THE EUROVISION SONG CONTEST: BEYOND THE SONG

El festival de Eurovisión: más allá de la canción

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ABSTRACT

The European Broadcasting Union (EBU) was born in 1950 to improve radio and television services through collaboration and sharing content. This was, initially, limited only to news and sports. Therefore, and in order not to be based only on those contents, in 1956 they opted for the creation of an event where music was a link between peoples: the Eurovision Song Contest. Sixty-one years later, the Song Contest has become one of the longest running programs in television in the world as well as one of the events with the largest audience. The objective of this research is to know whether the Eurovision Song Contest fulfills the purposes of the EBU that refer to cultural diversity and the identity of peoples.

Key words: Eurovision Song Contest; cultural diversity; identity of people; European Broadcasting Union

RESUMEN

La Unión Europea de Radiodifusión (UER) nació en 1950 para mejorar el servicio de radio y televisión mediante la colaboración y el intercambio de contenidos. Este, en un principio, se limitaba solo a noticias y deportes. Para aumentar sus servicios, en 1956 apostaron por crear un certamen dónde la música sirviera de nexo de unión entre los pueblos: el Festival de Eurovisión. Sesenta y un año más tarde, el Festival se ha convertido en uno de los programas de televisión más longevo del mundo, así como uno de los eventos que cuenta con más audiencia. Esta investigación pretende conocer si el Festival cumple con los objetivos de la UER, señalados en sus estatutos, que hacen referencia a la diversidad cultural e identidad de los pueblos.

Palabras clave: Festival de Eurovisión; diversidad cultural; identidad de los pueblos; Unión Europea de Radiodifusión

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Broadcasting Union (EBU) was established in 1950 to improve radio and television services through cooperation, technical assistance, programming exchanges and a joint defense of the interests of its members. These exchanges were initially limited to the broadcast of news and sports. Therefore, in order to expand its services, the EBU decided in 1956 to create a contest in which music acted as a point of contact among people: the Eurovision Song Contest.

Year after year, and festival after festival, opinions have become diversified. It seems clear that at the beginning it was a television show that gathered European families together in front of their TVs to watch it. Therefore, the 50s were the beginning of the "Eurovision phenomenon"; the 60s marked the consolidation of the Festival; the 70s saw Eurovision filled with superstars; in the 80s the festival

fell into decline; there was a rebirth in the 90s; and in the 21st century, Eurovision has become a popular phenomenon (Ayllón et al., 2004).

There is no exact definition of what the Eurovision Festival is, and after 61 editions, it is a complex task to describe it. However, Cebrián Herreros, in his book *Estrategia multimedia de la televisión en Operación Triunfo* declares:

> «It is a festival with a long history, already in its 41st edition, which has had ups and downs in terms of audience but which is still widely popular. That edition (2001) had an audience of over 100 million television viewers from 30 countries and about 6 million online viewers. In Spain there was an audience of 5,613,000 viewers in 2001, 45.7% of the share. In the 2003 contest there were 24 participating nations.» (Cebrián Herreros, 2003, p.5).

It is currently one of the longest-running television shows in the world, and it is one of the events with the largest audience. In 2016 it had an audience of 204 million television viewers.

Figure 1. Evolution of the audience of the Eurovision Festival in Spain
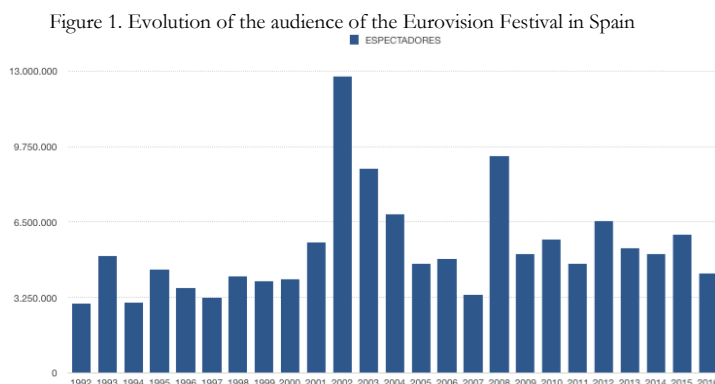
Source: Compiled by author based on data from *Eurovision-Spain*

The EBU explains that the Festival provides public services with values like respect, creativity, diversity and innovation, apart from European values. Ultimately, Eurovision is more than music; it is a television format which reinvents itself over the years and which has known how to adapt to its times. Eurovision is more than 40 nations; it is more than a visual show. It is a social, political, cultural, economic and technological program that has an impact inside of Europe and outside.

I belong to the generation that discovered and was hooked to Eurovision thanks to the appearance of a show that revolutionized Spanish television: Operación Triunfo. Back then, in 2002, 16 young artists competed in a music contest in which the winner, apart from starting a career in the music industry, would have the chance to represent Spain in the Festival. As Pardo points out (2005, p. 82), the audience that year was over 10 million viewers, and he attributes this to the fact that the personal journey of Rosa (the winner of the first season of Operación Triunfo), her charisma and her charm «brought all of Spain again in front of their TV sets and had them guessing who would win the Festival that year, something that had not happened since the seventies.»

The explanation for such choice of a topic of research and its subsequent delimitation is that, after a comprehensive search in the published literature on the subject, I have realized that there is not a lot of information on it. Similarly, we can conclude that the literature in Spanish on the Festival is virtually nonexistent.

Studying the Eurovision phenomenon allows the researcher to approach the subject from different disciplines. The first academic piece of research which is quoted in all the studies on the Festival comes from the field of mathematics and statistics. Yair Gad (1995) used a statistical study to develop bloc theory in «*Unite Unite Europe: The Political and Cultural Structure of Europe as Reflected in the Eurovision Song Contest*». In this study, the author claims that culturally close countries vote for each other and create three separate blocs. That is, the Western Bloc, the Northern Bloc and the Mediterranean Bloc.

