



From Brain Drain to Cultural Gain: the socio-economic impact of MAC fest on a Southern Italian community

Sara Concetta Santoriello, Università degli Studi di Napoli "Federico II", Vico Monte della Pietà, 1 - 80138 – Napoli, saraconcetta.santoriello@unina.it, 0000-0001-5313-8458

The role of cultural events in the peri-urban areas

A peri-urban area refers to the transitional zone that lies between urban and rural areas, although consensus on the definition of peri-urban area is lacking as a third type of landscape (Rauws & de Roo, 2011). It is characterised by a mix of urban and rural land uses but with an *«ongoing and rapidly changing pattern, in which consumption and production activities compete for land»* (ivi, p. 269). The term "peri-urban" is a combination of "peri", meaning around or near, and "urban", relating to a city. These areas face challenges associated with rapid urbanisation, such as inadequate infrastructure, conflicting land-use interests and environmental issues and it is common to notice how *«possibilities for representative and participative democratic structures are rare»* (ivi, p. 270).

The phenomenon of intellectual migration has emptied several Southern inner areas in favour of the Northern European contexts (Vendemmia, Pucci, & Beria, 2021). The Millennium generation (Gen Y) has suffered more than any other from this process of estrangement from their native places and the consequent depletion of human resources necessary to ensure forms of consociativism among non-profit sector and community-driven initiatives. They have enjoyed higher starting points in access to and enjoyment of cultural services and are *«the generation of the euro and European citizenship, but also the one that is paying more than any other for the economic and social consequences of the crisis»* (Istat 2016, 59-60). In recent times there are conditions of deprivation, understood as the failure to achieve significant factors for the determination of well-being, which concern, in particular, the 25-34 age group that is considered most vulnerable and multi-deprived (Istat 2023, 44). Gen Y wishes to be a changemaker.

There is flourishing of various cultural festivals in inner and peri-urban areas and it seems to be a generational response aimed at reversing this trend as an opportunity for local development, that is to say offering a better choice for those who must decide to leave or not and building a legacy for next generations. Taking into account the regional and local context (Mortoja, Yigitcanlar & Mayere, 2020), this is the case of the Salerno neighbourhood in Campania, where *Baccanalia* in San Gregorio Magno is a food experience. Cultural events play a pivotal role in fostering community engagement and social cohesion as ludic spaces in order to *«mediate cultural differences, promote sense of community and enable human creativity»* (Alves, Di Gabriele, Carillo, Masullo, & Maffei, 2021). Whether it's a music festival, art exhibition or cultural fair, these events contribute to the sense of belonging and shared identity among residents, as is the case of . The economic impact of cultural events in peri-urban areas is substantial and an example could be the famous *Notte della Taranta* in



Apulia (Rinaldi & Sergio, 2018). These events attract visitors, stimulating local businesses and supporting the growth of the creative and hospitality industries. From food vendors to artisans, cultural events provide opportunities for local entrepreneurs to showcase their products and services, contributing to economic diversity and resilience. Historical events become a means of preserving and celebrating local traditions, customs and heritage, that is the case of Italian folk ceremony *Gigli di Nola* in Campania as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage (Alves, Di Gabriele, Carillo, Masullo, & Maffei, 2021). Festivals that showcase traditional arts, crafts and performances become platforms for passing down cultural knowledge to future generations, fostering a sense of pride and continuity. Visitors are drawn to the unique blend of urban and rural elements, creating an opportunity for place branding. Successful events become synonymous with the identity of the area, attracting not only local but also regional and international visitors, thus boosting the local economy and fostering a positive image.

While cultural events bring numerous benefits to peri-urban areas, challenges exist. Issues such as managing increased footfall, balancing commercialization with cultural authenticity, and addressing the environmental impact must be carefully navigated. Additionally, inclusivity and representation of diverse community voices are essential to ensure that the benefits are shared equitably.

Community empowerment and bottom-up initiatives: the case of MAC fest

MAC fest - Festival of Music, Art and Culture - is a multidisciplinary event held in Cava de' Tirreni (Campania, Italy) and promoted by Macass APS, a group of young adults born between 1993 and 2003. The Festival encourages citizens to exchange experiences and points of view. Culture becomes the driving force of social innovation and promotes professional opportunities, involving private and public sector, bringing them together and allowing participation aimed at promoting and sharing European values of inclusion, participation and defence of Human Rights. With the purpose of enhancing local and emerging artistic talent from various domains, the event becomes a real-time stage for bands, painters, filmmakers, new media artists, dancers, but also speakers and enterprises.

