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Learning from the past

The Saborea project and the rebranding of the madeira destination in the post-pandemic era

Aprender com o passado

O projeto Saborea e o rebranding do destino Madeira na era pós-pandémica

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Abstract

Since January 2020, a multisectoral hub of Madeiran institutions has been involved in the INTERREG project SABOREA Mac. The main objective of this regional cluster is to put Madeira on the map of food destinations. The timing could not have been worse: a global disaster that severely affects the tourism industry within the framework of an ongoing pandemic, which no one anticipated. There have been no studies focused on this area of activity and on the impact caused by a health crisis of this magnitude that until recently was completely unthinkable. Learning from the past is a way to respond immediately to the urgent need to re-evaluate the original strategy of the SABOREA consortium, delineated in a totally different conjuncture. In this paper, we analyse the path adopted by the organizers of the 5th Centenary of Madeira's discovery at the end of (World War 1) WW1. Facing the cumulated impact of the conflict and the Spanish flu, they successfully rebranded Madeira, a strategy that continues to shape the perception of the destination by today's visitors. This case study serves as a starting point for considering to what extent the SABOREA project still fits into the reality of the post-pandemic era.

Keywords: Destination Branding, Madeira, Food Heritage, COVID-9, SABOREA Mac, Spanish Flu

Resumo

Desde janeiro de 2020, um consórcio multissetorial de instituições madeirenses está envolvido no projeto INTERREG SABOREA Mac. O principal objetivo deste cluster regional é colocar a Madeira no mapa dos destinos gastronómicos. O momento não poderia ser pior: um desastre à escala mundial que afeta gravemente a indústria do turismo no âmbito de uma pandemia, que ninguém previu. Estamos hoje perante uma falta absoluta de estudos sobre o impacto de uma crise sanitária de tal magnitude, impensável há um ano, nesta área de atividade. Olhar para o passado é uma forma de responder à necessidade de reavaliar no imediato a estratégia delineada anteriormente pelo consórcio SABOREA numa conjuntura totalmente diferente. Neste artigo, analisaremos o plano de ação adotado pelos organizadores do V^o Centenário do Descobrimento da Madeira no final da Primeira Guerra Mundial. Perante os efeitos cumulados do conflito e da gripe espanhola, conceberam uma estratégia de “rebranding”, que continua, ainda hoje, a moldar a perceção do destino Madeira. Este caso de estudo serve como ponto de partida para reavaliar em que medida o projeto em análise ainda se adequa no contexto pós-pandémico. Realça o potencial de uma abordagem histórica para repensar em tempo útil como lidar com mudanças drásticas no mercado de turismo. Confirma também que as estratégias de branding baseadas em valores fortes, multissetorialidade e estratégias participativas podem ser muito resilientes, mesmo em situações extremas.

Keywords: Marca de Destino, Madeira, Património Alimentar, COVID-19, SABOREA Mac, Gripe Espanhola

1. Introduction

Like many destinations, Madeira is facing its greatest challenge ever as a tourism-based economy. After several decades of almost continuous growth, this autonomous region of Portugal must now deal with immediate consequences and long-term effects of the COVID-19 crisis. From one day to the next, the strategies to attract visitors to the island, defined before the confinement, became obsolete and suddenly needed to be re-evaluated to fit the new reality and avoid the decline of this sector of activity. The INTERREG project 'SABOREA Mac - Gastronomic and Sustainable Tourism Destinations' must respond to the same challenge. The diverse pool of Madeiran actors involved, together with partners of the Macaronesia area of Cooperation, began working in January 2020, just before the pandemic hit. Its main objective is to rebrand Madeira as a food destination.

Considering the total lack of research focusing on the consequences of a health crisis of this magnitude¹, it is difficult to evaluate whether the planned outputs will produce the outcomes and the long-term impact expected. Learning from the past is a way to respond immediately to the urgent need to reassess the strategy

established before the plague. A historical account related to a previous pandemic event in Madeira serves as a starting point for an effective answer to this question. We decided to analyse the precedent of the Spanish flu, which reached the archipelago during the last year of World War 1 (WW1). Just like today, the health crisis had a tremendous effect on the tourism industry. As we will see later, the rebranding of the destination, which motivated the organization of the 5th centenary of the discovery of Madeira (VCDM) in the winter of 1922/1923 was executed in a worst-case scenario. However, it was very successful, and its outcomes in the long term are still very strong. In the next pages, we will address the tourism industry in Madeira before the COVID-19 crisis and the effect of the pandemic on this area of activity. We will also present the project SABOREA Mac: the partners, the concept adopted, the objectives, the working plan, the timeline, the deliverables, the outcomes and the impacts expected. Then we will explain the methodology, in terms of sampling and analysing the historical sources used in our study. The results of the research allow us to evaluate to what extent the rebranding strategy designed before the pandemic is still relevant.