European identity is another topic that is researched in the studies published about the contest. However, the main shared characteristic in those publications is that they study identity starting from a specific country, thus proving that a nation can be built through the Festival. In this regard, in our present study it is essential to start with the texts by Paul Jordan, known in the Eurovision world as 'Dr Eurovision': «*The Modern Fairy Tale: Nation Branding, National Identity, and the Eurovision Song Contest in Estonia*» (Jordan, 2014) and «*The Eurovision Song Contest: Nation Branding and Nation Building in Estonia and Ukraine*» (Jordan, 2011).

In both studies, the author highlights the importance that this event has had with regard to the creation of a national image and brand. For Estonia, Ukraine and Finland, the Eurovision Festival represented the opportunity to present a specific narrative of their identity to a wider audience. «Countries have used the Eurovision Song Context as a platform for creating a European image and, in that context, it has been a tool to build a nation» (Jordan, 2011, p. 135).

With this study, I want to apply a different view and approach to the Eurovision Festival, and to study it as a phenomenon that transcends the musical aspects and which is ruled by the cultural targets proposed by the European Broadcasting Union.

2. OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESIS

This research starts by answering a question that emanates from personal curiosity. The question emerges from looking into the organization in charge of the show. Does the Eurovision Song Contest meet today the objectives of the European Broadcasting Union?

Therefore, once that the main research question has been presented, we might say that our main goal is to know whether the Festival meets the two EBU goals that are outlined in its statutes, and which refer to the cultural diversity and the identity of its people. Implicitly, this research has also a secondary target: to present the Eurovision Festival as a television phenomenon with a cultural nature.

This research is based on the following main hypotheses.

H1 The Eurovision Song Contest guarantees cultural diversity to promote values of tolerance and solidarity.

H2 The Eurovision Song Contest protects and promotes the European cultural heritage.

H3 The Eurovision Song Contest reinforces the identity of its people, social cohesion and integration of all individuals, groups and communities.

3. METHODS

As part of the structuring and development of research, it is necessary to choose a methodology that makes it possible to analyze the topic of study in depth. This analysis is structured within the framework of a combined qualitative approach.

According to Duverger (1962, in Berganza, 2005, p.177), research can be done through two different methods. On the one hand, there can be direct observation of a social reality through interviews, surveys, questionnaires and participant observation. On the other hand, there is the study and analysis of different documents: written documents (including books, daily and periodical publications, statistical series, etc.), and audiovisual material. Therefore, I have opted for a combined qualitative method.

According to Denzin (1970, in Vallés, 2005, p.146), for the purposes of this research, participant

observation will be defined as a field strategy which simultaneously combines the analysis of documents, interviews to subjects and informants, direct participation and observation, and introspection. In this regard, researchers may use their personal experience to enrich what they observe from a position which is simultaneously close distant.

As Ruiz Olabuénaga & Ispizua state (1989, in Vallés, 2005:143), observation is a common activity in daily life. This common and generalized observation may transform into a powerful tool of social research, and as part of a scientific technique to gather information.

Berganza (2005: 284) explains that participant observation is the approach for data collection in which the researcher is part of the observed situation itself. In order to become familiar with this technique, it is necessary to meet the condition of having already been an ordinary participant of the analyzed phenomenon. Within this context, researchers access their personal experience to enrich what they observe from a close and a distant position at the same time.

To sum up what I explained above, I have carried out a participant observation of the Eurovision Song Contest from two perspectives. On the one hand, by participating as a viewer and a follower of the contest in *Eurovision's Greatest Hits*[1] and in the video meeting with potential candidates to represent Spain in the 2016 Festival which took place in the studios of the national Spanish television broadcaster *TVE* in Madrid. On the other hand, I have accessed other events with a press card. The events were: *Eurovision: You Decide*[2], *London Eurovision Party*[3] and the Eurovision Song Contest 2016[4]. To do so, the following characteristics have been taken into account:

Table 1 . Characterization of the technical role of a participant observer vs the regular role of an ordinary participant

ORDINARY PARTICIPANT	PARTICIPANT OBSERVER
Single purpose: doing activities that correspond to the social situation in which they are naturally participating.	Double purpose: being involved in activities that are part of the social situation that is being studied and in-depth observation of that situation.
Selective inattentiveness, state of relaxation or of taking some aspects for granted.	Increased attention; state of increased awareness.
Narrow-angle observation, limited to the immediate purpose of doing normal activities.	Wide-angle observation, enlarged by the added purpose of studying the tacit cultural aspects of a social situation.
Experience within the situation, interpreted as a member of the scene that takes part in it.	Experience inside and outside of the scene, thanks to the dual condition as a member and an outsider.
Natural introspection. Normal use of the personal experience in daily life in order to understand the experience of others.	Applied introspection. Use of natural introspection as a tool for social research.
Lack of a systematic register of activities, observations, introspections.	Systematic register of activities, observations, introspections.

Source: Compiled by author based on Vallés, 2005.

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[1] Concert organized by the *BBC*, held in London in March 2015 to commemorate the 60 years of the Festival.
[2] Gala organized by the *BBC* to choose the British representative for Eurovision 2016. It was held in London on 26 February 2016.
[3] Pre-Eurovision party held on 17 April 2016 in London. It was attended by several participants of the 61st edition of the Festival, including Barei, the Spanish standard-bearer in Eurovision 2016.
[4] The Eurovision Song Contest 2016 was held in Stockholm (Sweden) on May 10, 12 and 14.

