

Paradoxes of festival tourism: An analysis of the local impacts of Eurovision Song Contest in Turin

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Long Abstract

Festivals and other cultural events are usually considered essential levers for urban promotion and development. The positive effects on the local economic fabric are at the center of numerous studies and refer to a wide range of events (large or small; folkloric or globalized; entertaining as in the case of performing-art events or disclosing as in the case of science-led festivals). Among the main positive effects that cities obtain from being the venue for these events, urban image, tourist attractiveness and internationalization, and economic turnover are the most highlighted aspects. Concerning more significant events (such as the Olympics and the International Expos) or other specialized events (such as sector and sports events), festivals and other cultural events have the advantage of being much more inclusive and embedded within the territory that hosts them.

However, festival-based urban politics also present gray areas and ambiguities, which suggest adopting a critical approach. Cultural events can mobilise relevant shares of people (tourists, visitors, volunteers, professionals) and catalyze the global attention of an even wider audience. Event media exposure, in particular, is often the primary stimulus that induces cities to apply as venues, quite independently from estimating the expected outcomes and risks for the local communities. In that sense, we can say that events may have a "hypnotic" effect on urban policymakers (Dansero and Segre, 2002) that consider them a win-win option to promote the urban image, support the local economy, increase the cultural offer and produce benefits in a diffused way. Nevertheless, let's take a medium-term territorial perspective, which considers what happens in the territories at a suburban scale (urban districts and neighborhoods) and extends the analysis some years after the end of the event. The positive effects may be smaller than expected. Otherwise, some uneven dynamics, both positive and negative, may also emerge. The paper discusses this paradoxical dimension of festival tourism from both a theoretical and practical perspective, presenting the results of an extended quali-quantitative analysis of the effects produced by the Eurovision Song Contest Festival on the city of Turin and its neighborhoods.

The city of Turin is an interesting example of how the politics of events has evolved. After the success of the 2006 Olympic Games, the city government's adoption of decisions to promote growth and development through the lever of major events experienced a further

positive phase, which lasted for the next 5-10 years, fueled mainly by major cultural events. In 2007, for example, the MITO Settembre Musica International Festival was reconfigured and, in 2012, the Torino Jazz Festival was added to the already rich calendar of major cultural events in the city, including: the Torino Film Festival (inaugurated in 1982), the Salone del Libro (1988), Artissima (1994), the Salone del Gusto (1996) and Terra Madre (2004). Ten years after the Games, however, the choice to elevate the local politics of events and tourist promotion to the prime mover of the city's socio-economic development is accused by some local stakeholders of favoring the more central and attractive neighborhoods to the detriment of the impoverished suburbs. Even in public opinion, large events ceased to be considered always necessary and positive investments. The change of perspective translates into a "fluctuating" political season, suspended between the desire to replicate the success of the great Olympic event of the early 2020s Winter Olympic Games and the fear (as in the case of the renouncement of the 2026 Winter Olympics) of exposing the city to risks challenging to predict. An inner conflict between the option of maintaining the status quo and the ambition to return "pyrotechnic" (Belligni and Ravazzi, 2013) and "stratospheric" (Ferlandino and Rota, 2022).

On the one hand, the city administration expresses the need for programming more oriented toward "soft" cultural events capable of generating sustainable, fair, and distributed benefits. On the other hand, it obtained the designation of two major sporting events (the Nitto ATP Finals 2021-2025 and the 2025 Winter Universiade) and the 66th edition of the Eurovision Song Contest music competition, which is a cultural event, therefore considered more respectful of the pre-existing context (Ponzini, 2022) although capable of creating a widespread atmosphere of enthusiasm. The analysis that follows tries to relate the "Eurovision effect" that emerges from reading the local mainstream press (which does not take into account the alternative press) with the data available on the economic and perceptive dimension of the event.

The visitor experience communicated through people's comments and social media, and the narrative of the local, national, and international press played an important role in fueling the atmosphere of enthusiasm that accompanied the Eurovision Song Contest (Turin, 10-14 May 2022). Consistent with the Rolling Stone Italia journal, Turin responded very well to the call of Eurovision despite the stereotype of industrial, grey, and unattractive city (Santià, 2022). Local newspapers were even more generous, conveying the idea that at any level of the local society, opinions on the vent were only positive. For La Stampa, it was an "international event but also and above all a collective celebration that brought the people of Turin back to experiencing their most beloved park, filling it with cultural content and music" (Basilici Manini and Molino, 2022). "Euphoria", "emotion", "adrenaline", "energy", "creative noise" are the nouns most frequently used to describe the festival. Particularly appreciated was the choice to organize numerous free-of-charge performing events and round tables at the Eurovision Village in the Valentino Park. However, diseconomies and inconveniences caused by traffic, congestion, and waste were also present. Therefore, this paper aims to verify how much the positive perception of Eurovision 2022 corresponds to the data and analyzes produced by local agencies and observatories in the area.

At the end of January 2023, the Turin Chamber of Commerce communicated the results of its investigation carried out in collaboration with the Piedmont Cultural Observatory (OCP). From the data provided, we obtain the perception of an event that had important economic repercussions, especially from the point of view of the media impact and the return of image for the city (Table 1).

