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**“Defining the Success Determinants for Hosting a Religious Mega-Event: Lessons from the ‘World Youth Day Event.’”**

Iris Andrade Godinho

Masters in Management

Supervisor:

PhD, Álvaro de Borba Cruz Lopes Dias, Associate Professor with  
Habilitation

Iscte – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

September, 2024





BUSINESS  
SCHOOL

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Department of Marketing, Operations and General Management

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## Resumo

O evento da ‘Jornada Mundial da Juventude’ (ou JMJ) é considerado o maior encontro religioso, especificamente para os jovens, atraindo centenas de milhares (até milhões) de participantes. Dado isso, a ‘JMJ’ oferece um estudo de caso completo que capta os componentes cruciais que garantem o sucesso de um megaevento religioso. Esta dissertação tem como objetivo responder à pergunta: “Quais são os determinantes de sucesso para a realização de um megaevento religioso?”, analisando o evento ‘JMJ’ e o seu progresso contínuo com o objetivo de criar recomendações para o planeamento de um megaevento religioso de sucesso. Esta dissertação discute os vários componentes da indústria dos megaeventos, eventos religiosos e turismo, voluntariado de eventos e branding de destinos através de megaeventos; juntamente com exemplos dos últimos 10 anos de eventos da JMJ para obter literatura relevante e recente. Para atingir os objetivos foi utilizado um método qualitativo, tendo sido realizadas várias entrevistas com a participação dos participantes na JMJ Lisboa 2023. Foi aplicado um método de triangulação de dados para garantir resultados sólidos através da recolha de uma gama mais alargada de dados para análise. Da análise dos dados foram extraídos fatores-chave que, em última análise, conduziram à elaboração de um quadro de recomendações para o planeamento de um megaevento bem-sucedido. As conclusões retiradas afirmam principalmente que o sucesso dos megaeventos religiosos depende da gestão dos desafios logísticos, honrando simultaneamente a importância religiosa e cultural do evento, garantindo um bom funcionamento e gestão de custos.

**Palavras-chave:** Eventos religiosos; Megaeventos; Voluntariado; Destino anfitrião; Comunidade anfitriã; Peregrinação.

**Classificação JEL:** G14 - Event Studies; Z32 – Tourism and Development.





## Abstract

World Youth Day event (or WYD) is considered to be the biggest religious gathering, specifically for young people, drawing hundreds of thousands (even millions) of attendees. Given that, 'WYD' offers a thorough case study that captures the crucial components ensuring the success of a religious mega event. This dissertation aims to answer the question: "What are the success determinants for hosting a religious mega-event?" by analyzing the "World Youth Day" event and its continuous progress with the purpose of creating recommendations for planning a successful religious mega-event. This dissertation discusses the various components of the mega-events industry, religious events and tourism, events volunteering and destination branding through mega-events; Together with examples from the last 10 years of 'WYD' events to obtain relevant and recent literature. A qualitative method was used to achieve the objectives, several interviews were conducted with the participation of 'WYD Lisbon 2023' attendees. A data triangulation method was applied to ensure strong results by collecting a wider range of data for analysis. Key factors were extracted from the data analysis which ultimately led to elaborating a framework of recommendations for planning a successful mega event. The findings drawn mainly state the success of religious mega-events relies on managing logistical challenges while honoring the event's religious and cultural importance, guaranteeing a seamless operation and a spiritually fulfilling experience for all participants.

**Key Words:** Religious Events; Mega-events; Event Volunteering; Host Destination; Host community; Pilgrimage.

**JEL Classification:** G14 - Event Studies; Z32 – Tourism and Development.



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**Index of Acronyms**

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- IT – Information Technology
- WYD – World Youth Day
- ROI – Return on Investment

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1. Background

Mega-events are intermittent, wide-reaching events that happen on a worldwide scale (Magno & Dossena, 2020) and can vary from sports, cultural, business or religious events (Michopoulou & Giuliano, 2018). World Youth Day (WYD) is a religious event that happens every 2 to 3 years in different countries since 1986 (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2019), organized by the Roman Catholic Church, with the purpose of celebrating faith among Catholic youth around the globe (Norman & Johnson, 2011). WYD event lasts around a week and it adheres to a schedule comprising 14 different types of religious events (Bik & Stasiak, 2020), that include an introductory mass, papal welcome, way of Cross, Vigil and an Ending Mass accessible to the whole audience (Cardoso *et al.*, 2023). A key feature of World Youth Day is the participation of the Pope, who engages with the youth, delivers messages of hope and encouragement, and explains their significance in both the Church and society (Guzik, 2018).

It is the biggest religious gathering specifically for young people, drawing hundreds of thousands, even millions, of attendees (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2019). For instance, the 2013 WYD event in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) set the record for the highest attendance at WYD as over three million people are thought to have attended the final Mass, which was held at Copacabana Beach (WYD Lisbon 2023, 2022d). Nowadays, participants from 160–170 different nationalities typically attend the events (Grabińska, 2018).

The main goal of this religious event is to strengthen participants' spiritual ties to their faith (Jackowski *et al.*, 2016), however in addition to being a religious occasion, it's also a celebration of diversity and cross-cultural exposure (Cleary, 2016). The many backgrounds, cultures, and languages of the participants create a lively and dynamic environment (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2019). This cultural event offers a forum for young participants to learn from each other and establish enduring relationships while showcasing the diverse array of traditions found within the Catholic Church (Mandes & Sadłoń, 2018).

The event is suitable for participants between the ages of 14 to 30 (Cardoso *et al.*, 2023), and given their lack of financial capabilities, the Church offers accommodation with volunteer host families or at schools for the entirety of the event, depending on the acquired 'pilgrim package' of their choice (Bogacz-Wojtanowska, 2018). These packages also include different types of activities planned by youth groups pre-event (Cardoso *et al.*, 2023), city transportation, meals provided by local restaurants (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2019), resources

including informational guides and maps, mementos connected to WYD, and accident insurance (WYD Lisbon 2023, 2022d). To ensure that everything runs smoothly, WYD recruits and relies on volunteers which encourages a sense of community and the formation of close relationships between participants (Janus & Misiorek, 2019). Volunteers collaborate to achieve shared objectives forging a strong sense of success in the process and fostering a supportive environment (Yudhaputri & Fatimah, 2020).

WYD draws large numbers of participants to the host city and the surrounding areas, which has a substantial impact on tourism in the host country (Cardoso *et al.*, 2022). The increase in tourists may have a significant positive economic impact on nearby establishments, including lodging, dining, and entertainment facilities as well as the "pilgrim packages" that are provided to participants may have some financial consequences (Narbona & Arasa, 2018). For instance, full-week pilgrim packages at WYD Lisbon 2023 cost between 95 and 255 euros, depending on the desired dates, activities, and amenities with the possibility of a 90% fee return. (WYD Lisbon 2023, 2022c).

WYD can also benefit a host nation in other ways, such as by leaving a permanent legacy in the form of improvements to public spaces, lodging, and transportation networks (Jackowski *et al.*, 2016), and provides worldwide exposure through media broadcasting and the attendance of foreign visitors which leads to the global prominence of the host country (Wang & Jin, 2019). Additionally, by engaging in a variety of activities like religious services, workshops, and community service, it empowers and enables young people to positively impact their communities and create a better world for themselves (Guzik, 2018).

In light of these characteristics, WYD offers a thorough case study that captures the crucial components ensuring the success of a religious mega event. It demonstrates the capacity to captivate an international audience, produce a life-changing event, and has a profound effect on participants and host communities. This dissertation aims to analyze the "World Youth Day" event and its continuous progress with the purpose of creating recommendations for planning a successful religious mega-event. It focuses on the last 10 years of WYD events (Rio de Janeiro 2013, Krakow 2016, Panama 2019 and Lisbon 2023) to obtain relevant and recent literature. By analyzing the success of WYD, this dissertation aims to identify the missing gap in the current literature about the determinants of a successful religious mega-event and create a new model for organizing other religious mega events based on observation of internal and external data.



## **1.2. Research Problem**

Religious mega events, categorized as enormous gatherings with the power to change humanity (Dowson, 2017), since it creates the foundation for the development of values, a sense of community, and cultural involvement (Bod, 2019). Despite their widespread occurrence, little is known about how successful these events are, and there is a large knowledge vacuum about these mega events performances, which makes it difficult to comprehend the complex dynamics that drive religious mega-events to success or failure. The diverse nature of religious mega-events, the multiplicity of stakeholders and their goals, the spiritual and subjective nature of the experience, and the long-term effects on attendees and communities make it difficult to evaluate their success. (Cerutti & Piva, 2015).

Although there appears to be literature on the hosting of mega events, it is unclear whether specific principles apply to the creation of all kinds of mega events that are religious. Establishing such principles could give event planners a place to start and enable them to design backup plans and crisis management techniques for their own religious mega-events. Furthermore, governments and decision-makers stand to gain from knowing what makes religious mega-events successful (Verma et al., 2021).

This knowledge can inform the formulation of policies that facilitate the successful and long-lasting organization of such events while taking social, cultural, and economic factors into account. This dissertation aims to identify what are the determinants of a successful religious mega-event based on data saturation retrieved from experiences from the World Youth Day event over the last 10 years and other existent sources, highlight the complex elements that ensure religious mega-events are successful. Henceforth, create recommendations to help event organizers plan a religious mega-event effectively.

## **1.3. Research Objectives**

As previously stated, there is a gap in current research on the factors that contribute to the success of religious mega-events. It is intended through the development of this dissertation to address the underlying question: “What are the determinants of a successful religious mega-event?”, thus responding to the missing gap in the existing literature and therefore addressing the following objectives:

- (1) To determine the key factors that lead to the success of organizing a religious mega-event, using the World Youth Day event as a case study.
- (2) To assess how a destination can, benefit economically, socially, and culturally from hosting a religious mega-event long-term.
- (3) To create a broad framework for upcoming event planners to organize and carry out religious mega-events successfully.
- (4) To analyze the motivations that drive religious individuals to attend a religious mega event and how host destinations can affect this decision.

In order to close the knowledge gap and offer practical advice to the several parties engaged in the planning and implementation of religious mega-events, these research aims to methodically examine the many facets that go into their success.

#### **1.4. Dissertation Structure**

The structure of this thesis will be as follows:

*Chapter 1 – Introduction:* this chapter introduces WYD, mega-events and religious events, the aim of this research, the research question and the structure of the dissertation.

*Chapter 2 – Literature review:* The topics of mega events, religious mega events, volunteering at events and host destination branding are discussed in this chapter.

*Chapter 3 – Methodology:* This chapter discusses the methodology used in the different phases of data collecting, including interview process and sampling methods.

*Chapter 4 – Data Presentation & Discussion of Results:* In this chapter, all the data gathered from the interviews with the literature reviewed earlier, will be analyzed and compared. As well as a thorough discussion and implications.

*Chapter 5 – Discussion and Conclusion:* This chapter aims to address the research question, analyze results, and focus on research goals, with the support of a literature review.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1. Mega-Events

#### - *Mega-Events Overview*

Mega events are major due to their large size, attendance, amount of financial investments and media broadcasting (Lorde *et al.*, 2011). Some examples of the various types of mega events include: political summits (e.g., United Nations General Assembly and NATO summit), conventions (e.g., Comic-Con international), festivals (e.g., Oktoberfest and Glastonbury Festival), sporting events (e.g., Olympic Games and FIFA World cup), expos (e.g., World or specialized Expos), pilgrimage/religious events (e.g., World Youth Day) and more (Xu & Gonzalez, 2017). Mega-events happen in large metropolitan places that are usually already touristic spots (Mills & Rosentraub, 2013), drawing significant amounts of people to an area, putting the regional environment and infrastructure under incredible tension, and possibly carrying disturbances to its community (Wu *et al.*, 2016).

Even though these events happen over just couple of days or weeks, their planning happens over various years and requires an expansive scope of stakeholders responsible for exhibiting the host destination but also limit the possible disturbances for the local population simultaneously (Parkes *et al.*, 2016). These disturbances may include the blockage of entrances to locals' homes, loss of goods, increased costs of labor, products and housing, accordingly affecting on the low-pay communities (Allen *et al.*, 2022). These repercussions may include exorbitant expenses, given that mega-event preparations frequently require large funds as well as the need to modify enormous infrastructures for effective use after the event (Wolfe *et al.*, 2022). Although hosting mega-events can enhance tourism and infrastructure, the economic benefits are frequently exaggerated, and the financial strain on public resources can surpass the advantages (Madden, 2006). Event planners need to make every effort to minimize such disruptions because more regional collaboration will result from a locally supported event (He *et al.*, 2020).

Including the communities in the preparation and coordination of the event and help them understand the benefits that come with it, will influence the way event participants are welcomed in a more positive way (Yürük *et al.*, 2017). This creates social interactions between event-goers and the host communities that can encourage harmony and improve the overall satisfaction of mega-events for all participants (Kim *et al.*, 2022). Happy experiences,

a sense of celebration and pride are pivotal contributors to the worthiness of an event (Coakley & Souza, 2013).

- *Mega events & Economic impact*

Hosting a mega event can be costly due to the need of investment in resources for the construction or renovation of roads, railroads, airports, communication hubs, security systems, and lodging facilities (Gaffney *et al.*, 2018). However, estimating costs for mega events is disputable due to the frequent inconsistencies in transparency regarding expenditures and a certain level of arbitrariness in determining which costs should be attributed specifically to the event rather than considered general investments (Müller, 2015). Fortunately, mega events contribute to the expansion of tourism, serving as an important method to attract additional investments and offset the organizational costs sustained during such events (Elahi *et al.*, 2021). For instance, the organization of the Days in the Dioceses during WYD Kraków 2016 generated a total revenue of approximately € 1.2 million (Bik & Stasiak, 2020). As for WYD Brazil 2013, the total revenue generated was about R\$ 1.9 billion, R\$ 920 million counting for direct sources and R \$ 980 million for indirect sources, which underscores the significance of these events in contributing to revenue generation for the host cities (Monteiro & Marques, 2015).

Events have the potential to generate income through diverse channels, including ticket sales, sponsors, exhibition fees, merchandise sales, and other revenue streams (Barrios *et al.*, 2016). Getting sponsors is essential to increasing an event's financial success, and often companies and organizations frequently decide to sponsor an event in exchange for visibility, chances for branding, and entry to the event's audience (Morgan *et al.*, 2020). The alignment between a mega-event and its sponsors moderately influences how the event's image affects the sponsor's brand value, highlighting the significance of selecting appropriate sponsors (Coelho *et al.*, 2019). For example, during World Youth Day Panama 2019, 4 out of the 5 major sponsors were prominent banking institutions, while other key sponsors included supermarket and fast-food restaurants, as well as popular businesses like Canon, Travelex, and Hyundai (Kratochvíl, 2023). Another example is WYD Lisbon 2023, they had a total 144 sponsors under 3 types of sponsors: 5 founding partners (Pingo Doce, MEO, El Corte Inglés...), 19 institutional partners (Vitalis, Delta, Tap Air Portugal...) and 120 regular partners (Lay's, Compal, Staples...) (WYD Lisbon 2023, 2022b). Event sponsorship can dramatically improve brand exposure and marketing results, mostly by strategically

associating the sponsor's brands and the event's image, which can elicit favorable perceptions from attendees (Chakraborti et al., 2015).