4. THE EUROPEAN BROADCASTING UNION

The European Broadcasting Union (EBU) is the main public alliance of media entities in the world. It currently has 56 members (both within Europe and outside). Its main goal is to make public service media indispensable. As can be seen in Article 2, "it is a professional association with the purpose of promoting cooperation among its Members and with other broadcasting organizations around the world, representing the interests of its Members and assisting them in the programme, legal and technical fields, among others".

For them, public service media are the cornerstone of a democratic society, and they try to provide them with first-rate services and a center for learning and knowledge exchange. One of the main activities of the EBU is technical cooperation, and they have been one of the leading agents in the research and development of new media, contributing to the progress of new techniques of radio and television, such as the radio data system (RDS), digital video broadcasting (DVB) and high-definition television (HDTV). The EBU operates through two different networks:

—Euroradio: it promotes radio as a public service to ensure that it is still a key actor in the multimedia world. This is achieved through the exchange of music and professional networks, and the active promotion of digital and hybrid radio.

—Eurovision: it produces and broadcasts sports events and news with high quality, as well as cultural programs and entertainment and music shows. The first exchange of images through this network took place between the United Kingdom and France. However, the coronation of Queen Elisabeth II in 1953 is often cited as the start of exchanges through this network, when different European television stations (in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and the United Kingdom) decided to broadcast the same live signal of the event.

As stated in section 1.2 of Article 1 of its Statutes, the purposes of the EBU are to contribute, in the field of broadcasting, to:

1. Promoting and developing the concept of public service media (i.e. radio, television and other electronic media) and their values, in particular, of universality, independence, excellence, diversity, accountability and innovation, as referred to in the EBU Declaration on the Core Values of Public Service Media;

2. Safeguarding and improving freedom of expression and information, which is one of the essential foundations of a democratic society and one of the fundamental conditions for its progress and for the development of every individual;

3. Enhancing the freedom and pluralism of the media, the free flow of information and ideas, and the free formation of opinions;

4. Employing and developing information and communication technology as a means to further the right, regardless of frontiers, to express, seek, receive and impart information and ideas, whatever their source;

5. Developing cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and exchanges in order to promote tolerance and solidarity;

6. Protecting and promoting Europe's cultural heritage and the development of its audiovisual creation by offering an increasing choice of programmes and services;

7. Reinforcing the identity of the peoples, social cohesion and the integration of all individuals, groups and communities;

8. Fulfilling the public's expectations in the information, educational, cultural and entertainment fields through the production and dissemination of a diversified range of high-quality programmes.

5. THE EUROVISION SONG CONTEST

The Eurovision Song Contest is the largest and longest-running international music festival in the world. It is also the one with the largest audience. Throughout its 65 years of life, it has shot renowned artists to fame, such as Céline Dion, Olivia Newton-John, Julio Iglesias or the Swedish band ABBA. However, there have been few songs that have reached global success. One of them is *Nel blu, dipinto di blu*, better known as *Volare*, performed by the Italian singer Domenico Modugno in 1958.

This song contest of public televisions has been defined by some British media, like *The Telegraph* (2007) as "the most terribly wonderful cultural event in the continent".

5.1. HISTORY OF THE EUROVISION FESTIVAL

In the mid-fifties, the members of the European Broadcasting Union decided to meet and create a committee to investigate ways of rallying the countries of Europe round an entertainment programme. In late January 1955, this committee, chaired by Marcel Bezençon, director general of Swiss Television, came up with the idea of creating a song contest, inspired by the San Remo Festival (in Italy). The idea was approved by the EBU General Assembly in Rome on 19 October 1955, and it was decided that the first "Eurovision Grand Prix" would take place in spring 1956 at Lugano, Switzerland. In its beginnings, it was meant to bring Europe closer together and raise morale in the countries that had been devastated by World War 2, in an attempt to promote cultural understanding and new broadcasting techniques at the same time. The original idea behind the contest, which is still valid today, is that nations (those whose public televisions are active members of the EBU) could submit original songs that would then be performed and broadcast live.

The next step was to agree to a series of rules that would be followed by the seven initial participants: Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Switzerland and West Germany. On that year, the jury had a secret vote and the scores were not made public. Instead, they announced the winning son: *Refrain*, by the Swiss Lys Assia. Over the years, the organizers of the Festival realized that the voting stage was one of the main attractions of the show, and they decided to make it public. Two years later, in 1958, the "Eurovision Grand Prix" became an annual event.

Spain did not participate in any of the first five editions because, according to Pardo (2005), it lacked the technical facilities it required to connect the country with Europe. Its debut in the contest took place in 1961, with Conchita Bautista and the song *Estando contigo*.

There are no complete copies of the 1964 Festival, because a few days after it was held, there was a fire in the studio where it had been recorded. What we do know is that Italy won that year with Gigliola Cinquetti, and that the trio TNT represented Spain. According to Pardo:

> «The anecdote in that Festival, which was broadcast live for all Europe, was the appearance of demonstrators, carrying the inevitable banner, who crossed the stage while the TNT trio was singing, with criticism at the Spanish and Portuguese political regimes. This circumstance led the Spanish television TVE to impose the rule that it would apply a delay of some seconds in its broadcasts of international events it could not control» (Pardo, 2005, p. 23).

The 1968 edition in Spain was surrounded by controversy. Joan Manuel Serrat was chosen in the first place to go to London (the host of the contest). However, since he intended to sing in Catalan, TVE removed him from the competition. Only two weeks before the contest, the Spanish broadcaster decided to choose a young artist called Massiel, who was touring Mexico in those days. The singer, who was from Madrid, won the edition by only one vote, with Sir Cliff Richard's *Congratulations* as the runner-up. After Massiel's victory, Spain was tasked with organizing the Eurovision Festival in 1969.

