

Linden, H. and S. Linden (2018) "There were only friendly people and love in the air": fans, tourism and the Eurovision Song Contest. In C. Lundberg and V. Ziakas (eds.) *Handbook of Popular Culture and Tourism*. London: Routledge.

## **"There were only friendly people and love in the air": fans, tourism and the Eurovision Song Contest**

**Henrik Linden and Sara Linden**

### **Setting the Scene**

This chapter will give some insight into the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) as an event that attracts a particular group of tourists – fans. Fan tourism is a growing field and the travel industries are increasingly viewing fans as a key market segment. Visit London, for example, has built a whole marketing campaign around fans and fan tourism – "Fans of London" (Visit London, 2017) – and VisitBritain encourages fans of Britain to post pictures and comments on social media as part of the global #OMGB ("Oh My GREAT Britain") campaign (VisitBritain, 2017). As the concept of the fan has become more inclusive it has also entered into the mainstream consciousness – we can now be fans of "almost anything" (Guerrier, 2015). Although being a fan may still be "fraught with baggage from historical and contemporary media representations" (Stanfill, 2013, p. 17) – and fans are sometimes viewed as a threat to the dominant social order (Jensen, 1992; Hills, 2002; Sandvoss, 2005; Jenkins, 2008; Duffett, 2013) – the broadening of the fan concept has placed particular emphasis on fans as customers and, as such, they are attractive for businesses (Linden & Linden, 2017). In fact, in the experience economy, or consumer society, where subcultures are increasingly difficult to identify, it is instead *normal* to be a fan. So, while fans were previously viewed with suspicion, being a fan can now enhance one's status and increase one's social and cultural capital not only within the fandom, but beyond it too. Fans *experience* things, and after all, experiences are what we are all after.

Fan tourism traditionally often takes the form of a secular pilgrimage (Hall, 2002; Digance, 2006), as a location or site that has a meaning in the "text" surrounding a popular culture figure may be regarded as "sacred" within the fandom (Linden & Linden, 2017). A well-known example is Graceland in Memphis, the former home of Elvis Presley, which is one of the most popular tourism destinations in Tennessee (Graceland, c2017). Another common form of fan tourism is linked to events – such as travelling to attend a fan convention, a football match or a concert. In this sense, a travelling fan can also be viewed as an event tourist. Donald Getz (2013) divides event tourists into two categories: spectators and participants. However, in terms of the ESC it is increasingly difficult to draw the line between these two categories, as a large group of fans are not only directly involved in planning, organising and delivering the event – they also sometimes perform at sub-events such as EuroClub nights. Fans thus play a particularly important role in the staging of and experiences surrounding the ESC (Linden & Linden, 2017). Swedish fans also expressed the civic pride they felt when Stockholm hosted the event in 2016 and data suggest that both locals and visitors have a more positive attitude towards the city after the event (Stockholms stad, 2016). According to Stockholms stad (2016) 70% of the visitors who came just for the ESC plan to return within five years, and a report on the 2017 ESC in Kyiv (Institute of World Policy 2017) suggests that 92% of the visitors want to return – a remarkable number considering the reluctance of some fans (as we will see below) to go to Ukraine for security and safety reasons.

Event-led place and destination branding is a popular strategy for cities to seek global attention (see for example, Landry, 2000; Evans, 2003; Pike, 2016; Gold & Gold, 2017), and to ensure a positive event legacy it is important that the objectives of the host city are in alignment with the values of

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the event. In Stockholm 2016, the ESC slogan "Come Together" connected well with the "openness, technology and music" themes (Malhotra 2017) of the host organisation, which in turn are closely linked to Richard Florida's (2002) three T's for a successful creative city: talent, technology and tolerance.

On the next pages we will present an overview of the ESC in relation to fandom and tourism, covering aspects such as hosting the ESC, the fan experience, LGBT travel and what it means to be an ESC tourist. As we believe that it is important to give the fans a voice, we have included some quotations from an online qualitative survey that we conducted in early May 2017, where 18 members of the official Swedish ESC fan club, Melodifestivalklubben, answered (in addition to two demographic questions) the following five questions about Eurovision fandom and travel:

"Why did you become a Eurovision fan – and what does it mean to you to be a Eurovision fan?"