- *Mega events & Safety Management*

Cultural exchange is often linked to enhancing the appreciation and comprehension of cultural diversity; however, these differences may raise concerns for some visitors, particularly regarding safety and security issues (Mansfield & McIntosh, 2019). The arrival of diverse crowds from various cultures does not necessarily introduce new risks but consolidates existing risks within the city, highlighting the importance of disaster risk reduction (Girgin & Tasci, 2019). Song et al. (2024) emphasizes the significance of pre-event safety education and information dissemination to enhance personal safety awareness and manage service standards.

Event crowds can be dangerous without the implementation of sufficient safety precautions, such as guaranteeing venue structure safety, providing adequate emergency assistance and crowd management measures to impede hazards that could endanger participants' lives (Cigonetti et al., 2024). Event organizers, police officers, stewards, and other staff members work together to apply predetermined measures based on the crowd's narrative in order to reduce the risk of incidents involving different threats and ensure the safety and security of attendees (Gong et al., 2020). During WYD Rio de Janeiro 2013, the Brazilian Ministry of Justice deployed 6,008 security guards and 13,723 military personnel, leading to the absence of any incidents impacting pilgrims (França *et al.*, 2014).

The intricate nature of these events necessitates thorough pre-planning of effective crowd management in order to prevent congestion, avoid the overuse of specific locations, and ensure overall improved logistics management (Verma et al., 2021). Efficient crowd management entails thorough pre-event planning, continuous monitoring and control during the event, gathering feedback post-event, and reporting lessons learned to enhance future crowd management systems (Karthika *et al.*, 2022).

Other ways to ensure safety is through the use of technology in mega events (Girgin & Tasci, 2019). It is critical to have efficient audiovisual communication with the entire audience, cooperative work amongst all participating agencies, headed by knowledgeable staff in crowd management, and emergency plans for crowd control (Kamarudin *et al.*, 2022). According to Taylor & Toohey (2011), **technology and trained staff** play a crucial role in handling potential security issues during major events.

- *Mega events & Technology*

Technology and mega events are becoming more and more entwined, with technical developments having a major influence on event experience (Capasa *et al.* 2022). Embracing advanced technologies can help effectively transmit safety messages and pass on emergency information and security details during events (Taylor & Toohey, 2011). As soon as attendees enter an event, security can recognize them in a crowd by using CCTV surveillance cameras and facial recognition software to analyze patterns based on the texture and form of their faces (Petrescu, 2019). During WYD Rio de Janeiro 2013, all crowd displacements were monitored using GPS systems and video cameras, as well as through helicopter images and footage from street cameras placed by the Rio de Janeiro prefecture. (França *et al.*, 2014).

In terms of safety, drones can also be used to observe large-scale events which can help guarantee faster security and medical assistance. (Robakowska *et al.*, 2019). Thanks to their excellent camera recorders, organizers may identify and react to potentially dangerous circumstances swiftly (Nadobnik, 2016). Furthermore, drones can be used for photo/video production and event streaming which offers a number of advantages, including the ability to create new kinds of material and increase viewer engagement and participation (Mademlis *et al.*, 2019). Holograms can also be employed for viewer engagement as attendees can observe information from multiple angles, giving them a unique viewpoint (Song *et al.*, 2022). This can give companies a chance to differentiate themselves from rivals (Chin & Kim, 2015). However, to engage enormous crowds, standard audio-visual systems including microphones, projectors, speakers, screens, and other appliances remain essential (Ferdinand & Williams, 2020).

It is critical that mega events have an IT infrastructure that makes it simpler for attendees to access internet systems and facilitate communication within a venue, often with signal distribution via WI-FI (Garay *et al.*, 2014). WI-FI access also makes it easier to employ event apps, which can be used as a direct and quick communication tool with participants regarding future activities or potential disruptions (Narbona & Arasa, 2016). As Kharouf *et al.*, (2020) mentioned, costumers are increasingly using mobile devices and tablets to stay updated about the event online while also engaging with one another through social media. For instance, social media livestreams have become one of the most integrated technologies in the events industry as they can attract vast and diverse audiences, making them an excellent way to increase engagement (Richards, 2020).

Social media also allows participants to access electronic booking or online booking directly (Harb *et al.*, 2019). E-Tickets (or electronic tickets) are commonly sent in PDF format or other downloadable forms via email or a event apps and include a distinct barcode that can be scanned at the venue gates to expedite crowd processing (Enache, 2018). RFID technologies have also made it easier to enter events and assisted event organizers in cutting down on waiting times, guaranteeing a better attendee experience (Hudson & Hudson, 2013). Different locations and timetables can be shared using RFID tags with specific numerical sequences that are unalterable for security purposes, all enclosed within wristband tickets (Nugraha *et al.*, 2021).

Internet platforms and mobile devices now permit connection and communication in ways that were unthinkable in recent times, and they are especially important improvements for increasing event planning, expanding participation in activities, and engaging attendees (Narbona & Arasa, 2018). Using social media accounts and event websites can also help to facilitate effective communication and engagement between stakeholders, attendees, and future participants who are interested in attending the event (Cobanoglu, *et al.*, 2021). On a study conducted by Woźniak (2017), it was found that consulting the event website and internet channels is the quickest way that event participants can discover essential event-related information. It serves as an efficient marketing tool, offering cost savings by being quicker, more attainable, and easier for sharing information compared to traditional marketing methods (Harb *et al.*, 2019).

#### - *Mega events & E-Marketing*

Organizations are increasingly looking for methods to incorporate new technologies into their advertising efforts and channel strategies, providing clients with many ways to communicate, access information, and purchase products (Radikonyana *et al.*, 2015). Using online content as a marketing technique has demonstrated to strengthen the long-term interaction between events and participants, allowing event organizers to point out participant personality and behavior patterns and gain feedback on their preferences (Suryawardani & Wiranatha, 2017).

E-marketing for events encompasses broadcasting, promotion, online posts and platforms, ticket sales, and community interactions. It is important to point out that the general community perception can influence individuals when considering to attend an event that has been promoted online (Cena *et al.*, 2016). Social media is an effective marketing tool since posts spread quickly and its framework conditions include more information. For instance, the

organizers of WYD in Krakow in 2016 discovered that youth-oriented digital technologies were pertinent, considering that the standard age of the attendees was around 22 and they came from developed nations (Narbona & Arasa, 2018).

Furthermore, the events' social media and website must endorse its brand, have the proper information for participants, be easy to locate, and feature up-to-date and appealing content so that participants keep revisiting the platforms (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Over the years, WYD's social media has grown to a total of 22 languages on Facebook and 14 languages on Twitter, as well as individual profiles of each language, this reinforces the idea that social media is one of the biggest and most powerful channels of information for participants (Huguenin, 2018).

Emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and VR can be employed in event marketing, for instance, event marketers can craft a virtual tour of the event venue, sparking a positive impression and interest among participants about the nearing event (Behúnová *et al.*, 2022). VR marketing can assist event organizers in improving the event's image by providing an alluring, three-dimensional, and distinctive experience that allows attendees to connect with the event (Keng *et al.*, 2018), in a fresh and more personal way (Al-Obaidi *et al.*, 2019). Efficient use of digital marketing can lead to substantial reduced costs compared to traditional ways of marketing, decreased external service fees, advertising fees, processing fees, content design fees and monitoring fees (Suryawardani & Wiranatha, 2017). Moreover, it can provide sustainable advantages through the decreased amount in paper used, customized advertising and energy savings (Başev, 2022).

#### - *Mega events & Sustainable Solutions*

“Event-greening” is a process that combines both, social and environmental responsibility, in the decision-making process of an event's organization and it should include all stakeholders, such as participants, managers, venues, suppliers and sponsors (Kellison & Casper, 2017). Recently, event managers and industries have been applying “event-greening” into mega-events and subsequently, sponsors and participants began to choose organizations that focus on sustainable achievements (Gulak-Lipka & Jagielski, 2020). An exponential increase in international media reports have forced event managers to carry out environmental protection activities (Pourpakdelfekr & Oboudi, 2022).

Event managers should coach their staff members in sustainability practices so that events adhere to eco-friendly procedures (Hottle *et al.*, 2015), guaranteeing their contribution in the



retrieval and recycling of trash by attendees (Bianchini & Rossi, 2021). Events inevitably produce waste but with proper management, leftover resources can be recycled effectively, reducing environmental impact (Pourpakdelfekr & Oboudi, 2022). From a religious perspective, using eco-friendly products or recycling may be seen as selfless and exemplary (Davari et al., 2017). However, pro-environmental attitudes largely stem from the interaction between knowledge, personal morals, and motivations, which are influenced by socio-structural and psycho-social factors (Miller et al., 2015).

According to Zafari & Golzary (2022), promoting reusable items like packaging and food containers is a crucial part of improving waste reduction at events. Another way to encourage sustainability participation is by positioning recycling bins in key locations of the venue, such as near refreshment stations as it aids in trash collection (Bianchini & Rossi, 2021). Furthermore, environmental initiatives, like providing recycling containers or encouraging public transportation use among participants, can help increase sensibility towards eco-friendly practices (Pourpakdelfekr & Oboudi, 2022). Similarly, Gulak-Lipka & Jagielski (2020) have formulated a set of eight recommendations for mega event organizers to ensure environmental sustainability:

- (1) repurpose facilities for additional activities post-event;
- (2) opt to renovate existing venues over constructing new ones;
- (3) Incorporate eco-friendly innovations and solutions to reduce the environmental impact;
- (4) use ecological resources and (5) renewable substances in production;
- (6) apply zero-waste and recycling policies;
- (7) take advantage of city transportation and;
- (8) Protect the local environment, particularly natural resources like water and energy for warming up/cooling venues.

#### - *Mega events & Transportation Management*

Supervising transportation during mega-events can be difficult, as transport networks must accommodate both the influx numerous visitors and the constant flow of daily commuters (Kassens-Noor, 2019). According to Taha & Allan (2020) public transportation ensures convenient movement and accessibility for vast numbers of guests, therefore organizers endeavor to optimize the effectiveness of their large-scale event through the deployment of a cohesive urban transportation system. Mega event organizers often create city transportation

strategies to lessen traffic, pollution, and unhappiness among the local community by encouraging socially responsible travel like walking and public transportation, decreasing the needless use of private vehicles, and enhancing transportation systems (Xu & Gonzalez, 2017). Given that some attendees still prefer to use their own vehicles, it is important that parking spots are assigned adequately and there is enough capacity as it can significantly improve the event experience by decreasing traffic, boosting accessibility, and increasing safety in the event location (Ruan et al., 2016).

As explained by Serdar & Al-Ghamdi (2021) mega-events require specific transportation planning, such as blocking and rerouting roads, which can cause obstructions and extended traveling time. According to Mills & Rosentraub (2013) the congestion in public transportation and road traffic during events restricts transportation access for local residents and negatively impacts the region's basic consumption and productivity. Event planners must account for dislocation time and time management in event schedules, as poor time management can deplete guests' energy and initiate the schedule with anxiety and tension (Allen, 2010). Additionally, City planners must assess the potential traffic impact during mega events to develop effective strategies, such as promoting public transportation and providing price reductions, to mitigate the effects (Xu & Gonzalez, 2017). Improving the visual appeal of city transport, creating different transport modes, and bettering the access to transport network information can encourage the use of sustainable travel alternatives and shorten travel times throughout mega events (Ballarano et al., 2022).

#### - *Mega-events & Feedback Retrieval*

Assessment is a critical aspect of management that involves collecting information and receiving feedback to enhance processes, achieve goals more efficiently, and enable organizations to grow and adjust (Getz, 2018). Liang *et al.* (2013) highlighted the significance for businesses to swiftly acknowledge their customers judgment and information enquiries. Without the evaluation of guests' feedback and performance criteria, or post-event performance analysis, event planners risk repeating past errors, overlooking opportunities for development, and failing to elevate the standards of their services (Jonah et al., 2024). The assessment of event performance ought to consider both external customers, such as attendees, and internal customers, including volunteers; This multi-faceted perspective is crucial for enhancing external customers experience (Michopoulou & Giuliano, 2018). Obtaining feedback following an event is essential for evaluating its overall success or

shortcomings, identifying complications, and deriving recommendations that can be beneficial for the planning of following events (Garbacz et al., 2017).

Event managers can use technological tools like mobile phone technology and online survey channels to facilitate the process of feedback retrieval (Arntz et al., 2024). They can conduct online surveys using free, easy-to-use tools that can efficiently organize and analyze responses, providing valuable insights to help leverage opportunities (Piatnychuk et al., 2022). Even though feedback is usually retrieved post event, Mobile applications are an effective method for gathering immediate feedback and asking for questions while attendees are actively participating in a session (Tay, 2021). Ultimately, Managers need to constantly monitor customer feedback, whether it's positive or negative, regardless of the source (Suharto *et al.*, 2019).

## **2.2. Religious Tourism and Events**

### *- Pilgrimage*

For ages, religion and spirituality have always been reasons to why individuals have decided to travel and nowadays people continue to take religion and culture into account when visiting a destination (Cerutti & Piva, 2015). Religious or pilgrimage tourism is seen as an age-old form of travel, with millions of individuals journeying to significant pilgrimage centers to fulfill their religious convictions and satisfy their spiritual curiosity (Cristea *et al.*, 2015). Roughly 240 million individuals undertake pilgrimages each year, with the predominant participants belonging to the Christian, Muslim, and Hindu faiths (Božic *et al.*, 2016). Understanding the perspectives of religious tourists involves examining their motivations, conduct, and experiences (Kim *et al.*, 2020). The motivation of religious tourists to visit a particular destination may also be shaped by various socio-demographic factors, including sex, age, level of education, occupation, finances, residency, and nationality (Hassan et al., 2023).

This can be considered to be “pilgrimage”, when tourists travel due to their strong religious convictions and their curiosity about the artistic, cultural, or historical significance of religious sites (Durán-Sánchez, 2018). It is a sacred journey with a profound purpose, the pilgrim is aware that the journey will pose challenges, yet it brings life-enriching experiences (Jongmeewasin, 2016). The crucial distinction between pilgrimage and tourism lies in the

hospitality extended by locals, offering free meals to spiritual and religious pilgrims, as well as to the underprivileged, along with the unique characteristics of pilgrimage destination (Kim *et al.*, 2020). Individuals traveling for religious purposes are more inclined to select a destination that offers genuine religious experiences. (Tsai, 2023).