2. The COVID-19 Impact in Madeira

In the last decade, Madeira has gained a prominent position in the national and international tourist scene, asserting itself as a quality destination, constituting one of the main sources of revenue for the archipelago. This

sector had a weight of 26.6% in the regional GDP before the COVID-19 pandemic. It was directly responsible for 16.7% of the jobs, representing 15.9% of the total Gross Value

¹ It should be remembered that this paper was written in the summer of 2020. Since then, several studies of the COVID-19 impact on tourism on insular territories have been published.

Castanho et al., 2021a; Castanho et al., 2021b; Castanho et al., 2021c; Couto et al., 2021.

Added (GVA) generated in this Portuguese territory (DREM, 2015).

The number of visitors saw a constant growth during the 2010s, reaching approximately 7.5 million overnight stays (OS) in hotel establishments in 2017 – the highest score since records began – and one that would be significantly higher than 8 million if we consider the other types of facilities (DREM, 2019). According to the SRETC, all the performance indicators of tourist accommodation show that the sector had positive growth in the last decade - in guest flows, occupation, prices and profitability (SRETC, 2017). However, beginning in the summer of 2018, the industry presented signs of some slowdown, with slight drops in the monthly rates of guests and OS, which led to negative accumulated values for the year, -0.8 % and -0.3%, respectively. Total receipts (TR) for the year grew by 1.7% and lodging receipts (LR) increased by 1.9%. even so, the annual Revenue per Available Room (RevPAR) decreased by 1.4% (SRTC, 2019). The provisional statistics for 2019 confirm that the sector is suffering a progressive decline, which is evident in the following data: -0.7% in guests, -2.6% in OS, -4.4% in TR, -4.0% in LR, and -6.6% in RevPAR (SRETC, 2020a).

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. The Regional Government of Madeira was quick

to implement measures to limit passengers and crews at airports, cease flights from countries with active community transmission, and suspend the docking of cruises and yachts. An Alert Situation was soon announced, decreeing mandatory quarantines for anyone who arrived in the territory and the social isolation of persons infected (SRETC, 2020b). Despite all these measures, the first case detected in the Region occurred on March 17, followed by a few more at a very controlled pace. At the end of April, there were only 86 individuals who tested positive and 43 recovered, increasing respectively to 90 and 76 one month later. A few more contaminations were identified since then, but up to 03/09/2020, no deaths by COVID-19 were recorded².

With all the restrictions imposed, the tourism sector suffered a huge blow, with the principal statistical indicators (guests and OS) registering extremely high levels of cancelled reservations (DREM, 2020a), corresponding to a strong contraction in terms of TR, LR and RevPar compared to the same period of 2019 (DREM, 2020b). The inoperability of this area of activity during two months of stoppage represented, in itself, a direct drop of about 4.4% of the regional GDP (SRETC, 2020b; Figure 1). Considering the growing fear of a 2nd pandemic wave on the global scale, an improvement is unlikely in the near future.

² Daily reports of the epidemic COVID-19. Website of the Regional Secretariat of Health and Civil Protection. <https://covidmadeira.pt/tipo/relatorios/> [accessed 08/09/2020].

Figure 1 – Avenida Arriaga (Funchal) during the confinement, 18/05/2020 (AJMS)



3. Presentation of the SABOREA Mac Project

The project SABOREA Mac explores a new paradigm of tourism, at least in regard to Madeira. It is the first time that a destination brand is designed to specifically target the food heritage of this Portuguese territory. Until now, “Gastronomy” has been presented by the local leaders as a merely complementary resource (SRETC, 2017). Consequently, there was never any promotion strategy that focused on this sector by itself (Almeida & Garrod, 2017), even though some scholars currently consider this a promising niche (Almeida, 2016).

In recent years, the interest in local cuisines has been enhanced by a real change of paradigm in the heritage arena initiated by the 2003 UNESCO Convention of the Intangible