"Have you ever travelled to the Eurovision Song Contest? If the answer is YES, how many times and to what destinations – and what motivates you to travel to Eurovision?"

"Did you go to Stockholm during Eurovision 2016? If the answer is YES, please tell in your own words about the experience"

"Are you planning on going to Kiev for Eurovision 2017? If the answer is YES, what is your reason for going and what expectations do you have? If the answer is NO, what is your reason for not going?"

"What country do you hope will win the 2017 contest – and why?"<sup>1</sup>

### **Hosting the Eurovision Song Contest – and being a fan of it**

The ESC has produced few lasting superstars, at least on a global scale. The exception to the rule is of course ABBA (who won for Sweden in 1974) and to some extent Celine Dion (the Canadian, who won for Switzerland in 1988), although she did perhaps not become a "mega star" until later. This does not matter, however, as the lure of the competition goes far beyond the competing artists and acts. A unique aspect surrounding the ESC – an event that has both been described as "American Idol meets the Olympics" (SVT, 2016) and termed the "Gay Christmas" (Rehberg, 2007) – is also that it has spawned fans of the *competition itself*, rather than fans of specific acts.

A European invention, the contest is also largely a European affair – although it has increasingly transcended beyond Europe, both in terms of its audience and the countries that are taking part in the competition. Morocco took part in 1980, and Israel – due to the Israeli Broadcasting Authority (IBA) being a member of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) – have participated most years since 1973 (even winning it three times: 1978, 1979 and 1998). The ESC has been popular in Australia since at least the 1980s, and to mark the 60th ESC in 2015 Australia was allowed to enter a contestant for the first time. They are now – after having participated three times already – an established ESC participant. The event is also broadcasted in China and the USA, further cementing

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<sup>1</sup> The responses were in Swedish and have been translated by the authors, Henrik and Sara Linden. The survey was kindly distributed online by Anders Ringqvist on 3 May 2017 via the Melodifestivalklubben member pages.

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the global nature of the event – and confirming that there are large groups of fans outside of Europe. In the USA, the official ESC broadcaster is Logo, an LGBT themed cable network that reaches around 50 million homes (Jordan, 2016). Chris McCarthy, the network's general manager, told *The Guardian* in 2016 that "Eurovision is a cultural phenomenon we have admired from afar for years [and] we are thrilled to bring the event to US audiences and cheer alongside the rest of the world" (Qvist, 2016).

Initially, the ESC was created to try out transnational broadcasting links in Europe, and to provide content to the EBU (Fricker, 2013, p. 75) – thus not for any explicit European unification purposes. However, the contest and broadcast have developed into "an occasion for the performance of European unity, and its recurrent and ritualistic character add to the sense of cultural import and gravity around it" (Fricker, 2013, p. 76).

The ESC is the longest running pan-European media event (Sandvoss, 2008). It is also an event that has grown both in size and importance – in its inaugural year, in 1956 in Lugano (Switzerland), only seven countries took part, while in 2017 in Kiev (Ukraine) 42 countries entered the competition. It is now the largest non-sporting live media event in the world, with viewing numbers far exceeding those of the Academy Awards (Szalai & Roxborough, 2016; Carniel, 2017). Therefore, it is not surprising that it has become seen as a nation branding tool, and – after the fall of the Soviet Union – as an opportunity for Eastern European countries to "return" to Europe (Iglesias, 2015, p. 233). Paul Jordan (2014, p. 11) states that "participating countries have used the contest to project certain images of themselves on the European stage, and shape how they are perceived by their European others and by themselves".

A fan, quoted by Cornel Sandvoss (2008, p. 193) recounts that Eurovision was an early source of information about Europe: "as a child it informed me about Europe, made me interested in languages, travel, etc." As a pan-European event, it has the scope to give the audience across Europe a shared experience of what it means to be European. Jessica Carniel (2017, p. 14), in a paper about Australia's participation in the ESC – a participation that in itself makes the "Europeanness" aspect more complex – also compares the "opportunity to showcase national cultural industries in a state-based competition with nationalistic implications" to those offered through "sporting events such as the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup." Thus, the contestant competes *on behalf* of their country, and may also represent a particular culture *within* that country.