Visiting sacred sites as a form of tourism can offer unique encounters that have connotations with philosophical allusions and possibly provides religious devotion, objectives, and yearnings (Kim *et al.*, 2020). Religious sites provide a diverse array of offerings, encompassing services, music, and other organized religious activities, as well as secular visitor spaces like museums and valuables housed within their exquisite historic venues (Griffin and Raj, 2017). Frequently, pilgrims elongate their journey's impact by bringing home keepsakes available for purchase at these venues (Jongmeewasin, 2016). Religious tourists or “Pilgrims” typically don't need luxurious services, it is enough for them to have simple accommodation, food and pilgrim packages that are not too expensive and ought to cover significant costs (Navruz-Zoda *et al.*, 2019). A study conducted by Zakizadeh *et al.* (2022) showed that the purchasing power of attendees is to be considered by event management when setting ticket or package costs, as this can impact the levels of attendance and sales. A study conducted by Cardoso *et al.* (2022), found that pilgrims also preferred attending WYD with a group of friends or family, this is because generally pilgrims value the communal experience. During WYD, it was granted that if the pilgrims’ groups solicited, they could remain together in the same location either at a school, or to be divided among families. (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2019).

Pilgrims aim to break away from the pressures of everyday life, yearning for a spiritually enriching, formative, and culturally immersive encounters, they seek growth and enlightenment through their experiences at destinations, while also enjoying the exploration of different worldviews and lifestyles, and experiencing different cultures (Nicolaidis, 2016). This type of tourism can be considered as a growing occurrence (Durán-Sánchez *et al.*, 2018), due to the fact that religious tourism increases awareness towards religious heritage and supplies funds for its preservation, as well as aid the community’s development and cultural appreciation (Griffin & Raj, 2020). Religious tourism can impact the economic and cultural development of destinations that incorporate religious elements as well (Kim *et al.*, 2020). This has caused religious tourism to grow into a wide range of specialized markets, including Christian camps, spiritual retreats, volunteer-focused religious pilgrimage, modern pilgrimage, religious based cruises, conferences, and festivals. (Iliev,2020).

- *Religious Events*

Religious events are attractive for those who have strong spiritual interests and devotion, are keen on socializing with other individuals who share the same interests and are interested in the cultural components of such events (Lee *et al.*, 2015). These events allow participants to explore various customs and traditions, while simultaneously reinforcing their religious convictions (Getz & Page, 2016). Furthermore, participants have the opportunity to engage in cross-cultural interactions (Small *et al.*, 2005), and the chance to gain insights into heritage, history, ethics, and religious values through their engagement with the residents (Jepson & Clarke, 2014).

Participants' reasons for attending religious events might differ greatly (Kamath *et al.*, 2021). Individuals frequently decide to engage in religious activities because of their personal experiences and comfort level with their own **church and religious community** (Lee, 2018). According to a study about the motivations to attend WYD conducted by Jackowski *et al.* (2016), the following 3 groups were identified: (1) Religious motivations (seeing the pope, rituals, religious development, etc.), (2) touristic motivations (exploration, culture, geographical interest, etc.) and (3) social-recreational (amusement, making acquaintances, social development, etc.).

Typically, religious events include the renting of sacred locations and/or artifacts, to bring together various interested stakeholders (Dowson, 2020). At these sites, pilgrims can purchase religious mementos such as candles, icons, and holy water, generating revenue that benefits the local community (Vijayanand, 2012). This is important because if locals are content with the perks provided by an event, they are likely to develop positive opinions and approval for the realization future events (Kim *et al.*, 2015). Religious events, especially mega-events, can create benefits and exposure for all stakeholders involved (Mills & Rosentraub, 2013). In order to meet the needs of the pilgrims, organizers of WYD Panama 2019 created a presentation that included projections of the number of potential customers that each establishment might subsequently receive and as a result, the city was filled with “Pilgrim Menu” advertisements from various businesses, including Subway, KFC, and Pizza Hut (Kratochvíl, 2023).

Hosting a religious mega-event like WYD benefits the host towns immensely because it brings millions of tourists to a particular location and fosters a favorable ambience (Bod, 2019), protects cultural identity and boosts regional businesses (Liutikas, 2023). These events foster regional and international ties between large numbers of people in support of planetary

causes, including resistance to racism, environmental degradation, and hunger (Lopes & Silva, 2021). Often impart moral and ethical lessons, giving people a foundation to overcome obstacles in life and make moral choices (Guzik, 2018). Religious events can be seen as a tactical marketing strategy for communities to strengthen their faith and increase church attendance as well as open discussion about moral ramifications and ethical implications (Dowson & Olsen, 2023). On a survey conducted by Bik & Stasiak (2020) about WYD Krakow 2016, they discovered that two overarching theological and spiritual goals of attending the event were; about 70% of participants said “seeing Pope Francis” and more than 80% said “fortifying their faith”. Additionally, Luonila *et al* (2016) research reveals that having a good reputation helps an organization acquire new clients, among other benefits.

Since locals share their physical assets and facilities, offer services to visitors, and see effects on their quality of life, it is crucial that they lead these activities (Kala & Chaubey, 2023). Theodori & Robison's (2019) investigation revealed a correlation between higher levels of religious membership and higher levels of engagement in community-focused activities. Religious communities that care about the welfare of their members and the community at large ought to support these kinds of social activities since they have the power to positively impact people's lives. (Pfeiffer *et al.* 2018). Rather than just being bystanders to the ceremonies and activities, they ought to take charge of the project and actively participate in it (Zarb, 2020). Interestingly, volunteering at religious and cultural events can be seen as a form of social interaction that is essential for community involvement (Bod, 2019).

#### - *Religious Events & Pre-event Activities*

Mega-events can exert a significant effect on communities and resident organizations even before they take place by hosting pre-event activities (Tilcsik & Marquis, 2013). Pre-event activities are critical for logistics, education, community development and involvement, all of which leads to increased engagement and a successful principal event (Jaccard, 2023). Although pre-events are small in terms of audiences, they can be viewed as important occasions for conversation and interaction with essential stakeholders, namely volunteers (Mhanna *et al.*,2017). Ideally, hosts should learn about their audiences' interests to improve and personalize pre-events, which are usually related to the participants' motivations to attend the main event (Higgins & Lauzon, 2003). There are two types of pre-event activities according to Bao *et al.* (2024): (1) official start-off activities planned by the event hosts, which can include training, volunteer bonding exercises, fundraising events, and missionary

work; and (2) impromptu private gatherings planned by the attendees, like touristic activities and shopping for mementos.

Engaging in selfless acts is emphasized in many religions, particularly Christianity, as highlighted by Lincoln et al. (2008). In a study conducted by Roberts & David (2018) revealed a positive correlation between religiosity and giving donations, people who place a higher value on religious beliefs and practices are also more inclined to donate. In their study Higgins and Lauzon (2003) discovered that attendees are committed to investing their time and effort in going to and engaging in pre-events, collecting donations, and covering the related financial expenses, all driven by the desire to make a meaningful collective impact. Since religious groups emphasize and encourage acts of selflessness, activities like fundraising prior to a religious event can be advantageous for both the hosts and participants (Davari et al., 2017). Additionally, these events can assist organizers in managing attendees' expectations and engagement, ensuring the triumphant execution of the main event (Vij *et al.*, 2019).

In the run-up to a major event, volunteers arrive early to receive training and become acquainted with the event's logistics, this is ideal for networking, developing partnerships, and assuring the event's long-term success (O'Brien & Gardiner, 2006). These pre-events unite volunteers in working for the benefit of the community, fostering bonds of trust and building social networks between each other (Nassar & Talaat, 2009).

## **2.3. Events Volunteering**

### *- Volunteer Roles*

Volunteers are typically unpaid laborers, who are driven for different of reasons to work at an event (Yudhaputri & Fatimah, 2020). Numerous volunteers are needed for many events, particularly megaevents, to do basic but essential activities (Cnaan *et al.*, 2017). The success of events heavily relies on volunteering, as volunteers undertake diverse roles crucial for smooth execution and enhancing the overall experience for attendees (Nedvetskaya & Girginov, 2017). Volunteers have the capacity to act as program administrators, collaborating with individuals or groups, and mobilizing different community facets to encourage social involvement (Brudney & Meijs, 2014). Some volunteers may take on management responsibilities based on their past experience, while others with less experience may work in

customer service positions or in supporting tasks like stage handling or catering (Yudhaputri & Fatimah, 2020). During the WYD events, volunteers are assigned to particular regions and jobs, inspect bags, cars and tickets at the entry gates (together with the police), provide name tags, manage traffic, administer first aid, staff stalls, and dispense refreshments and food. (Bik & Stasiak, 2020). All event personnel must have a clear understanding of their specific role in fostering attendee's happiness if the event is to succeed (Yudhaputri & Fatimah, 2020).

Event organizations that oversee volunteers and communities need to think about rules and policy requirements, such as putting safety, legal, and regulatory obligations into practice (Wicker, 2017). Large-scale events involve complex logistical planning involving thousands of volunteers who must be vetted by home security agencies and law enforcement, as well as undergo extensive training from the relevant agencies (police, emergency services, metro police, fire departments) on topics like first aid, mass event safety, and traffic direction (Bik & Stasiak, 2020). It is impractical to expect volunteers to execute well without adequate training, which should cover volunteer's role in all tasks (Nassar & Talaat, 2009). Throughout the event, volunteers must be watched over and supervised to make sure they are carrying out their responsibilities to the required levels (Yudhaputri & Fatimah, 2020).

Overall, event volunteering represents a collaborative endeavor that amplifies the success and influence of events (Ahn, 2018), simultaneously offering volunteers fulfilling experiences and chances for personal and professional development (Boluk *et al.*, 2017). Volunteering may stem from a positive outlook that believes assisting others or the community can increase one's level of personal satisfaction (Gallarza *et al.*, 2013).

#### - *Volunteer Recruitment and Retainment*

Nonetheless, their enthusiasm for volunteering might wane, leading them to discontinue their involvement, a departure distinct from resigning from responsibilities and benefits associated with a paid job (Jiang *et al.*, 2017). Given that volunteers don't receive payment for their work, management must place greater emphasis on cultivating positive experiences (Alfes *et al.*, 2017), through training, orientation, and recognition programs aimed at appreciating and motivating volunteers for their valuable contributions for volunteers to boost their motivation (Kim & Cuskelly, 2017).

There are many reasons why people volunteer, such as a desire to participate in the event's activities (sports, music, etc.), advance their careers, network with others, be charitable, have fun, or support a cause (Cnaan *et al.*, 2017). Kay *et al.* (2017) regard



competence-mastery (to attain, learn, challenge, or compete) and stimulus-avoidance (to avoid overwhelming situations) as reasons to volunteer. The phrase "volunteer tourism" has gained popularity recently since volunteers may be drawn to an event because it is being held in a location they have always wanted to visit as a tourist (Yudhaputri & Fatimah, 2020).

Volunteering has been associated with several benefits, including higher educational standards for the general public, increased employability, and the acquisition of transferable skills that may be used to various areas of life, future employment, and volunteer activities (Mair *et al.*, 2023). Manetti *et al.* (2015) verified by their research that funding volunteer activities has a favorable effect on volunteers' abilities, interpersonal relationships, and sense of fulfillment. Supervisors can assist in clearing up any confusion surrounding volunteer assignments by responding to inquiries, providing instructions, and offering support and gratitude that the majority of people don't receive in their daily life (Cnaan *et al.*, 2017). While ineffective management is closely associated with volunteer departure, effective management techniques are recognized to increase volunteer retention (Dunn *et al.*, 2020).

Event organizers frequently engage volunteers via outreach initiatives, social media, community groups, or specialized volunteer management platforms (Kim & Cuskelly, 2017). However, nonprofit organizations like charities or neighborhood associations frequently assign volunteers to carry out complimentary event activities (Kay *et al.*, 2017). Successful recruitment of volunteers needs transparent communication, an enticing value proposition, and a nurturing environment that acknowledges and values volunteers' efforts (Kappelides *et al.*, 2019). According to Cnaan *et al.* (2017), expressed gratitude by a manager is the most important form of acknowledgement in measuring the attributes of supervision. These elements play a crucial role in ensuring robust support for the event (Kolar *et al.*, 2016).

#### - *Volunteering and Religion*

The majority of religious traditions encourage prosocial and altruistic behavior, which encourages involvement in volunteer work (Grönlund *et al.*, 2023). In theory, religion and volunteerism are intricately connected because of religion's capacity to inspire believers and its tight ties to secular nonprofit social groups (Yeung, 2018). Certain religious groups actively promote missionary work, which frequently entails volunteering to help underprivileged populations, which may involve offering humanitarian help, health benefits, or education in line with the teachings of faith (Butt *et al.*, 2017). It allows people to have the

opportunity to reflect, be humble, and strengthen their link to faith through selfless acts (Cnaan, *et al.*, 2017).

Hughes (2021) contends that the likelihood of attendance at religious services is the primary factor in increased volunteering, which suggests that religion is impactful through the interactions and participation that happen through religious meetings. Religious beliefs help fortify ideas of civic duty and important driving forces behind people's engagement in volunteer work and social care, which in turn help sustain ingrained social engagement systems and support networks locally (Febo, 2020).

Numerous religious communities promote volunteering through their values, norms, practices, and social obligations, as individuals become part of religious communities imbued with these traits, they undergo socialization that encourages them to align their actions with these principles (Grönlund *et al.*, 2023). Religious people absorb these ideals, therefore believing in religion should be positively correlated with increased pro-social activity, such as volunteering, as a manifestation of these firmly held beliefs (Petrovic *et al.*, 2021). Communities can discourage selfishness and encourage and spread actions of selflessness and compassion (Luria *et al.*, 2017), and support the formation of believers' moral identities (Yeung, 2018). The impact of religion through social relationships appears to expand beyond a member in a religious community, the more acquaintances and social relationships people keep inside a religious group, the chances of volunteering increase (Grönlund *et al.*, 2023).

## **2.4. Destination Marketing through Mega-Events**

### *- Mega-events impact on destinations*

Governments and communities desire to host and plan mega events for various reasons, which mainly include financial, touristic and business development growth (Jago *et al.*, 2010). It has been discussed that these benefits can endure even after the event has concluded (Barrios *et al.*, 2016). Often destinations fiercely compete over the possibility of hosting mega events as they are known to greatly influence tourism attraction (Fourie & Gallego, 2011) and the potential to create new touristic spots (Wang & Jin, 2019). An event that is well-planned and executed can bring life to the host destination by enabling its tourism potential to be realized. (Mainolfi & Marino, 2020). Organizing mega events on a regular basis could be one approach to foster destination loyalty, due to behavioral causes or as region-attachment-based

causes (Brown et al., 2016). In fact, the execution of a large event can encourage the improvement of a destination's image, it can support the possible reconversion of that image, shifting, for example, from a purely industrial city to a touristic spot (Ferrari & Guala, 2017). Events can provide an enhancement in the way the destinations are perceived internationally, improved sense of collective pride by the host populations (Mair & Duffy, 2018) and it serves as a strategy for worldwide competition for capita (Müller, 2017).

