

Cultural events for a sustainable tourism development in urban destinations: the case of Milan's week

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Abstract

Purpose of the paper: *The aim of this paper is to explore the effects generated by a suite of cultural micro-medium events in an urban destination on both hotels' performance and the seasonality structure in order to promote sustainable tourism development.*

Methodology: *The empirical analysis uses a mixed method that combines a quantitative analysis of the daily performance of a destination with a desk analysis of press interviews to local stakeholders.*

Findings: *The results highlight a positive contribution of cultural micro-medium events to tourism at the destination. This evidence contributes to the academic debate on strategic event management by shedding light on the potential role of minor cultural events as a driver for sustainable tourism development.*

Practical implications: *This study suggests guidelines to destination managers on how to benefit from micro-medium cultural events: a strong connection with the destination's vocations, the importance of public-private collaboration and the establishment of a portfolio of recurrent events.*

Limitations of the research: *This explorative study presents two main limitations: the authors cannot exclude that other small events were taking place in the city at the same time as the micro-medium cultural events analysed. Secondly, several of the events studied are recent and therefore their impact on the destination could be underestimated.*

Originality of the paper: *During the last decades, the managerial literature has been devoting considerable attention to the role and the benefits generated by events. However, the main focus of these studies has been on large and mega events while little consideration has been dedicated to smaller events which are widespread, recurrent and relatively easier to manage.*

Key words: sustainability; micro-medium cultural events; seasonality; tourism destination

1. Introduction

Sustainability is an essential characteristic of the successful tourism destinations of the future, a key principle in the management and competitiveness of tourism destinations over the long term (Crouch, 2011;

d'Angella and De Carlo, 2016). The broad thrust of studies on strategic management clearly states that the creation of sustainable competitive advantages depends on both investment and product development and intangible assets like brand, image and reputation (Crouch, 2011; Dwyer and Kim, 2003; Mazanec *et al.*, 2007).

For an urban tourism destination to be sustainable means attracting the right amount as well as the right mix of visitors (Kastenholz and Almeida, 2008), limiting seasonality peaks (Martin *et al.*, 2014), assuring an appropriate quality of living for both temporary and permanent visitors (Eslami *et al.*, 2019; Yu *et al.*, 2016), generating a valuable economic contribution for the territory without compromising it (Souza *et al.*, 2018). Barcelona (Russo and Scarnato, 2018), Dubrovnik (Panayiotopoulos and Pisano, 2019) and Venice (Seraphin *et al.*, 2018; Bertocchi *et al.*, 2020) are three examples of top destinations in terms of number of visitors (before Covid-19) which have been facing a critical sustainability-linked issue: over-tourism. Other cities, like Milan, are facing other critical sustainability-linked concerns: seasonality and an unbalanced visitor mix (Sainaghi *et al.*, 2019).

Events play a pivotal role among the strategies that destinations are putting in place both to reduce some of the critical issues generated by unsustainable tourism development and to assure continuous growth, (Getz and Page, 2016; Stokes, 2008). In particular, the relevance of the events for tourism can be found on the one hand in their ability to intercept additional tourist flows and new segments of visitors (Connell *et al.* 2015), and on the other hand in their ability to extend the tourists' average length of stay and expenditure (Gibson *et al.*, 2003; Tang and Turco, 2001), mitigate the seasonality factor (Connell *et al.* 2015), act on the spatial distribution of tourists in the territory and possibly generate a "recentralization" or "recommodification" of the urban space (Zukin, 2004; Mommaas, 2004; Sharp *et al.*, 2005). Today these redistribution and recommodification effects, applied in overtourism situations, could also prove particularly useful when rethinking what destinations can offer in the post-pandemic recovery phase. Moreover the potential positive effects generated by shrewd management of the events portfolio are even broader. In addition to the effects on the image, brand and destination awareness among specific target travellers (Richards and Wilson, 2004; De Carlo and d'Angella, 2011), events also produce a significant impact on the entire destination's production ecosystem (Negrusa *et al.*, 2016; Bracalente *et al.*, 2011). Finally, even from a political-organizational point of view, events can facilitate the convergence of national and local objectives and the alignment of stakeholders' agendas, while strengthening collaboration and building cooperation networks that probably would not have been activated in the absence of a common goal (Mariani and Giorgio, 2017).

Cultural events constitute an important category within the events' portfolio of an urban destination. As cultural products, they are considered one of the key determinants of a destination's competitiveness (Crouch and Ritchie, 2000). For this reason, cultural events play a crucial role in the strategic repositioning processes undertaken by various cities (Miles and Paddison, 2005), called to compete in a now crowded market. In fact, by

investing in infrastructures and cultural attractions, destinations seek to conquer market niches in the international competitive context in which they operate, thus developing activities that are capable of activating synergies with other strategic sectors of the local economy (Russo and van der Borg, 2002).

During recent decades, the managerial literature has been devoting a considerable attention to the role and the benefits generated by events. However, the main focus of these studies has been on the top of the pyramid proposed by Getz (2014) - mega and hallmark events - while little attention has been paid to smaller events, which are widespread, recurrent and relatively easier to manage. To contribute to filling this gap, this paper aims to explore the effects generated by a set of cultural micro-medium events in an urban destination on both the performance of businesses and the seasonality structure of the destination. In particular, using an empirical analysis focused on the city of Milan, this study attempts to measure how innovative ways of using micro-medium cultural events programmed throughout the year and targeting both business and leisure audiences, can promote the sustainable tourism development of an urban destination.