We need to be careful not to generalise too much – the ESC means different things in different countries, and some countries take it more seriously than others (as they are aware of the public relations benefits) – the contrast between the United Kingdom and many other countries, in terms of the attitude of the media for example, is significant (Georgiou, 2008). The British comments about the ESC are often steeped in irony (Coleman, 2008), but other nations have a non-ironic approach as Julien Danero Iglesias (2015, p. 234) points out: "the contest is seen in Moldova as something very important and journalists take seriously all developments around the contest" (Iglesias, 2015, p. 234).

In many ways, the ESC resembles a sporting event – particularly as it is a competition where, in the end, there is a winner. The winning nation also gets to host the following year's ESC. This ensures a spread of host countries and cities, but it also means that there is little time for preparation (Stockholm, for example, only had ten months to prepare for the 2016 ESC – as they first needed to

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win a bidding competition against Gothenburg). It affects host cities and organisers as well as the fans – meaning that there is less time to prepare compared with, for example, a big sporting event. It gives nations less control too, as they cannot put in a bid – they need to *win* the competition to be able to host it. However, this does not stop countries from actively working towards hosting the ESC. Many countries put in a lot of time and effort to find a winning formula, like Azerbaijan, for example, did in the years running up to their victory in 2011 (Ismayilov, 2012) – when they also hired a Swedish team to pen the winning song. Sweden have won the competition twice in the last five years, and this may be partly due to having the most advanced national selection procedure, as confirmed by the official website of the ESC:

"The most successful televised national selection format is Melodifestivalen in Sweden, which features four live shows in different cities across the country, a second-chance show and a spectacular final." (Eurovision, 2017, para. 2)

While the ESC as a broadcasting event sometimes reinforces cultural stereotypes, the corporal city event adds other dimensions. Watching from the sofa and following social media may thus fuel old-fashioned dichotomies (see Georgiou, 2008; Coleman, 2008). However, travelling to attend the event and mixing with fans from other countries may instead foster a deeper sense of understanding for other cultures.

Michael Morgan (2006, p. 305) has stated that the word "experience" is used by the leisure industries to "describe the essence of what customers are seeking and paying for" (cited in Cohen, 2010, p. 27). So, what does the Eurovision "experience" consist of, from a holistic point of view? To be precise, the Eurovision Song Contest is, in essence, a broadcasting event – created and designed for a television audience. However, it is also a *city event*, encompassing a number of sub-events, which is an event strategy that we have come to associate with most large scale events and festivals. As such, it involves a big organisation, and the whole city – whether its population like it or not – is affected.

In Stockholm in 2016, the stage for the broadcasting event was the Globe Arena where the actual competition took place. The city event took place throughout Stockholm and its suburbs, but the focal point for the "two-week musical extravaganza" (Stockholms stad, 2016) was Kungsträdgården and Skeppsbron in front of the Royal castle in Old Town:

"Eurovision Village in Kungsträdgården Park became the official party venue for the public, boasting two stages, food, and activities. The 81-meter-high City Skyliner attraction was located in the center of the park. The pavilion at Skeppsbron in front of the Royal Palace was home to the official party venues EuroClub and Euro Fan Café." (Stockholms stad, 2016, p. 14)

One fan who took part in our survey refers to how the event has grown since the last time he attended in 2000, thus confirming the festivalization of the city through the event:

"A fantastic experience in all different kinds of ways. Eurovision evening in Kungsan [Kungsträdgården, the location for Eurovision Village] with Carola and Herreys [former Swedish ESC winners] among others, and a Ted Gärdestad [former Swedish ESC contestant] celebration at Euroclub – my first visit to Euroclub. An awesome experience. In 2000 this didn't exist in Stockholm as far as I know. In those days you just booked the hotel and ticket

and took the train to Stockholm, entered the arena and then out again. There was no Euroclub back then and it wasn't as enormous as it is now!"

