

2016

## Religious Rites and Ceremonies as the Expression of Local Identity and an Opportunity for Local Development: the case of the “Fòcara” di Sant’Antonio Abate” in Novoli (the bonfire of St Anthony Abbot) in a small town in the Salento Peninsula in Southern Italy

Anna Trono  
*University of Salento*, [anna.trono@unisalento.it](mailto:anna.trono@unisalento.it)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijrtp>



Part of the [Tourism and Travel Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Trono, Anna (2016) "Religious Rites and Ceremonies as the Expression of Local Identity and an Opportunity for Local Development: the case of the “Fòcara” di Sant’Antonio Abate” in Novoli (the bonfire of St Anthony Abbot) in a small town in the Salento Peninsula in Southern Italy," *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*: Vol. 4: Iss. 2, Article 6.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.21427/D7X42Q>

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijrtp/vol4/iss2/6>

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](#).

---

# Religious Rites and Ceremonies as the Expression of Local Identity and an Opportunity for Local Development: the case of the “Fòcara” di Sant’Antonio Abate” in Novoli (the bonfire of St Anthony Abbot) in a small town in the Salento Peninsula in Southern Italy

---

Anna Trono

Department of Cultural Heritage  
University of the Salento (Lecce, Italy)  
[anna.trono@unisalento.it](mailto:anna.trono@unisalento.it)

Religious ceremonies play an important role when understood as an opportunity for improving the image of a city, improving the socio-economic situation and promoting regional development. These are the objectives of the local administration in Novoli, a small town in the Salento peninsula in Puglia, south-eastern Italy. The most important religious, social and tourist event of the year in Novoli is the feast of Saint Anthony Abbot, which falls on the 17th of January. The festivities continue for many days and include religious rites, street lights, exhibitions, food stands, popular music and brass band concerts, markets and conferences. There are numerous attractions not only for pilgrims and those devoted to the saint, but also for lovers of folklore and the simply curious. There is a wine fair, a market and the museum of contemporary art, as well as conferences and meetings of various kinds. The event that sees the greatest involvement of the local community is the building of the monumental bonfire known as the fòcara, made up mainly of vine branches, which is set alight the evening before the day of the saint. In the afternoon before the lighting of the fire, after mass, the statue of the saint is carried in procession through the streets of the town. In the evening the pyre is lit by setting off batteries of fireworks that run up the sides of the bonfire to the top, with spectacular effects. The other key location during the festivities is the sanctuary of the saint, which sees a constant flow of worshippers and pilgrims.

This study seeks to analyse the event of the Fòcara of Sant’Antonio in Novoli, the biggest bonfire in the Mediterranean, attracting more than 150,000 spectators a year. Making extensive use of mass media, the event involves a substantial commitment in terms of finance and human resources. Although this is clearly necessary for the promotion of local identity, in terms of the hoped-for increase in tourism and the development of a marginal rural area in the Italian Mezzogiorno, the results have been poor.

**Key Words:** bonfire, religious feast, local identity, cultural tourism

## Introduction

A region is a complex system, composed of various sub-systems (culture, society, environment), whose survival depends on the attention paid to cultural and environmental heritage. Heritage has a historic value as a sign (not always clearly visible) of the continuity and intensity of human occupation, but it is also the expression of the constantly changing relationships that are generated among the sub-systems and the global system. A region’s diversity is characterised by its specific qualities, which confer on it an identity whose strength depends on the local community’s awareness

of it. Ideally, this identity fuels behaviours that tend to strengthen it, leading to development (*autopoiesis*). In the absence of this process, identity becomes lost and there is a de-structuring of the system (*entropy*). Recognition of the value (and therefore the conservation) of historic evidence and cultural heritage is therefore part of a strategy, in which cultural heritage plays an important role in terms of relations and communication, but also innovation and creativity. It is on the reach of these specific characteristics that the quality of the cultural and environmental products on offer depends, and such characteristics are thus key to the market’s appreciation not only of the cultural

heritage but of the region itself. The ability of the local community to safeguard and make the best use of its cultural heritage as the expression of its identity conditions its development.

Events represent an excellent opportunity for the recovery of a community's distinctive traditions, culture and values (Janiskee, 1980; Bowdin *et al.*, 2006, p.3), and are an important tool of collective identification (Quinn, 2009). They are even more important when they are based on - and promote - local culture. Events create new knowledge and generate a dynamic, culturally vital and creative environment. They attract investment and generate additional tourist flows both while they are in progress and afterwards, with short and long-term effects on the development of the host community. In addition, they enhance the visibility of the region's qualities and facilitate new socio-cultural dynamics (Brunet *et al.*, 2001; Allen *et al.*, 2008:5). They are also an opportunity for encounters, exchanges and the sharing of values in an empathetic relationship between the visitors and the local community. The participants are not merely spectators but come into direct contact with the places, the population and local traditions; they absorb the cultural values that the event and its atmosphere transmit, thereby transforming the consumption of the cultural product into an experience. In addition, the event enables the local community to acquire greater awareness of the importance of its traditions, beliefs, values and the inter-cultural exchanges that the event itself makes possible.