Cultural Heritage (Bortolotto, 2011). Folk customs are now understood in a more constructivist manner, as a transmission and a creative process at the same time (Silva, 2016a; Silva, 2016b). Today, a growing number of actors believe that innovation is an appropriate way to deal with this kind of legacy (Barata et al., 2017), especially food traditions, opening the door to conciliate preservation and its use as development resources (Silva, 2016b). The SABOREA Mac project embraces this new trend, following the quintuple helix model, one of the last n-tuples helices concepts (Park, 2014). Recently, the interest for this approach has increased significantly in tourism studies (Björk, 2014; Sumarto, 2020), and in

the heritage arena, too (Barata et al., 2017; Provenzano et al., 2018). Currently, it involves a collaborative effort between actors belonging not only to government, academia and business areas, as is the case in the original triple helix model (Etzkowitz et al., 2000), but also to media, culture and civil society, which constitute the fourth helix (Carayannis et al., 2009). There is some discussion about the exact nature of this new component. Nonetheless, its importance as a driver of innovation is very consensual (Ivanova, 2014; Carayannis et al., 2014; Nordberg, 2015; Kriz et al., 2018). Regional development is often the main objective targeted (Kolehmainen et al., 2016; Lew et al., 2018; Hasche et al., 2019), as is the case here. The quintuple helix model is just an upgrade aiming at high sustainability (Carayannis et al., 2012), facing the challenge of the socio-ecological transition, assumed as a priority by the European Commission a decade ago (EC, 2009).

A regional cluster that includes a diverse pool of actors was constituted. Represented were actors from:

- a. academy: University of Madeira (UMA);
- b. government: Secretaria Regional de Turismo e Cultura (SRTC); Direção Regional de Turismo da Madeira (DRTM);
- c. commerce and industry: Associação Comercial e Industrial do Funchal - Câmara de Comércio e Indústria da Madeira (ACIF-CCIM);
- d. cultural heritage arena: Agência de Promoção da Cultura Atlântica (APCA Madeira), Associação de Casas do

Povo da Região Autónoma da Madeira (ACAPORAMA).

All the partners participate in the task to design, implement, and disseminate the destination brand 'SABOREIA-Madeira' and gastronomic routes based on this trademark. As a collective, they also collaborate with similar groups from five other regions affiliated with the project, belonging to the Macaronesian area:

- a. Azores (Portugal);
- b. Canaries (Spain);
- c. Cape Verde;
- d. Senegal;
- e. Mauritania.

The Macaronesia is not intended here in a strictly biogeographical point of view as the EC leaders usually do³. With Cape Verde and the two other African associates offer a quite different perspective. It is understood, in this case, as a space of interlaced food traditions, the cuisine of each local cluster being an original composition of shared ingredients and techniques, resulting from exchanges in the 'longue durée' between Macaronesia, Europe, Africa, the New World and even more distant parts of the planet⁴. In this point of view, this partnership embraces a new paradigm, which transcends the principle of geographical and cultural continuity, inherited from the nineteenth century. In itself, it represents an innovation in the context of the food heritage arena, still often oriented by the anachronistic premises of methodological nationalism⁵.

Although each regional cluster is responsible for developing its own promotion strategy, all the institutions involved share the umbrella mark, 'SABOREA Mac' The inspiration was

3 2002/11/EC: Commission Decision of 28 December 2001, art. 1 and 2. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32002D0011&from=EN>. [accessed 05/06/2020].

4 Cf. the case study of Madeira (Silva 2018a).

5 Silva 2018b. About this concept, see Beck (2006).

‘SABOREA Spain’, a national label established in 2010, sponsored by Turespaña⁶. Lanzarote was part of this project as a founding member⁷. This island in the archipelago of the Canaries was also a pioneer in reducing the environmental impact of holidaymakers, in response to the exhaustion of the ‘beach and sun’ model adopted before (Valls et al., 2004).

From the beginning, SABOREA was not only a way to rebrand the destination identity, but also an innovative manner of generating incomes for the good of host communities. The goal was to strengthen quality tourism, putting forward the local products by designing a unique offer based on gastronomy and vitiviculture. The main objective was to value old ways as a factor of distinction, launching initiatives to provide visitors with a gastro-sustainable experience. The partners involved were encouraged to map and promote culinary legacies and preserve the environment in their own territory. The dissemination of the brand is achieved through different media and social events related to food traditions. The same principles and strategy are now applied to extend the Lanzarote example of good practices to other regions of the MAC Cooperation Area, this time in a transnational way with the leadership of the Cabildo’s Council.

In each destination involved, the participants are committed to:

- a. generating a planning model for sustainable gastronomic tourism;
- b. creating gastro-sustainable routes;
- c. promoting and marketing the routes.

