

Events and Hospitality: Strategic Insights From Hotel Managers in Portugal

Filipe Segurado Severino¹, Francisco Silva², Raul Ribeiro Ferreira³ and Fernando Garrido⁴

¹Escola Superior de Ciências Empresariais, Instituto Politécnico de Setúbal (IPS); CiTUR - Centre for Tourism Research, Development and Innovation, Estoril

²Escola Superior de Hotelaria e Turismo do Estoril; Center for Geographical Studies, IGOT, University of Lisbon, Portugal, and Associated Laboratory Terra; CiTUR - Centre for Tourism Research, Development, and Innovation, Estoril

³Center for Geographical Studies, IGOT, University of Lisbon

⁴Instituto Superior de Lisboa e Vale do Tejo (ISCE); ISCE Research Centre (CI-ISCE); President of the Portuguese Hotel Managers' Association (ADHP)

filipe.severino@esce.ips.pt

francisco.silva@eshte.pt

raul.ferreira@eshte.pt

fm.garrido@outlook.com

Abstract: Events have emerged as critical levers for destination competitiveness, seasonality mitigation, and hospitality performance. However, the impact of events on hotel operations remains underexplored, particularly from the perspective of hotel management. This exploratory study examines how hotel directors perceive, measure, and adapt to the influence of events across different Portuguese destinations. A focus group was conducted with hotel directors operating in various regions of Portugal, representing both independent and chain-affiliated units. Through a content analysis approach, six thematic dimensions were identified: 1) limitations in capturing guest motivations and event-related revenue; 2) disparities in data sharing and benchmarking practices; 3) regional and typological variability in event impact; 4) internal organizational responses to event operations; 5) structural challenges in stakeholder coordination and communication; and 6) prospective trends in event-driven hospitality strategy. Findings reveal considerable heterogeneity in how hotels integrate events into strategic planning, especially concerning pricing, forecasting, and operational readiness. While internal events are more easily tracked, external events often generate unaccounted residual revenues. The results also underscore persistent difficulties in institutional coordination, particularly with municipalities, and a general reluctance among hotel administrators to share performance data due to competitive concerns. Nevertheless, the focus group highlighted that academically framed collaborations may facilitate more open dialogue and data sharing. The study offers preliminary yet valuable insights into the operational, strategic, and governance challenges faced by hotels in leveraging events as tools for value creation, brand positioning, and sustainability-oriented planning. By shedding light on the interface between event dynamics and hospitality management, this research contributes to academic debate and practice in tourism destination development.

Keywords: Event Management; Hospitality Strategy; Hotel Performance; Stakeholder Coordination; Event-related Demand Attribution.

1. Introduction

Events are widely recognised as strategic instruments that can strengthen destination competitiveness and influence tourist satisfaction, with implications for local tourism performance and hospitality demand dynamics (Teixeira et al., 2019). Hotels, in turn, operate as key “interfaces” where event-related demand is converted into measurable outcomes such as occupancy, average daily rate (ADR), revenue per available room (RevPAR), and total revenue, and where such demand is shaped by managerial decisions (Borovcanin et al., 2020; Moreno Melgarejo et al., 2020; Piga and Melis, 2021). Yet, empirical studies also show that event impacts are not necessarily uniform, varying by event type and by hotel segment or tier, which implies that destination-level narratives may conceal differentiated firm-level effects and managerial challenges (Collins et al., 2022; Moreno Melgarejo et al., 2020; Piga and Melis, 2021). Because much existing evidence relies on aggregated performance indicators and event–baseline comparisons, both the profiling of event-driven travel motives and the attribution of indirect or residual revenue effects remain analytically challenging, with important implications for forecasting and strategic learning (Piga and Melis, 2021). From the demand-side, events can also affect experiential evaluations in accommodation contexts, particularly when event experiences are integrated with the hotel setting, reinforcing the relevance of understanding how hotels respond to event-linked guest experiences and satisfaction outcomes (Boo and Busser, 2018; Teixeira et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the ability to strategically integrate events into forecasting, pricing and readiness depends on the quality of information flows, monitoring capacity and coordination arrangements, which have been shown to remain constrained in event

operations (Alanzeh, 2022; Melly et al., 2023; Piga and Melis, 2021). Against this background, this exploratory study examines how Portuguese hotel directors perceive, measure, and operationalise event impacts in forecasting, pricing, preparedness, and stakeholder coordination.