Attendees do not pick the event's location; thus, the destination's image may operate as a significant factor in their prospective participation, especially for large events happening in different locations each time (Carlson et al., 2016). The features of a destination can often serve as a source of ulterior motivation, attracting participants to an event (Newland & Aircher, 2018). For example, a destination's climate (including intense heat or rain), which has a direct impact on participants' experiences and general behavior (Filingeri et al., 2017), or the adaptability and capacity of a venue, which are crucial considerations when selecting an event location (Houdement et al., 2017). Furthermore, people are more likely to select a place above others if they are well-informed about it, have favorable opinions of it, and have experienced happy feelings from attending a mega event. (Kenyon & Bodet, 2018).

#### - *Stakeholder Roles in Destination Branding*

The perception of a mega-event is a highly significant aspect since it affects the perception of the location, the organizations involved, the attendees, and every other stakeholder that works together to make the event a reality (Ferrari & Guala, 2017). More contemporary branding viewpoints recognize that a variety of stakeholders, such as suppliers, partners, local businesses, and others, collaborate to jointly define the purpose and identity of brands (Tjandra *et al.*, 2021). Having several parties involved in the organization and execution of a mega-event makes event preparation, execution, and related marketing results more difficult to reach (Wang & Jin, 2019), they all must remember how crucial it is to offer participants a high degree of contentment and inclusivity in all of the activities offered at the destination (Zouni *et al.*, 2021). In an effort to weaken the barriers of language, the WYD organization offers pilgrims the option to register in 25 different languages, which is one way it ensures inclusion and satisfaction (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2019).

Stakeholders must track whether the event genuinely enhances tourists' experiences and influences their inclination to recommend or revisit the destination for a holiday (Sorrentino *et al.*, 2020) although, the travel industry isn't fleeting and the desire to visit a destination

must exist before, during, and after the event takes place (Wang & Jin, 2019). This is because the reputation of a destination can significantly influence how an event is perceived, prompting event managers to carefully assess and select the most suitable host location (Dragin-Jensen, 2016).

Mega-events cannot always generate a positive image; if unpleasant incidents happen, such as crime during an event, the destination's image may instead sustain medium and long-term harm (Ferrari & Guala, 2017). Negative occurrences may happen as a result of some of the scenarios examined in WYD events, particularly if some people or organizations attempt to create troubling situations (França *et al.*, 2014). However, attendees and residents have high levels of trust in event stakeholders and hope they will devise plans to minimize drawbacks and maximize benefits (Gursoy *et al.*, 2017). It is imperative that stakeholders institute free and honest communication because it facilitates information sharing, problem solving, and the development of a common understanding of expectations and objectives (Turkulainen *et al.*, 2015). Stakeholders should also produce interesting content and use a variety of media to connect with the intended audience (Wang & Jin, 2019). They can integrate offline and online communication efforts to provide greater value to their clients, it is important to include offline communication methods as they are most suited for customers who prefer personal engagement (Karjaluo *et al.*, 2015).

Participation from the community promotes a sense of shared accountability and desire for the mega event's favorable results (Taks *et al.*, 2015). They can make investments in public areas, transportation, and architecture to increase an area's allure as a venue for events (Ouariti & Jebrane, 2020). Furthermore, local communities enhance the destination's brand by exhibiting cultural diversity, genuineness, and friendliness, all of which have a significant impact on tourists' opinions and shape the destination image as a whole during events (Li *et al.*, 2023). In conjunction with event planners and business owners, establishing strategic alliances augments the destination's prominence (Vogt *et al.*, 2016). They actively assist in presenting the location by emphasizing its attractions and distinctive cultures (Amara, 2017), and by showcasing distinctive goods and services throughout destination branding events, encouraging originality and innovation (Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa, 2019).

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1. Methodological Approach

This dissertation has with aim to evaluate the determinants of a successful religious mega event and with that, create a guideline model that is applicable in the development of future religious mega events no matter the religion, destination, culture, stakeholders and size.

The first step of this methodological analysis will begin with a qualitative approach, by carefully selecting different stakeholders from the last World Youth Day (WYD Lisbon 2023), a series of interviews will be conducted with previously prepared questions that aim to collect data to identify the positive and negative characteristics of the mentioned event. A selection of a number of participants from different age group and genders will be interviewed. The concept of saturation will be applied, as it is in all subjective studies that rely on interviews as the primary data source; This involves continuously adding new participants to the review until no new information is obtained, indicated by data repetition or clear redundancy (Marshall *et al.*, 2013). This notion will determine when no additional interviews are required and the data obtained has reached its optimal point for this research.

The second step will be to correlate the interviewees answers to the previously studied data such as attendance numbers, financial records, investments, tourism levels, etc., from different WYD events in the last 10 years and the literature written by different authors about this specific topic. Data triangulation involves cross-checking the data gathered from interviews with other references, this certifies the accuracy and validity of the outcomes by demonstrating that separate data sources align with the same conclusions (Donkoh & Mensah, 2023).

The third step will be to gather and evaluate all data collected and find common “themes” mentioned by the interviewees, and use that information to begin to construct the recommendations which will ensure the successfulness of future events based on past personal experiences. Once all the “themes” are in accordance with both the internal/external data, it will be possible to finalize a well-structured model that meets the defined objectives for this dissertation.

### 3.2. Sample and Data Collection

#### - *Reliability and validity of the study*

To guarantee reliability, the same set of interview questions will be used uniformly throughout the extent of this investigation. Standardization minimizes variability in responses by ensuring that questions are presented and comprehended consistently (Conrad & Schober, 2021). The first interview will serve as a pilot study to confirm that the questions are suitable and that the responses align with the research subject. This pilot study will generate sub-questions and identify vagueness or irregularities in the prepared questions, enabling corrections to be made and to ensure that the intended data is being retrieved each time (Majid et al., 2017). Furthermore, participants will also be provided with a uniform understanding of the study's objectives and the interview process, and be reminded to keep an impartial attitude throughout the interviews.

In terms of validity, the interview questions will be submitted to the dissertation supervisor and adjustments will be made accordingly. The interview questions will be assessed and evaluated by the dissertation advisor and any adjustments deemed necessary will be made. The interview questions will be made according to the study objectives, ensuring that they enfold all relevant aspects of the study under investigation.

While saturation can be achieved through relatively small homogeneous samples (9-17) (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021), efforts will be made to improve the external validity of the study by choosing a varied variety of interviewees and by conducting long lasting interviews. In order to prevent bias, suggestive questions will be discarded, impartial language will be used and the identity of participants will remain hidden.

#### - *Interview Development and Process*

The initial stage of creating the interviews involves creating an appropriate set of questions. This will involve assessing all the subjects covered in the literature review which will aid in comprehending the success, difficulties, and stakeholder involvement in religious events. The interviews will consist of a series of open-ended questions, which are in line with the research goals and cover all pertinent subjects, aiming to generate thorough responses. Annex A displays the questions created, the authors who influenced them, and the specific research

goals they correspond to; these questions will assist in directing the interviews. The questions will follow a logical order, starting with pre-event questions, moving on to "during-the-event" questions, and ending with post-event questions.

The interviews will be arranged at times and locations that are convenient to participants, and online interviews will be done upon request. Before each interview begins, participants will receive information on the study's objectives, the context in which their responses will be displayed, and will be asked to give informed consent. They will also be asked if they prefer to conduct the interview in English or Portuguese, allowing participants to choose their preferred language will allow them to share their experience more comfortably and eloquently. Before starting the interview, there will be a casual discussion to ensure the interviewee feels at ease, which is crucial in a religious or culturally sensitive discussion. As the interviews will be carried out in a free-flowing conversational style, intriguing topics may come up naturally and additional significant questions may need to be included in the interview outline. At the end of the interviews, participants will be asked if they are willing to share pictures they have taken throughout the event to be included in this research paper. For anonymity purposes, all the pictures that include individuals' faces will be covered.

All interviews will be recorded using a phone voice recorder and also through written notes, which will help later on in accurate transcription. Upon completion of transcribing the interview recordings, an analysis of the data will be conducted to identify predominant themes and patterns evident in the responses. This thematic analysis will assist in deriving significant conclusions regarding the factors contributing to the success of the religious mega-event. In the case of some of the interviews, participants may be more comfortable with conducting the interviews in Portuguese and those interviews will have to be translated to English language.

#### - *Sample*

Due to the specific nature of the study, a purposive sampling technique will be applied. This includes intentionally choosing participants who are expected to offer valuable, pertinent information (Campbell et al., 2020), due to their involvement or experience with the event. Given that the event being discussed is attended mostly by participants between ages 14 and 30, the interviewees will stay within that age group. For a different perspective and to avoid anomalies in the answers a couple of interviews will be done outside of that age group. Snowball sampling will be conducted by asking the initial participants to recommend others who fit the study's requirements. The number of participants needed will be based on the idea

of data saturation, which involves conducting interviews until no new information or themes are being discovered in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Communication with interviewees and recruiting them will be conducted using email, telephone, or face-to-face. Details regarding the research, such as its objective, the type of involvement required, and the purpose of the data collected, will be given during recruitment. At this stage, it will also be ensured that all participants give informed consent. The aim is to recruit interviewees with different demographics (gender, age, religious affiliation...) and socio-economic backgrounds (occupation, locality...), to provide a more holistic perspective on the event's impact. The sample will include participants such as pilgrims, volunteers (central and parish) and host families. At the end, the participant list will be checked in order to ensure all participants groups are well included.

- *Ethical issues*

In order to prevent ethical concerns, the responses will be assessed and any potential ethical concerns will be addressed. Prior to and following the interviews, participants will be informed about the interview process, the questions to be posed, and the details that will be shared in the research paper. Participants will also be informed of their option to decline answering any question or leave the interview without facing any repercussions.

The interviewer will ensure that all data is securely stored for the purpose of this research paper and to protect individuals' personal information. The data and the identities of the interviewees will be kept confidential in order to safeguard their anonymity. In regard to the nature of the interviews, the questions will be handled thoughtfully while respecting the attendees' faith and practices.



## Chapter 4: Data Presentation & Discussion of Results

### 4.1. Research Findings

The following shows how participants answered each question, how their answers relate to previous research found in the literature review and the common themes found. Annex B shows the finalized list of interviewees and information about each of them.

*Question 1 - “Did you attend any pre-event activities? Did this make you look forward to the upcoming event?”*

Pre-event activities can have an important effect on communities and organizations before a mega event (Tilcsik & Marquis, 2013). *Participant 1*, who experienced *community activities*, said: “I took part in a pre-event called “Missionary Gesture” with my volunteering group, organized by the WYD committee and the church. This activity involved bringing the WYD spirit to people in nursing homes, hospitals, prisons... who seemed thrilled to have us there.” According to Cnaan et al., (2017) *missionary work* allows people to have the opportunity to reflect, be humble, and strengthen their link to faith through selfless acts, which is WYD’s main goal (Jackowski *et al.*, 2016).



(Figure 1. & Figure 2.).

Engaging in selfless acts is emphasized in many religions, particularly Christianity, as highlighted by Lincoln et al. (2008). A study conducted by Robert & David (2018) revealed a positive correlation between religiosity and **giving donations**. This is due to the fact that religious groups uphold and promote acts of selflessness (Davari et al., 2017). For instance, *Participant 6* stated: “My youth group and I decided to participate in various *fundraising pre-*

events in order to raise money for people who wanted to attend the event but didn't have the financial means.”

Pre-events can also be viewed as important occasions for *conversation and interaction* with essential stakeholders, namely volunteers (Mhanna et al.,2017). As per *Participant 7*: “I went to *community-bonding* activities and *volunteer training* seminars. The training courses improved my comprehension of my duties and motivated me to do the best job I could.”. As Kim and Cuskelly (2017) stated: (Volunteers' motivation can be boosted) *through training, orientation, and recognition programs* aimed at appreciating and motivating volunteers for their valuable contributions, subsequently contributing to the success of an event. Alluding to volunteer contributions, *participant 5* said: “I helped distribute the “pilgrim packages” at my parish to the participants that came to collect them prior to the event. We also helped to create *decorations and signal emergency exits* at the host schools”, and expressed how she was happy to be included in pre-event tasks. As Yürük *et al.* (2017) explained, *community involvement* in the preparation and coordination of the event, creates feelings of acceptance which influences positively the way event participants are welcomed.



(Figure 3., Figure 4. & Figure 5.).

*Question 2 – “How did you hear about the event? And what made you want to participate?”*

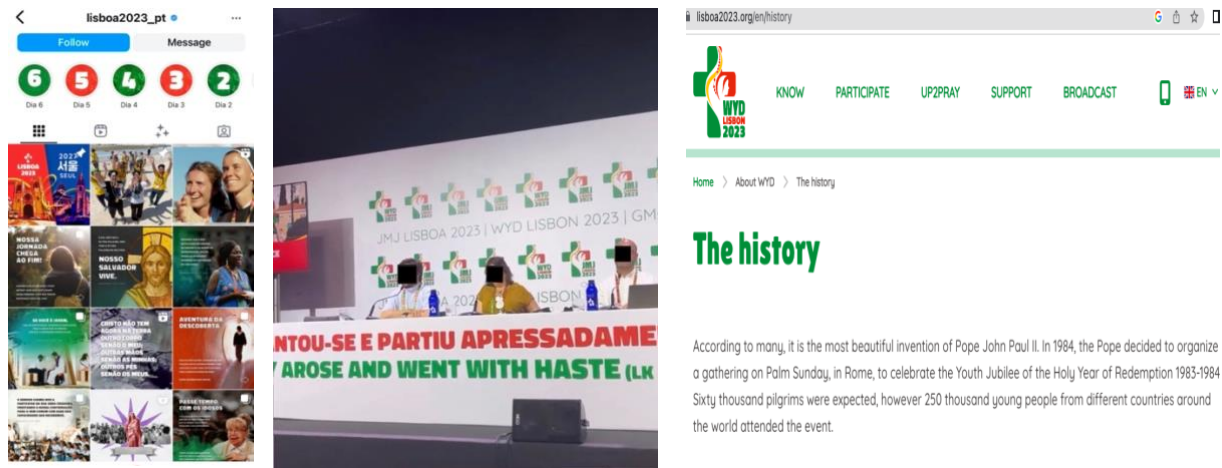
Participants' reasons for attending religious events might differ greatly (Kamath *et al.*, 2021). For instance, *participant 1* said: “I have been part of my parish since a young age and throughout time, older members of my *religious community* (catechists and youth group) who had already participated in different WYD events, always encouraged me to attend.” According to Lee's (2018) research, individuals frequently decide to engage in religious activities because of their personal experiences and comfort level with their own *church and religious community*.

The influence from close acquaintances was a common theme among the answers given by the participants. For example, *Participant 3* responded: “When the event was announced, my *friends* encouraged me to participate. They wanted to go together and thought it would be a good experience for people our age and so I decided to sign up.” A study conducted by Cardoso et al. (2022), found that pilgrims preferred attending WYD with a group of friends or family, this is because generally pilgrims value the *communal experience*.