The chosen venue was the Teatro Real of Madrid, and Salvador Dalí created the promotional poster. For the occasion, Franco's regime lifted the state of emergency to receive the other delegations. Nevertheless, Austria did not attend the contest and declared that they did not want to send any singer to participate in a country under a dictatorial regime. That edition ended with a tie for first place of four countries. Since there was no tiebreak rule, all four of them were declared joint winners: Spain, the UK, the Netherlands and France.

However, if there is one year that represented a turning point in the history of the contest, it was 1974:

> «The great hit that year, and maybe the greatest in the entire history of Eurovision, was the winning song, *Waterloo*, by the Swedish group ABBA. For the first time, pop music with the commercial style of the radio stations of that time was performed in a Festival that was becoming old-fashioned. And it marked the birth of a group which, along the next eight years, would be a constant hit with each and every one of their albums. It was a true revolution for the Festival, and its influence lasted for a very long time» (Pardo, 2005, p.43).

The 1998 edition was marked by the political and religious debate generated by the Israeli representative, the transsexual artist Dana International. The clashes in Israel between Orthodox Jews and laypeople because of the choice of Dana were shown in newscasts throughout all Europe in the weeks prior to the contest, which meant that the Israeli delegation arrived at the Festival with a significant promotional advantage over other contestants. The victory of the singer «rekindled in all of Europe the debate about and the interest for the Festival» (Pardo, 2005, p. 91).

With the arrival of the new era, the live orchestra disappeared and allowed artists to use a pre-recorded backing track. In 2004, a semi-final was introduced due to the increasing number of countries who attended the event in Istanbul. In 2008 there were 43 participating countries, and the EBU decided to organize two semi-finals, which are still held today.

The most relevant historic fact in the last decade has been the participation of Australia. The Australian broadcaster *SBS* was invited to participate and it went straight to the final in the 2015 show, to celebrate its 60th anniversary. This exception was justified by the EBU as a gift for having broadcast the Festival for so many years (Australia started broadcasting the ESC in 1983). In the latest edition of the contest, in 2016, Australia became a full member, with the right to participate (despite not being an active EBU member), although in the same conditions as the other contestants: after competing in the semi-finals.

5.2. THE EUROVISION FESTIVAL AS A MEDIA EVENT

Along its 65 years of life, the Eurovision Song Contest has become a phenomenon that transcends the borders of the continent. It hosts contestants from dozens of countries and has an audience of over 200 million viewers, which makes it the most-watched non-sporting event in the world, and which has grown so much that it now takes place along three nights, with the two semi-finals (on a Tuesday and a Thursday) and the final (on a Saturday). Dayan and Katz (1992) define this type of events as the main holidays of broadcasting media:

> «The most obvious difference among media events and all other television genres is that, by definition, they are not part of the programming routines. In fact, they are interruptions of the routine; they intervene in the usual rhythm of television in our lives. […] They are broadcast while they are happening, in real time, live; and they are organized outside of the media» (Dayan and Katz, 1992, p.5).

Bolin (2006) explains that the contest shares many features with other international media events like the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup. However, the author also compares it to other annual events which are broadcast worldwide, like the Academy Awards ceremonies, or the MTV Awards. He claims that the Festival is very similar to sports events, insofar as it is a competition among different nations; or to the Academy Awards, which is a competition among actors. The author ultimately believes that since this is a fight among nationalisms, this makes the Eurovision Song Contest a unique element in its genre.

On the other hand, Jackson (2007, in Jordan, 2011, p. 20) states that the fact that the Festival has so many fans turns it into something more than a media event. In this sense, we may say that the contest, apart from a media event, is a special event:

> «These are events with a unique and festive nature, with their own image, status, prestige or brand, with a limited and fixed duration, and that turn the attention of enormous media companies on the hosting cities. In general terms, these events involve a series of actors and organizers that plan and control the event, while the audience is present on the venue where they can experience the unique atmosphere of the show » (Skodra, 2010, p.12).

These type of events attract coverage from the media to the hosting cities, as well as thousands of journalists, tourism writers, world-renowned artists and athletes, enthusiasts and tourists who want to be part of a unique experience.

Dayan and Katz (1992), in their book *Media events. The live broadcasting of history*, point out that media events are ceremonies that attract a great number of viewers, and one or more nations, and also:

> «They are characterized by a *norm of viewing* in which people tell each other that it is mandatory to view. They cause viewers to *celebrate* the event by gathering before the television set in groups, rather than alone [...] These events reach the largest audiences in the history of television» (Dayan and Katz, 1992, p.9-14).

As a result of this large following over the years, the Eurovision Song Contest is now seen through second screens. This year, Eurovision has dominated the conversation on social media. More specifically, the 2016 edition managed to monopolize "social conversations during the entire night, and generating over 7 million comments" (*RTVE*, 2016). In addition, when it became known that Ukraine was the winner "there were 72.915 tweets per minute on the topic" (20 Minutos, 2016). This social network has become one of the best platforms for viewers to comment on the contest. Twitter has become some sort of "virtual loungeroom", in the words of Highfield et al. (2013, p. 318), where audience members can gather to discuss and debate, in real time, what they are watching on their TV screens. In this sense, according to these authors, this social network has become an unofficial extension of the Eurovision Festival because, through it, the audience can participate in a direct communication, talking to and connecting with other fans of the European music festival.

Aware of this, Twitter developed a special hashtag (#) for the week of the Festival in 2015; it was created from the generic logo of the contest, which is shaped as a heart, together with the flags of the participating countries. These *hashflags* are available in the social network for special occasions or events, although this was the first time in which they had been used for a music competition, because until that moment they had only been used for sports events, such as the FIFA World Cup of 2014. In the Eurovision Festival of 2016, Twitter created again a special hashtag for the event, but this time only the logo of the contest was used.