The ESC is increasingly regarded as a mega event – a term usually associated with the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup – and Annika Malhotra (2017), Project Manager for Events at Stockholms stad (the City of Stockholm) referred to it as such when we spoke to her. This is not surprising, seeing that the television audience was 204 million in Stockholm in 2016 (EBU 2017) and 182 million in Baku in 2017 (Jordan 2017). Also, according to Stockholms stad's (2016) *Host City Summary Report*, the direct tourism revenues for Stockholm 2016 is estimated at approximately £33 million. Each visitor spent on average five days in Stockholm, spending around £200 every day, while media representatives spent an average of £330 per day and stayed 9-10 days on average (Stockholms stad, 2016).

There are a number of reasons for why someone becomes a fan of something, but it is often linked to a "milestone" event occurring in one's life (Harrington & Bielby, 2010). For the ESC fans a common factor is that of a "milestone" event occurring in childhood or adolescence (see for example Sandvoss, 2008), such as one's own country winning or doing well (indicating a communal national experience) or that the fan has been moved by or identified with a particular performance on a more private level (indicating a more individual experience). However, for the travelling fans, the private needs and wants become shared experiences. From the event tourist's point of view there is thus room for individualisation and self-development (Richards, 2011, 2013), co-creation (Lugosi, 2014) and a communal experience fostering a sense of belonging (Taylor & Woodward, 2014; Ferdinand & Shaw, 2012) – and the ESC could be viewed as a form of safe haven where the individual and collective needs and wants meet.

Despite its status as a mega event, the ESC has maintained a certain intimacy that is rare for such big events. This is largely a consequence of the central role played by the fans – and the close relationship that exists between the fans, the artists and the competition itself. In Stockholm in 2016, fans were given greater access to the event than ever before, and Stockholms stad (the City of Stockholm, the organisers of the events programme) immediately involved Melodifestivalklubben (the official Swedish OGAE fan club) in the planning and design of the EuroClub and Euro Fan Café. Linnea Rosén (2017), Events Manager at Stockholms stad and the Project Manager for EuroClub and Euro Fan Café at the 2016 ESC, told us in an interview that the fans possessed invaluable knowledge and insight into what makes the event work – both from the artists' and audience's point of view. Thus, the fans can be seen as co-creators of the event – and their expertise ensured that the *fan experience* was at the heart of the event organisation. For example, for the fans attending the ESC, digital connectivity is important – and many of the press accredited journalists and bloggers are also fans. Therefore, when planning the functional aspects of the Euro Fan Café and the EuroClub, it was important to have plenty of power sockets available (as well as extra chargers) and to give fans the opportunity to stash away their equipment (such as cameras and laptops) safely within the premises, so that they did not have to return to their hotel between the rehearsals and performances at the Globe Arena and arriving at the EuroClub.

Social media has played a major role in enhancing the ESC experience for the television audience, and particularly Twitter has proved to be an effective platform for engaging live ESC audiences in conversations, often of an ironic or humoristic nature, to enhance the sense of fan community and

belonging (Highfield, Harrington & Bruns, 2013). It could be argued that social media enhances the travel experience too, as it gives fans the opportunity to share their corporal experiences with not only their travel companions, but with a much wider group of friends and "connections" who are not there physically (Linden & Linden, 2017). In addition, they will also be able to access other travellers' photographs and comments (for example, via Instagram or Twitter), thus *augmenting* the experience – and prolonging it, as they will be able to look back on these images and reminisce once the event is over.

Although the event is the main draw, event tourists and fans do care about the destination. Some destinations are viewed as more attractive by the ESC audience, for several different reasons. The LGBT aspect, safety and tolerance are often brought up as central components, and the fan reactions to Austria winning in 2014 – Vienna is described by UNWTO as "an iconic destination for LGBT travellers" (Rahbar, 2017, p. 92) – and Ukraine in 2016 were thus quite different. The British fan site EUROfiasco (2016, para. 8) wrote the following when it was confirmed that Ukraine would host the 2017 ESC:

"So for the first time since 2011 [when Azerbaijan won], a country has won that, on balance, we are unlikely to go to. (I am assured that Kiev has many charms, but Ukraine's not going through the best of times at the moment - and their attitudes to The Gays are a bit, well, mixed)."