The first edition (2019) was a one-day festival composed of 4 panels, an exhibition and a concert. The 2020 edition spaced during an entire month due to COVID-19 restrictions with little events and the promotion of “La 48H” videocontest and “Macchiato” magazine. Since 2021 MAC fest has become a one-week long festival.

Every year, about 50 young people are involved in the making, around 45 partners work with Macass APS in designing the format and up to 5 companies support the Festival financially. Citizens are invited to make a donation during the crowdfunding campaign (1/2 months before). The Festival is totally free entry under the European Parliament patronage.

MAC fest is a suitable case study as a cultural event in a peri-urban landscape, promoted by both Millennials and Zillennials in Southern Italy, most of whom emigrated to the North or abroad for study and work.



Cava de' Tirreni is located 10 kilometres northwest of the town of Salerno, in a richly cultivated valley surrounded by wooded hills, close to Amalfi Coast. The town is a 50-thousand-inhabitants hub between the area of Agro Nocerino Sarnese (with an agricultural and industrial economy) and the Sorrento Peninsula (with an economy based on tourism).

The author has a leading role in the organisation, gets access to the documentation, provides the experiential background with on-site observations and contributes to a richer analysis of the social context in which it is set because it is her homeland. Document analysis involves a transparent examination, recognizing the potential for bias and critically assessing how organisational decisions may influence the study's outcomes.

Starting from its third edition, MAC fest organisers promote a socio-economic impact report based on pre and post survey data. It is, therefore, possible to compare and analyse this example of bottom-up initiative in the three-year-period and measure the cultural demand trend before and after the Festival. The research crosses several lines, questioning: the role of Millennials in the production of cultural events; the impact of non-profit festivals in terms of social innovation; the value-creation associated with the attraction of tourism and the promotion of emerging professionals linked to the world of art, music and culture.

Partial results

In examining the socio-economic impact report on the cultural event, it is essential to acknowledge the unique perspective brought forth by the author's dual role as an organiser. This insider perspective allowed for an in-depth understanding of the intricacies of event planning, community engagement and the overarching goals. The intention was to navigate the dual role with integrity, striving for an unbiased interpretation of the findings.

During the summer, each Macass APS member experiences the organisational process as a way to come back, a voluntary service and the need to fill the void of cultural offers as well. It is composed of an executive board with 7 members, 35 other members (also members of working groups) and around 50 staff members during the festival week (MAC fest, 2023). MAC fest benefits only from private contributions (sponsors and donations) and it is free of charge in all its parts. It is one of the reasons why the organisers draw up and publish a "Socio-economic impact report", through which measure the cultural demand trend and its effects in terms of participants' wealth and motivation.



Outcomes	2021	2022
Total entries	3260	8839
Average entries/day	407	1105
CasaMAC and livesthows attendees	2400	7209
Arts Exhibition attendees	400	1350
Speech attendees	120	200
Masterclass attendees	41	60

Tab. 2: Report d'impatto socio-economico edizione 2022 (MAC fest, 2023)

However, it is possible to quantify economic efficiency with the cost per MAC Fest entry. The concept of "*Willingness to spend*" refers to a consumer's inclination and readiness to allocate their financial resources for goods or services. It reflects an individual or a group openness and readiness to make purchases, signifying a crucial aspect of consumer behaviour and economic activity.