5.3. THE EUROVISION SONG CONTEST AS A CULTURAL TOOL: THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITIES

Bjönberg (2007) argues that the ESC is an event in which all its ingredients, namely music, language and dance, are potential indicators of a national culture. The contest is a showroom of a shared cultural experience. In this regard, we can use it as an example of the ideals of the European Union and its motto: "United in diversity", although, as it has been explained above, the contest does not have a direct relationship with the European Union. This author also claims that the performances in the television show carry cultural meanings associated with problems of national, regional and European identity and of its musical representations.

Events such as the Eurovision Festival, according to Jordan (2005, p. 43), become a vehicle for the promotion of a culture through the participation and the organization of the event itself. The European identity, like any national identity, is a cultural construct, a feeling of belonging to an imagined community. European and national identities do not necessarily exclude each other: belonging to a group does not mean that one cannot belong to any other. In the ESC, both frames of identification, national and European, take place.

Bjönberg (2007, p. 16) explains that one of the many roles of Eurovision is «to show the musical representations of each national identity». Bolin (2006, p. 191) states that the ESC has become a discursive tool in the definition of the concept of Europeanness and the political strategies for Europeanization. Similarly, the website of the EBU points out that, for 60 years, the Eurovision Festival has been Europe's favorite show, which after over six decades and more than 1400 songs has become a modern classic, strongly rooted into Europe's collective culture. According to Bolin (2006), the Eurovision Festival is also a platform for the promotion of the nation. In this regard, the author establishes a comparison between the event and the World Fairs of the 19th century, in which the organization of the event made it possible for countries to promote their image and show themselves to a large audience.

The changes that have taken place in Europe are reflected in the Festival in a more general way. Many of the winners in the last decade have come from new incoming states (Estonia, Latvia, Ukraine, Serbia and Russia) or from countries that have participated from the start and are located on the periphery of Europe, such as Finland or Greece (Fricker, 2009, p. 1-2). As Raykoff and Tobin explain, Eurovision provides a context to examine the definition of Europe and the notions of European identity in the new century (2007, p. 23). The contest may be seen as a symbolic representation of Europe; as the configuration of Europe as a united bloc. In order to explain how we can see the unity of the continent during the contest, we merely have to point out several sentences that have been heard from the beginning of the contest: "*Good Evening, Europe!*", "*Europe, start voting now*". Lehti & Smith (2003, p. 183-184, in Jordan, 2005, p.40-41) also add that the participation of Israel and Morocco reinforce the notion of Europe as a social construct. In this context, events such as the Eurovision Festival may be considered as a symbol of European pop culture, because it is already part of a traditional ritual of television. The contest represents a sense of "union" as part of a routine. This apparent feeling of community, therefore, makes it possible to imagine individuals with a real connection with other members from different states (Jordan, 2011, p. 11).

Catherine Baker writes that the Festival offers the countries two chances to show their nationality: first of all, the live performance, which will be related to the promotion of the singer or singers; and second, the promotion of the hosting city or country. Baker continues by claiming these potential nationality initiatives, which represent over 40 countries from inside Europe and outside as well, create pressure to represent the nation, based on known and simplified positive images of the country or the region.

The Eurovision Song Contest has been used by the participating nations as a platform for the visualization of different aspects of their national heritage, either through the choice of costumes or through the music style (Jordan, 2005, p. 46).

Examples that include typical musical elements of the folklore of each country can mostly be found in Eastern countries. However, in this regard there are also some exceptions. For example, Portugal has always opted to show its Portuguese folklore and its music. Therefore, the music style that has dominated its participation on the festival was the fado. In the year 2011 they changed that trend and sent a proposal that showed Europe that "the struggle is joy", as a clear reference to the Carnation Revolution that took place in the country in 1974, and in which carnations starred prominently on the stage.

Image 1. Portugal's performance in the Eurovision Song Contest in 2011.

Source: Compiled by author based on YouTube

Baker (2008) writes that Eastern countries follow the strategy of focusing on the folkloric styles that represent old or local traditions. Moreover, she asserts that the regions in the periphery of Europe maximize their possibilities of success in the European entertainment market by displaying something which is exotic and distinctive.

However, we may not only find elements that show the identity of each country in the songs that compete each year. We also find them in the performances during the intermissions, or during the voting time. Another form of appreciation of national and European identity may be seen in the slogans of the Festival and the postcards that introduce each country.

In its beginnings, the Eurovision Song Contest aimed at bringing countries together through music. With the passage of time, the show itself has attempted to create certain elements that help to convey that message of unity, including the slogans of the contest. We need to go back to the year 2002 to see one for the first time in Eurovision. Estonians decided to give the 47th edition of the show a theme to unify the production of the event around a common motif. At first, the slogans were mainly aimed at highlighting the position that each hosting country occupied in Europe. However, that message of unity that the contest wanted to transmit started to become evident from the year 2013.

The strongest examples of the representation of a nation, according to Jordan (2005), are the fragments of short films that appear between songs during the Eurovision Festival. These postcards

are similar to tourism publicity campaigns, because they are essentially a representation of the heritage of each country (2005, p. 44).

These postcards could be seen for the first time 40 years ago, in 1970 to be precise, and they lasted 30 seconds. In these clips, the standard-bearers of each nation were seen at the most representative monuments of each country. Throughout a major part of the history of the contest, the opening sequence of each participant has been portrayed with a postcard. These clips play several roles in the show. First of all, they leave a space between the different performances that makes it possible for the organizers to change the stage and prepare it for the next artist. Second, they show us the cultures, traditions and landscapes of the participating countries, thus building the identity of each of them by showing small publicity fragments narrated by the commentator of each broadcaster.

Image 1. Fragment of the postcards of the Festivals in 2000 and 2011.