Gastronomy is not intended here simply as a fine-dining experience but, in a more holistic manner, as an intangible cultural heritage, valued as an environmentally friendly tourism resource based on food traditions. In 1996, the

World Commission for Culture and Development disseminated the idea that the concept of sustainability deals with much more than the ecological factor (WCCD, 1995). The current EU policies and the ONU 2030 agenda reflect this premise. The project SABOREA Mac recognizes the following variables, aptly considered as relevant by scholars of this study area, to conciliate holidaymaking with a humanistic perspective of development (Mowforth et al., 2016):

- a. ecological. As everybody knows, sustainability is about reducing the carbon footprint of human activity. This is at least, historically speaking, the first meaning of this concept, being intended since the Brundtland report of the World Commission on Environment and Development as a virtuous relation between economy and environment (WCED, 1987). Madeira being an island, favouring local products is the most efficient way to minimize the impact of imports (Sousa & Mota, 2020);
- b. economical, with a fair distribution of the income generated by the gastro-sustainable routes, benefitting rural areas less visited by tourists;
- c. social and cultural, based on the authenticity of the destination.

The authenticity intended here is not of an essentialist nature or simply the contrary of commoditization (Bortolotto, 2013; Silva, 2016b). In this case, it is openly assumed as a collaborative construction, not grounded exclusively on the academic outlook and the governmental agenda. The guest communities will participate in the inventory of local food legacies and their perspective will be considered in the design of a director plan and

⁶ <http://www.tastingspain.es> [accessed 04/09/2020].

⁷ <http://saborealanzarote.org> [accessed 04/09/2020].

the creation of gastro-sustainable routes by the mediation of “Casas do Povo” and a “Cooking Collective”. This new entity can be defined as a third space, associating professionals involved in the restaurant industry – and even farmers – with a gastronomic offer based on an autochthonous cuisine, favouring proximity and quality. Products and preparations consensually valued as ‘traditional’ will be selected by them to support tourism experiences, following a set of criteria corresponding to three keywords:

- a. Landscape: promoting local products with low ecological impact;
- b. Culture: preferring products and preparations with social meaning as identity markers for guest communities;
- c. History: preferring products and preparations rooted in the endogenous culinary system of by-gone days.

In the end, the focus on sustainability should allow the destinations involved in the project to embrace the ascending paradigm of the slow tourism (Valls et al., 2019), travellers having the

opportunity to incorporate the spirit of the places they visit more deeply.

On September 2, 2019, a preliminary encounter of the regional cluster was held at Funchal, and a Madeiran delegation met the international partners at Lanzarote on November 25. The implementation of the working plan began in January 2020 as scheduled with the edition of a book presenting regional recipes collected by researchers and students of the UMA (Mota et al., 2021). Just a few weeks later, the team abruptly stopped its activity for several months due to the general confinement imposed by governmental authorities to prevent the propagation of the COVID-19 virus. The SABOREA project restarted slowly with a first public event, on June 29. To avoid the risks of contamination, the format chosen was an on-line webinar broadcast dedicated to the food traditions of Madeira⁸. The tasks programmed in 2020 were then conditioned by the evolution of the sanitary situation in the archipelago. The project was supposed to end in the last month of that year, but because of the pandemic, it was carried over into 2021.

4. Methodology and Limitations

In 2009, the European Commission had already predicted the possibility of humanity being affected by a major pandemic crisis in the next decade (EC, 2009). Before that, many scholars had highlighted the fact that mass tourism contributes to the spread of diseases (Mowford et al., 2016). Some authors had previously studied to what extent extreme situations such as natural cataclysms and epidemics would

condition the choice of Madeira as a destination (Pão et al., 2014). However, what the word “extreme” means today is very different from 2019. There still is a lack of research about the consequences of a pandemic event of this magnitude in this industry, which is presently one of the collateral victims most affected by the fear of COVID-19⁹. If the immediate impact of the virus on this kind of business is already

⁸ 29/06/2020, webinar “Tradições alimentares da Macaronésia: contributos para a sua inventariação e estudo na RAM”. <https://fvczxb.s.cld.pt> [accessed 16/08/2020].

⁹ Cf. Licinho Cunha (ex-Portuguese Secretary of State of Tourism), communication at the Webinar “COVID-19 e turismo: e daqui em diante?”, Escola Superior de Hotelaria e Turismo do Estoril, 23/06/2020.

evident, the long-term effects are uncertain. Contrary to other crises suffered by modern economies during the last decades on a cyclical base, no one predicated a scenario so dark. In this particular case, contingency plans had to be written from scratch. As tourism is an emerging area of study, there is a lack of previous lessons to fully learn what could help in adjusting the supply efficiently to an apparently totally new pattern of demand. In this context, the definition of branding strategies to promote a destination is a very challenging task.