A motivator for travelling can be to experience a stronger sense of self, and to reinforce one's perceived identity and create a sense of belonging (Pearce, 2005; Cohen, 2010). This may be extra prominent in fan travel, as the object of the fandom draws people together through a deep common denominator. Although many Eurovision travellers may be driven by escapism as a push factor, the pull factors are more obvious: the contest itself, the opportunity to mix with like-minded people, and the chance to experience the destination itself (if viewed as an attractive one). Immersion is important in relation to escapism (see for example, Pine & Gilmore, 1999) and the fans are often completely immersed in the series of ESC events and experiences that form part of a separate, or parallel, universe. For the fans, the ESC and its related events is seen as a more tolerant universe. A Swedish fan that took part in our survey, confirmed this aspect: "I am in a wheelchair and I stood right at the front by the stage at Euroclub; I never dare to do that otherwise but here there were only friendly people and love in the air."

When Baku hosted the ESC in 2012, the theme was "Light Your Fire," reflecting that Azerbaijan was promoted more widely as "The Land of Fire" – further indicating that hosting the Eurovision Song Contest was part of a broader destination marketing project for Azerbaijan. As ESC hosts, Visa regulations may be less strict for ESC tourists, as was the case with Azerbaijan in 2012:

"In an effort to encourage an ever greater number of tourists to visit the country during the Eurovision week in May 2012, the Azerbaijani authorities moved to simplify the country's visa regime for those intent on attending the ESC (Eurovision ticket holders, accredited individuals, and invited guests, that is), making it possible for the latter group to obtain a visa on the border and do so at a lower than usual rate." (Ismayilov, 2012, p. 845, note 12).

There are of course other issues involved in restricting the fans' travel patterns too. One of our respondents, a fan from the south of Sweden who has attended the ESC five times since 2000, has

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mainly visited ESCs in the neighbouring countries due to his fear of flying. However, a trip by train to Baku was planned, but in that particular case other circumstances stood in the way:

"I was planning on going to Baku in 2012 and a train journey had been drawn up for me since I don't fly if I can avoid it. The train journey included a transfer in Dagestan and since UD [the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs] advice against traveling to Dagestan it was UD that had to make the decision for me..."

Murad Ismayilov noted in 2012 that that the ESC sparked "the first wave of open discussion in national online media as to the overall situation with, and the society's attitudes towards, the country's sexual minorities" (p. 846). Also, following the Azerbaijan victory in 2011, an LGBT website was launched, "the first of its kind in Azerbaijan and indeed the entire Caucasus" (p. 846). Taylor and Woodward (2014) states that festivals – and we can certainly regard the ESC as a festival – are often sites of cultural critique. Thus, given the history of the ESC and its large LGBT following, it is not surprising that hosting the ESC creates discussion and puts the host country under political scrutiny but, as Catherine Baker (2014) has pointed out, this is not always reflected in policy making and actual improvements of LGBT rights.

From 2013 onwards, the Eurovision themes have been directly linked to the wider values of the ESC – such as inclusion, diversity and acceptance. In Malmö in 2013, the slogan was "We Are One." In Copenhagen in 2014, it was the more modern but similarly inclusive "#JoinUs." In 2015, in Vienna, the theme was "Building Bridges." In Stockholm 2016, the slogan was "Come Together" and in Kyiv in 2017 it was "Celebrate Diversity." These overarching themes correlate well with the views of the fans, and the "coming together" component is put forward as a key aspect of their fandom. The themes go well with what is often put forward as a positive effect of travel and tourism more generally, in that it helps fostering tolerance (see e.g., Crotti & Misrahi, 2017; Scott, 2015).

In an article for the magazine *Vice*, freelance journalist Weronica Perez Borjas (2016) admits that Swedes have a special relationship with Eurovision:

"I've never really been a fan of the Eurovision Song Contest but I have to admit that I've found myself falling for it over the years. It shouldn't come as a surprise that living in Sweden can do that to a person – Swedish people have a collective perpetual obsession with the ESC."