Events are frequently associated with festivities that celebrate the rhythms of agricultural societies (Rolfe, 1992), as well as rites and celebrations of a religious nature (Gotham, 2005). In peasant societies, events are frequently combined with the feast of the patron saint, and include a myriad of different initiatives (religious rites, special street lights, food festivals, markets, brass band and popular music concerts). By means of certain rites, events celebrating patron saints perpetuate ancient practices, knowledge, images and memories, making the experience of the sacred particularly moving and immediate. Reference to the rhythms of nature in the cyclical patterns of agricultural activities expresses the sacred nature of time perceived within a mythical-religious tradition. Nostalgically recalling a way of life that is now irredeemably lost, the feast presents an artificial imaginary and anachronistic transfiguration of the rural past, almost idealising the peasant existence, its culture and its social forms.

Over time, these religious celebrations have become not just an authentic expression of faith but also a chance for social aggregation. The anthropological value of the rites and the shared participation in them lies not only in their forms but also in their associative function.

Indeed, the festive and celebratory nature of the event brings together and involves the entire community, strengthens its cultural identity and represents its social capital. And this is even truer if the event is founded on local tradition and culture, presenting itself to the community as an important tool of collective identification (Quinn, 2009).

The nature, features and role of events are the subject of an extensive literature (see, among others Allen *et al.*, 2008; Getz, 2007, 2008; Rizzello and Trono, 2012), which has grown considerably in recent years thanks to the contribution of international research groups such as the ATLAS Events Group headed by Greg Richards, and the research programme funded by the Italian Ministry of Education and coordinated by Sergio Cherubini (Cherubini, *et al.*, 2009).

Events have been studied in terms of the destination's characteristics (size, resources, carrying capacity, etc.); geographical position (Butler, 1980); the level and type of tourist development in the affected places; the type of event; the public safety implications for all the people involved (from the public to the organisers); the relationship between supply and demand; the distance between the social and cultural models of residents and tourists (Light, 1996); the effect of events on tourist behaviour (Richards and van der Ark, 2013); the relationships between the main stakeholders and their involvement in the event's organisation (Stokes, 2008:256; Blichfeldt, 2010; Trono and Rizzello, 2014); and the synergy between public and private sectors (Izzo and Masiello, 2009).

This study considers a religious event, the feast of Sant'Antonio Abate (St Anthony Abbot), patron saint of Novoli, a small municipality situated in southern Italy, celebrated each year with the lighting of the *fòcara*, a huge bonfire more than 20 metres high and 25 metres in diameter, which draws tens of thousands of visitors and entails considerable commitment (financial and otherwise) on the part of public and private bodies.

The work will focus not only on the event itself, but above all on how it is perceived by visitors, the local community and stakeholders. The objective is to assess

the feast of the saint, linked in the past to the agricultural and liturgical calendars of a small rural town, as a regional marketing tool with implications that go beyond the specific theme of the event and involve regional development. This is the objective of the local authorities, who see the *fòcara* as a key vector of 'integrated' tourism, based on a range of material and intangible cultural heritage (the *fòcara*, the feast of the Saint and food-and-wine products), which brings together religiosity, experience, history, tradition, music, and tastes and smells: a tourism that involves all the senses, the result of the active participation of regional and cultural bodies, associations and companies working in this sector.

However, this hypothetical situation is not fulfilled in practice. Indeed, the organisation of the event is not accompanied by initiatives to promote the rural landscape, the lifestyle, or peasant traditions. It does not involve operators in the adoption of new and sustainable economic strategies that attract tourists. The event does not provide opportunities for creating a tourism product consisting of a variety of services (transport, visiting opportunities, catering, accommodation, recreation, cultural initiatives) and characterised by the online promotion of the attractions in the municipality and nearby towns. In short, there are no proposals that might induce visitors to remain in the area after the event, and no measures to favour alternative mobility within the area.

The *fòcara* is really no more than a celebration, greatly enjoyed by the local population and visitors alike, which raises issues of sustainability as measured by environmental, cultural, communicative, educational and managerial indicators. It is an event that requires a serious commitment in terms of human and financial resources and involves many stakeholders. However, it struggles to produce the hoped-for results in terms of the rediscovery of cultural identity among the younger generations and the promotion of tourism and regional development.