Researchers in social sciences dedicate attention to the consistency of the facts they choose to explore, to the way they have been collected, and to what extent they are representative. Working with pre-existent series, historians accept their sources just as they are. Discontinuous by nature, they offer less accurate insight than the material normally used in tourism studies to understand present phenomena. However, the documents deposited in archives are there, in generally waiting untouched a long time before arousing the interest of scholars. In addition, the sciences dealing with the past treat a very large thematic panoply, normally not caring whether they are pertinent to the current demand of the modern society or not. So, when intelligence is urgently needed to face sudden challenges, we can almost always count on relevant data, and

often prior investigations, about issues which never prodded other disciplinary perspectives before. Indeed, when leaders look desperately for a direction to orient action and cannot afford to wait for undertaking fieldwork, archive documents are there ready to be used. Previous research and even unstudied sources can offer immediate answers for a timely reaction in the context of an unexpected crisis. In this case, we will explore testimonies of the Spanish flu. This pandemic drastically affected the hospitality industry of the island one century ago. To fight back, the local stakeholders delineated a very successful strategy to relaunch the destination, which in the long term, would definitively turn Madeira into a tourism-based economy. The trademark adopted on this occasion – the ‘Pearl of the Atlantic’ as it was called – is still widespread today. The newspaper *Diário da Madeira* (DM) was an active part of this process as we will see later, which is why one of us (AJMS) consulted all the editions of this Funchal newspaper from the first mentions of the epidemic in the archipelago (1918) to the 5th centenary celebration of the discovery of Madeira (winter 1922-1923), which is the birthplace of the new brand. Out of a total of approximately 1500 daily publications conserved at the Regional Archives of Madeira (ABM), all the articles related to sanitary crises and tourism issues were considered. In the next part, we present the analysis of this assemblage¹⁰.

5. Findings

The case study of Madeira is very special. This is one of the oldest destinations in the world. The main island has received foreigners since

the early times of the colonization. Some scholars consider these first visitors as true tourists (Silva, 1985), others do not (Silva,

¹⁰ It was not possible to list the references of the DM editions consulted in the Findings chapter to respect the word limits imposed by the Herança's

guidelines. However, they are included in the original version of this paper available here: <https://8da4ky.s.cld.pt>.

1994). Nevertheless, everybody agrees that the harbour of Funchal already hosted numerous holidaymakers in the 19th century, mostly in stopovers and for medical reasons at the beginning, but increasing only for leisure (Silva, 1994; Câmara, 2002).

During the same period, the inhabitants suffered several plagues fostered by the growing number of individuals travelling around the world: scarlatina (1806¹¹, 1814¹², 1825¹³, and 1864¹⁴), variola (1801, 1815, 1858, 1859, 1870, 1873, 1907¹⁵), measles (1816, 1884¹⁶), cholera (1856¹⁷, 1910¹⁸), gripe (1884), and meningitis (1904¹⁹). It is relevant to note that despite this succession of epidemic episodes, the number of foreigners sojourning at Madeira increased exponentially at this stage (Rodrigues, 2019). Last but not least, the Spanish flu (*gripe espanhola*, also named *influenza* or *pneumonica*) reached Madeira in the autumn 1918²⁰. On the mainland, the first wave started in May or June 1918, and there was a 2nd one, the most lethal, from the end of the summer to November, and a third, less mortiferous in the spring 1919 (Sobral et al., 2018; Costa, 2020).

The DM mentions the appearance of this disease in Portugal only in June, already calling it “*Gripe espanhola*” in another article a month after. As today, quarantining was the principal strategy for fighting a virus back then. From the end of September, some papers mentioned the arrival of several crews suspected of being infected, who were immediately secluded. In October, the District Governor took drastic measures to avoid the epidemic in Madeira, which included the shutdown of the harbour to

ships except for food supply and later the opening of an isolation facility for the dockers. But at this point, it was just a precaution in response to the news from different parts of the world attesting to the fast spread of the plague. Optimistic, despite the never-ending war and the expected health crisis, a group of Madeiran entrepreneurs announced the statutes of the future *Club de Turismo da Madeira* (CTM), tourism already being seen locally as a real industry at this stage. Some even believed that with some public investments, it could soon be the main economic activity of the island. Counting on the unconditional support of the DM, the new association purposed to promote the archipelago abroad, including through a rebranding operation. It would give continuity to the development programme based on this industry started by the Junta Agrícola do Distrito Autónomo do Funchal in 1915 (Vieira, 2014). Unfortunately, both organizations were short-lived.

Meantime, the epidemic spread in different areas of Funchal, mainly affecting the poorest, among them, the inhabitants of Monte. Most of the men of this parish were drivers of the famous toboggan wicker sledges, which were heavily affected by the decline of tourism during WW1, aggravated by the quarantine. In January 1919, the harbour was opened to travellers again, despite the progression of the flu in the north of the island and Porto Santo. The epidemic would fade in the next weeks, and soon, the health crisis definitively ended, after an estimated total of 790 deaths (Sobral, 2018). It was in this context that a group of journalists working at the DM resurrected the idea of

¹¹ Gourlay, 1811.