In her article, she interviews some travelling fans who have gathered at the Eurovision Village in Kungsträdgården in central Stockholm, where the final was shown on big screen:

"It's our third time attending Eurovision, after Copenhagen and our own city, Vienna. We decided that every time the ESC is in a city we'd like to get to know better, we'll travel for the event and for the sights." (Paul and four Austrian friends, cited in Borjas, 2016)

"Eurovision is like nothing else in the world. If you go to football, rugby or any other sport, there's always rivalry. Here, no one is aggressive or high on power, there are no barriers." (Matt from the UK, cited in Borjas, 2016)

Borjas (2016) also notes the friendly atmosphere surrounding the event and writes: "Halfway through the results, it struck me that the Eurovision Song Contest is one of the few large scale events, where people get piss drunk, wave their national flags and peacefully hug it out together."

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This statement confirms what Linnea Rosén (the Project Manager for EuroClub and Euro Fan Café in 2016) told us – that the atmosphere was friendly throughout the Eurovision week and that, despite high levels of alcohol consumption, there were hardly any incidents involving the police (Rosén, 2017). This, of course, is in stark contrast to many sport events where atmosphere can sometimes be violent and hostile (see e.g., Crawford, 2004; Jamieson & Orr, 2009). Another reason for the friendly atmosphere at ESC may be the closeness of the fans, and the community aspect (as many fans visit again and again - for example, the majority of the Swedish fans who took part in our survey had attended several ESCs).

### **LGBT travel – and Eurovision fans as tourists**

The ESC is regarded to be a safe space for LGBT travellers. According to Baker (2014), already in the 1980s there was a transnational fandom based around Eurovision – largely consisting of gay men. As Peter Rehberg (2007, p. 60) has pointed out, Eurovision "provides a rare occasion for simultaneously celebrating *both* queerness *and* national identity." However, some destinations are viewed as safer than others, and no former Soviet Union states are listed as gay friendly destinations by IGLTA (the International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association). IGLTA was formed in 1983 and is "the world's leading global travel network dedicated to connecting and educating LGBT travelers and the businesses that welcome and support them along the way" (IGLTA, n.d.) and provides tourists with travel advice. They are also involved in UNWTO's (2017) new report on LGBT tourism.

Ahead of the ESC in Kyiv, the British Government advised UK visitors to be aware of some differences between Britain and Ukraine – particularly with regard to attitudes towards the LGBT community and risks involved in being open about one's sexuality:

"although homosexuality isn't prohibited by law, public attitudes are less tolerant than in the UK and public displays of affection may attract negative attention. There's no provision under Ukrainian legislation guaranteeing freedom from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation" (British Embassy Kyiv 2017).

Here we can see a contrast between Kyiv and Stockholm, where the former is regarded as less of a safe place to go for LGBT travellers. This did not discourage Jonathan Koo, a 39-year old programmer from San Francisco (cited in Gander, 2017) to look forward to going to Kyiv for Eurovision 2017:

"Everyone by now knows Eurovision has turned into 'gay Christmas' and there's no reason for it to stop being such. I know I'm being naive but in my head I imagine a Footloose scenario where we convince the town to loosen up and have fun, but as is evident in Kiev with the controversy over the rainbow arch, that would probably never happen."

The fandom has certain subcultural elements, in that it provides fans with the opportunity to pursue an alternative lifestyle without being judged: "Eurovision has always meant, for many of its LGBT fans, a way to rewrite heterosexual community and ritual into something special to them" (Baker, 2017, para. 2). As we saw above, the ESC has been referred to as a form of "gay Christmas" – a "national holiday for queers" (Elmar Kraushaar, cited in Rehberg, 2007). The OGAE, the international fan club of the Eurovision Song Contest, has also been described as a form of support group, and according to Rehberg (2007, p. 60) Eurovision fandom "has in itself been read as a metonymical



secret code for being gay." Most researchers and commentators agree that gay men make up the international core of the fandom, and it is evident that the connection to LGBT culture is strong – although the fans are made up of a wide demographic (the Swedish fan club, for example, has a significant female membership – and eight of our 18 respondents were women). We did not specifically ask our survey respondents to account for their sexual orientation, although one of them did answer the question "state your age and gender" by writing "gay guy of 46".