Likewise, *Participant 5* found his *family’s influence* to be one of his main reasons to attend, he said: “When it was announced that the next WYD was in Portugal, I immediately decided that I would participate. The reported *success of previous WYD’s events* and my family were my biggest influence; hearing their experiences and personal research online made me very excited to experience WYD for myself.” Luonila et al (2016) research reveals that having a good reputation helps an organization acquire new customers, among other benefits.

Similarly, Cena et al. (2016) highlighted that the general community perception can influence individuals when considering to attend an event that has been promoted online. Alike *participant 1 and 3*, *Participant 8* was influenced by his religious community and a group of friends too: “Originally, I learned about the event through my parish, friends and through *discussions and advertisements on social media channels*. I saw it also as an opportunity to finally visit Lisbon, a city I have always wanted to explore.” According to Cobanoglu, et al. (2021), using social media accounts and event websites can help to facilitate engagement between stakeholders, attendees, and future participants who are interested in attending the event. Additionally, Newland & Aircher (2018) argue that the features of a *destination* can often serve as a source of ulterior motivation, attracting participants to an event.

Another common motivation among participants was the opportunity to strengthen their faiths. *Participant 9* explained that during a parish gathering in 2022, the opportunity to be a host family for WYD was being divulged and said: my husband and I decided and embark on this mission right there and then because we thought it would *strengthen our faith*, and I believe it did!”. This proves Dowson & Olsen (2023) statement that religious events can be used as tactical marketing strategy by the church for communities to strengthen their faith.



(Figure 6. (WYD Lisbon 2023, 2023), Figure 7 (WYD Lisbon 2023, 2023) & Figure 8. (WYD Lisbon 2023, (2022d)).

*Question 3 – “What sort of guidance and information did you receive before the event? How was it delivered to you? Did you feel well informed?”*

*Participant 2* decided to answer this question from a volunteer point of view, she said: “ I received *online training* before the event, through a digital platform. We received information about media training, safety procedures (in partnership with Cruz Vermelha), communication skills, recycling...These topics were also discussed informally among my parish group...” The sharing of information with volunteers prior to the event is important, this is because according to Nassar & Talaat (2009) it is impractical to expect volunteers to execute well without adequate training, which should cover volunteer's role in all tasks.

Similarly, *participant 8* also received his *information online*, he said: “I received all information online (website, email, etc.). I was provided with information regarding event scheduling, modes of transportation, lodging, safety precautions, and cultural advice. As someone who was traveling from overseas, I found the advice to be very helpful.” On study conducted by Woźniak (2017) it was found that consulting the event website and internet channels is the quickest way that event participants can discover essential event-related information.

Participants also mentioned ways in which they got their information online but also *offline*, for example, *participant 10* said: “Before the event, I went to get informed at my local parish about becoming a host family. We were informed about the logistics adopted, event schedule, contacts and other useful details to support our guest pilgrims.” Given that offline communication methods are most suited for customers who prefer personal engagement,

businesses can integrate their offline and online communication efforts to provide greater value to their clients (Karjaluoto et al., 2015).

*Question 4 - “Pilgrim Packages’ cost between 95€ and 255€, depending on the desired dates, activities, and amenities with the possibility of a 90% fee return. What is your opinion about this offer regarding cost/benefit?”*

According to Navruz-Zoda *et al.* (2019) religious tourists or “Pilgrims” typically don't need luxurious services, it is enough for them to have simple accommodation, food and pilgrim packages that are not too expensive and ought to cover significant costs. In agreement, *participant 4* responded: “This might be controversial...but I believe that these prices are quite accessible as WYD pilgrims had *accommodation, food, transport* included in their packages... all that for 255€ is a very affordable way to visit Portugal, especially in august which is *peak season* and it would be much more expensive for a regular tourist to come at this time.”

*Participant 5* also expressed how the appeal of the destination made the pricing of packages worthwhile: “I believe these were reasonable prices. Especially because as a pilgrim, you could visit the Portugal beyond the event, as it is continuously becoming a well *desired tourism spot* for many people. You weren't forced to go to all *activities* going on and you could expand your trip by visiting museums that were *free* that week, go to the beach, learn about the culture...” According to Wang & Jin (2019) the desire to visit a destination must exist before an event takes place. This is because the reputation of a destination can significantly influences how an event is perceived, prompting event managers to carefully assess and select the most suitable host location (Dragin-Jensen, 2016). Additionally, event planners must remember how crucial it is to offer participants a high degree of contentment and inclusivity in all of the activities offered at the destination (Zouni *et al.*, 2021).

Although all participants agreed that the pricing was reasonable, *Participant 3* said: “I think it was good pricing given that everything was included.... From another perspective, the girls we sheltered found it a little costly, this is because their *country's economic power* is weaker than ours, if it had been just a little more expensive they wouldn't have been able to come.” A study conducted by Zakizadeh et al. (2022) showed that the purchasing power of attendees is to be considered by event management when setting ticket or package costs, as this can impact the levels of attendance and sales.



(Figure 9., Figure 10. & Figure 11.).

*Question 5 – “What is your opinion about the way the event was structured in terms of timeline? what aspects do you believe should have been altered or improved?”*

A common theme among participants was that they found that the event activities were scheduled too close to one another in terms of timing. Participant 7 said: “In my opinion, some events were arranged too near to one another, which made it challenging for attendees to *travel between locations* and enjoy each activity to the fullest. A little *more time between events* and *clear passage instructions* would have improved the experience. Additionally, the bigger events were quite crowded, which resulted in *lengthy wait times* and some logistical challenges.” The intricate nature of mega events necessitates thorough pre-planning of effective crowd management in order to prevent congestion, avoid the overuse of specific locations, and ensure overall improved logistics management. (Verma et al., 2021).

Similarly, participant 6, found that his pilgrim group was struggling with arriving on time to the activities, he said: “I think the schedule was a little tight for pilgrims at school in the mornings... For instance, we could only keep the water open for 2 hours for the portable showers, I believe that was too little time for everyone to shower and this caused a lot of disagreements. Additionally, we were instructed to serve breakfast at around 10am, however most activities started around that time and they would be late almost every day.”. Event planners must account for dislocation time and time management in event schedules, as poor time management can deplete guests' energy and initiate the schedule with anxiety and tension (Allen, 2010).

Another common answer among participants was the opportunity to *visit the destination beyond the event*, participant 8 said: “Although I found the timeline to be very intense as

there were many activities happening on each day, I liked that we had the option not to attend all of them... I took this time to visit the Oceanarium, Pena Palace and Jeronimos' Monastery as we had *pilgrim discounts* in most touristic spots..." An event that is well-planned and executed can bring life to the host destination by enabling its tourism potential to be realized. (Mainolfi & Marino, 2020). Additionally, visiting sacred sites as a form of tourism can offer unique encounters that have connotations with philosophical allusions and possibly provides religious devotion, objectives, and yearnings (Kim *et al.*, 2020).



(Figure 12. & Figure 13.).

*Question 6 – “In your opinion, do you think Lisbon was the appropriate location for an event of this magnitude? Why?”*

When asked this question, most participants agreed that Lisbon was the right pick, for example, *Participant 4* said: “I found Lisbon to be the appropriate location as it has large open spaces and appropriate *cultural sites* for this type of event. I think however, the population should have been a little more flexible... companies (that could) should have considered allowing its employees to work from home during the time of the event to reduce traffic throughout the week... I believe chaos is typical in any event of this magnitude and often it is difficult to please everyone involved.” Usually, Mega-events happen in large metropolitan places that are usually already touristic spots (Mills & Rosentraub, 2013), drawing significant amounts of people to an area, putting the regional environment and infrastructure under incredible tension, and possibly carrying *disturbances to its community* (Wu *et al.*, 2016b). Event stakeholders must limit these possible disturbances (Parkes *et al.*, 2016).

*Participant 10* also agreed with Lisbon being the appropriate location, he said: “It is the capital, it has many *wide fields* that can hold large crowds and it has many *public transports*

which was important for pilgrims to move around... From a religious point of view Fátima (popular pilgrimage place) would have been more appropriate, however they wouldn't have been able to fit everyone there and the pilgrims would have seen everything in one day.” According to Taha & Allan (2020) public transportation ensures convenient movement and accessibility for vast numbers of guests, therefore organizers endeavor to optimize the effectiveness of their large-scale event through the deployment of a cohesive urban transportation system. Moreover, Houdement et al. (2017) determined that the adaptability and capacity of a venue are crucial considerations when selecting an event location.

*Participant 2* somewhat disagreed with the other participants by saying: “Honestly no, I think since Portugal has many cities that aren't as crowded, they would've been a better location in terms of *traffic*... Some of my acquaintances even left Lisbon for the week as they didn't want to be a part of the chaos, but many did not have the opportunity... Luckily, it was summer and a lot of people went on vacation which facilitated the space and logistics issue... Regardless, the event had a positive social and cultural impact in our younger population, therefore these disturbances were worthwhile.” City planners must assess the potential traffic impact during mega events to develop effective strategies, such as promoting public transportation and providing price reductions, to mitigate the effects (Xu & Gonzalez, 2017).



(Figure 14., Figure 15.and Figure 16.).

*Question 7 – “Did you feel safe during the entire event? What measures were taken to ensure your safety? What would improve”*

Event organizations that oversee volunteers and communities need to think about rules and policy requirements, such as putting *safety, legal, and regulatory obligations* into practice (Wicker, 2017). *Participant 6* noticed the various safety policies WYD had used: “I was



happy to see they had *hired security and police* to be at the venues. At a couple of events, we had to go through *X-ray machines*, many people had to leave behind objects that could be harmful to others. During the events in which the pope was present, we could spot some snipers inside buildings in the distance.”

*Participant 1* spoke about her experience as a *volunteer*, she said: “I felt completely safe during the event... I would do night *shifts* while the pilgrims were sleeping, to make sure no one left or came into the school or that they didn’t engage in unsafe activities... the only improvement I would have made was allowing the use of *apps* to track each pilgrim’s whereabouts in order to ensure no one got lost.” According to Taylor & Toohey (2011), *technology and trained staff* play a crucial role in handling potential security issues during major events.

*Participant 5* who also answered from a volunteer perspective said: “we were told during *training* that ensuring security meant doing the best we can within our capabilities. For example, if someone is having a medical emergency, you don’t try to help them, you call an ambulance... The role of a volunteer involves being a good assistant, not a rescuer. I was also instructed to approach my superiors as they had access to an app with immediate contact with *emergency relief*...” Bik & Stasiak (2020) stated that in order to ensure safety, volunteers must undergo extensive training from the relevant agencies on topics like first aid and mass event safety. Additionally, embracing advanced technologies can help effectively transmit safety messages and pass on emergency information and security details during events (Taylor & Toohey, 2011).

Various participants expressed how they adopted *personal safety measures* during the event. For instance, *Participant 4* said: “(As a host family), we were lucky enough to welcome two very nice accessible people. However, I felt nervous when I signed up to be a host family because we didn’t know much about our pilgrims, I think we should have been given *more information* about them. I took some personal safety measures and provided a document with my contact information, address, locations... in case my pilgrims got lost.” Song et al. (2024) emphasizes the significance of pre-event safety education and information dissemination to enhance personal safety awareness and manage service standards.

*Participant 9* also referred to relying on self-safety measures by saying: “I never felt any type of insecurity at both events I was present at. I felt equally safe in the smaller “Rise up” event in Olivais (mass in polish) and when I attended the large mass at Eduardo VII Park with my young grandchildren (aged 4 and 5). My only fear was that the *kids would get lost* in that sea of people... That's why they always rode their parents’ shoulders.”. Event crowds can be

dangerous without the implementation of sufficient safety precautions, such as guaranteeing venue structure safety, providing adequate emergency assistance and crowd management measures to impede hazards that could endanger participants' (and children's, in the case of participant 9) lives (Cigonetti et al., 2024)



(Figure 17., Figure 18. & Figure 19. (Lusa, 2023).).

*Question 8 – “What kind of technology was available to you by the event for personal use? did you find it beneficial? Why?”*

Internet platforms and mobile devices now permit connection and communication in ways that were unthinkable in recent times, and they are especially important improvements for increasing event planning, expanding participation in activities, and engaging attendees (Narbona & Arasa, 2018). *Participant 2* agreed by saying: “I often used the *app* provided by WYD which was tailored for my pilgrim and volunteer needs. It included information about prayer zones, my duties, current events, norms and changes in the program which helped me independently manage my day... It also included a *QR code* which was used to pick up meals for myself. We also used *WhatsApp* to communicate among volunteers and also with the team leaders.” Event apps can be used as a direct and quick communication tool with participants regarding future activities or potential disruptions (Narbona & Arasa, 2016).

Likewise, *Participant 7* also mentioned using mobile apps: “I mainly used messaging apps like *WhatsApp* and *Messenger* and *social media* groups to quickly exchange information and coordinate among volunteers and organizers. As Kharouf et al., (2020) mentioned, costumers are increasingly using mobile devices and tablets to stay updated about the event online while also engaging with one another through social media.

An issue often reported by the participants was the weak network in the venues, *Participant 6* said: “It was difficult to use my phone during the event because the *network* was almost always down. I did use the event app, especially to locate different restaurants in

the area and also their waiting time and the number of people to be served. I also used their *partner app* “halo” to follow the masses guides, songs and readings”. As stated by Garay et al. (2014), it is critical that mega events have an IT infrastructure that makes it simpler for attendees to access internet systems and facilitate communication within a venue, often with signal distribution via WI-FI.

*Question 9 – “What kind of technologies were you able to identify during the event? how did it improve your experience as an attendee? What else would you have included”*

In terms of event technology, Ferdinand & Williams (2020) confirmed that in order to meet the needs at events sites, standard audio-visual systems including microphones, projectors, speakers, screens, and other appliances remain essential. For instance, *Participant 1* said: “When we had events at “Parque Eduardo VII”, it was almost impossible to see the stage among the crowd. Thankfully, there were *massive screens and sound system* that allowed us to see and hear everything happening on stage... We also used *drones* to facilitate taking a picture during a volunteer activity as we used our bodies to spell out WYD (JMJ) seen from above.” Drone use for photo/video production and event streaming offers a number of advantages, including the ability to create new kinds of material and increase viewer engagement and participation (Mademlis *et al.*, 2019).

Other high-tech equipment observed by the participants was the use of holograms on stage, *Participant 4* said: “During the Via Sacra event, there were screens and *holographic projections* showing biblical illustrations and passages in different languages. Something I would have added to the event would be *automatic water sprays* which I have seen in other events and it would have helped with the hot weather as we stood outside for many hours.” With the help of holograms, attendees can observe information from multiple angles, giving them a unique viewpoint (Song *et al.*, 2022), which can give companies a chance to differentiate themselves from rivals (Chin & Kim, 2015). *Participants 4’s* “automatic water sprays” suggestion could also be seen as a way to set WYD apart. This is because according to a study conducted by Filingeri et al. (2017), unfavorable weather, including intense heat or rain, has a direct impact on participants' experiences and general behavior.