¹² Silva et al., 1921.

¹³ Idem.

¹⁴ Idem.

¹⁵ Idem.

¹⁶ Idem.

¹⁷ Grabham, 1870. Sarmento, A. A., “Os cinco seculos da vida madeirense”, ABM, DM, 2483, 02/07/1919, p.1.

¹⁸ Dhiman et al., 1992.

¹⁹ Silva et al., 1921.

²⁰ Teixeira, N., “Relatório sobre as duas epidemias de gripe em 1918, -a “espanhola”, em junho e julho, e a “pneumónica”, de agosto a dezembro”, ABM, Diário de Notícias, 13727, 07/12/1919, p.1.

celebrating the 5th centenary of the discovery of Madeira (VCDM), which had been announced previously. The intention was to earn support for the emerging cause of the regional autonomy, and at the same time, to promote the island as an international destination. The CTM, which had its first meeting at the beginning of February did not take part in this initiative. A few months later, the DM published a new call to prepare several cultural and recreative activities within the framework of the VCDM on the 2nd of July 1919, the official anniversary of the pioneers' landing. Some of the scheduled events actually happened, however, the audience was exclusively local. The centenary was also celebrated in Brazil and by Madeirans studying at the University of Coimbra. The DM dedicated the whole first page to this commemoration, lamenting the lack of support of the economic agents, who did not see the business opportunity. Again, no mention is made of the participation of the CTM. An article published the next day went further, referring specifically the VCDM as a way to attract foreigners, promoting the natural beauty and cultural richness of the insular territory. Such initiatives were certainly needed. The decline of Madeira as destination would soon be accentuated by the closing of casinos, previously frequented by numerous travellers, and fake news in the international press about epidemics and earthquakes. In the winter of 1921/1922, the leisure steamers transporting American tourists were again making frequent stopovers at Funchal. Unfortunately, after few days, most of them left the island headed to the Mediterranean.

In the spring, the Portuguese aviators Carlos Gago Coutinho and Artur de Sacadura Cabral, crossed the South Atlantic by air for the first time, marking the centennial of Brazil's independence and testing an innovative navigation device. The international buzz around this prolonged accomplishment gave

the idea to the DM's reporters to commemorate the discovery of Madeira again. The objective was both political – to enhance the visibility of the regionalist cause – and economic, to promote this insular territory as a real destination instead of a mere stopover. The plan was to take advantage of the venue of Canary islanders, attracted by previous cultural exhibitions of Madeiran organizations in the Spanish archipelago, and other foreigners, numerous before the war, to celebrate the end of the year at Funchal.

The staging of the regional history would show them that the island, known up to that point for its healthy climate and picturesque views, should also deserve the interest of the visitors for its glorious past. The uncertainty about the exact date of the discovery was invoked to legitimate the repetition of the commemoration. In August, some of the most prominent intellectuals of Madeira – the so-called *Geração do Cenáculo* – joined the DM's reporters to plan the first meeting of the VCDM's promoters, inviting members of the governmental, military and ecclesiastical organizations to participate, and local entrepreneurs too. Islanders studying in the mainland's universities would participate later.

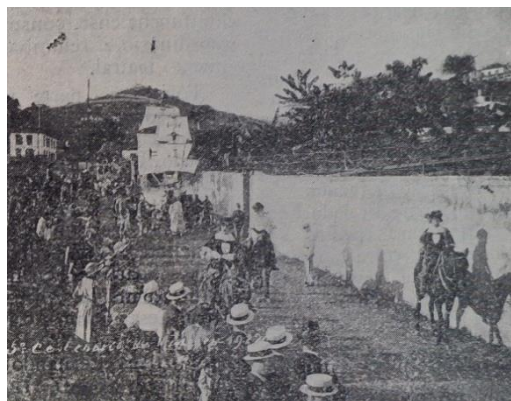
The meeting had a large audience. All those present agreed to create several executive commissions, including one to receive foreigners expected at this occasion. Another one was charged with writing to newspapers and appealing to the mediation of the official representatives abroad, attracting visitors from the mainland Portugal, and from the Canary Islands, France, Germany, England and America. The strategy adopted, which would turn Madeira into a tourism-based economy in the long term was simple: organize theatrical performances, an exhibition and a parade (F., 1924) alluding to the past of the island, at the same time promoting the local products (wine,