Although attending the Eurovision events and partaking in Eurovision related activities are the main focus for the fans, we must not forget that they are also tourists – and, as we saw above, many of them are staying several days. There is therefore at least some room for sightseeing and experiencing the host city in a broader sense. Leading up to each Eurovision Song Contest, fans exchange information about what to do, and the fan websites – such as *ESC Insight* – as well as general travel magazines and newspapers are posting tourist advice and travel tips. It is clear that the number of articles, blog posts, tweets, etc. about a destination increases when they are set to arrange any major event – and particularly when it is a global media event such as the Olympic Games, the FIFA World Cup or the ESC. The online behaviour among people also changes – according to Ismayilov (2012), in the first month after Azerbaijan's Eurovision victory in 2011 the Google searches on the country increased eightfold, while the interest on TripAdvisor went up by 4000%. Writing for *ESC Insight*, Alison Wren (2017, para. 2) urges fans who are planning on visiting Kyiv to explore the destination beyond Eurovision:

"As tempting as it is to totally immerse yourself in the Eurovision bubble, Kyiv is a city which is well-worth getting out and exploring. With three million inhabitants this large city has a wealth of interesting architecture, tourist attractions and tasty food options."

There are various ways for locals and tourists to engage with the event, and like most larger festivals or sporting events there are multiple event locations – as we have seen the ESC is not only about the broadcasting events, it is also about the *city* events and established experiences such as EuroClub, Euro Fan Café and Eurovision Village. In Stockholm 2016, the EuroClub and Euro Fan Café were brought together for the first time, thus giving access to a wider group of fans and facilitating deeper interaction between the superfans and the curious public. EuroClub (the Eurovision night club) were only for participants, delegates and members of the OAGE fan clubs, but accreditation was open to a larger number than previous years.

As we saw above – Kyiv is regarded by fans as less of a "natural" ESC destination than the previous host cities Stockholm (2016) and Vienna (2015). Of the 18 fans participating in our survey, only two were going to Kyiv for the 2017 ESC. Some respondents explained that the reasons for not going included logistical and financial aspects such as time constraints, high travel costs and difficulty to get time off work. One fan wrote: "I don't have time to go and it is cosier to lie on the sofa with a bowl of candy and watch it on TV", while another one simply stated: "No, I can't afford it." However, other key reasons for not attending were uncertainty about the safety, accessibility and political value discrepancy. Here follows a sample of responses that gives some further insight:

"No, as a wheelchair user it doesn't feel accessible to go there"

"It is mainly because I wasn't ready to go abroad alone, especially not to a country like Ukraine that feels a bit unsafe. It was also partly due to my finances."

"I am not going, as Ukraine feels a bit messy with the Russia situation and I also feel that it would be expensive to bring the children there. It is not a country that I generally want to go to either, so therefore I will stay at home."

"No. On the one hand it is the safety situation in Ukraine that keeps me from going, and in addition it is too expensive to go there."

"I wasn't a fan of the winning song and I don't want to go to a country that is in conflict with Russia [---] The fear of ending up in an eventual war zone is big. When it was confirmed that Ukraine had won, I was so disappointed (as I wanted Australia to win) that I went straight home without partying with my friends."

"No, I feel that Ukraine is not a country for me. They are so far removed from my values that I don't want to give them anything."

"Niet! No! I only go when the ESC is in Sweden, that's enough for me!"

"No! Me and my husband felt that if we were to take a break it would be 2017. We planned another vacation. I don't feel 100% confident about the security in Ukraine."

"No, it's a bit far away and it's too unsafe in Ukraine. But it is fun to be at home and watch Eurovision too."

Two of the fans, however, were planning on going, and very much looked forward to it:

"Yes, to visit a new country. I expect it to be as good as the other shows."

"Yes. I think it will be slightly less well organised compared to Stockholm but it will be good anyway. I appreciate seeing ESC live on location, it is something special."