## Methods

After a brief presentation of the Salento peninsula, the town of Novoli and its recent socio-economic dynamics, the paper illustrates the *fòcara*, the network of interests that it generates and the perception of the event among visitors. The paper then discusses its failure to function as a driver of regional growth and an integrated tourism product characterised by uniqueness and competitiveness, which are essential for the growth

of demand and supply in the local tourism sector. Indeed, as Hall *et al.* point out:

*Managing visitor satisfaction in the context of events is becoming increasingly important in light of recognition of the positive economic, social and tourism benefits that one-off or infrequent occasions can generate (Hall et al., 2010:247).*

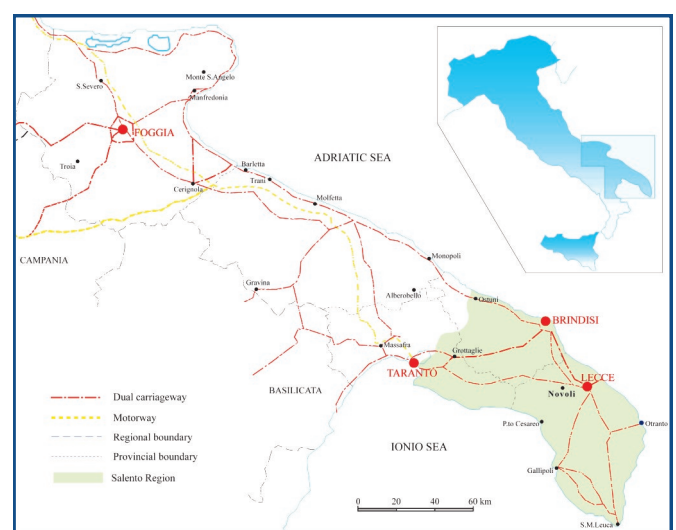
To this end, a direct survey was conducted among the participants in the event on the day of the lighting of the bonfire in January 2014 and interviews were conducted with local stakeholders.

## The Salento

The heel of the Italian boot and the most easterly part of the Italian peninsula, the Salento stretches out between the Adriatic and Ionian Seas towards Albania and Greece, a virtual 'bridge' between Europe and the countries of the eastern Mediterranean (Figure 1).

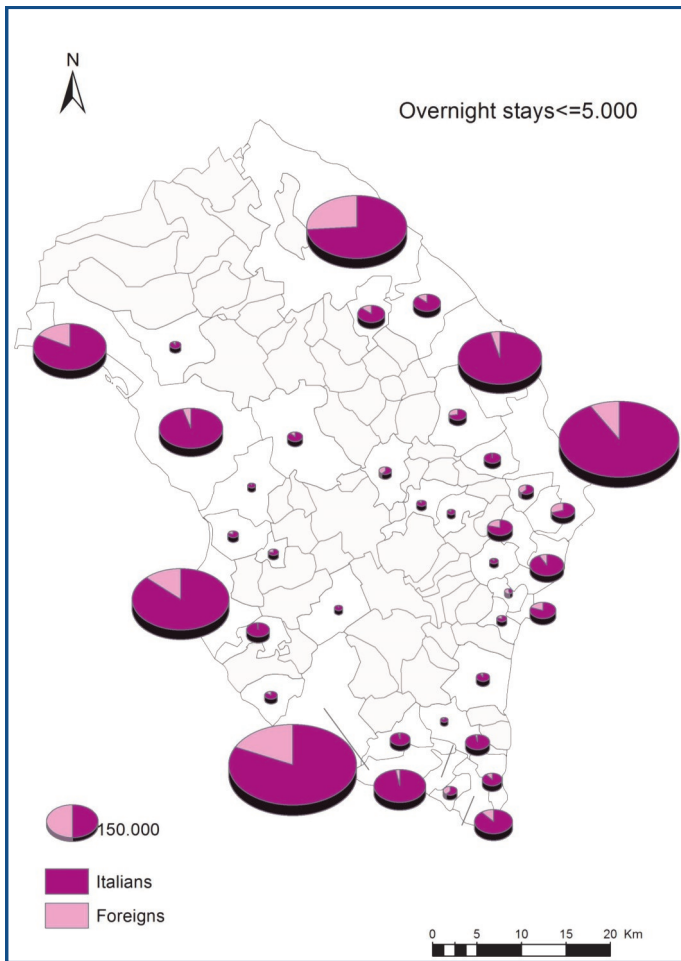
The region has a long history of relations - evident to varying degrees - with nearby Greece, as a result of maritime communications between these two lands. The Greek presence lasted from the Archaic age to the Middle Ages, in the later phases under the control of Greek Byzantium, which left its mark on the local culture and architecture, especially crypts and underground churches. The Salento is a crucible of different cultures and civilisations, which have followed each other in succession over the centuries (Messapians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Turks, Venetians, Angevins and Aragonese), leaving traces of their presence everywhere, in both the towns and the

