

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS IN REAL-LIFE CONTEXTS: THE CASE OF THE CURRICULAR UNIT OF EVENTS ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

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### ABSTRACT

The historical and intense relationship between events nowadays is of greater economic, social and cultural importance due to the increasing number of events and the exponential increase of tourism (Vieira, 2015). According to Getz and Page (2016), events have a strong connection to Tourism, with first articles addressing this issue appearing in the 70s. Events are an important motivator of tourism, and figure prominently in the development and marketing plans of most destinations (Getz, 2008).

In this context, it is essential that degrees in Tourism explore the relationship between events and tourism and provide students with a set of tools to handle the whole management process, planning and organization of events. This can lead to more tourists and funds, and consequently increase the destination competitiveness. On the other hand, given that education increasingly has to develop creativity, critical thinking and problem solving, while promoting communication and collaboration (Schleicher, 2016), it is essential to also reflect upon the teaching methodologies.

In order to achieve these objectives, the undergraduate degree in Tourism of the School of Technology and Management of Viseu has, since 2011, the curricular unit of Events Organization and Management, where learning is developed based on a project. Indeed, students plan, organize and execute an event. Students are challenged with the organization of an event during the semester and have several responsibilities such as choosing the type of event, deciding the programme, defining the aims of the event, date and location, preparing the budget and identifying the target audience.

With this challenge, students develop several key skills of a successful event organizer, such as: creativity, critical thinking, adaptability, flexibility, pro-activity, teamwork, work pressure, initiative, self motivation, communication, leadership, problem solving and openness to experience. Although students have full autonomy to choose the type of event, they are encouraged to be solidarity. In six years of teaching/learning by project the six different events held raised 4,620 Euros in favour of various causes. Through this form of teaching the students have worked in a real context, developing skills that will be essential in their future professional careers. On the other hand, they establish important contacts with potential employers, suppliers, organizations, among others.

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