These answers indicate that the event itself holds a strong attraction and that, despite some concerns regarding organisation and safety, it is a "must" for some fans to see the event "live on location." The draw, as we have seen above, is not only the live event but also the surrounding spectacle and being part of the ESC travel community – which involves fans as well as artists and other delegates.

### **Implications for popular culture tourism: So, who should win – the song or the destination?**

When asked about what country they wanted to win the 2017 ESC, many of our respondents clearly indicated that the destination was of greater importance than the song. For example, one respondent who favoured the entries from Bulgaria and Portugal hoped Italy would win: "if I think of what country I want to go to next year I would vote for Italy." Another one, who liked Estonia, Macedonia and France best, wanted Portugal, Cyprus, Malta or Iceland to win, as "they have competed a long time but never won" – and "it would be nice with a week by the Mediterranean: sunbathing, swimming and partying." One respondent, who preferred Romania's song, stated: "but for me it would be more suitable if e.g. Italy, who is the favourite, won, as it would make it easier to dare to travel to Eurovision." Another respondent stated:

"I don't think there is a standout winner, but the others have convinced me that Italy is best, so I suppose they are the country I will support. It is also a country that I would not mind taking the children to, what with the pasta, pizza and ice cream and sun :)"

Here follows four other examples, further emphasising the importance of the destination – and also showing that one's own country is not necessarily the favourite (which is a different approach compared to sport fans):

"Italy – to get the chance to go to a warm country on vacation in May. Would be nice. Otherwise I look forward to Sweden winning... if only to equal Ireland's record of seven victories."

"Italy or Iceland. I really want to go to these countries."

"Italy, Estonia, France or Finland because I like the songs I would really like to go to one of those countries. Because a fan also thinks about what country one would like to go to."

"My favourites in this year's competition are Estonia and Israel. So I would probably rather go to Tallinn next year. Israel is too far away."

All the answers above, together with some of the respondents' reluctance to go to Kyiv for security reasons, shows that there are a number of components contributing to what motivates fans to travel. The tourism experience is central and cannot be discounted, but even for determined fans more mundane aspects such as time, cost and distance are key obstacles. Even the small sample here shows that the Eurovision audience, at least the members of OGAE Sweden (Melodifestivalklubben) is diverse, and that there are different motivators involved. It also shows that the tourism experience aspect cannot be discounted – instead it would be fruitful to further explore the ESC from an event and fan tourism perspective.

What makes the Eurovision Song Contest quite unique both as an event (or, rather, a set of events) and a fandom – is that the fans are firstly fans of the *competition*, and not of a particular artist. With a television audience of 204 million in 2016 (EBU, 2017) and 182 million in 2017 (Jordan, 2017) the ESC can be regarded as a mega event, but despite its size it has maintained a certain intimacy – which may be partly due to the friendly atmosphere among the travelling fans (many of whom are regular ESC attendees). The ESC as a media event is sometimes prone to stereotyping, and perhaps constructing simplified European identities, but the corporal event experience adds other aspects and dimensions. While watching from the sofa and following social media comments may reinforce old-fashioned dichotomies (see Georgiou, 2008; Coleman, 2008), travelling to attend the event and mixing with fans from other countries foster a greater sense of respect for other cultures.

It is clear that *fans* and *fandoms* play a key role in popular culture travel – and in particular in event-led travel. As we have seen above, relevant links can be drawn between ESC travel and international sport travel – in the sense that the audiences are predominantly made up of dedicated fans and fan communities – but it is also important to note that a major difference is the intimate nature of the ESC, where fan involvement exceeds traditional audience participation. As illustrated by the Stockholm 2016 event, the ESC is an event not only organised *for* fans but also in many respects an event organised *by* fans – thus adding a dimension to the connection between the travelling fans and the location(s) where the event takes place. The ESC fans are therefore seen not only as

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ambassadors for the event itself or the competition, but also for the *destination*. This implies that involving fans in the planning and management of large scale events – instead of merely viewing them as spectators – may be a fruitful approach for destinations that wish to host memorable and successful events that lead to a positive tourism legacy.

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