Figure 1 Puglia Region and the Salento Peninsula



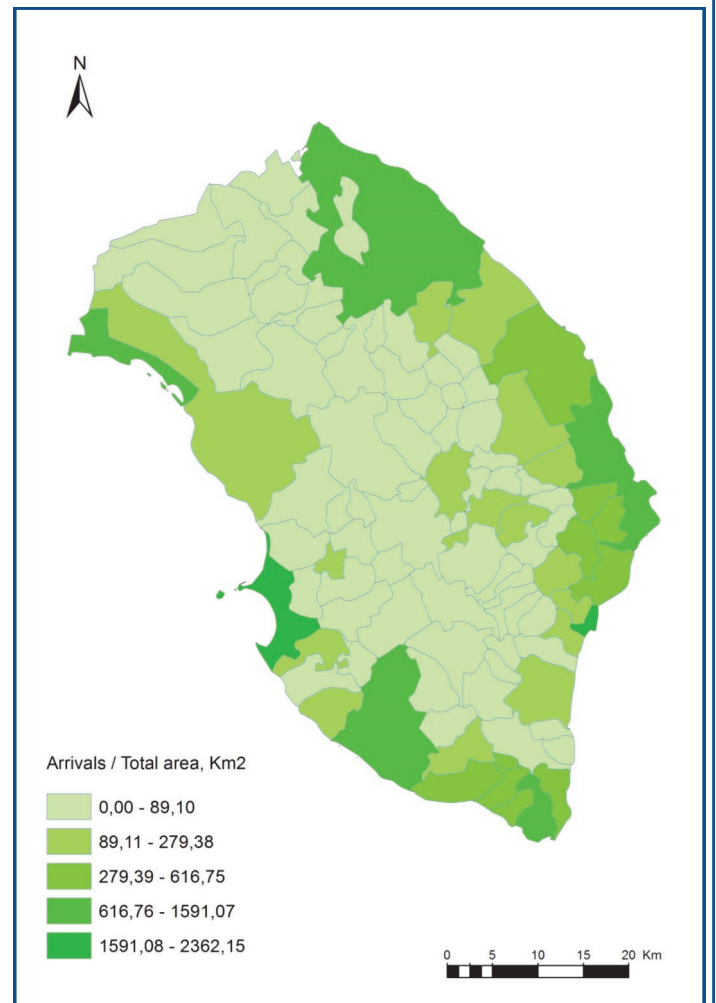
Source: Anna Trono

**Figure 2 Overnight Stays (2014)**



Source: Viaggiare in Puglia. Regione Puglia, 2015

**Figure 3 Tourist Density (2014)**



Source: Viaggiare in Puglia. Regione Puglia, 2015

countryside. Bastions of rurality have survived the advent of new lifestyles and profound socio-economic transformations, and ancient building techniques have continued to be handed down through the generations.

What is striking is the area's ability to contain, absorb and reconfigure its many cultural stratifications. The distinctive features of the Salento are rurality and cultural contamination: they persist in the tangible dimensions of architecture, landscapes and settlement patterns, but also in the intangible dimension of a slow pace of life and regular celebrations. Rites, beliefs and traditions also reflect these two aspects, generating images that are contradictory but of great interest for the tourist who seeks informed and interesting travel experiences and products that are both authentic and new.

Tourism in the Salento is clearly a growth area, as indicated by the strong increase in arrivals (+188.7%) and overnight stays (+124%) in the period 1996-2014, but the level of attractiveness for tourists is below its potential. Despite its rich cultural heritage, found in both the cities and the countryside, along the coast and inland, the most widely practised form of tourism in the Salento has always been focused on the beaches. It is therefore highly seasonal and concentrated along the coast, as shown by Figures 2 and 3.

Apart from the city of Lecce, the municipalities with the highest tourist density and longest average stays are those along the coast (Otranto, Gallipoli, Melendugno, Porto Cesareo and Ugento), where 74% of the total provincial overnights stays are concentrated (in 2014). This means that tourist flows are highly seasonal, with international tourism accounting for a low percentage. Indeed, from 2012 to 2014 there was a fall of 7.6% in foreign stays and 4.4% in foreign arrivals.

This type of tourism follows the traditional industrial model of the three Ss. It has been unable to resolve the problem of its short season despite policies ostensibly aimed at integrated promotion of the comparative regional advantages (environmental, cultural, economic, etc.). It is mass tourism with a strong environmental impact, characterised by an ever greater assault on the beaches, all-night partying in the resorts and a general neglect of the environment and the quality of services. Some success has been had by rural, food-and-wine and day-trip tourism, activated by the local action groups that manage EU LEADER projects, but still with limited visibility and autonomy in terms of the range of products and services on offer.

However, these tourists are also drawn by the gastronomy, food festivals and feasts of the inland rural areas, generating a sort of competition among the local population in the provision of events that seek to recover and reinterpret traditional peasant festivities (see the *Notte della Taranta* music festival and the *Fòcara* di Sant'Antonio Abate) that have strong links with other Mediterranean countries. These events are promoted by public and private organisations in accordance with an innovative and evolutionary approach to resources and cultural processes. However, as a form of tourism it generates limited income for the region, which is seeing a gradual erosion of its traditions and cultural heritage, with direct negative impacts on the environment. It is also of little interest to tourists who seek personalised experiences and high levels of information that enrich their knowledge, tourists who value the quality of the hospitality, environmental sustainability and respect for the history and traditions of the local communities: in short, the kind of tourist desired by any developed society!