The paper is structured as follows. The literature review in section two presents the theoretical background of this study, highlighting the hypotheses that will be tested in the empirical analysis. The methodology used to carry out the quantitative analysis is described, while the results are presented in section 4. Finally, the theoretical and managerial implications are discussed in the last paragraph as are the limitations of this study¹.

2. Literature review

2.1 Cultural events as a driver for sustainable destination development

The literature has dealt extensively with the role of events in territorial development (Getz, 2006; Getz and Page, 2016) and wide attention has been given in particular to specific types of events, such as mega events and hallmark ones (Jafari, 1988), because of their important impacts on tourism. This vast literature has adopted very different perspectives and has focused, case by case, on the various benefits - and also drawbacks (Barclay, 2009) - that destinations can derive from hosting events. The results of these studies, of course, depend very much on the size of the events taken into consideration, on their durations, on the focus and on the ability of the event to attract public and private investments in infrastructure and services.

Generally, a distinction is made between primary and secondary effects (Clark, 2008) at least as regards mega and hallmark events: the primary benefits include public-private investment partnerships, image and place identity impacts, environmental impacts on the built environment, and the structural expansion of the visitor economy; the secondary benefits then

¹ This paper is the result of a joint research work of the authors. However, Francesca d'Angella wrote sections 3 and 4; Martha Friel sections 2.1 and 5; Ruggero Sainaghi sections 2.2 and 2.3; Angelo Miglietta section 1.

include connectivity and infrastructure legacies, labour market impacts, secondary impacts on the property market, post-event usage of improved land and buildings, and various others (Clark, 2008).

One of the most interesting aspects of events is their use as a tool for launching or consolidating wider urban regeneration actions (Smith, 2012), for strategic repositioning in terms of place branding (Richard and Wilson, 2004 *et al.*), or for transition from industrial economies to service economies, as in the case of cities such as Linz (OECD, 2014), Turin (Ferrari and Guala, 2017) and many others (Richards, 2007). Furthermore, from a tourism perspective, event-based strategies have the function of supporting, on the one hand, precise positioning strategies on specific products and markets (Hall, 1992; Evans, 2015), and on the other hand, the development of particular product clubs.

Among the different types of events - sporting events, trade fair events, summits and international political conferences etc. - cultural events have played a particularly important role in pursuing these strategic goals; this is demonstrated by the extensive literature that has been developed on the issue, ranging from the analysis of small events for the cultural and tourism promotion of minor destinations (Simeon and Buonincontri, 2011) to that on the role of larger events such as the European Capitals of Culture or other special events, for urban regeneration, strategic repositioning, and tourism promotion (Richards, 2007; Liu, 2014).

With specific regard to cultural events-based strategies, some authors have introduced the concept of “eventful cities” (Richard and Palmer, 2012) emphasizing that “as events have become increasingly integrated into the daily life of cities, so the planning of events and their integration with civic goals have become even closer. The contemporary city is likely to see eventfulness as one more source of creativity that can be developed to stimulate the creative industries, enhance the attractiveness of the city and promote social cohesion” (Richard and Palmer, 2012, p. 37). This literature often intersects with that on creative cities and, in fact, a number of recent studies have focused on complementary aspects such as the interaction between events, promotion of the local creative economy and tourism development (Ziakas, 2014; OECD, 2014), and on the use of events for the development of the so-called “night economy” (Evans, 2014; Sound Diplomacy and Andreina Seijas, 2019) in connection with the issue of “vibrant cities”. These studies have highlighted how cultural events can not only help positioning the city on the tourism market, but also generate positive effects on the cognitive heritage of local communities and contribute to an improvement in urban liveability and security - with positive effects, again, on the attractiveness of the destination.

Clearly, in many of these studies, the issue of sustainability is present even when not explicitly addressed: the question of the effectiveness of events-based development and promotion strategies for a destination is, in fact, closely intertwined with that of socio-cultural (Ziakas, 2015; Richards, 2015), environmental and economic sustainability, and with the ability to generate positive structural effects on both local economies, the labour market and the cultural system (Musgrave and Raj, 2009). However, in recent years a specific literature has been developed on the connection

between events and sustainability, aimed on the one hand at identifying the conditions for events, and especially mega events (Hall, 2012), to take place in a sustainable way (Getz, 2009; Dredge and Whitford, 2010; Jones, 2014), and on the other hand at analysing how events themselves can become important tools for promoting a more sustainable tourism, better integrated in local development strategies (Haven-Tang and Jones, 2009; Raj and Musgrave, 2009).

Moreover, studies have focused on how events should be integrated into urban sustainable development policies (Getz and Page, 2016) to favour processes for diversifying the local tourist offer, support the creation of culturally lively, socially inclusive and therefore more attractive urban systems (Sacco *et al.*, 2017), and contribute to counter tourism seasonality. The latter aspect has been specifically addressed by *Tourism Management* and events management literature. Already in the mid-70s, some authors had started analysing the use of hallmark events as a response to seasonality (Ritchie and Beliveau, 1974). An extensive literature was then consolidated around these first studies, deepening the relationship between events and seasonality both on the demand side and in terms of effects on the supply structure of the destination (Connell *et al.*, 2015), and looking both at small/rural destinations and cities (Sainaghi and Mauri, 2018).