Source: Compiled by author based on YouTube

5.4. POLITICAL FEATURES IN THE EUROVISION SONG CONTEST

Before each show starts, the stage manager gives one basic instruction: "Enjoy, this is music!" However, there is one question that has played an important role in the competition since the arrival of televoting: politics. This is a common debate topic that periodically leads the media to investigate accusations of irregularities regarding the management of the contest, as well as the problem of trends and political influence on the voting system. Is Eurovision politics? Do politics have an influence on the European music contest?

As I said, with the arrival of televoting, some critical voices started to claim that Eurovision had become a political battlefield. In addition, there were growing opinions regarding fraudulent voting on

the show. In this regard, the European Broadcasting Union has always tried to adapt the rules and ensure that the contest operated smoothly so that such comments would not take place.

If we go back a little, it is known that, in 2008, after the UK was left in the last position and Russia was proclaimed the winner, Sir Terry Wogan announced that we would no longer be commenting on the Festival for the *BBC* and claimed that the show "was no longer a music contest". In this same line of opinion, the victory of Serbia in the Festival the previous year had shocked Western Europe, where the audience and the media criticized the validity of the results. In fact, this situation was debated on the British Parliament, where the liberal-democrat MP Richard Younger-Ross denounced that the voting system was an attack against the relationship among the peoples of Europe.

In view of this situation, several authors have studied the votes in the contest based on mathematical and statistical formulas. Yair was the first author to publish a document that approaches the trends of votes in the contest. After an analysis of the voting between 1975 and 1992, he proved that there were three main areas that were based on shared feelings and interests: the Western Bloc, the Mediterranean Bloc and the Northern Bloc. The existing scientific evidence seems to suggest that there are indeed some specific voting patterns that emerge. Later studies expanded the analysis until 2003, "adding variables of linguistic and cultural relationships (the form of facing social inequality, individualism, masculinity, tolerance…) (*La Vanguardia*, 2016).

After an analysis of voting in the Festival between 1975 and 2002, Gatherer (2006) identified the following blocs: Benelux (Belgium and the Netherlands), the Viking Empire (Island, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), the Balkan Bloc (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey, Macedonia, Albania, Greece, Serbia and Montenegro, Romania and Cyprus), The Warsaw Pact (Poland, Ukraine and the Russian Federation) and the Pyrenean Axis (Andorra and Spain).

Image 3. Blocs in the Eurovision Song Contest according to Gatherer.
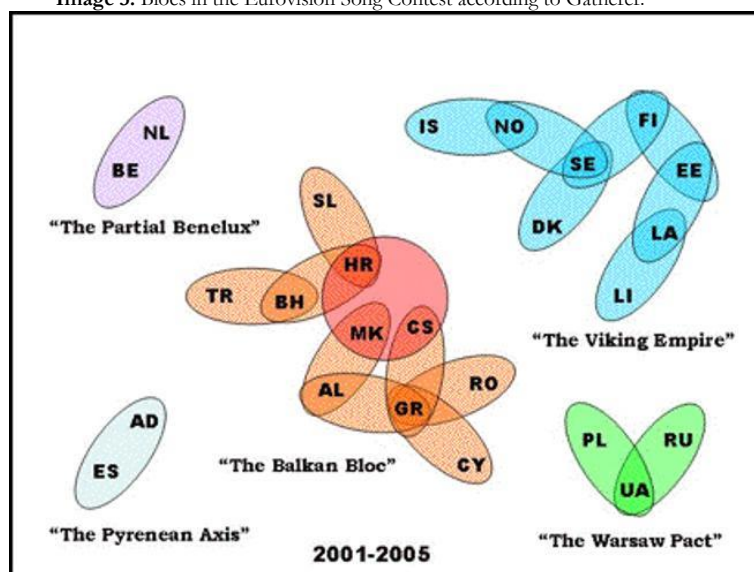
Source: Gatherer, 2006

As we can see, both political and cultural factors have an influence on voting. However, Blangiardo and Baio (2014) identified the impact of the social and geographic structure of voting patterns after the analysis of two decades of the Festival (from 1998 to 2012). In their study, they identified the presence of positive or negative trends (which would show if there was a protest vote) in voting based

on geographical proximity, migration patterns and the cultural characteristics of the participating countries. The analysis did not find evidence of any negative trend:

> «In conclusion, the findings from our model seem to suggest that no real negative bias emerges in the tele-voting. In some cases (and in accordance with previous findings in the literature), we found moderate to substantial positive bias, which could be explained by strong 'cultural' similarities, e.g. due to commonalities in language and history, and to a lesser extent to geographical proximity and migrations.» (Blangiardo & Baio, 2014, p. 2321)

We may conclude, in this review of the existing voting patterns, that cultural traits prevail over political factors in this matter. However, although the literature claims that political factors do not have an influence on voting, it is true that they are generally present during the contest. One example may be found in the lyrics of the songs. In 2005, the Ukrainian song, *Razom nas bahato*, performed by the hip-hop band Greenjolly, had been a protest hymn in the Orange Revolution. After the song had been selected, the EBU insisted that the lyrics contained specific political references that attacked the pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich. Afterwards, those verses were removed from the original version of the song. There was also the case of Spain in 2008, with *Baila el Chikichiki*, or of Georgia in 2009 which was called *We don't wanna put in.* This last example stirred controversy because of its similarity with the statement *We don't wanna Putin.* In the 2013, many voices accused the Swiss song of containing a religious message (something which is forbidden by the rules of the Festival). The group Heilsarmee, which is German for 'Salvation Army', was sent to the Festival with the song *You and Me*, and wore Salvation Army uniforms. The EBU warned them that they had to change their name and outfit, lest they were expelled from the contest. Finally, they accepted and changed the name of the group to Takasa. In the last edition, the Ukrainian song was called *1944*, and in it, the singer, Jamala, presents one of the stories that her great-grandmother had told her. It was about the tragedy that befell her family and the Crimean Tatars in 1944, and it delivered a message of collective memory so that people would not forget their past. If the lyrics are analyzed, there is no evidence of any political message, and the only connection with the historical events is the story that the singer tells in press conferences. The EBU confirmed that the song did not contain any political references and allowed her to participate.