### **The Socio-economic Dynamics of the Municipality of Novoli**

Novoli is a small town in the Salento peninsula in the Puglia region in southern Italy. With about 8,000 inhabitants, it lies within the sphere of influence of the provincial capital Lecce (Figure 1), which has proved unable to produce new opportunities and processes that might enable growth in its hinterland (Trono, 2013).

Novoli is basically an agricultural town. For centuries, wine, oil and tobacco have set the rhythms of its agricultural economy, which was once accompanied by a healthy processing industry, the remains of which can be seen in the underground olive presses, grape presses and tobacco processing factories, today abandoned or converted to new uses. Here, as in the rest of the Salento, the cultivation and processing of tobacco played a key socio-economic role, absorbing a substantial amount of human capital, for more than half a century (Trono, 1988). The 'liberalisation' of tobacco production (starting with EEC regulation 727 of 21 April 1970) and the more recent reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (the *Fischler Reform*) have led to the gradual disappearance of tobacco from the Salento. The wine-making sector continues to operate, supported by a centuries-old cultural and social tradition and consolidated agricultural practices, which, thanks to innovation and modernisation, have enabled Novoli to be part of the 20 Municipalities of the *Parco del Negroamaro*, a virtual vine consortium with social, economic and cultural objectives.

Figure 4 Procession with the Statue of Sant'Antonio Abate



Source: Municipality of Novoli (Lecce)

Here, as in many other areas of the Italian Mezzogiorno, recent developments have highlighted serious signs of economic stagnation. Agriculture is entering a state of 'senescence' and is gradually being abandoned by the young. The construction sector is in crisis, as are numerous small and medium sized manufacturing companies. The commercial tertiary sector, of a somewhat 'Levantine' nature, survives, while rural tourism has not taken off, despite the conspicuous funding provided by the *Valle della Cupa* Local Action Group that manages the LEADER Programme in this part of the Salento. However, heritage items of cultural and tourism interest (churches, palazzi, villas and gardens) can still be found, along with the distinctive landscape of disused stone quarries. In the past the latter provided work for quarrymen and the raw material for the refined architecture of the towns and the exuberant decoration of portals, balconies and windows, but they have since returned to a more natural state. Many have been transformed into olive groves or fruit orchards, or have simply been "colonised" by fig trees and Mediterranean maquis. It is however the *fòcara*, marking the end of the Christmas festivities and the

start of the Carnival season, which catalyses interest and enlivens the community.

The local authorities of the municipality of Novoli have sought, without success, to promote cultural tourism. Particular attention and conspicuous funding - both public and private - have been given to the feast of Sant'Antonio Abate (St Anthony Abbot), which among the numerous initiatives (religious rites, special street lights, shows, a food festival, brass band and popular music concerts, a market and conferences) includes the lighting of a monumental bonfire built with vine prunings: the *fòcara*.

### **The *fòcara* (bonfire) of Sant'Antonio Abate**

The feast of Sant'Antonio Abate (St Anthony Abbot, patron saint of Novoli) falls on the 17<sup>th</sup> January, but in this small town in the Salento the celebrations take place over several days and include a number of initiatives involving the whole community.

The religious heart of the event is the sanctuary of Sant'Antonio Abate, which welcomes a constant stream of worshippers and pilgrims. After mass on the

**Figure 5 The Bonfire is Made of Branches Pruned from the Area's Vines.**



Source: Municipality of Novoli. Lecce

eve of the feast, among the various liturgical rites is a procession with the statue of the saint through the streets of the town (Spagnolo, 1998; Arcuti, 2008) (Figure 4).

The religious rite is followed by the lighting of the monumental bonfire, the *fòcara*: a large pyre made of vine branches, constructed many weeks before the feast by a few dozen volunteers.

To obtain the material needed for the bonfire it is necessary to wait until the pruning of the area's vines is concluded. The branches are collected from the vineyards, tied into bundles and transported to a broad open space on the outskirts of the town where they are carefully piled up so as to create a pyre about twenty metres wide and twenty-five metres high. This takes over a month. The shape varies from year to year but is roughly that of a traditional haystack. It has a number of levels with progressively smaller diameters, like a wedding cake. Sometimes there may be a tunnel at the base. Tall ladders and chains of people are needed to carry the bundles of twigs to the top, and it is essential that the structure grows symmetrically, because it must be able to bear its own weight and resist the force of

the winds, all of which shows how skilful the bonfire builders need to be (Imbriani, 2013) (Figure 5).

The pyre is lit by setting off numerous batteries of fireworks (see Figure 6) that run up the sides of the bonfire to the top, with spectacular effects.

The *fòcara* burns all night and the following day like an enormous candle, until it is completely consumed, forming a backdrop to concerts until late evening, while visitors browse the various attractions, market stalls, displays of food-and-wine products and the fair.