However, much of this literature focuses mainly on large events or events of a certain duration while literature on tourism promotion strategies based on micro and small events is still very limited. With specific regard to small events, mainly cultural and sporting, studies have dealt with analyzing through surveys their role in attracting and retaining tourists in destinations (McKercher, 2006; Malchrowicz-Moško and Poczta, 2018) or assessing their economic impact, especially with regard to events in rural areas (Alves *et al.*, 2010).

Instead, it is interesting to analyze how a model based on micro-medium cultural events can be adopted by urban destinations as in the case of Milan.

In urban destinations, these events are sometimes also constructed as “off” events of larger business events. It is now particularly interesting to study this type of model due to the effects that can be generated on the sustainability and seasonality of tourism by acting on the destination's mix of offerings and on the mix of tourists.

2.2 Seasonality and events in the Milanese experience

As we have seen, events are able to generate many positive effects such as growth in the local economy, the development of new products, and the creation of a strong brand and image (Getz and Page, 2016; Lyu and Han, 2017; Sainaghi and Baggio, 2019). Events can also produce negative effects, especially for residents and the environment (Moisescu *et al.*, 2019). One of the special goals of events is surely the reduction of seasonality (Connell *et al.*, 2015), defined by Butler (1994) as a temporal imbalance in terms of number of visitors, overnights, tourists' expenditure, and any other metric that captures the demand fluctuation. This phenomenon has basically two origins: natural and institutional. The first is weather-related while the

second is the result of human activities and decisions. In the last twenty years, scholars have been studying seasonality to reduce its institutional component, still deeply affecting destinations all over the world. In particular, with regard to cultural destinations, studies show how promoting cultural tourism policies to overcome seasonality requires a reduction in the horizontal fragmentation of the decision-making process (Cuccia and Rizzo, 2010). This is the central topic of this paper and therefore the focus of this section is on demand fluctuations, with a specific focus on Milan, a city that scholars have studied with particular interest in recent years because of its rapid tourism development and sound promotion strategies.

Milan's seasonal patterns have been analysed over the years by various international studies (De Carlo *et al.*, 2009; Sainaghi and Baggio, 2019; Sainaghi and Canali, 2009a, 2011; Sainaghi and Mauri, 2018a; Sainaghi *et al.*, 2019; Sainaghi *et al.*, 2019) as well as national ones (Sainaghi and Canali, 2009b; Mauri and Sainaghi, 2017; Sainaghi and Mauri, 2018b). Despite the precise goal, methodology and approach of each single paper, these studies agree that Milan's seasonal patterns are mainly triggered by the market segments attracted. There are essentially three of these: business, trade-fair and leisure guests.

Business people come to Milan to visit firms, clients, suppliers and public institutions. Milan is Italy's economic capital. Furthermore, the Lombardy region produces roughly 20% of the national GDP. This first target group is mainly present in mid-week and in particular during work days (though not all days in mid-week are work days as civil and religious festivities can also occur). Therefore, the business target generates significant variations in demand during the week.

Trade-fair guests are attracted by a whole range of events. The city's exhibition centre - Fiera Milano - is very active in this sector and Milan is ranked as the second largest trade-fair destination in Europe. The seasonal patterns generated by this segment are more complex because they are triggered by the specific events. These take place both during weekdays and at weekends, but mainly influence work days. The trade-fair portfolio is huge and diversified. However, previous studies agree that only a few events are able to significantly impact local hotels. The most important trade-fairs are usually international and business-to-business events.

Finally, *leisure* clients constitute a growing segment, especially since the Milan Expo. Though these visitors can come to Milan any day of the week, previous studies have revealed a strong focus on weekends and non-working days more generally. This is not surprising given the high rates charged by many hotels on business days.

Therefore, based on this three-part breakdown, there is a significant and articulated fluctuation in demand at week level. A second important factor in tourism evolution in Milan is the Expo and more generally its legacy. During 2015 the revenue per available room (RevPAR) increased by 59% (Sainaghi and Mauri, 2018). Furthermore, the Milan Expo has produced an important rise in all the hotel metrics. Therefore, the post-Expo period (2016-2019) is characterized by higher performance than the pre-Expo one (before 2015).

2.3 Research questions

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Considering the two streams of literature described above, it seems clear that events matter and constitute a crucial determinant of hotel performance. If well managed, they can be a powerful tool for achieving sustainable tourism development as they could be used to manage seasonality by attracting the right segments of visitors in the right period of time. Moreover, managing events often requires strong public-private collaboration, and this is clearly a source of sustainable competitive advantage for tourism destinations (Dickson *et al.*, 2017). Moving on to cultural events, these are an important component of the event portfolio of any destination. In addition to the benefits just stated, cultural events are even a tool for improving the quality of living of residents.

However, much of the evidence for this comes from studies focused mainly on large events - mega and hallmark events - or events of a certain duration. As far as we know, micro-medium cultural events have not been investigated as much by scholars even if they take place in a multitude of destinations on a regular basis and are both cheaper and easier to manage than big ones. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to measure the impact of cultural micro-events on hotel performance and destination seasonality by answering the following research questions:

Hp1: Does the performance of an urban destination improve (occupancy, ADR, and RevPAR) during micro-medium cultural events?

Hp2: Do cultural micro-medium events reduce the seasonality of an urban destination at week level?