Participants also reported the way in which technology aided the attendance in the various activities happening during the event, *Participants 7* explained: “I thought it was great that *social media live streaming* were used because it made it possible for people who couldn't make it in person to still participate in debates and activities live. As a volunteer, I found it

helpful that *RFID technology* was used for access control and registration since it quickened check-in procedures and guaranteed a more seamless movement of participants across the event venues” As Richards (2020) stated, livestreams have become one of the most integrated technologies in the events industry as they can attract vast and diverse audiences, making them an excellent way to increase engagement. RFID technologies have made it easier to enter events and assisted event organizers in cutting down on waiting times, guaranteeing a better attendee experience (Hudson & Hudson, 2013).



(Figure 20., Figure 21. & Figure 22. (WYD Lisbon 2023, 2023)).

*Question 10 – “Do you believe that the event encouraged sustainability? What measures were taken to ensure a clean and ecological environment? Do you believe that these measures were effective? and do you consider this an important aspect?”*

Recently, event managers and industries have been applying “event-greening” into mega-events and subsequently, sponsors and participants began to choose organizations that focus on sustainable achievements (Gulak-Lipka & Jagielski, 2020). *Participant 4* explained some ways in which WYD implemented “event-greening”: “We were provided with a *reusable water bottle* (that I still use) and there were various *drinkable water fountains* near the bathrooms so that we could refill our bottles.” According to Zafari & Golzary (2022), promoting reusable items like packaging and food containers is a crucial part of improving waste reduction at events.

From a religious perspective, using eco-friendly products or recycling may be seen as selfless and exemplary (Davari et al., 2017). However, pro-environmental attitudes largely stem from the interaction between knowledge, personal morals, and motivations, which are influenced by socio-structural and psycho-social factors (Miller et al., 2015). In more

straightforward terms, *Participant 5* noted: “We were dealing with various types of *races and ethnicities* and I think some *cultures* don’t pay as much attention to waste as others.

However, everyone was aware of the location of the various recycling bins provided by the event and there was no excuse to throw trash on the ground.” According to Bianchini & Rossi (2021) positioning recycling bins in key locations of the venue, such as near refreshment stations, aids in trash collection and encourages sustainability participation.

*Participant 10* was another participant who noted the importance of recycling bins, she said: “I noticed several types of containers for trash in Tejo Park (one of the venues) but also containers for packaged sealed food (not eaten) so there wouldn’t be any waste. Given that the event was dealing with a crowd of over a million people, I think it would be difficult to do much better than that.”. Events inevitably produce waste but with proper management, leftover resources can be recycled effectively, reducing environmental impact (Pourpakdelfekr & Oboudi, 2022).

*Participant 1* also commented on the difficulty in maintaining sustainable practices due to the event’s size: “It was almost impossible to keep track of all the *trash* that was being created. Throughout my *volunteer training*, we were informed about *recycling measures* and were instructed to call out pilgrims who left their trash behind and to pick it up if we saw any...” Event managers should coach their staff members in sustainability practices so that events adhere to eco-friendly procedures (Hottle et al., 2015), guaranteeing their contribution in the retrieval and recycling of trash by attendees (Bianchini & Rossi, 2021).

Providing incentives for eco-friendly practices during the event seemed like an important aspect for participants, for example *Participant 8* said: “In terms of *transportation*, incentives like discounted tickets or shuttle services were offered to *motivate participants* into taking public transit, which promoted environmentally responsible travel, helped to ease parking and traffic issues and minimized carbon emissions. As stated by Pourpakdelfekr & Oboudi (2022) environmental initiatives, like providing recycling containers or encouraging public transportation use among participants, can help increase sensibility towards eco-friendly practices.



(Figure 23., Figure 24. & Figure 25.).

*Question 11 – “In your opinion, in what ways did the event impact the local community? Pros and cons.”*

All participants found that the local community was equally affected positively and negatively, depending on the perspective. For instance, *Participant 5* said: “I feel like the local community was disturbed by the amount of people on the streets, *noise, traffic and crowded public transports* during that week. However, I believe that all the disturbances were worthwhile from a perspective that it brought in a lot of *tourism*.”. According to Mills & Rosentraub (2013) the congestion in public transportation and road traffic during events restricts transportation access for local residents and negatively impacts the region's basic consumption and productivity. Event planners need to make every effort to minimize these disruptions because more regional collaboration will result from a locally supported event (He *et al.*, 2020).

Participants also felt that the local community was not content with the investment needed to execute the event. This might be because mega-event preparations frequently require large funds (Wolfe *et al.*, 2022). Although hosting mega-events can enhance tourism and infrastructure, the economic benefits are frequently exaggerated, and the financial strain on public resources can surpass the advantages (Madden, 2006).

As per *Participant 6*: “In terms of acceptance by the Portuguese public, most didn't want the event to happen in Lisbon as they were afraid of the disturbances it would cause and didn't agree with the *large financial investment* made... however, the local pilgrims and parishioners got to *socialize with the different cultures/nationalities* which was enriching for us...”.

Religious event attendees are keen on socializing with other individuals who share the same

interests (Lee et al., 2015), while also enjoying the exploration of different worldviews and lifestyles, and experiencing different cultures (Nicolaidis, 2016).

Another way in which participants felt that the local community was being benefited was through the attention that Portugal was getting. Events can provide an enhancement in the way the destinations are perceived internationally, improved sense of collective pride by the host population (Mair & Duffy, 2018) and it serves as a strategy for worldwide competition for capita (Müller, 2017). As *Participant 3* explained: “Overall, I think it was good for the *country’s image* and it brought a *happy atmosphere*. In comparison with other EU countries, Portugal falls behind in the (mega) events industry. Hosting this event so successfully has opened the door for the possibility of hosting similar events in the *future*. On the negative side, non-participating locals *avoided the metro and restaurants*, this might have affected business owners”. In order to overcome this issue, Kala & Chaubey (2023) explained that since locals share their physical assets and facilities, offer services to visitors, and see effects on their quality of life, it is crucial that there is a lot of community involvement in all event activities.

Similarly, *Participant 2* thought that the local community could have been compensated further: “As a local citizen, I was upset about the way we were positioned in the venues as we were not able to see the stages properly... They should have *prioritized the Portuguese public* and placed us in sectors closer to the stages... I think it was unfair that other nationalities got to be in better sectors when we were the ones investing and organizing this event.” This is important because if locals are content with the perks provided by an event, they are likely to develop positive opinions and approval for the realization future events (Kim *et al.*, 2015).



(Figure 26., Figure 27. & Figure 28.).

*Question 12 – “What was your preferred mode of transportation to go to the different event venues? Did you think the transportation modes available to you were well organized?”*

Supervising transportation during mega-events can be difficult, as transport networks must accommodate both the influx numerous visitors and the constant flow of daily commuters (Kassens-Noor, 2019). All participants reported the use of a combination of public transports (train, metro and bus) in order to reach the event venues. There were also mentions of trying to reach the venues by car but most reported to be the least feasible way of transportation. As per *Participant 1*: “I live outside of Lisbon; therefore, my main mode of transportation was the *train*... The event provided us with a *free card* that could be used in all *public transportation* that was only valid for the duration of the event... I chose not to drive to the locations as there were *limited parking spaces* near the venues. In Lisbon, we did a lot of *walking* as a part of our pilgrim journey and so we rarely used transportation.” Mega event organizers should create a city transportation strategy to lessen traffic, pollution, and unhappiness among the local community by encouraging socially responsible travel like walking and public transportation, decreasing the needless use of private vehicles, and enhancing transportation systems (Xu & Gonzalez, 2017). Additionally, improving how parking spots are assigned and maximizing capacity can significantly improve the event experience by decreasing traffic, boosting accessibility, and increasing safety in the event location (Ruan et al., 2016).

Participants also expressed dissatisfaction with the traffic congestion during the event week, namely *Participant 3 said*: “In Lisbon, we used the *metro or bus* to move around, and faced some issues as they had closed the nearest stations... Unfortunately, my parents tried to attend one of the events by car and couldn’t reach due to traffic and *blocked roads*”. As explained by Serdar & Al-Ghamdi (2021) mega-events require specific transportation planning, such as blocking and rerouting roads, which can cause obstructions and extended traveling time. In their study, Ballarano et al. (2022), emphasize that improving the visual appeal of city transport, creating different transport modes, and bettering the access to transport network information can encourage the use of sustainable travel alternatives and shorten travel times throughout mega events.



*Question 13 – “What sponsors can you remember from the event? what is your perception towards those brands now?”*

Getting sponsors is essential to increasing an event's financial success, and often companies and organizations frequently decide to sponsor an event in exchange for visibility, chances for branding, and entry to the event's audience (Morgan *et al.*, 2020). As per *participant 5*: “The most striking sponsor was Pingo Doce (*local supermarket chain*), we most often collected our pilgrim meals at their establishments as they had the best *menus*. I also recall Telepizza and Dominos which also provided us with pilgrim meals. I think it was important for these brands to be involved in an event of this magnitude, it *equally benefited them and the event*” As stated by (Mills & Rosentraub (2013) religious events, especially mega-events, can create benefits and exposure for all stakeholders involved. Acquiring local sponsors can even protect cultural identity and boost regional businesses (Liutikas, 2023).

Most participants found that the most important and memorable sponsors were the ones providing meals, for instance *participant 6* said: “For me, the most prominent sponsors were Pizzahut and Dominos... I would often choose one of them because their meals would be very filling and I was familiar with their pizzas already... I was glad that they participated in the event. The only issue is that they were *running out of ingredients and the waiting time* could be quite long.” This can be seen as problematic because as explained by Coelho *et al.* (2019) the alignment between a mega-event and its sponsors moderately influences how the event's image affects the sponsor's brand value, highlighting the significance of selecting appropriate sponsors.

The participants also mentioned the various ways in which the event provided sponsor brand visibility, as observed by *participant 2*: “I can still recall the *municipal councils* of Lisboa and Cascais, the insurance business Fidelidade, as well as a *few supermarkets and cafes* like Padaria Portuguesa, McDonald's, and Pingo Doce. I spotted these brands around the venue, and there were even activities sponsored by them.”

As specified Chakraborti *et al.* (2015), event sponsorship can dramatically improve brand exposure and marketing results, mostly by strategically associating the sponsor's brands and the event's image, which can elicit favorable perceptions from attendees.



(Figure 29. (Telepizza, 2023)., Figure 30. (Pingo Doce, 2023). & Figure 31. (WYD Lisbon 2023, 2022a.)).

*Question 14 – “The next WYD is in South Korea (2027), would you attend it? Why?”*

Event attendees do not pick the event's location; thus, the destination's image may operate as a significant factor in their prospective participation, especially for large events happening in different locations each time (Carlson et al., 2016). According to Kenyon & Bodet (2018) people are more likely to select a destination above others if they are well-informed about it, have favorable opinions of it, and have experienced happy feelings from attending a mega event. Likewise, *participant 1* responded: “I enjoyed my first WYD event and I am making plans to attend again in 2027. I would like to experience this event in a foreign country, even though tickets to South Korea can be quite *expensive*. It fascinates me how a country that is not catholic will be hosting a catholic event... I think *reinforcing my beliefs* involves getting to know others too... this event will expose me to *new cultures and environments*, and provide me with *personal growth and acceptance*.” As per Getz & Page (2016) international religious events allow participants to explore various customs and traditions, while simultaneously reinforcing their religious convictions.

*Participant 7* also showed interest in attending the event, she said: “Without a doubt, I would think about going to WYD in South Korea. Although I had an amazing and unforgettable time at WYD Lisbon, I would want to attend the event in a different nation. I would be delighted to pursue the chance to *broaden my spiritual, social, and educational horizons* internationally.” Throughout these events, participants have the opportunity to engage in cross-cultural interactions (Small et al., 2005), and the chance to gain insights into

heritage, history, ethics, and religious values through their engagement with the residents (Jepson & Clarke, 2014).

Nonetheless, some participants disagreed with the opinions given above. For instance, *Participant 3* explained: “I would probably not attend WYD in South Korea... this is because would like to experience WYD more independently and I’m afraid to *travel alone* to such a *distant, culturally and religiously different country*.” Cultural exchange is often linked to enhancing the appreciation and comprehension of cultural diversity; however, these differences may raise concerns for some visitors, particularly regarding safety and security issues (Mansfeld & McIntosh, 2019). Moreover, individuals traveling for religious purposes are more inclined to select a destination that offers genuine religious experiences. (Tsai, 2023).

*Participant 9* also explained why she wouldn’t attend, she said: “I’m not thinking about going to WYD in South Korea even though I think it will be a very *unique place* to hold WYD. It’s too *far* and I have reached an *age* where I no longer want to go on big adventures, neither would I be able to convince my husband to come with me for the same reason.” As stated by Hassan et al. (2023) the motivation of religious tourists to visit a particular destination may be shaped by various socio-demographic factors, including sex, age, level of education, occupation, finances, residency, and nationality. Therefore, it is important to consider these aspects when choosing a destination for a religious event.

*Question 15 – “Did the WYD committee reach out to you in order to find out about your experience? As an attendee, is this an important action to you?”*

Obtaining feedback following an event is essential for evaluating its overall success or shortcomings, identifying complications, and deriving recommendations that can be beneficial for the planning of following events (Garbacz et al., 2017). Unfortunately, when asked this question, most participants reported not to have received any personal requests for feedback or evaluation. As per *Participant 5*: “I don’t think the event organization ever reach out to me personally afterwards looking for feedback, however I’m aware my *team leaders* had a folder in which they left their *observations*, in order to be passed on to future WYD events. They collected written *feedback from various volunteers* too, which they included in that folder.” The assessment of event performance ought to consider both external customers, such as attendees, and internal customers, including volunteers; This multi-faceted

perspective is crucial for enhancing external customers experience (Michopoulou & Giuliano, 2018).

Similarly, *Participant 8* also reported not receiving any requests for feedback, he said: “Unfortunately, I don’t think anyone reached out to me because I had an issue I didn’t get to *report*. My group and I spent a really long time waiting under a viaduct to get into one of the venues... the sector that was allocated to us was full even though we got there early.... This was not a good experience and I hope it doesn’t happen in future WYD events...” According to Jonah et al. (2024) without the evaluation of guests’ feedback and performance criteria, or post-event performance analysis, event planners risk repeating past errors, overlooking opportunities for development, and failing to elevate the standards of their services. On the other hand, *Participant 2* was one of the few participants that did get to share her feedback directly, she said: “Yes, the event sent me and some (not all) of my volunteering colleagues an *email* to fill out an *online survey* about our experience. Additionally, we received a diploma for our volunteering efforts which I found to be very thoughtful.” Liang *et al.* (2013) highlighted the significance for businesses to swiftly acknowledge their customers judgment and information enquiries. Technological tools like mobile phone technology and online survey channels can be used to facilitate this process (Arntz et al., 2024). A simple and cost-effective method for gathering feedback is to conduct online surveys that can efficiently organize and analyze responses, providing valuable insights to help leverage opportunities (Piatnychuk et al., 2022).