The central districts of the town are lit up by special street lights, the architecture enhanced by a myriad of colours, and the sides of the roads are occupied by traders selling all kinds of goods.

All the spaces of the small town are used for ceremonies - secular and religious, cultural and recreational - and services of a logistic nature (public safety, first aid, parking) (see Figure 7).

The preparations for the feast begin a long time before the official date, since the organisation has become increasingly complex, especially in recent years. The



Figure 6 The Spectacular Bonfire



Source: Municipality of Novoli. (Lecce)

Figure 7 Location of Services Linked to the Fòcara in the Centre of Novoli



Source: Fondazione La Fòcara, 2015

citizens' committee is supported by numerous partners, which include both public and private bodies: the *Fondazione La Fòcara*, the Municipality of Novoli, Puglia Regional Administration, Lecce Provincial Administration, the University of the Salento and the Valle della Cupa Local Action Group, in addition to cultural and environmental associations and traders' groups such as Coldiretti (farmers) and many others.

The feast of Sant'Antonio in Novoli puts the community, with all its alliances and divisions, centre stage, but it also opens up to the numerous visitors, requiring respect for the gastronomic customs associated with the occasion (Imbriani, 2008).

There are many attractions for pilgrims and those who are devoted to the Saint, but also for tourists, lovers of folklore, visitors to the wine fair and the markets, lovers of contemporary art, scholars and anybody seeking to participate in conferences and cultural gatherings of various kinds (theatre, opera, etc.). In addition, the festivities also draw the simply curious: the lighting of the *fòcara* has always had a broad appeal and continues to attract a large number of people (more than 150,000), as well as the interest of the media.

The feast is a religious occasion, a moment of veneration and worship of the Saint, but it also promotes dialogue with institutions and other cultures near and far, such as the countries of the Mediterranean.

### **The *fòcara* from the Visitor and Stakeholder Point of View**

A direct survey was conducted on January 17<sup>th</sup> 2014, with participants in the procession of the Saint and the lighting of the *fòcara* being asked to fill in questionnaires. The sample was chosen at random from among the participants in the event. A total of 100 questionnaires were compiled, 96 of which were considered valid. The questionnaire is composed of 20 questions, the results of which, are presented in the following sections

#### **a. Identity of the participants**

The responses to the questionnaires confirm high participation in the event by both the young (38% were aged 16 to 29) and adults (56% were aged 30 to 59), with a high level of education (35% were graduates and 42% had a high school diploma); many were students (26%) but there were also many professionals

**Table 1. Motives for participation in the event**

Motive	% of total
The spectacular nature of the event	48
Spending time with family and friends	28
The music programme	17
The lighting of the <i>fòcara</i>	42
Seeing the displays and the stalls	3
Visiting the local area	3
Learning something	5
Trying something new	6
Other	3

(23%), annual incomes ranged from €5,000 (24%) to over €30,000 (22%). They come mainly from the province of Lecce, either from the provincial capital (30%) or from other provincial towns (30%). Many also come from municipalities in the provinces of Brindisi and Taranto (both 13%). Few are from other regions of Italy (7%).

The participants heard about the *fòcara* via various local means of communication, especially social networks and advice from friends and acquaintances (48% by word of mouth).

#### **b. Reasons for interest in the *fòcara***

The spectacular nature of the event continues to be the interviewees' primary motive for participation (48% said 'I like the event' and 42% said 'I am drawn by the lighting of the *fòcara*') (see Table 1). A high percentage of interviewees said that this was not their first visit (39%) or that they intended to return in subsequent years (28%), involving their acquaintances and relatives (43%), considering the *fòcara* to be an opportunity to spend time with family and friends (28% of interviewees).

#### **c. Religious motives for participating in the event**

Most of the interviewees (76%) said that they had no interest in the religious functions of the feast of Sant'Antonio Abate.

#### **d. The values of the event**

In contrast, many are enthusiastic about the spectacle of the monumental pyre, the reddish glare of the sacred flames tearing through the darkness, recalling ancient

**Table 2. Positive Features of the Event**

Feature	% of multiple responses
The event has improved Novoli's image	43
The event made me feel part of a big community	25
I feel physically active	16
I feel moved	15
I feel something unique	15
I feel a unique sensation	13
I acquire new knowledge	11
I participate actively in the feast	7
I have new interests	6

customs, stirring emotions and evoking fantasies (15%). More than half of the interviewees (58%) believe that the event has improved Novoli's attractiveness, while maintaining the basic features of the feast and promoting the sense of belonging to the community (25%).

***e. Perception of the sustainability of the event in environmental, cultural, communicative, educational and managerial terms.***

For more than a quarter of the interviewees, the event is perceived as too crowded and chaotic (26%). It is also argued that it has become too much of a spectacle (11%), having lost its religious meaning and its identity (14%). Many therefore, call for a return to a more sustainable event in line with tradition, reducing the presence of the market stalls (35%), having a smaller number of sideshows and secondary events (8%) and reducing the number of participants (17%).