2. Literature Review

Event–hospitality research has frequently operationalised event impact through hotel performance indicators (e.g., occupancy, ADR, RevPAR and total revenue), showing that major events can generate measurable uplifts while highlighting attribution challenges when performance gains must be linked to specific event stimuli and revenue lines (Borovcanin et al., 2020; Moreno Melgarejo et al., 2020).

However, the literature also presents opposing view on “revenue value” of events for hotels. While daily-data studies document large occupancy, price and revenue increases for some flagship events, they also show that many events yield small or statistically insignificant effects, reinforcing that impacts depend on event type and market context (Depken II and Stephenson, 2018; Steitz and Hall, 2020). Moreover, even when hotel KPIs rise, event-related gains may be unevenly distributed across hotel segments and may reflect shifts in demand composition across hotel tiers rather than a uniform expansion (Collins et al., 2022), with displacement mechanisms further moderating net effects (Brännäs and Nordström, 2006). Finally, event-impact estimation is often moderated by capacity constraints, displacement mechanisms and attribution limits (e.g., leakages and measurement limitations in standard hotel datasets), which can lead hotels to under- or over-estimate the contribution of externally hosted events in routine performance reporting (Brännäs and Nordström, 2006; Depken II and Stephenson, 2018; Piga and Melis, 2021).

Comparative approaches that contrast event periods with “business-as-usual” baselines further indicate that price and occupancy responses may vary across editions of similar festivals, reinforcing the conditionality of event effects and the importance of contextual moderators (Piga and Melis, 2021). Relatedly, performance comparison practices can be supported by third-party performance systems and aggregated reporting, yet empirical knowledge remains comparatively thinner regarding the specific inter-organisational information flows and coordination processes through which event intelligence is shared and operationalised across destination actors (Piga and Melis, 2021). Evidence from heterogeneous hotel markets demonstrates that event types can shift demand composition across hotel tiers (from economy to luxury), suggesting that event externalities may reshape demand within the accommodation system rather than uniformly expand it, with implications for segmentation and revenue management (Collins et al., 2022). Beyond performance metrics, events have been linked to tourist satisfaction and to dimensions of regional tourism competitiveness, supporting their strategic interpretation as destination value-creation mechanisms (Teixeira et al., 2019). At the micro-experiential level, research on hotel-based event experience shows that when events are integrated into the hotel setting, satisfaction outcomes are affected, positioning hotels as part of the event consumption ecosystem rather than as passive capacity providers (Boo and Busser, 2018; Teixeira et al., 2019). Post-crisis work on event operations also documents governance and resource constraints, such as limited monitoring capacity, indicating that coordination architectures and information flows can condition both event feasibility and hospitality preparedness (Alanzeh, 2022; Melly et al., 2023). Collectively, these streams motivate manager-centred inquiry into how hotels perceive, measure and operationalise event impacts under heterogeneous market conditions and coordination constraints.

3. Methodology

This exploratory study adopted a qualitative design using a semi-structured focus group to examine how hotel leaders perceive, measure, and operationalise event impacts in hotel strategy and operations. The session followed a structured guide addressing: i) participant and hotel profiling; ii) perceived impacts of internal and external events on performance and operations; iii) information management and guest/event profiling; iv) organisational responses and interdepartmental alignment; v) coordination with destination actors; and vi) future trends and innovation in event-driven hospitality strategy. The focus group was held on 22 March 2024 (61 minutes), moderated by two researchers, and involved nine participants from hotel management and senior professional roles. With informed consent, the session was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, with identifiers removed to ensure confidentiality and GDPR-aligned data handling. Data were analysed through qualitative content analysis using iterative coding, moving from meaning units to higher-order themes, combining sensitivity to performance monitoring and event baselines with openness to emergent managerial concerns. The process yielded six thematic dimensions: measurement limitations; data and performance

comparison practices; contextual heterogeneity; internal organisational responses; stakeholder coordination challenges; and prospective strategic trends.

4. Findings and Data Analysis

The content analysis shows that hotel leaders consider events strategically relevant, yet they frequently emphasise the limited informational granularity available to identify event-driven demand and attribute its value, especially for externally hosted events. A core difficulty concerns profiling the purpose of stay: “Often, we do not know what guests’ motivations are when they arrive... whether they come for leisure, for example, or with another purpose”. This limitation is reinforced by procedural constraints at check-in, where “in many cases, check-in... there is a standardised procedure that prevents that question”. Consequently, performance uplifts may be observed, but causal learning about which events drive which segments and behaviours remains constrained.