(Figure 32. (WYD Lisbon 2023, 2022a.)).

## 4.2. Theory Contribution

- *Study recommendations framework*

Table 1. represents the extracted recommendations through interviews and investigation of past research. Annex C. shows a synthesized version of the table below.

Interview Questions	Dimensions	Recommendations	Inspiring Authors & Interviewees
Q1 - “Did you attend any pre-event activities? Did this make you look forward to the upcoming event?”	Pre-event Activities	Create pre-event community activities for attendees and volunteers such as missionary work and community-bonding activities.	Participant 1 & 7, (Cnaan <i>et al.</i> , 2017), (Tilsik & Marquis, 2013).
	Pre-event Charity Work	Create opportunities for stakeholders to donate, such as, hosting fundraising events.	Participant 6, (Davari <i>et al.</i> , 2017), (Robert & David), (Lincoln <i>et al.</i> , 2008).
	Volunteer Involvement & Motivation	Motivate volunteers through training, orientation, bonding, recognition programs and involvement in the preparation and coordination of the event.	Participant 7 & 5, (Kim & Cuskelly, 2017), (Yuruk <i>et al.</i> , 2017), (Mhanna <i>et al.</i> , 2017).
Q2 - “How did you hear about the event? And what made you want to participate?”	Community Influence	Share event information with local places of worship to familiarize potential attendees and encourage communal experience.	Participant 1, 3, 5 & 8, (Lee, 2018), (Cardoso <i>et al.</i> , 2022).
	Event Reputation	Promote the success of past events, mainly through online channels.	Participant 5, (Luonila <i>et al.</i> , 2016)
	Social Media	Market the event on social media channels to engage stakeholders, attendees, and future participants.	Participant 8 (Cena <i>et al.</i> , 2016), (Cobanoglu <i>et al.</i> , 2021).
	Destination Attraction	Pick a destination that will attract participants to the event. (refer to question 6).	Participant 8, (Newland & Aircher, 2018).

	Faith Affirmation	Work together with places of worship and religious communities to provide better opportunities for attendees to strengthen their faith	Participant 9, (Dowson & Olsen, 2023).
Q3 - “What sort of guidance and information did you receive before the event? How was it delivered to you? Did you feel well informed?”	Staff Briefing	Provide staff with important information such as safety procedures, media training, recycling, communication skills... (preferably through digital platforms).	Participant 2, (Nassar & Talaat, 2009).
	Online Information Sharing	Use online tools to provide information on scheduling, modes of transportation, lodging, safety precautions, cultural advice... for quicker and broader effects.	Participant 8, (Woźniak, 2017).
	Offline Information	Provide offline information posts for attendees looking for more personal engagement.	Participant 10, (Karjaluoto <i>et al.</i> , 2015).
Q4 - “Pilgrim Packages” cost between 95€ and 255€, depending on the desired dates, activities, and amenities with the possibility of a 90% fee return. What is your opinion about this offer regarding cost/benefit?”	Reasonable Offers	Offer packages to attendees that include accommodation, food and transportation at reasonable prices.	Participant 4, (Navruz-Zoda <i>et al.</i> , 2019).
	Destination Popularity	Consider seasonality, touristic potential and activities and the country’s economic power when pricing event packages.	Participant 3, 4 & 5, (Wang & Jin, 2019), Dragin-Jensen, 2016), (Zouni <i>et al.</i> , 2021), (Zakizadeh <i>et al.</i> , 2022).
Q5 - “What is your opinion about the way the event was	Dislocation time	When scheduling the event, consider traveling time to the venue, gate waiting times and the slow crowd movement between activities.	Participant 6 & 7, (Verma <i>et al.</i> , 2021).

structured in terms of timeline? what aspects do you believe should have been altered or improved?"	Starting & Finishing hours	Avoid scheduling starting times that are too early and closing times that are too late.	Participant 7, (Allen, 2010).
	Pilgrimage	Allow some time for attendees to visit the destination beyond the event.	Participant 8, (Mainolfi & Marino, 2020).
	Tourism Boost	Offer ticket discounts for touristic sites to attendees.	Participant 8, (Kim et al., 2020).
Q6 - "In your opinion, do you think Lisbon was the appropriate location for an event of this magnitude? Why?"	Destination Attributes	Choose a destination with large open spaces and appropriate cultural sites to the type of event.	Participant 4 & 10, (Mills & Rosentraub, 2013), (Houdement et al., 2017).
	Host communities	Evaluate the possible disturbances that could affect the local communities. (more in question 11).	Participant 2 & 4, (Wu et al., 2016), (Parkes et al., 2016).
	Public Transport Networks	Choose a destination with practical public transport networks. (more in question 12).	Participant 10, (Taha & Allan, 2020).
	Sustainability	Promote public transportation and offer price reductions to encourage sustainable travel and reduce traffic. (more in question 10).	Participant 2, (Xu & Gonzalez, 2017).
Q7 - "Did you feel safe during the entire event? What measures were taken to ensure your safety? What would improve?"	Safety Precautions	Put safety obligations into practice such as hiring security and police, acquire safety technologies (x-ray machines, tracking apps...), ensure participants do not enter the venues with harmful objects...	Participant 6, (Wicker, 2017), (Taylor & Toohey, 2011).
	Trained Staff	Train staff on safety procedures and first aid, adjust their shifts accordingly and provide them with direct emergency relief contacts.	Participant 1 & 5, (Bik & Stasiak, 2020), (Taylor & Toohey, 2011).
	Safety Awareness	Encourage attendees to take personal safety measures and provide all the information necessary to decrease feelings of uncertainty.	Participant 4 & 9, (Song et al., 2024).

	Crowd Management	Implement crowd control measures to prevent stampedes and lost children/people.	Participant 9, (Cigonetti et al., 2024).
Q8 - “What kind of technology was available to you by the event for personal use? did you find it beneficial? Why?”	IT Infrastructure	Ensure that the venue has a strong IT infrastructure so that attendees can use their mobile phones to communicate and stay updated on the event.	Participant 6, (Narbona & Arasa, 2018), (Garay et al., 2014)
	New technologies	Provide attendees with new technologies to facilitate their experience such as QR code, online ticketing, event apps, prayer apps...	Participant 2, (Narbona & Arasa, 2018).
	Social Media	Have a strong presence on social media for better information exchange and engagement.	Participant 7, (Kharouf et al., 2020).
Q9 - “What kind of technologies were you able to identify during the event? how did it improve your experience as an attendee? What else would you have included?”	Common Event Technology	Invest in standard audio-visual systems such as microphones, projectors, speakers, screens...	Participant 1, (Ferdinand & Williams, 2020)
	Immersive Technologies	Use new technology such as drones, holographic projections and sprinkler systems.	Participant 1 & 4, (Mademlis et al., 2019), (Song et al., 2022), (Chin & Kim, 2015), (Filingeri et al., 2017).
	Social Media	Consider live streaming the event through social media.	Participant 7, (Richards, 2020).
	RFID Technology	Implement RFID technology for better access control and registration.	Participant 7, (Hudson & Hudson, 2013).
Q10 - “Do you believe that the event encouraged sustainability ? What measures were taken to ensure a clean and ecological environment? Do you	Reusable Materials	Implement some “event-greening measures” such using reusable food/beverage containers and providing water fountains.	Participant 4, (Gulak-Lipka & Jagielski, 2020), (Zafari & Golzary, 2022).
	Sustainable Awareness	Promote eco-friendly behaviors that appeal to all races and cultures in the event.	Participant 5, (Davari et al., 2017), Miller et al., 2015).
	Recycling Practices	Position recycling bins in key locations such as near refreshment stations.	Participant 5 & 10, (Bianchini & Rossi, 2021).



believe that these measures were effective? and do you consider this an important aspect?"	Staff Training	Include sustainable practice measures in staff training	Participant 1, (Hottle et al., 2015), (Bianchini & Rossi, 2021).
	Waste Reduction	Collect uneaten sealed food to be donated so it does not go to waste.	Participant 10, (Pourpakdelfekr & Oboudi, 2022).
	“Green” Transports	Promote sustainable modes of transportation such as walking and biking.	Participant 8, (Pourpakdelfekr & Oboudi, 2022).
Q11 - “In your opinion, in what ways did the event impact the local community? Pros and cons.”	Crowd Management	Minimize disruptions such as overly crowded spaces, traffic and lots of noise at inappropriate hours.	Participant 5, (Mills & Rosentraub, 2013), (He et al., 2020).
	Public Expenditure	Be mindful of the funds required in order not to disrupt the local economy.	Participant 6, (Madden, 2006), (Wolfe et al., 2022)
	Socialization	Encourage the socialization among different nationalities and a happy atmosphere by including the host community in different activities.	Participant 3 & 6, (Lee et al., 2015), (Nicolaidis, 2016).
	Tourism & Destination Image	Promote the destination and its culture in order to boost tourism.	Participant 3, (Mair & Duffy, 2018), (Muller, 2017).
	Local Economy	Partner with local businesses to prevent avoidance.	Participant 2 & 3 (Kala & Chaubey, 2023).
	Offered Benefits	Offer special perks to the local communities such as better seat allocation during the event.	Participant 2 (Kala & Chaubey, 2023), (Kim et al., 2015).
Q12 - “What was your preferred mode of transportation to go to the different event venues? Did you think the transportation modes available to you were well organized?”	Inter-modal transportation	Promote an intermodal city transportation strategy (train, metro, buses...) by making necessary upgrades and offering free/discounted tickets.	Participant 1 & 3 (Kassens-Noor, 2019), (Xu & Gonzalez, 2017), (Ballarano et al., 2022).
	Parking Spots	Create parking spaces for private vehicles and maximize capacity.	Participant 1 (Ruan et al., 2016).
	Road Blockages	Only block the roads where redirection is possible and do not disturb the traffic flow.	Participant 3 (Serdar & Al-Ghamdi, 2021).

Q13 - “What sponsors can you remember from the event? what is your perception towards those brands now?”	Local Brands	Partner with local brands to protect cultural identity and boost regional businesses.	Participant 5, (Mills & Rosentaub, 2013), Liutikas, 2023).
	Brand Reputation	For actively participating sponsors, ensure that they have all the resources needed and their services are adequate.	Participant 6, (Coelho et al., 2019).
	Brand Visibility	Boost sponsors visibility by strategically associating the sponsors' brands and the event's image and providing signage, promotional materials, and sponsored activities.	Participant 2, (Chakraborti et al., 2015), (Morgan et al., 2020).
Q14 - “The next WYD is in South Korea (2027), would you attend it? Why?”	New Environment	Expose attendees to new cultures and environments to encourage for personal growth and acceptance.	Participant 1, (Getz & Page, 2016).
	Destination Attributes	Consider the destination image, uniqueness, reputation, overall hosting and attendees’ costs, safety and attendee’s demographics.	Participant 1, 3 & 9, (Keyon & Bodet, 2018), (Carlson et al., 2016), (Tsai, 2023), (Hassan et al., 2023).
	Cross-Cultural Interaction	Create opportunities for cross-cultural interactions	Participant 7, (Small et al., 2005), (Jepson & Clarke, 2014), (Mansfield & McIntosh, 2019).
Q15 - “Did the WYD committee reach out to you in order to find out about your experience? As an attendee, is this an important action to you?”	Internal & External Customer Feedback	Allow staff to provide feedback (positive and negative) and have them collect feedback from attendees as well.	Participant 5 & 8, (Michopoulou & Giuliano, 2018).
	Future Events	Analyze all feedback collected and log the improvements to made in future events.	Participant 8, (Garbacz et al., 2017), (Jonah et al., 2024), liang et al., 2013).
	Technology	Use online tools to collect and analyze feedback data such as online surveys and email.	Participant 2, (Arntz et al., 2024), (Piatnychuk et al., 2022).

- *Theory Contribution Discussion*

By analyzing the responses from the interviews conducted together the existing knowledge on religious mega events, recommendations for the successful planning of a religious mega event began to arise. This study's framework intends to achieve each research objective proposed initially (page...). As highlighted in Annex C. this study identified 6 key factors that determine the success of a religious mega-event. The first factor being *community satisfaction*, the research findings indicate how religious mega events can fulfill the needs of attendees while generating lasting benefits for the local community. The recommended strategies aim to enhance the attendees' social and spiritual experience over the long term.

The second factor is *technological integration*, the technological recommendations suggested in this study can aid event managers expand their audience reach, boost participant engagement, and optimize event logistics. Technical developments have a major influence on event experience (Capasa *et al.* 2022) and these recommendations are designed to keep up with the ever-changing requirements and expectations of participants.

The third factor refers to the *acquisition of funds*. As mentioned previously hosting the economic benefits are frequently exaggerated, and the financial strain on public resources can surpass the advantages (Madden, 2006). These fund acquisition recommendations support a religious mega-event that is accessible and pleasing to the community as it helps reduce reliance on public funds.

The fourth factor alludes to the intricate *logistics management* of a religious mega-event. The suggestions provided guarantee seamless operations, effective crowd flow, and improved safety. Every suggestion is in line with the operational requirements of mega-events, guaranteeing a smooth experience for both participants and planners.

The fifth factor is about *sustainability*. These recommendations are crucial for decreasing the environmental impact of mega-events while also supporting sustainability and social responsibility, ultimately leading to lasting benefits for both the environment and the host communities.

The last key factor relates to *tourism*. The recommendations concerning tourism are crucial for using the event as a strategy for promoting the destination and boosting economic growth. this strategy results in economic, social, and cultural benefits for the host destination while motivating potential attendees to participate in the event.

### 4.3. Implications

By offering recommendations to event managers for planning a successful religious mega event, this dissertation adds to the existing research on religious events. The recommendations defined and the research findings above in this report have important implications for event organizers in effectively organizing and implementing religious events.

This dissertation has pointed out that event planners might consider working together with local religious or community groups to follow through with some of the recommendations given above. These organizations can assist the event planners in coordinating activities that match the spiritual objectives of the event and provide a variety of opportunities for people of all ages and interests in the community as per the WYD event. Partnering with these organizations raises awareness of the event among religious communities, which is the intended audience. Furthermore, appealing to businesses recognized for supporting religious causes and events may result in increased money and publicity.

To advertise the event effectively, event planners must also establish a significant online and media visibility, according to the research above. Possibly, contacting influencers who are recognized for creating religious-themed content or who cater to the desired age demographic for the event. Employing a social media team to consistently post about the event and previous events, share quotes or short video from religious figures, provide early registration incentives and engage with comments and questions, is an effective method to promote the event while enhancing its image and reputation (as done for WYD).

In addition to the recommendations, a full destination analysis may be required. This research report specifies that host destinations should have well-developed travel infrastructure, easy access to public transports, and plenty of parking spaces. Event planners must also analyze the availability of appropriate locations (large fields) and facilities, as well as the accompanying costs. Furthermore, the research findings revealed that it is critical to consider cultural norms, safety laws, and potential risks while conducting an event in a specific location. Working closely with the host government may facilitate the compliance with these terms.