sugar, embroidery, wicker crafts, vegetables, fruits and flowers) within the framework of an agro-industrial exposition. It would include stands of food and drinks (“barracas”). The local gastronomy, however, had only a secondary role within the framework of this innovative strategy. Sports competition, and a historical ball were scheduled, too, and a DM reader suggested including folk dances interpreted by actual peasants (*baile de vilões*) in the programme of the event. The idea of illuminating the downtown had as a precedent the commemoration of the aerial crossing of the South Atlantic a few months before. The New Year's Eve would be celebrated with an unforgettable fireworks display, as were the Portuguese airmen earlier. The Reid's hotels and a few rich families had the habit of privately organizing this kind of performance at the

occasion of Réveillon. It would now become a public initiative, intended as a tourist attraction, being the charge of the *Comissão de Festas da Cidade* later (Vieira, 1999). The whole experience would convert the foreigners into ambassadors of Madeira in their own countries. In the next weeks, the flow of news, opinions and exhortations to participate was incessant, most of them on the front page. The local businessmen individually supported the VCDM with substantial donations, with funding by the municipality of Funchal, as well.

According to the DM, the whole operation was a success. The group from the Canary Islands arrived first, on December 28, 1922, a day before the beginning of the centenary, which ended on January 4, 1923, with the allegorical parade (F., 1924; Figure 2).

Figure 2 – The allegoric parade of the VCDM, 04/01/1923 (F., 1924)



A monograph edited by the propaganda commission, specifically dedicated to the celebration, was presented in public during the opening day²¹. Nonetheless, the *Elucidário Madeirense*²² will be the pinnacle of the marketing strategy adopted by the organizers.

This editorial project had been started a few years earlier, some extracts being published by the DM in 1920. Dealing with a very broad set of issues, the book included for the first time exhaustive and accurate information about the cultural/natural heritage and the history of

²¹ “Quinto centenario do descobrimento da Madeira”, DM, 3493, 31/12/1922, p.1; “As festas históricas do quinto centenario do descobrimento da Madeira”, DM, 3494, 03/01/1923, p.1; “V centenario do descobrimento da Madeira”, DM, 3501, 11/01/1922, p.1.

²² “Quinto centenario do descobrimento da Madeira”, DM, 3492, 30/12/1922, p.1; “Quinto centenario do descobrimento da Madeira”, DM, 3493, 31/12/1922, p.1.

Madeira. This work, which followed the higher academic standards of this period, was rewarded with a very favourable critic in the literary supplement of the Times journal (LSTJ) in February. The most famous newspapers of England, which had only published the photograph of the VCDM celebration earlier, now dedicated an entire article to the regional encyclopaedia, establishing the link with the

commemoration. The event was also recorded in a film exhibited in the same year in Lisbon, Tenerife and Brazil, being again reported by the LSTJ (Góis, 2015). Madeira, which depended on the exportation of wine to survive for several centuries, in the following decades would initiate a new cycle driven by tourism, which is still today the base of the local economy (João, 1999).

6. Discussion

The media buzz around the VCDM started a new era of the Madeira destination. It has been known internationally as the “Pearl of the Atlantic” since then (João, 1999), a designation probably inspired by the title of a tourism guide printed in 1914 (Jardim, 1914). Until 1978, it was the official brand of the island (Carvalho et al., 2017). The variant of its Portuguese translation, “Pérola do Oceano”, was already alluded to in an article of the DM published in 1920. The switch from “Oceano” to “Atlantic” occurred a few months before in a transcription of the daily ‘*O Século*’. The catchy name was used in several papers in regard to the centenary later, including one in the *Revista de Turismo* (Olavo, 1923), being sometimes replaced by “Flôr do Atlântico”. Besides the analogy, the idea that Madeira is a garden is already there, highlighting nature as a very enjoyable view sought after by visitors. The new brand also incorporated the cultural and historical factors, valued for the first time as attractions.

Before the VCDM, we have numerous writings related to the tourism experience and describing the customs of the inhabitants of Madeira, but never a collective effort to promote the destination openly. Normally, the purpose of the writers was to share their adventure and useful intelligence with future

travellers (Vieira, 1999). There were only a few private attempts to advertise Madeira abroad (Câmara, 2002; Marujo, 2013). Years earlier, some English businessman, owners of hotels in Funchal, sometimes financed propaganda campaigns in their homeland to attract compatriots to the island. But never before was there a trans-sectorial effort to create a new branding, supported by an ambitious strategy, starting with the study of the cultural/natural heritage and history, the results being disseminated to a large audience in different formats of media and staged in public events.

As the SABOREA Mac project today, the VCDM's organization involved not only the hospitality lobby but also other active forces of the Madeiran society. Both initiatives are based on strong values: in the first case, patriotism at the service of the regional cause and in the second, sustainability as way to guarantee a bright future for the whole planet. Once more, the strategy of rebranding will have to be implemented in a period of pandemic that severely affects the tourism industry. However, as we see occurring before, the emerging sector demonstrated it was resilient, expanding consistently despite the adversity. There is no reason to believe that the same will not happen after the COVID-19 crisis. Considering this precedent, we should not ask ourselves *if* but

when the Madeiran destination will flourish again.