5.5. LANGUAGE AS A CULTURAL VEHICLE

Ifversen (2002, in Jordan, 2011, p. 21) suggests that language, religion, tradition and customs are some of the elements that mark a culture. Moreover, in this regard, we may add that language is an important factor to convey a message in Eurovision performances, as well as a way to show cultural diversity onstage.

Throughout the history of the contest, as we have already seen, there has been a constant debate on the language that artists should use for their songs. This is reflected on the EBU's "linguistic policies", with different norms that have regulated the use of languages throughout the six decades of the music contest. In 1999, the EBU decreed that countries would be free to choose any language they wanted. This has had some interesting results: English has become the language of choice for most participants. Since the arrival of the new era, there has also been a trend of using English as a *lingua franca* within the contest. In view of this fact, *The Telegraph* (2006) made the sarcastic remark that "Oscar Wilde might have described Eurovision as an entire continent divided by a common language: English".

Figure 2. Language of the 64 winning songs of the Eurovision Song Contest[5]
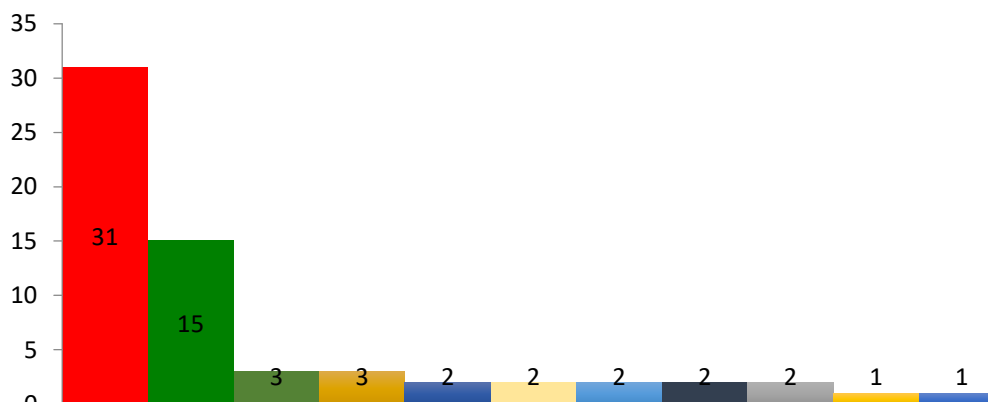
Source: Compiled by author

Why does English predominate in Eurovision? There seem to be two main reasons for it. In the first place, English can be understood by most Europeans; and in the second place, the business of pop music in general is led by artists who sing in English.

Not only Eastern countries sing in English, but also those in the center of Europe. In the case of Spain, after 55 years of participation in the contest, elements in English have gradually entered its songs. It started in the year 1988, with the group La Década and their song *La chica que yo quiero*. According to Pardo (2005), the directors of *TVE* decided to give it an English title, *Made in Spain*, to prepare it for the international market. In the year 2002, fragments in English were included for the first time in a Spanish song. It was with Rosa López's *Europe's living a celebration*. Then came songs with a chorus entirely in English, as in the case of Ruth Lorenzo and her *Dancing in the Rain*. Already in 2016, Spain submitted a song with all its lyrics in English: *Say Yay!*, by Barei.

Although there is indeed a trend of winning songs that are performed in English, the truth is that there have been three examples in the last editions that show otherwise. The first one, which was the winner in 2004, was performed in English and Ukrainian; the winner of 2007 was sung in Serbian; and finally the winner of 2016 had a song in English and Crimean Tatar (a minority language). However, cultural diversity, with regard to the language, cannot only be seen in the winning songs. Along more than six decades, we have been able to hear the following languages on the stage: Swedish, Czech, Catalan, Spanish, Romansh, Luxembourgish, Norwegian, Viennese, Montenegrin, Ancient Greek, Udmurt, Romanian, Russian, Romani, Ukrainian, Slovak, Antillean Creole, Võro, Neapolitan, Portuguese, Icelandic, Maltese, Hebrew, Albanian, Crimean, Slovene, Armenian, Arabic, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Estonian, Breton, Pontic Greek, Croatian, Bulgarian, Georgian, Bosnian, Latvian, Serbian, German, Hungarian, Corsican, Polish, Irish, Finnish, Dutch, Samogitian, Turkish, Danish, French, Tahitian, Swahili and Azerbaijani. There have also been songs with sign language and in constructed languages.

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[5] Note: Although there have been 61 editions of the Festival, which would mean 61 winners, this also takes into account the tie with four winners in 1969, which leads to a total of 64 winners.

5.6. REPRESENTATION OF SOCIAL VALUES

When Conchita Wurst became the winner of the contest in 2016, the President of the Austrian government, Heinz Fischer, declared that it was not only a victory for Austria, but a victory for diversity and tolerance in Europe.

However, tolerance is not a new and fashionable topic in the contest. Apart from Conchita, we need to direct our attention to the victory of the transsexual artist Dana International in 1998. This helped the Festival to be seen as an open-minded and tolerant contest. However, this is an image that has accompanied the show since its first edition of 1956. In the words of Wolther (2014):

> «Tolerance for artists singing the praises of their countries, even if we might disagree with them; tolerance for languages that might sound strange and unmelodic to our ears; and tolerance for different cultural preferences in music and stage performance. The Eurovision Song Contest is not a show for intolerant, narrow-minded or xenophobic people, just because of the diversity this programme is made of.» (2014, p. 49-51).