3. Methodology

3.1 Milan as a tourism destination

The city of Milan is an interesting example of a destination that has experienced rapid tourism development and is working now both to consolidate this successful trend and to manage tourism flows in a sustainable way. Until 2000, Milan was an industrial city, tourists were almost exclusively business ones, and generally speaking tourism was driven by trade fair activity without any deliberate tourism development strategy (De Carlo and d'Angella, 2011). From 2006, following its selection as an Expo venue, the city started a deliberate process to manage tourism as part of its economy. Over the ten years that followed, the city worked to improve its international reputation through: the establishment of new governance bodies, a series of communication initiatives, permanent collaboration with local stakeholders, and a vibrant calendar of events. In 2020, Milan has become the second Italian destination for international visitors, it has started a DMO (Destination Management Organization) to enhance the city's attractiveness and branding, it has activated permanent forms of public-private collaboration and it has started to combat seasonality and the unbalanced visitor mix. The City will host the winter Olympic Game in 2026.

Cultural investments in Milan have often acted as a driving force for wider urban redevelopment processes in depressed city areas, as has been the case in some former manufacturing districts. One of these, for example, is the Vigentino district, at the centre of a project of radical urban transformation after the area was revitalized thanks to the opening of the Milanese headquarters of the Prada Foundation.

Events were and still are a fundamental component of this tourism development strategy. The city's events portfolio is a compendium of different kinds of events that cover all the typologies highlighted by Getz (2014): from occasional mega-events to local activities.

In recent years Milan has successfully experimented an innovative formula of thematic festivals, categorized into “City” and “Week” events, dedicated to music, literature, environment and innovation, with initiatives scattered throughout the city and the metropolitan area.

The “City” is a format of cultural initiatives which lasts 3 days, from Friday to Sunday, involving all the Milanese cultural entities that operate on a specific topic (i.e. The Piano, Books, Museums etc.). The “Week” format focuses on an event or sector fair of international relevance around which a program of events develops with the collaboration of public and private parties from specific sectors (i.e. Fashion, Design, Music, etc.).

Conceived on the model of the *Design Week* and *Fashion Week*, the *Weeks* format has been applied to other cultural sectors such as contemporary art (ArtWeek in April), photography (PhotoWeek, June), movies (MovieWeek, September) and so on. Both kinds of events are capable of involving an audience of hundreds or thousands people in just a few days (Table 1).

Tab. 1: Key-figures of some of the most well-known thematic festivals in Milan

2018	Period	Visitors	# events	Av. Daily visitors	Av. Visitors per event
Book city	15-18 Nov	175,000	1,452	43,750	121
Green city	22-24 Sept	60,000	500	20,000	120
Digital week	15-18 Mar	70,000	400	17,500	175
Design week	17-22 Apr	500,000	1,367	83,333	366

Source: Milan, Monza and Brianza, Lodi Chamber of Commerce

The reference model, in this case, is that of the Fuorisalone, conceived in 1991 on the initiative of “Interni magazine” as a container for the off-site events of the “Salone del Mobile” (the design week) and now risen in the list of the most popular events at international level, with around 500 thousand attendances during the international exhibition (2019 data).

“The model of the first week [Fuorisalone] was very precise. There was a very important moment at the beginning of the Pisapia [former Milan mayor] mandate with the experimentation of Book City, while the systematization of the calendar took place during the Sala administration. In 2016, the arrangement of “weeks” and “cities” was a constitutive element in the “Fare Milano” government program. There is no inventor of the brand but it is the product of a city that knows how to get involved in a collective way and promotes and produces strong innovation”. (Cit. Filippo Del Corno, Deputy Mayor for Culture of the city of Milan).

3.2 Data, variables and analyses

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The empirical analysis is based on a mixed method that adopts and integrates both quantitative and qualitative research techniques (Johnson *et al.*, 2007). The quantitative analysis is based on the Smith Travel Research (STR) data. This source offers daily data on a large sample of Milan hotels (approximately 80 per cent of the total), representing more than 30,000 rooms. The empirical data relate to a period of 13 years (2007-2019), mapping out the performance of the hotels both for the periods when each cultural Week was held in the city and for the five years beforehand. The availability of daily data makes it possible to compare hotel performance for specific days during the five years before a “week” was taking place, and during the three most recent ones (of course the dataset reported only performances for two and one year for the events that started in 2018 and 2019).

The year of the first editions of the events is shown in Table 2, together with both the week and the month seasonality in which each of them was scheduled. The week seasonality categorizes the events according to the days in which they take place. So we have events occurring during the week-end (WE) and events taking place throughout the entire week (W). The month seasonality variable divides the months in which each event takes place into high and low season according to the value of the presences in Milan recorded in 2016 in that specific month. In particular, the low season months are those in which the presences recorded do not exceed the threshold of 900,000, while all the others are categorised as high season.