There is another aspect which deserves some reflection. Despite some negative episodes related to conjectural causes (Almeida, 2016), the celebration of the VCDM inaugurated a long-term growth of the tourism locally. In fact, the formula invented by the promoters continues to mould the experiences proposed to visitors today. The idea that the endogenous culture is a resource, equally as important as the untouched nature and the paradisiacal climate, is still consensual.

Since then, wine, sugar, embroidery and wicker crafts staged during the allegorical parade of the closing day has been the subject of intensive heritagization, following the same strategy to turn holidaymakers into ambassadors of regional products abroad²³. In fact, the goods promoted in 1922/1923 continue to be the key icons of the local identity. Now, some of them are even the object of annual celebrations dedicated solely to them, as is the case of the Madeira wine²⁴ and the flowers²⁵, which gives rise to a harvest festival of their own. *Barracas* reappear cyclically along the promenade of the Avenida Arriaga, too²⁶. At

the same location, the dances of *vilões* entertain the foreigners²⁷, who come to be delighted with the Christmas streetlights of Funchal²⁸ and the fireworks of New Year's Eve²⁹. In fact, since the abandonment of 'Pearl of the Atlantic' as the official brand in 1978, we have witnessed a quick succession of new trademarks (Carvalho et al., 2017). However, the most popular experiences which correspond to these new denominations are not so different from those offered to the audience of the VCDM a century ago.

The traditional cuisine is still not seen today as an attraction in itself in regard to the governmental strategies of economic development. From this point of view, the SABOREA Mac project is an authentic revolution in the true meaning of the word. It represents, at once, a change of paradigm, considering the food culture as an item of primary importance, and a coming of full circle, back to the principles at the base of the brand 'Pearl of the Atlantic': an innovative, multisectoral, participative approach, and a study of the local heritage being fully valued as a tourism resource.

7. Conclusion

Having in mind the COVID-19 pandemic effect on the tourism industry, Francesca Romagosa (2020, p. 690) recently wrote: "The crisis is so far-reaching and has developed so suddenly

and unexpectedly that it has become very difficult to make predictions that are even slightly realistic. [...], the only certainty right now is uncertainty". Readjusting branding

²³ Visit Madeira. <http://www.visitmadeira.pt/pt-pt/a-madeira/produtos-regionais> [accessed 20/06/2020].

²⁴ Visit Madeira. <http://www.visitmadeira.pt/pt-pt/o-que-fazer/eventos/pesquisa/festa-do-vinho-madeira> [accessed 20/06/2020].

²⁵ Visit Madeira. <http://www.visitmadeira.pt/pt-pt/o-que-fazer/eventos/pesquisa/festa-da-flor> [accessed 20/06/2020].

²⁶ "A nossa preocupação não é vender, é dar a conhecer o nosso produto". <https://www.esev.ipv.pt/dacomunicacao/index.php/2019/02/28/madeira/> [accessed 20/06/2020].

²⁷ Visit Madeira. <http://www.visitmadeira.pt/pt-pt/a-madeira/tradicoes-regionais> [accessed 20/06/2020].

²⁸ Visit Madeira. <http://www.visitmadeira.pt/en-gb/news/detalhe-noticias/new-christmas-lights-delight-funchal?Action=1&M=NewsV2&PID=18253> [accessed 20/06/2020].

²⁹ Visit Madeira. <http://www.visitmadeira.pt/en-gb/madeira/did-you-know-that/fireworks-display-tradition> [accessed 20/06/2020].

strategies in such conditions is a true challenge. The analysis of historical data demonstrates that the hospitality sector faced a similar, or even worse, situation in Madeira a century ago. This case study gives some hope to the stakeholders of this area of activity today. First, the destination proved to be resilient to severe epidemiological disasters. Secondly, the VCDM's precedent and the appearance of the trademark 'Pearl of the Atlantic' show that the concept designed before the beginning of the plague by the SABOREA Mac consortium is not necessarily obsolete. The experience of the centenary demonstrated that a branding

grounded on strong values, supported by the civil society and based on scientific research, can resist adverse conjunctures. With some adjustments, it had good chances to still be suitable in the post-pandemic era. From this point of view, the path followed by the project is sustainable *per se*. Indeed, resilience and adaptability are currently seen as a fundamental basis of sustainability (Romagosa, 2020). Even strategies designed to promote the destination must be sufficiently flexible and robust, remaining effective even during major crises such as the one the tourism industry faces today.

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