in the territory. It could also mean a work base for the managers of tourist organizations to readapt their strategies to promote the event, giving it differentiating and competitive characteristics, which contribute to the (re)conquest of promising markets for this territory.

The present study has some limitations related to the inclusion of other levels of importance related to the image of the nautical tourist destination, specifically with the event "Wakeboard Opens Days" and with the degree of satisfaction of residents and visitors, participants in the event, are understandable as relevant dimensions for the context of general deepening of the theme under study aquatic event(s) in the cultural and nautical diversity of a destination.

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