Tab. 2: “Week” and “City” portfolio

Events	Year of the first edition	Length (# of days)	Week seasonality*	Milan's month seasonality 2016
Arch week	2017	6	W	High
Art week	2019	4	WE	High
Bike city	2018	12	W	High
Book city	2012	4	WE	High
Calcio city	2019	4	WE	High
Design week	1961	6	W	High
Digital week	2018	5	W	Low
Fashion week	1958	7	W	High
Food city	2017	7	W	High
Foto week	2017	7	W	High
Green week	2018	4	WE	High
Montagna week	2019	7	W	High
Movie week	2018	8	W	High
Museo city	2017	3	WE	Low
Music week	2017	7	W	High
Pet week	2019	8	W	High
Piano city	2012	3	WE	High

* Weekend days = WE; Entire week = W

Source: Authors on yesmilano.it and Milan's municipality data

2016 was chosen as reference year for the seasonality identification because most of the events started in 2017 and therefore 2016 is the most

recent year that does not contemplate the effect caused by the events on flows and, accordingly, on the performance of the hotels. From the list reported in Table 2 the authors decided not to include The Design Week and the Fashion Week in the analysis these two events differ from the others for several reasons. First of all, they are old, well-established events, with an international reputation and appeal, which already are *per se* a reason to come to Milan for both business and leisure tourists. Secondly, in our analyses we compare the tourism performance of the city for the days on which the event takes place and for the same days of the year before the one in which the events were established. As these two events have been in place since the Fifties, it is not possible to perform the same analysis that we can do for the others.

The database prepared for carrying out the analyses includes 658 records (daily data) and 13 variables. The variables embrace date information (day number, month number, year, comprehensive date and day of the week), “*Week/City*” name and edition number and performance data (Occupancy, Average Daily Rate (ADR), Revenue per Available Room (Revpar), number of rooms available (Supply), number of rooms occupied (Demand), and revenue. Starting from this dataset, a second one was created that synthesised the performance indicators for each edition of the event. This dataset includes 115 records and 12 variables, the same as the first dataset except for the “day number” - eliminated as the unit of analysis shifted from daily data to average event data. The data reported in the second dataset has been analysed using a variance analysis to see if and to what extent the city’s performance changed before and after the week/city implementation.

To eliminate possible external effects, we checked for the presence of other important events in the city during the “*Week/City*” analysed. This check shows that some exhibitions (disconnected from the theme of the events analysed) indeed did take place during the same days but as the majority of these were in existence before the week/city and are periodical, they do not interfere that much with our analysis. However, we eliminated from our dataset the KPI relating to 3 periods in which other events took place on days on which a “*week/city*” event was on or on which one would have been on in the years before the first edition. These four periods refer to two events only: the Art Week, because the Design Week was taking place in the city on the same days of the year in 5, 4 and 2 of the years before its first edition.

Moreover, we highlight that in 2019 there is an overlap between: The Green Week and Calcio City, as well as Bike City and Montagna Week. We expect this to reinforce the “event effect” on Milan’s performance.

Furthermore, in order to really appreciate the enhancement of the destination’s performance we took the overall increase in Milan’s KPI due to the so called “Expo effect” into consideration. Table 3 summarizes the city’s performance before, during and after Expo 2015 and the variation between the years before and after it.

Tab. 3: Milan's KPIs before, during and after Expo 2015

	Occupancy	AdR	RevPAR
Pre- Expo period (2010-2014)	62%	€ 122.10	€ 78.96
During Expo	69%	€ 147.24	€ 106.27
Post-Expo (2016-2019)	70%	€ 137.09	€ 99.27
Var. % pre-post Expo	13%	12%	26%
Var. pre-post Expo	8,18	€ 14.99	€ 20.30

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Source: Authors on STR data

In the analyses that follow, in order not to be misled by the “expo effect”, we only consider a variation of a KPI that is higher than the “Expo effect” to be a significant effect.

To add further information to the quantitative analysis of the Week/City events analysed, we carried out a desk analysis of the interviews given to the press in the last three years by the following stakeholders: municipality councillors and the mayor, Milan's tourism agency and members of the hotel association. In total 20 interviews were analysed, and a number of municipal resolutions and documents were also examined.

4. Findings

Tables 4a, 4b and 4c summarize the performance during the three most recent editions (if available) of each *Week event/City event* and on the same days in the previous 5 years (indicated by the “minus” sign.

So edition -1 reports performance on the days when the event took place in the year before the first edition, and edition -2 refers to the days when the event took place two years before the first edition and so on). In almost all the cases the trend over the period shows improvements in the performance of the destination during the days on which events take place. However, we only consider to be relevant event effects (in *italic*, in a fringed cel), the increases in occupancy, ADR and RevPAR that are higher than the “Expo effect”, an element that has only been affecting the city since 2016.

Tab. 4a: Milan's Occupancy before and during the Weeks/Cities analysed

Occupancy	Days	Performance in the years before the first edition					Most recent editions			Comparing performance before and after Expo 2015		
		-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3	Av. Perf. Before	Av. Perf. After	Var. %pt
Arch week	W	70%	72%	75%	71%	73%	81%	74%	79%	72%	78%	6
Art week	WE	83%	84%	71%	87%	71%	83%			71%	83%	12
Bike city	W	75%	77%	76%	87%	90%	85%	86%		81%	85%	4
Book city	WE	50%	49%	43%	57%	48%	70%	68%	75%	49%	71%	22
Calcio city	WE	69%	74%	75%	77%	74%	78%			74%	78%	4
Digital week	W	61%	58%	60%	64%	62%	67%	80%		61%	73%	12
Food city	W	69%	70%	70%	77%	68%	84%	81%	81%	71%	82%	11
Foto week	W	77%	61%	66%	74%	68%	69%	74%	80%	69%	74%	5
Green week	WE	74%	72%	75%	75%	79%	76%	79%		75%	78%	3
Montagna week	W	76%	67%	75%	89%	87%	91%			79%	91%	13
Movie week	W	76%	79%	77%	86%	89%	88%	85%		81%	86%	5
Museo city	WE	50%	62%	47%	46%	45%	52%	55%	56%	50%	55%	5
Music week	W	61%	59%	63%	66%	72%	75%	75%	81%	64%	77%	13
Pet week	W	72%	76%	78%	83%	79%	85%			78%	85%	7
Piano city	WE	54%	51%	44%	57%	62%	74%	71%	71%	54%	72%	18