Table 1 - Eurovision Song Contest economic outcomes. Source: elaborations by Turin Chamber of Commerce(2022)

	euro mln
Direct Expenses	11,0
Indirect Expenses	7,8
Induced Expenses	4,0
Overall Impact	66,0

Of approximately 89 million euros estimated by OCP as an overall impact, 66 million represent the equivalent advertising value of the media exposure the city has benefited from in the press, web and radio-television broadcasts. However, the effects that are estimated to have had an impact on the territory due to the direct expenditure of visitors (11.0 million euros) and the indirect (7.8 million) and induced (4.0 million) benefits of the event are more limited: overall 22.8 million - equal to 2.4 times the value of the investment supported directly by the City of Turin (Turin Chamber of Commerce, 2022).

Concerning the number of spectators (Figure 2), the survey returns 63 thousand seats filled on the occasion of the 9 events organized at the Pala Olimpico and an audience of 220 thousand people at the Eurovision Village (128 thousand if the number of tickets offered is subtracted to sponsors and delegations and spectators present at more than one event).

Table 2 - Distribution of the public by event and origin. OCP processing on questionnaire data and secondary sources. Source: Turin Chamber of Commerce (2022)

	Pala Olimpico Visits	Eurovision Village Visits	Visits to Pala Olimpico and Eurovision Village	Total unique Visits
Torino Municipality and Province	16.051	63.324	(9.267)	70.108
Rest of Piemonte	2.540	4.632	(737)	6.435
Rest of Italy (13.641	20.411	(7.027)	27.025
Foreign	10.632	21.110	87.060)	24.682
Total	42.864	109.477	24.091	128.250

Despite low tourist expenses, the festival was able to attract many visitors and generate a good return for the visibility and tourist offer of the city. In this regard, more than 70% of the tourists who participated in the OCP survey declared that they had used the Eurovision opportunity to visit at least one city museum, 52% said they were in Turin for the first time and the 59% expressed an interest in returning to revisit the city in the future.

These data are also confirmed in the analysis on Eurovision conducted by the Turin and Province Tourism Observatory in collaboration with the Department of Languages, Foreign Literature and Modern Cultures of the University of Turin. Although the sample of subjects interviewed is different, in this case, too, there is a strong appreciation of the event and the city: the adjectives "beautiful" and "elegant" associated with the city frequently emerge from

the questionnaires of Italian visitors; in those of foreigners, the adjectives "warm", "friendly", "surprising" and "amazing" are especially common. In addition, the Observatory's study revealed an excellent appreciation of many of the services offered by the city, with particularly positive opinions especially regarding: the museums (average opinion equal to 4.5 on a scale from 1 to 5), reception by residents (4.4), restaurants and tourism offices (4.4), accommodation (4.3). Less appreciated, but still positive, are: cleanliness (4.0), transport (4.0) and signage (3.8).

At the same time, the comparative reading of the two surveys highlights a paradoxical mixed effect of the festival, almost ignored by the mainstream local press. Of the 55,000 tourists estimated in Table 3, 35,530 are tourists who are estimated to have stayed overnight in the city (15,565 using hotel facilities, 22,715 non-hotel ones), the rest (around 35.4% of the total) are daily visitors or excursionists (15,565) or people who were hosted at home by friends (3,905). In particular, the Turin and Province Tourism Observatory estimates that 84% of Piedmont, 41% of Italians and 6% of foreigners have not stayed overnight in Turin.

Table 3 - Number of tourists at the Eurovision Song Contest. Source: our reworking from the Turin Chamber of Commerce (2022)

	Total	of which			
		Daily visitors	Hosts	Non-Hotel	Hotel
Tourists (n)	55.000	15.565	3.905	22.715	12.815

The perception of the economic consequences of Eurovision is completed with the survey of the opinions expressed by the operators and residents most directly exposed to the event (Ferraris, 2023). The results of questionnaires administered in the months of January-February 2023 in the neighborhoods of San Salvario, Centro and in the Valentino area (including the westernmost part of the Borgo Po and Cavoretto neighborhood) indicate that, after months, the 93.2% of residents believe that the main impact consisted in "greater promotion of the city as a tourist destination" compared to a residual 2% convinced that the event did not generate significant externalities. Among merchants, however, the percentage of respondents who provide these same answers is 78.9% and 21.0%. Especially among local stakeholders, in practice, there are signs of a less univocal and enthusiastic opinion: alongside complaints about traffic and congestion (also exacerbated by the concurrence, before and after Eurovision, of movie filming in several parts of the city, the Giro d'Italia and the Book Fair), the questionnaires convey displeasure at the lack of respect for the lawns and public greenery of the Valentino and dissatisfaction at the lack of circulation of information, which meant that many knew about the event only after the event started. The ongoing survey also reveals how around 50% of residents and operators believe that Eurovision has caused an increase in prices and, more generally, in the cost of living. Finally, they were asked what would need to be improved in the future if Eurovision returned to the city: 59.5% of residents support the need to intervene in traffic and mobility, while 43.2% would like better waste management and, as regards merchants, 73.7% would like to see communication improved by the Municipality.

The case of the Eurovision Song Contest helps to understand the lights and shadows of urban politics based on cultural events. The opinions on Eurovision collected from various layers of society (local observers, policymakers and administrators, stakeholders and citizens, tourists and visitors) are positive and negative. The lesson learned is that investments in urban growth

via the planning of festivals and other cultural events must always embrace a long-term perspective and find a virtuous dialogue with the instances of the places and the local communities that host them. For example, the fact that the festival's communication needed to be improved and that the impacts were unfairly distributed from a spatial point of view suggests the opportunity for a territorialized planning open to the participation of citizens and other local stakeholders.

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