Once that the songs are selected, words like "tolerance", "freedom", "inclusion", "respect" and "modernity" become the main actors in the speeches of delegations and artists alike. Ultimately, they all try to convey a message when they are on the Eurovision stage: Hungary sang in 2014 against domestic violence; Sweden delivered a message against bullying in 2015, and the Netherlands have protested this year against the demands of society and asked people to take life easy.

5.7. REPRESENTATION OF MINORITIES

Language representation in the Eurovision Song Contest has been accompanied by the representation of minorities, given the fact that on the stage there have been songs in minority and almost forgotten languages. However, we can also see the image of other minorities within the show. According to the United Nations in the document *Minority Rights: International Standards and Guidance for Implementation*, there is no internationally agreed upon definition of what groups represent a minority. However, Capotorti describes a minority as:

> «A group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members - being nationals of the State - possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language» (Capotorti, 1979, p.1).

According to this definition, the first representation of a minority was shown in 1964. Anneke Grönloh, who had been born in Indonesia but had Dutch ancestors, represented the Netherlands that year. It would be the first country that had a person of color as a representative on the Eurovision stage.

There are many similar examples in the history of the contest. In the case of Spain, there have been representatives belonging to a minority: the Romani people. It happened first with Peret in 1974, then with Remedios Amaya in 1983, in 1990 with the duo Azúcar Moreno, and finally in 1996 with Antonio Carbonell.

People with disabilities have also had representation in the Eurovision Festival. Spain led this movement in 1992 when it selected Serafín Zubiri (who acted again in 2000), a blind singer, pianist and songwriter. This was followed by Corinna May, who represented Germany in 2002, and Diana Gurskaya, who represented Georgia in 2008. In 2015, Monika Kuszyn□sk, the representative for Poland, was the first person on a wheelchair to perform in the Festival. In this same edition, there was a group from Finland, Pertti Kurikan Nimipäivät, which was integrated by four artists with autism and Down syndrome.

Similarly, Eurovision has also left room for minorities through its different music styles. In 1980,

Norway represented the Sami people with its proposal. In 2004, Võro was featured in Estonia's song, which showed that language and that music to the world. In this review, we cannot forgive the Finnish heavy metal band that conquered Europe in 2006: Lordi. In their performance, the group appealed to their national cultural identity by using the traditional four winds hat of the Sami while carrying Finland's flag. This was a visual means to invoke a feeling of national community. The band created a public identity that showed a symbolic representation of the Finnish audience. On the other hand, the leader of the group, Mr. Lordi, has often declared in many public interviews that he belongs to a minority and a subculture, and that their victory was a triumph for tolerance (Pajala, 2006, p. 366, in Rinne & Häyhtiö, 2007, p. 340-341).

6. CONCLUSIONS

The origins of the Eurovision Song Contest can be found in 1956, a year in which Europe was still recovering from the Second World War. Back then, uniting countries through music, in the words of Pardo (2005, p. 14) was as innovative and significant «as the decision to create the euro as a common currency 45 years later». There was a time in which French ballads, long and fancy dresses were the stars of a Festival that had been born with the intention of being broadcast annually over the radio. Now, six decades later, the contest has become one of the most important television events of the year. In all this time, the competition, which initially gathered seven countries, has evolved to a point in which it is a three-night show in which 43 nations compete for an award to the best European song.

However, in the middle of all this show, it is easy to forget that the Eurovision Festival is one of the few existing Pan-European traditions. In spite of the challenges that Europe must face, this European music contest is still meeting its main objective today. Regardless of where we come from, what we believe in, the type of music that we like or the traditions that we celebrate, it is a day in which we can be together thanks to music.

As we have seen in the studies published about voting patterns and trends in the contest, politics has not a significant transcendence, and the biggest influence on votes are the cultural traits, languages and history shared among the different countries.

Apart from language, cultural diversity can be seen in music styles. Although it is true that there is an existing trend in choosing Anglo-Saxon styles for the contest, there are still countries that decide to show their traditions and their culture on the stage. These countries, which are mostly from Eastern Europe, always have more local or more national proposals, because for them Eurovision is the only chance they have to open up and show themselves to the world. It is the moment of the year in which they can share their culture with the more than 200 million viewers who watch the competition.

The event is, indeed, a cultural ritual which repeats itself every year and which goes beyond the musical aspects, so that national identities are present during the entire gala. Each edition is different from the others, and they can never be compared. However, what they do have in common is that, through different resources such as postcards or performances during the intermission, and even at the time of the connection with the spokespeople who give the scores from each country, the identity of the participating countries is shown. This cultural event is also an opportunity for the participating countries (including non-European countries such as Israel, Azerbaijan or Australia) to feel part of a whole, a community or a continent from the first minute in which presenters greet all of Europe.

This diversity and unity of the countries is also included in the values that the Festival sponsors. Values such as tolerance, respect, friendship (among the participants) and the messages issued from the stage of the Festival are still relevant in our days. The Eurovision Song Contest has lost its essence in some countries. Nations from the center of Europe do not need to rely on exotic stereotypes, like the Eastern bloc, in order to create a strong brand for their country, because they already have one. Instead, they show a plural identity on the stage because their performance on the show is only a small part of their national representation. Indeed, the event provides a platform for peripheral states to

compete with Western countries, not in political terms, but cultural. The Festival is represented as an opportunity to see the countries as cultural powers. For this reason, it is important to clarify what the contest is and to give the Eurovision Festival its original meaning back. For this reason, I add here a proposal of a significant description of the contest and define it as an annual media event which is part of the European cultural heritage, in which the participating countries show their own identity, guaranteeing cultural diversity and promoting the integration of all individuals, groups and communities, which meets the goals of the European Broadcasting Service.

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