(Expo effect = +13%)

(strikethrough data has been excluded from the analysis)

Source: Authors on STR data

Tab. 4b: Milan's ADR before and during the Weeks/Cities analysed

ADR	Days	Performance in the years before the first edition					Most recent editions			Comparing performance before and after Expo 2015		
		-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3	Av. Perf. Before	Av. Perf. After	Variation
Arch week	W	€ 134.8	€ 129.8	€ 150.6	€ 138.7	€ 135.5	€ 149.0	€ 130.4	€ 149.2	€ 137.9	€ 142.9	4%
Art week	WE	€ 262.4	€ 274.2	€ 127.5	€ 292.5	€ 128.1	€ 148.5			€ 127.8	€ 148.5	16%
Bike city	W	€ 143.1	€ 145.8	€ 145.2	€ 180.3	€ 188.3	€ 182.8	€ 215.6		€ 160.5	€ 182.8	14%
Book city	WE	€ 128.6	€ 118.0	€ 110.0	€ 103.0	€ 102.5	€ 120.6	€ 121.5	€ 131.6	€ 112.4	€ 124.6	11%
Calcio city	WE	€ 119.3	€ 128.0	€ 148.0	€ 138.0	€ 134.4	€ 144.7			€ 133.5	€ 144.7	8%
Digital week	W	€ 117.1	€ 108.5	€ 128.1	€ 132.2	€ 116.5	€ 138.0	€ 136.8		€ 120.5	€ 137.4	14%
Food city	W	€ 114.6	€ 119.6	€ 115.9	€ 134.1	€ 126.7	€ 139.8	€ 144.6	€ 148.1	€ 122.2	€ 144.2	18%
Foto week	W	€ 151.6	€ 119.3	€ 132.5	€ 161.2	€ 124.6	€ 127.5	€ 126.6	€ 144.6	€ 137.8	€ 132.9	-4%
Green week	WE	€ 123.1	€ 122.8	€ 129.4	€ 148.6	€ 139.5	€ 143.8	€ 147.6		€ 132.7	€ 145.7	10%
Montagna week	W	€ 123.1	€ 115.7	€ 124.4	€ 155.7	€ 151.4	€ 172.8			€ 134.1	€ 172.8	29%
Movie week	W	€ 149.7	€ 155.0	€ 152.1	€ 175.7	€ 182.5	€ 182.6	€ 205.3		€ 163.0	€ 193.9	19%
Museo city	WE	€ 106.6	€ 136.8	€ 113.7	€ 119.0	€ 114.4	€ 109.6	€ 120.1	€ 116.8	€ 118.1	€ 115.5	-2%
Music week	W	€ 111.4	€ 109.8	€ 109.0	€ 110.3	€ 118.4	€ 121.3	€ 121.8	€ 134.1	€ 111.8	€ 125.7	12%
Pet week	W	€ 121.8	€ 135.8	€ 145.8	€ 150.9	€ 136.3	€ 162.8			€ 138.1	€ 162.8	18%
Piano city	WE	€ 140.4	€ 122.0	€ 105.9	€ 100.4	€ 102.4	€ 130.3	€ 124.8	€ 128.4	€ 114.2	€ 127.9	12%
											(Expo effect = +12%)	

(strikethrough data has been excluded from the analysis)

Source: Authors on STR data

Tab. 4c: Milan's RevPAR before and during the Weeks/Cities analysed

RevPAR	Days	Performance in the years before the first edition					Most recent editions			Comparing performance before and after Expo 2015		
		-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3	Av. Perf. Before	Av. Perf. After	Variation
Arch week	W	€ 93.8	€ 92.9	€ 113.3	€ 98.5	€ 99.1	€ 120.6	€ 97.0	€ 117.2	€ 99.5	€ 111.6	12%
Art week	WE	€ 247.2	€ 229.4	€ 91.1	€ 253.9	€ 91.1	€ 123.6			€ 91.1	€ 123.6	36%
Bike city	W	€ 107.2	€ 112.6	€ 110.5	€ 156.4	€ 169.1	€ 155.8	€ 185.8		€ 131.2	€ 155.8	19%
Book city	WE	€ 64.1	€ 57.3	€ 47.1	€ 58.6	€ 49.2	€ 84.8	€ 82.5	€ 98.9	€ 55.3	€ 88.7	61%
Calcio city	WE	€ 82.1	€ 94.7	€ 110.4	€ 106.6	€ 99.9	€ 112.3			€ 98.7	€ 112.3	14%
Digital week	W	€ 71.4	€ 62.9	€ 77.3	€ 84.4	€ 72.7	€ 92.0	€ 108.8		€ 73.7	€ 100.4	36%
Food city	W	€ 79.1	€ 84.0	€ 81.2	€ 103.5	€ 86.6	€ 117.7	€ 117.8	€ 120.3	€ 86.9	€ 118.6	37%
Foto week	W	€ 116.9	€ 72.5	€ 87.7	€ 119.3	€ 84.9	€ 88.0	€ 93.1	€ 115.3	€ 96.3	€ 98.8	3%
Green week	WE	€ 91.3	€ 88.6	€ 97.0	€ 111.2	€ 110.0	€ 109.1	€ 116.8		€ 99.6	€ 113.0	13%
Montagna week	W	€ 93.1	€ 77.3	€ 93.4	€ 139.2	€ 132.1	€ 158.0			€ 107.0	€ 158.0	48%
Movie week	W	€ 113.5	€ 122.2	€ 117.1	€ 151.5	€ 162.0	€ 160.3	€ 174.9		€ 133.3	€ 167.6	26%
Museo city	WE	€ 53.0	€ 85.0	€ 53.8	€ 54.5	€ 52.0	€ 57.4	€ 66.6	€ 65.9	€ 59.6	€ 63.3	6%
Music week	W	€ 67.9	€ 65.2	€ 68.5	€ 72.6	€ 85.8	€ 91.2	€ 91.4	€ 108.2	€ 72.0	€ 96.9	35%
Pet week	W	€ 87.2	€ 103.8	€ 113.1	€ 125.9	€ 107.6	€ 137.6			€ 107.5	€ 137.6	28%
Piano city	WE	€ 76.2	€ 62.3	€ 46.3	€ 57.5	€ 63.1	€ 96.5	€ 88.1	€ 90.7	€ 61.1	€ 91.8	50%
											(Expo effect = +26%)	