To improve the sustainability of the event they suggest a greater focus on parking, toilets and public transport, as well as better traffic and waste management (see Table 3)

***f. Economic and social reasons for interest in the event and its relevance to local development***

For many interviewees, the attention and investment allocated to the *fòcara* by the local and regional administrations have definitely improved the organisation of the event, which is viewed positively by the majority (54%) and considered excellent by 16% of the sample.

In addition to the questionnaires filled in by participants in the feast, interviews were conducted with about ten local residents, entrepreneurs and administrators, assumed to be representative in social, cultural and generational terms. The aim was to gain a better understanding of the perception of the event's benefits, costs and objectives from the point of view of both the organisers and the local community and the synergy between public and private sectors in organizing the event.

The survey clearly showed that the *fòcara* is not just the expression of honour and devotion to the Saint, or of attention to tradition, but also entails the promotion of civil and institutional relationships, in a dialogue with peoples and cultures of other places.

The outlook of the various actors involved in organising and managing the event is absolutely positive. They are building a dense network of cultural and economic interests encompassing public authorities and local stakeholders, as well as a variegated community of figures from the academic, cultural, economic and political fields; they are creating a powerful synergy between public and private sectors; and facilitating the creation of a system of relations between the main affected groups.

The people responsible for holding the event every year undoubtedly face a large and increasing number of challenges, especially considering the involvement of more and more players and the growing complexity of the secondary events programme in recent years.

**Table 3. Weaknesses of the *fòcara***

	% of multiple responses
Parking	48
Traffic management	36
Toilets	30
Public transport	27
Waste management	25
Signage	22
Services for welcoming visitors	18
Organisation of display stands	16
Quality of the events	6
Other	10

The weak points are the uncertain survival of the *fòcara* itself, due to the limited generational replacement of the craftsmen responsible for building the giant pyre; and the excessive dependence on public funding, which greatly exceeds private-sector contributions.

Another problem is the loss of the religious meaning of the bonfire of Sant'Antonio Abate, overshadowed by the event's recreational nature, the emphasis on the 'spectacular' effects of the *fòcara* and the event's cultural value. The excessive focus on music and folklore also detract from the feast's original purpose, as does the presence of an immense crowd, practically uncontrollable by the time the bonfire is lit, representing a serious potential risk to public safety.

The imperfections in the organisation and execution of the event require a more careful assessment not only in terms of the intangible benefits and improved image, but also the direct financial returns. Careful attention should be paid to both the objectives and the assessment of the relative results by the regional authorities.

It is important to estimate the event's social and economic impact (in terms of both value and resources involved) on the region. A monetary value should also be attributed to the economic benefit that accrues to those who work on the organisation and management of the event, and to the region itself, which works so hard to make it a success!

Furthermore, the event has not brought about the hoped-for interest from tourists, and even the visitors' area of attraction does not go beyond provincial and regional boundaries. No changes have been seen in the socio-economic reality or the quality of life of the local community, which does not see the event as having any potential benefit. It is not even particularly interested in tourism, whether cultural or religious, ultimately being concerned only with the feast itself!

## Conclusion

The *fòcara* of Sant'Antonio Abate is an important tool of collective identification and undoubtedly creates value for the host region. The presence and the role of certain actors - from the volunteers who patiently build the pyre to those who invest time and both physical and economic resources - generate value for the event. The *fòcara* without doubt consumes financial resources and human capital and could represent an effective tool for marketing the area's other products and services, but in reality, it does not create exchanges of culture and experience, and it has not succeeded in making the most of local knowledge, traditions, energy and resources by means of radical and continuous promotion of the event and regional assets.

The promotion of tourism in an area and its development cannot happen only by supporting the holding of an event once a year. It also requires infrastructural measures, and what is needed above all is the integrated growth of the community as a whole, including its economic, social and cultural aspects.

It is thus necessary for the "Fondazione *La Fòcara*" to broaden its initiatives, going beyond the schedule and activities linked to the seasonal event celebrating the Saint.

Local bodies, both public and private, which invest a great deal in the event, must identify cultural, social and economic tools that are suitable and effective for making change become an everyday presence in the community.

Considering the clearly defined regional character of the *fòcara*, it is also important to consider its impact in terms of a systemic logic, which is highly useful for those who are called on to govern the regional system (Cherubini, *et al.*, 2009:9). What is proposed therefore is a more wide-ranging project that promotes the variegated natural, agrarian, urban and cultural landscape that characterises broad swathes of the Salento. Such a project needs to grasp the relationship between religiosity and the region, between religious rites, social customs and agricultural traditions in a process of rediscovery and recovery of *all* the cultural heritage. In other words, what is required is the creation of a system, developed with reference to the various regional resources, which can reinforce the area's cultural identity among the new generations but also act as a marketing tool for promoting the region and developing tourism.