Event managers should establish early communication with the host destinations' government and host city municipality to understand the regulatory requirements for hosting a large-scale religious event. Legally, this process might involve the submission of permits, ensuring venue codes are being followed and environmental regulations. This research

indicates that event managers need to request for access to public spaces and utilities, developing traffic management, security plans with provisions for crowd control, emergency responses, and designating alternative routes for local residents, which are some key factors that city council would need to be involved in. Furthermore, organizers should adopt environmentally friendly techniques and seek promotional assistance through online city channels and media press conferences.

Regarding promotional support, event administrators may need to carefully examine potential sponsors to verify that their products, services, and corporate policies are consistent with the values of the event's participants. This research has revealed that it is critical to prioritize partnerships with sponsors, preferably local, who have a good reputation in the community and can assist reinforce the event's message. This may require certain restrictions and contracts to avoid sponsors from overshadowing the event's spiritual purpose. Additionally, organizers should incorporate eco-friendly practices and seek promotional support through online city channels and media press conferences.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

### - *Conclusion and recommendations*

This study was conducted with the key purpose of identifying the success determinants for hosting a religious mega-event, focusing on the World Youth Day event (mainly WYD Lisbon 2023), in order to come up with possible recommendations that can assist events managers to organize any kind of religious mega-event prosperously. Unlike the topics of sports and music mega-events, it seems there are not many research articles on religious mega-events. This research paper unravels a complex set of determinants that influence the success of religious mega events, each playing a critical role in the overall execution and experience.

It was discovered during the practical section of this study that “pre-event” activities were important to consider when hosting a religious mega event. However, there seems to be a gap in previous literature when it comes to the hosting of “pre-event” activities for any type of event. Religious individuals seem to care about missionary work, as it allows people to have the opportunity to reflect, be humble, and strengthen their link to faith through selfless acts (Jackowski *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, this study recommends further analysis of pre-event activities relating to selfless work as it can be a key aspect in starting off a religious mega-event.

When it comes to marketing and attracting attendees to a religious mega-event, this research paper highlights the various ways technology and destination branding can be useful. Using online content as a marketing technique has demonstrated to strengthen the long-term interaction between events and participants (Suryawardani & Wiranatha, 2017). As mentioned, promoting the success of past events, the current event, the host destination and providing personal engagement online are the most effective ways in creating awareness towards a religious mega-event. It is important to consider that religious individuals consider the communal experience when attending an event, future research should focus on how to highlight this aspect when marketing a religious mega-event.

The image of a destination and its potential for religious tourism has been proven to be a motivating factor for attendance. An event that is well-planned and executed can bring life to the host destination by enabling its tourism potential to be realized. (Mainolfi & Marino, 2020). There seems to be a lot of research based on what a mega-event benefits the host destination but not how a host destination can benefit a mega-event. This research paper

alludes to the consideration of seasonality, touristic potential and activities, to be some of the crucial aspects to attract attendees to an event. Especially, for religious attendees looking to take their pilgrim journeys beyond the event and looking to explore new cultures and environments.

In terms of communication with participants, this study has emphasized on the importance of technology. From providing online training to volunteers to sharing real time information about the event to attendees, it is the best way to reach large audiences. However, it is important to still have offline posts where participants can get their information from as they might be looking for personal communication. As the events industry becomes increasingly digitalized, future research should focus on how to consolidate both methods of communication so that attendees can continue to have the option to choose between the two.

This study delves into various strategies for the smooth fulfilment of operations. For instances events planners are advised to consider time management in their event scheduling and crowd safety and movement. Event crowds can be dangerous without the implementation of sufficient safety precautions, such guaranteeing venue structure safety, providing adequate emergency assistance (Cigonetti et al., 2024). The help of trained volunteers proved to be crucial in keeping the safety for attendees as well as other tasks. Therefore, it is important to keep them motivated through training, orientation, bonding, recognition programs and involvement in the preparation and coordination of the event.

In terms of operations of a religious event, event managers need to consider implementing “event-greening measures”. From a religious perspective, using eco-friendly products or recycling may be seen as selfless and exemplary (Davari et al., 2017). Simple methods such as providing recycling bins and products using recyclable materials are mentioned in this report however, future research should focus on innovative ways that sustainable practices can be applied in mega-events efficiently.

Another aspect emphasized in this study are the costs involved in hosting a religious mega-event. Given that pilgrims typically don't need luxurious services, it is enough for them to have simple accommodation, food and pilgrim packages that are not too expensive and ought to cover significant costs (Navruz-Zoda *et al*, 2019). This research encourages event planners not to be too dependent on public spending by finding sponsors, holding fundraising events and analyzing and considering the host destination economic power. The alignment between a mega-event and its sponsors moderately influences how the event's image affects the sponsor's brand value, highlighting the significance of selecting appropriate sponsors (Coelho et al., 2019). For instance, partner with local brands to protect cultural identity and

boost regional economy. Although hosting mega-events can enhance tourism and infrastructure, the economic benefits are frequently exaggerated, and the financial strain on public resources can surpass the advantages (Madden, 2006). Essentially, the prosperity of the success of religious mega-events relies on managing logistical challenges while honoring the event's religious and cultural importance, guaranteeing a seamless operation and a spiritually fulfilling experience for all participants.

- *Limitations*

The current study explored one of the many possible research methods to determine the success factors of hosting a religious mega-event. However, it is not only the perspective of external customers who experience the event that can be significant to this research. Perhaps, the knowledge and experience of internal customers can be found relevant to defining the determinants of a successful mega-event. Therefore, the interviews conducted could provide a larger number of recommendations and key factors for the successful planning of religious mega-events as it would require a different question script. The idea that other sources of information can be made available for delving deeper into this research topic, this implies that further studies could be conducted on the various determinants, could be made in the future. For instance, evaluating event managers views on planning a religious mega-event and the contributions of vendors, suppliers and sponsors can be seen as relevant to this study. Other limitation relating to this research, was the fact that most interviewees were Portuguese, and not of other nationalities. This is because the event at hand, was hosted in Lisbon, and this research focuses mainly on the impact on host communities. The lack of disclosure and exact information on attendance numbers, investments made and ROI on the WYD events, prevents this study to be done through quantitative methods of research.



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## Annexes

### Annex A – List of Interview Questions Extracted from Investigation of Past Research.

Interview Questions	Authors	Literature
Q1 - “Did you attend any pre-event activities? Did this make you look forward to the upcoming event?”	(Tilcsik & Marquis, 2013).	“Pre-event activities can have an important <b>effect on communities and organizations</b> before a mega event.”
Q2 - “How did you hear about the event? And what made you want to participate?”	(Kamath <i>et al.</i> , 2021)	“Participants' <b>reasons for attending religious events might differ</b> greatly, indicating the wide range of needs, convictions, and goals held by those who decide to take part in religious mega-events.”
Q3 - “What sort of guidance and information did you receive before the event? How was it delivered to you? Did you feel well informed?”	(Kenyon & Bodet, 2018)	“People are <b>more likely to select a place</b> above others <b>if they are well-informed about it</b> , have favorable opinions of it, and have experienced happy feelings from attending a mega event.”
Q4 – “‘Pilgrim Packages’ cost between 95€ and 255€, depending on the desired dates, activities, and amenities with the possibility of a 90% fee return. What is your opinion about this offer regarding cost/benefit?”	(Navruz-Zoda <i>et al.</i> , 2019)	“Religious tourists or “Pilgrims” typically don't need luxurious services, <b>it is enough for them to have</b> simple accommodation, food and <b>pilgrim packages that are not too expensive</b> and ought to cover significant costs.”
Q5 - “What is your opinion about the way the event was structured in terms of timeline? what aspects do you believe should have been altered or improved?”	(Allen, 2010)	“Event planners must account for <b>dislocation time and time management</b> in event schedules...”
Q6 - “In your opinion, do you think Lisbon was the appropriate location for an event of this magnitude? Why?”	(Wodecka <i>et al.</i> , 2016)	“According to a study about the motivations to attend WYD... <b>touristic motivations (exploration, culture, geographical interest, etc.)</b> ...”
Q7 - “Did you feel safe during the entire event? What measures were taken to ensure your safety? What would improve?”	(Gong <i>et al.</i> , 2020)	“Event organizers, police officers, stewards... apply predetermined measures based on the crowd's narrative...to reduce the risk of incidents involving different threats and <b>ensure the safety and security of attendees.</b> ”

Q8 - “What kind of technology was available to you by the event for personal use? did you find it beneficial? Why?”	(Garay, 2014)	“... to accommodate enormous crowds, it is also critical that mega events have an <b>IT infrastructure that makes it simpler for attendees to access internet systems and facilitate communication within a venue...</b> ”
Q9 - “What kind of technologies were you able to identify during the event? how did it improve your experience as an attendee? What else would you have included?”	(Capasa <i>et al.</i> 2022).	“Technology and mega events are becoming more and more entwined, with <b>technical developments having a major influence</b> on the scope, effect, and <b>experience</b> of these kinds of events.”
Q10 - “Do you believe that the event encouraged sustainability? What measures were taken to ensure a clean and ecological environment? Do you believe that these measures were effective? and do you consider this an important aspect?”	(Gulak-Lipka & Jagielski, 2020).	“...event managers and industries have been applying “event-greening” into mega-events and subsequently, sponsors and <b>participants began to choose organizations that focus on sustainable achievements.</b> ”
Q11- “In your opinion, in what ways did the event impact the local community? Pros and cons.”	(He <i>et al.</i> , 2020)	“Event planners need to make every effort to minimize (community) disruptions because more <b>regional collaboration</b> will result from a locally supported event.”
Q12 - “What was your preferred mode of transportation to go to the different event venues? Did you think the transportation modes available to you were well organized?”	(Ouariti & Jebrane, 2020).	“(Stakeholders) can make investments in public areas, <b>transportation</b> , and architecture to <b>increase an area's allure as a venue for events.</b> ”
Q13 - “What sponsors can you remember from the event? what is your perception towards those brands now?”	(Morgan <i>et al.</i> , 2020)	“Getting sponsors is essential to increasing an event's financial success... <b>organizations frequently decide to sponsor an event in exchange for visibility...</b> ”
Q14 - “The next WYD is in South Korea (2027), would you attend it? Why?”	(Carlson <i>et al.</i> , 2016).	“...the <b>destination's image</b> may operate as a significant factor in their prospective participation...”
Q15 - “Did the WYD committee reach out to you in order to find out about your experience? As an attendee, is this an important action to you?”	(Garbacz <i>et al.</i> , 2017).	“Obtaining feedback following an event is essential for <b>evaluating its overall success</b> or shortcomings...”

*Annex B – List of interviewees and their demographics.*

Interviewees	Gender	Age	Profession	Role in the event	Locality	About the interviewee
Participant 1	Female	21	Student	Pilgrim Host family Parish Volunteer	Massama (Sintra)	Host family to 2 French boys (16 and 17 years old)  Catechist for young children at her local church.
Participant 2	Female	23	Student	Pilgrim Parish Volunteer	Belas (Sintra)	Team leader of her volunteer group.
Participant 3	Female	22	Bar Hostess	Pilgrim Host family	Agueda (Aveiro)	Host family to 2 Venezuelan sisters (15 and 22 years old).  Stayed at EB 2,3 Jorge de Barros school.
Participant 4	Male	22	Student	Pilgrim Host Family	Algés (Oeiras)	Host family to a Filipino couple (both 19 years old).
Participant 5	Male	20	Phone Operator	Pilgrim Parish Volunteer	Sete Rios (Lisboa)	Rover Scout (clã)
Participant 6	Male	18	Student	Pilgrim Parish Volunteer	Olivais (Lisboa)	Stayed at Secondary School Eça de Queirós.
Participant 7	Female	21	Student	Central Volunteer Pilgrim	Montijo	Very active in her religious community.
Participant 8	Male	24	Engineer	Pilgrim	Spain (Madrid)	Stayed with a host family
Participant 9	Female	74	Retired (Secondary Teacher)	Host family Pilgrim	Olivais (Lisboa)	Host family to a polish couple.



						Wife to participant 10.  Very active in her religious community.
Participant 10	Male	75	Retired	Host Family Pilgrim	Olivais (Lisboa)	Husband to participant 9.

*Annex C - Synthesized version of table 1. (Pages 47-52).*

Key Factors	Recommendations
Community Satisfaction.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Organize missionary work and community-bonding activities.</li> <li>2. Motivate volunteers (orientation, bonding, recognition programs...)</li> <li>3. Provide staff with important information (</li> <li>4. Minimize disturbances to the local community (noise, crowded spaces, road blockages...)</li> <li>5. Encourage attendees to take personal safety measures.</li> <li>6. Partner with local businesses to prevent avoidance.</li> <li>7. Offer special perks to the local communities.</li> <li>8. Create opportunities for cross-cultural interactions.</li> <li>9. Allow staff to provide feedback.</li> </ol>
Technology Integration.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Promote past events and the current event online.</li> <li>2. Use online tools to provide real-time event information and live-streams.</li> <li>3. Ensure that the venue has a strong IT infrastructure.</li> <li>4. Have a strong presence and more personal engagement on social media.</li> <li>5. Invest in standard audio-visual systems and RFID technology.</li> <li>6. Invest new technology (drones, holograms...).</li> <li>7. Use online tools to log and analyze feedback data.</li> </ol>
Funds Acquisition	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Host fundraising events.</li> <li>2. Offer reasonable priced packages.</li> <li>3. Be mindful of the funds required (public expenditure).</li> <li>4. Offer price reductions on city transportation and cultural sites.</li> </ol>

<b>Logistics Management</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Collaborate and share event information with local places of worship.</li> <li>2. Consider traveling time, gate waiting times and crowd movement.</li> <li>3. Evaluate starting and ending times.</li> <li>4. Pick a destination with wide spaces, appropriate cultural sites and practical public transport networks.</li> <li>5. Put safety obligations into practice and train staff on safety procedures.</li> <li>6. Implement crowd control measures.</li> <li>7. Promote an intermodal city transportation strategy.</li> <li>8. Create parking spaces for vehicles and maximize capacity.</li> <li>9. Ensure sponsors have all the resources/services needed.</li> <li>10. Associate the sponsors' brands and the event's image.</li> </ol>
<b>Sustainability</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Promote public transportation and eco-friendly behaviors</li> <li>2. Implement some event-greening measures.</li> <li>3. Position recycling bins in key locations.</li> <li>4. Staff training.</li> <li>5. Collect uneaten sealed food.</li> <li>6. Promote sustainable modes of transportation.</li> </ol>
<b>Tourism</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pick an attractive destination (image, uniqueness, reputation...).</li> <li>2. Consider seasonality, touristic potential and touristic activities.</li> <li>3. Allow time for attendees to visit the destination beyond the event.</li> <li>4. Promote the destination and its culture in order to boost tourism.</li> </ol>