(strikethrough data has been excluded from the analysis)

Source: Authors on STR data

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An analysis of the “*italic variations*” reveals that the positive impact of the *weeks/cities* on the hotels’ occupancy is modest. Only two events have been able to generate an improvement of average hotel occupancy in the post Expo period: Book city and Piano city. It is interesting to note that the two of them are “*City*” events - i.e. short ones - and are relatively old (first edition in 2012) compared to the other “*Week*” and “*City*” initiatives. In other words, they are well-established appointments in the city calendar, with a reputation, and well known to both residents and visitors from outside.

Moving to the second KPI - the average daily rate - a conspicuous number of events positively impact on hotel rates in contrast to what emerges from the analysis of the first KPI. In fact, seven of them are associated with an increased ADR, higher than the Expo effect (+13%). These events have a long duration (on average seven days), are recent (started from 2017 or even later) and they are mainly “*Weeks*” (only two “*Cities*”).

The third KPI - The Revenue per available room - is the index that shows the highest number of significant impacts on the destination’s performance: eight events are associated with improvements of the RevPAR that are higher than the Expo effect (26%). Two of these events are “*Cities*” (Piano and Book) and six are “*Weeks*”. The reason why this indicator shows the higher amount of significant impacts is the relationship that links the three KPI. In fact, $RevPAR = occupancy * ADR$ and therefore these results somehow combine the evidence that emerged from the other two performance indicators.

These first quantitative elements verify the first hypothesis, confirming that the destination’s performance - measured by three main hotels’ metrics - improved during the events.

The second hypothesis focuses on the events’ ability to improve the weekly seasonality in Milan. As reported in Table 2, the portfolio of “*weeks*” and “*cities*” includes both events held during the weekend and events that unfold across the entire week. The first category includes: Museo city, Art Week, Piano City, Green Week, Calcio City and Book City. The other category is more numerous, and mainly includes “*weeks*”. Looking at the three KPI again from this standpoint, it emerges that in terms of occupancy, the only events able to improve the destination’s performance occur during the weekend. This means that on average the ability of the micro-medium cultural events analysed to boost the occupancy rate is very modest, the only two successful cases occur during the periods when Milan is less crowded and therefore when even a modest impact could be of value for the city: the weekend. Coming to the second and the third indicators - ADR and RevPAR - there is only one event that takes place during the weekend among the good performers (in red): The Art week. This second element underlines the conclusion that the ability of this kind of cultural micro-medium events to improve the week seasonality of Milan by boosting hotel performance during the weekend is very limited. Yet we should highlight once again that the majority of the events analysed are new and therefore these modest results show the potentiality they have for the future. The second hypothesis was rejected on the basis of these findings.

However, it would be limited and partial to consider only the effects of these events on hotel performance and therefore these results were cross-checked with those obtained from analysing interviews and official documents released to the press from 2017 to 2020 by the primary stakeholders.

As stated by the Deputy Mayor for Culture of the city of Milan Filippo Del Corno, *“Events increase the attractiveness index of a place, help to publicise it and to position it on the destination desirability map. [...] In addition, the events set in motion virtuous economies for the promotion of the artistic, architectural and landscape heritage of the area which lives in strong symbiosis with the planning of the event. Finally, there is also the value that events bring to increase the cognitive heritage of the community”*.

Furthermore, another quite interesting successful element that goes beyond the performance indicators relates to the strong and permanent collaboration between local institutions and companies in the organisation of the events themselves. As explained by Luca Martinazzoli, Head of City Marketing, *“We designed the idea of “Week” to give the city a rhythm, and to give different actors from different sectors the opportunity to express themselves using the city’s brand - a very strong brand - and using the city’s physical and human stage”*. An important result of this strategy has been that *“the municipal administration makes the stage available and most of the content is now provided by private entities”*.