Willingness to spend trend

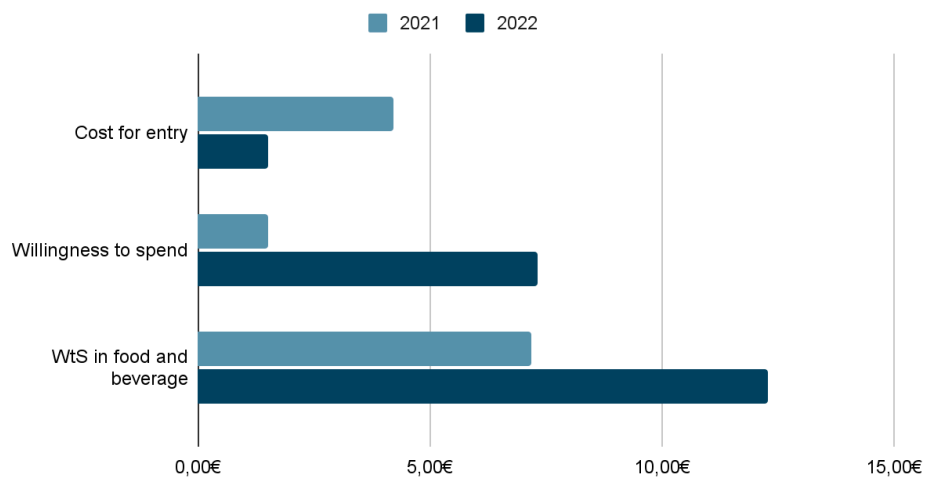


Fig. 1: Report d'impatto socio-economico edizione 2022 (MAC fest, 2023)

The "*Cost per entry*" has decreased by 182% in 2022, resulting from the increase of entries and from an efficient allocation of economic resources, while keeping the feedback from the audience. On average, the attendees' willingness to spend is about 4 times higher than the cost of the single entry. In light of this, the festival appears to still have sustainable economic growth. A single visitor willingness to spend has increased by 70% compared to 2021 standing at 12.3€/user. The actual expense, on the other hand, was 6.16€/user: even in the



activities of food & beverage, as the analysis shows, there is a business value to be exploited in order to increase total revenues (MAC fest, 2023).

Conclusions

Cultural events in peri-urban areas emerge as transformative agents, contributing to community well-being, economic vitality and the preservation of local identity. As these events continue to evolve, striking a balance between urban and rural influences, they hold the potential to shape peri-urban landscapes positively and create sustainable, vibrant communities for the future. A study around *La Notte della Taranta* demonstrates how «a cultural festival, despite being a mass gathering, is able to create strong bonds among its participants and between them and the area where the event takes place. Although these bonds are “instantaneous”, they are positively correlated with the economic impact of the event on the territory» (Attanasi, Casoria, Centorrino, Urso, 2013).

MAC fest tracks progress with a technique that asks participants directly what are the highlights, in order to guide investment and creative direction, confirm its commitment to sponsors, monitor sentiment towards the brand and stay in touch with its community throughout the rest of the year.

References

- Alves, S., Di Gabriele, M., Carillo, S., Masullo, M., & Maffei, L. (2021). *Exploring the soundscape and the atmosphere of the Gigli di Nola cultural festival in Italy*. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 41, 100848.
- Attanasi, G., Casoria, F., Centorrino, S., & Urso, G. (2013). *Cultural investment, local development and instantaneous social capital: A case study of a gathering festival in the South of Italy*. *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, 47, 228-247.
- ISTAT (2016). *Rapporto annuale 2016. La situazione del Paese*.
- ISTAT (2023). *Rapporto annuale 2023. La situazione del Paese*.
- MAC fest. (2022). *Report d’impatto socio-economico MAC fest 2021*. Retrieved at: <https://www.macfest.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/report-impatto-socio-economico-macfest.pdf>
- MAC fest. (2023). *Report d’impatto socio-economico edizione 2022*. Retrieved at: <https://www.macfest.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Report-Impatto-2022.pdf>
- MAC fest. (2024). *Report di impatto socio-economico edizione 2023*. Proceeding library
- Mortoja, M. G., Yigitcanlar, T., & Mayere, S. (2020). *What is the most suitable methodological approach to demarcate peri-urban areas? A systematic review of the literature*. *Land Use Policy*, 95, 104601.
- Rauws, W. S. & de Roo, G. (2011). *Exploring Transitions in the Peri-Urban Area*, *Planning Theory & Practice*, 12:2, 269-284, DOI: 10.1080/14649357.2011.581025



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI NAPOLI

FEDERICO II



Rinaldi, A., & Sergio, S. (2018). *Events and the governance of the territory: the festival La Notte della Taranta in Apulia, Italy*. *Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Management*, 6(6), 281-290.

Vendemmia, B., Pucci, P., & Beria, P. (2021). *An institutional periphery in discussion. Rethinking the inner areas in Italy*. *Applied geography*, 135, 102537.