Measurement challenges are accentuated when considering ancillary and indirect revenues. Internal/contracted events allow clearer tracing of consumption (e.g., bundled meals), whereas external events generate dispersed spending that may not be systematically tagged to the event. As one excerpt summarises: “extra consumption, such as trips to the bar, is paid by guests themselves and is not included”. Similarly, indirect revenues may be under-allocated across internal systems: “Imagine a delegate uses the spa; that spa revenue will, in no way, be allocated or associated with the event”. This distinction helps to explain why managers perceive the value of external events as partially “invisible” in routine reporting.

A second set of findings concerns data governance and performance comparison practices and their implications for coordination. The analysis registers organisational resistance to transparency, “there are administrations that do not like to share results... ‘secrecy is still the soul of the business’”, while also noting that an academic framing may facilitate openness: “if the approach is academic, it may be somewhat easier...”. In parallel, coordination with public actors is depicted as uneven, with “communication between municipalities... and hotels about the events calendar being very deficient”. These data practices have direct coordination implications, as limited sharing and uneven comparative performance information constrain the circulation of event intelligence, reinforcing late and fragmented communication with destination actors.

Third, impacts are framed as structurally heterogeneous by region and hotel typology: “the impact will be different for Algarve, Lagos, Madeira or the Azores, following a regional and seasonal logic”. This heterogeneity translates into differentiated operational responses, including staffing and F&B adjustments during peak moments: “...knowing, for example, that there are 60 people without lunch... we put a buffet to speed up... at the end of the month, we add up 7–9 thousand euros”. Operationally, this uncertainty affects not only staffing and F&B capture, but also forecasting and pricing readiness, particularly when events are externally hosted and demand baselines are difficult to establish.

Overall, and summarized in Figure 1, the findings reinforce that converting event dynamics into measurable and governable hospitality strategy depends on improved profiling, more systematic attribution practices, and more reliable coordination and information flows across destination actors.

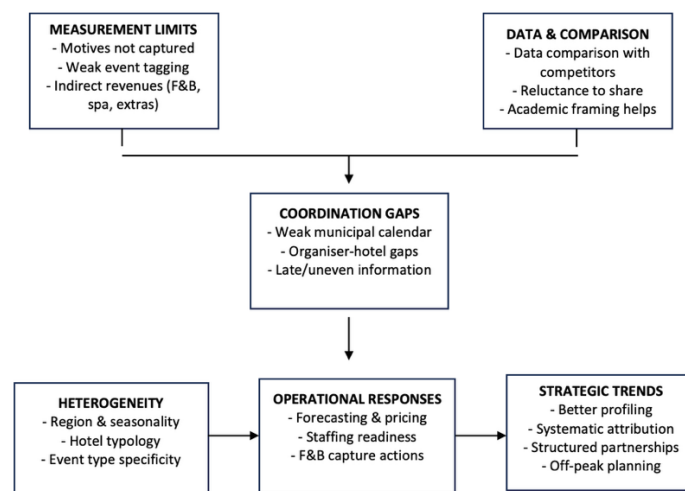


Figure 1: Event–hospitality interface: focus group-derived thematic framework

5. Conclusion

This exploratory focus group study advances understanding of the event–hospitality interface by foregrounding hotel directors’ perspectives on how event impacts are recognised, measured, and operationalised across Portuguese destination contexts. Findings indicate that strategic use of events is constrained by limited profiling of guests’ event-related motives and by weak attribution of indirect revenues, particularly for externally hosted events, which restricts forecasting accuracy and learning. Results also highlight persistent coordination gaps, most notably uneven municipal communication, and organisational reluctance to share performance information, although academically framed collaboration may facilitate more constructive exchange. Importantly, event impacts are perceived as structurally heterogeneous across regions and hotel typologies, requiring context-sensitive operational readiness, pricing, and F&B capture strategies. Overall, enhancing event-driven hospitality strategy depends on improved data capture, more systematic attribution practices, and more reliable inter-organisational information flows to support measurable and governable value creation.

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Ethics Declaration

This research did not require formal ethical clearance as it did not involve any vulnerable populations or sensitive topics. All participants provided informed consent prior to their participation in the study.

AI Declaration

No generative artificial intelligence (AI) was used in the writing or editing of this work.

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