Last but not least, those events contribute to reshaping the urban space, moving flows of visitors to areas that are less congested by tourists and residents. *“[...] there are moments that involve the entire urban space and provide knowledge of the city that goes far beyond the more consolidated forms. In other cities abroad [this type of cultural event] is always concentrated in one place; [on the contrary] a characteristic of the Week and City format is that they draw unusual maps of Milan that lead to the discovery of places, neighbourhoods, cultural centres, places of aggregation that have the ability to amaze and challenge the entrenched view of our city every time. The whole city feels deeply involved, called on to participate actively or by proposing initiatives or contents and as a spectator”*. (Cit. Filippo Del Corno, Deputy Mayor for Culture of the city of Milan).

The perception of a positive effect in the redistribution of flows throughout the city generated by the Milanese formula is also shared by stakeholders from the hotel industry.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The results that emerge from the empirical analysis confirm the existence of a positive impact generated by the *“Week”* and *“City”* portfolio on the performance of the city, but not big enough to modify its week seasonality. Although modest - especially in terms of room occupancy - this impact highlights a positive contribution of cultural micro-medium events to tourism in the city. This contribution takes shape not only in terms of its ability to attract large flows of overnight visitors, but rather in terms of the attractiveness of the offer for specific segments of high-value tourists. In

addition to this, of course, events also play an important role in pursuing the objectives of the city, in terms of inclusiveness and the promotion of cognitive capital, two central aspects for positioning Milan as a “vibrant” city of international importance. This first evidential element constitutes a contribution to the academic debate that has already proved the positive impact of mega and large scale events but focused less attention on smaller initiatives.

The analysis therefore sought to highlight a new model of urban tourism development based on micro-medium events, relating it to hotel performance. This innovative model hinges on a coordinated calendar of “City” events, an innovative format of small-scale cultural initiatives distributed throughout the area with great capacity for participation and inclusion, and “Week” events that are capable of promoting the integration of the various vocations of the city - production, tourism, culture and services - supporting the collaboration between public and private actors operating in different cultural and creative sectors and scattered throughout the city.

It is therefore a model that, in an attempt to overcome seasonality, tends to combine business tourism and leisure tourism, thus contributing to mitigating seasonality also by means of a new visitor mix and a strategic scheduling of events, in line with what is also suggested by the literature on the sector.

Moreover, three valuable elements that emerged from this study have important managerial implications. The first of these concerns the strong link between the portfolio of cultural events, the economic activity and the vocations of the territory that hosts them. The most important “Weeks” that Milan hosts are attributable to its excellences, highlighting a link between tourism development strategies and broader urban development policies, so that the benefits are sustained and the entire set of the territorial resources is optimized. As proof of this, even in the presence of an unprecedented health crisis such as the covid-19 pandemic, the city has quickly organized the first “digital Fashion Week”, scheduled for July 2020. It is an effective example of a B2B-B2C event that combines business activities and cultural contents. This formula enhances the value generated for a wide-ranging group of the destinations stakeholders: residents, entrepreneurs/managers and tourists among the others.

The second valuable implication is related to the permanent public-private collaboration put in place in recent years for the organisation of these events. The evidence for this does not come from the quantitative analysis, but emerges from the interviews with the event organisers. It is clear, in line with previous studies, that the rich portfolio of “Weeks” and “Cities” results in a stronger and closer permanent collaboration between the municipality that organizes the platform and the private bodies that fill it with contents. As demonstrated even by other international cases - Barcelona, Vienna, Northern Ireland among others - events are important drivers for establishing and then institutionalising local collaborative strategies and, in some cases, even for setting up new permanent destination management bodies. Once again, this element highlights the

need to manage events as part of a broader destination strategy that goes beyond the tourism field and embraces a multitude of related industries and stakeholders. This is because sustainable tourism development relies on collective decision-making around the transformation of - natural and economic capital resources in particular - and in this specific case cultural ones too (Martini and Buffa, 2015).

Furthermore, an additional implication which is remarkable for both destination managers and businesses is that it takes time to exploit the effect of minor cultural events on a destination's performance. In fact, as emerged from the findings, the most effective events are the oldest ones. Apart from the Fashion and the Design weeks, which are undeniable successful events with a high impact on the city, among the events analysed in this study the most valuable ones are *Book city* and *Piano city* which started in 2012. *Book city* in particular seems to have a quite important role. This is an interesting event which is very closely connected both to the promotion of an important economic sector for the city, that of publishing, and to local cultural participation policies (promotion of reading). In addition, *Book city* was also a tool for the international promotion of Milan during the process for obtaining recognition as a UNESCO Creative City of Literature (2017).

The other city events - the more recent ones, started in 2017, 2018 or 2019 - are less impactful. It is possible to deduce from this that well established events are better than the new ones as there is greater awareness of them, they have a reputation and a story to tell. This means that a long-term events strategy is required and that maintaining the event portfolio over time can be important for capitalising on the effects of the investments made to start new initiatives.

This explorative study has two main limitations: first of all, even if we check for the presence in the city of important exhibitions during the same days as a *Week* or a *City* event, we still cannot be sure that no significant event was taking place somewhere in a hotel or in another venue in the city because Milan does not have an official destination calendar. Secondly, several of the events analysed are very recent as they only started in 2018 or 2019. The limited number of years available reduces the ability to establish if an event has generated a stable effect, as the awareness of it can be modest in early years, while the collaboration between the actors involved might not yet be consolidated.

In addition, fundamental for assessing the impact of the most recent events will be the evolution of the post Covid-19 recovery process, while the city's ability to innovate the offer in terms of event management, further diversification of the public / target, and reuse of public space will play a key role as well.

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