

# Using festivals and events to trigger the renaissance of a mature **tourism destination**: The case of Portimão, Algarve

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**Keywords** | Tourism Destination, Tourism Destination Management, Destination Management Organisation, Repositioning of Tourism Destination, Tourism Destination Life Cycle.

**Objectives** | The main objectives of the research presented here are:

- to understand the repositioning process of a local destination;
- understand the nature, scope and purpose of the repositioning strategy;
- identify key factors that allow the repositioning process;
- evaluate the politics and tourism setting, under which the repositioning strategy was possible;
- understand and evaluate the role of the local DMO.

**Methodology** | Research on the dynamics of local tourism destinations is not enough spread, nor is the understanding of those dynamics sustained upon enough empirical research. Facing those questions and research challenges, the researchers opted for a qualitative approach, particularly, a single case method.

In spite of tourism being considered a very complex and open system, Portimão is a municipality with autonomy of decision, a local government body with a rich set of assets and strong economic life, those traits allowing the designation of a bounded destination. The research strategy that was followed reflects the best option to understand activities, decisions, relations, issues, behaviours of social stakeholders and the action of the local tourism managing organization (DMO), sometimes a highly political one. Following this path, documents, a focus group, and semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders and leaders of the DMO and municipality were chosen as instruments for data collection. Techniques, such as qualitative content analysis and conceptual maps with different levels of elaboration, were chosen to analyze data, understand and design the final case and draw its conclusions.

**Main results and contributions** | The dynamic of reshaping the destination is undoubtedly connected with the restructuring of the DMO itself. Undoubtedly, a set of festivals and events, some designed and purposefully organized, others emerging from the outside context of the destination, were the drivers of change for the renaissance of Portimão as a competitive tourism destination, attracting new visitors, new investors and diversifying its portfolio of tourism products, with new attractions and new cultural and sports events of international impact. At the same time, a strategy of building an

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important set of culture and sporting facilities by the local government, in partnership with private investment, underscored and sustained that event and festival strategy.

In the very core of all this strategy were the political will and leadership of local authorities, settled around the building and development of a tourism local municipal enterprise, which acts as a DMO. This case reveals that the DMO must be fuelled with appropriate financial and human resources. It also shows that only a team of empowered, dynamic and skilled managers and staff, with a vision, clear objectives and a successful management, will be able to pilot the challenges posed by a stagnation period, using those set of festivals and events as the main trigger to lead the destination to a rejuvenation stage.

**Limitations** | The results and contribution of this study derive from the local context, therefore, they cannot be generalised. Nevertheless, they have its own value in its own context. The evaluation of the strategy was strictly based on the point of view of the key decision makers and politicians, local managers and support staff, and the documents issued by the DMO, local municipality and press. Therefore, it may seem that it lacks a consensus of the other stakeholders or informants of the destination.

**Conclusions** | The empirical research carried out suggests that the festival and event strategy may be a strategy for repositioning a mature destination, if sustained by a unique set of festivals and events, an adequate set of facilities and by a strong and envisioning DMO leadership. This strategy may even attract new investors that can reshape the supply side of tourism with new attractions and products. The empirical research reveals another important issue: the reshaping of a destination is closely tied to the role of the destination management organization.