## Bibliography

- Allen, J., O'Toole, W., Harris, R. and McDonnell, I. (2008) *Festival and Special Event Management*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn. Milton, QLD: Wiley.
- Arcuti S. (2008) Santità e devozione popolare nel medioevo. In D. Levante (ed) *Sant'Antonio*
- Abate e il fuoco della Santità*. Novoli, Biblioteca Minima, 31-44.
- Blichfeldt, B. S. (2010) "Town of Mussels": A Danish Case Study on Place Branding, Food Festivals and Community Identity. Odense: Danish Centre for Rural Research (CLF), University of Southern Denmark.
- Bowdin, G., Allen, J., O'Toole, W., Harris, R. and McDonnell, I. (2006) *Events Management*, 2nd edn. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Brunet, S., Bauer, J., De Lacy, T. and Tshering, K. (2001) Tourism development in Bhutan: Tensions between tradition and modernity. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 9(3): 243-56.
- Butler, R.W (1980) The concept of a tourist area cycle of evolution: Implications for management of resources. *Canadian Geographer* 24 (1): 5-12.
- Cherubini, S., Bonetti, E. and Iasevoli, G. (2009) La misurazione del valore degli eventi. In Cherubini, S., Bonetti, E., Iasevoli, G. and Resciniti R. (eds) *Il Valore Degli Eventi. Valutare Ex Ante Ed Ex Post Gli Effetti Socio-Economici, Esperienziali e Territoriali*. Milan: F. Angeli, 13-63.
- Crompton, J.L and McKay, S.L. (1997) Motives of visitors attending festival events. *Annals of Tourism Research* 24(2): 425-439.
- Getz, D. (1994) Resident attitudes towards tourism: A longitudinal survey in Spey Valley, Scotland. *Tourism Management* 15: 247-258.
- Getz, D. (2007) *Event Studies: Theory, Research and Policy for Planned Events*. Oxford: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Getz, D. (2008) Event tourism: Definition, evolution, and research. *Tourism Management* 29, 403-428.
- Getz, D. (2012) Event studies. In Page, S.J. and Connell, J. (eds) *The Routledge Handbook of Events*. London and New York: Routledge, 27-46.
- Gotham, K. F. (2005) Theorizing urban spectacles. Festivals, tourism and the transformation of urban space. *City*, 9 (2): 225-245.
- Hall, J., Basarin, V.J. and Lockstone-Binney, L. (2010) An empirical analysis of attendance at a commemorative event: Anzac Day at Gallipoli. *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 29: 245-253.
- Imbriani, E. (2008) Fuochi rituali, folklore e politiche culturali. In D. Levante (ed) *Sant'Antonio Abate e il fuoco della Santità*. Novoli: Biblioteca Minima, 21-16.
- Imbriani, E. (2013) Religione popolare e identità culturali. In Romano, A. and Spedicato, M. (eds) *Sub voce Sallentinis. Studi in onore di p. Giovan Battista Mancarella*. Lecce: Ed. Grifo, 189-195.
- Izzo, F. and Masiello, B. (2009) Reti organizzative e creazione di valore degli eventi. Il network orchestrator nei festival della cultura. In Cherubini, S., Bonetti, E., Iasevoli, G. and Resciniti R.(eds) *Il Valore Degli Eventi. Valutare Ex Ante Ed Ex Post Gli Effetti Socio-Economici, Esperienziali e Territoriali*. Milano: F. Angeli, 97-132.
- Janiskee, R. (1980) South Carolina's harvest festivals: Rural delights for day tripping urbanities. *Journal of Cultural Geography* 1: 96-104.
- Light, D. (1996) Characteristics of the audience for 'events' at a heritage site. *Tourism Management* 17(3): 183-190.
- Quinn B. (2009) Festivals, events and tourism. In Jamal, T. and Robinson, M. (eds) *The SAGE Handbook of Tourism Studies*. London: Sage, 483-503.
- Richards G. and van der Ark A.L (2013) Dimensions of cultural consumption among tourists: Multiple correspondence analysis. *Tourism Management* 37: 71-76.
- Rizzello, K. and Trono, A. (2012) Cultural events as a tourist development strategy for rural areas. Two case studies from the Salento Peninsula compared. In Richards, G., de Brito, M. and Wilks, L. (eds) *Exploring the Social Impacts of Events*. London: Routledge, 174-189.
- Rolfe M. (1992) *Arts Festivals in the UK*. London: Policy Study Institute.
- Spagnolo, G. (1998) *Il Fuoco Sacro, Tradizione e Culto di Sant'Antonio Abate a Novoli e nel Salento, Campi Salentina*. Lecce: Crsec/Lecce.
- Stokes, R. (2008) Tourism strategy making: Insights to the events tourism domain. *Tourism Management* 29: 252-262.
- Trono, A. (1998) Il tabacco nel Salento leccese: da risorsa economica a bene culturale. In *Fiscoli e Muscoli. Archeologia Industriale nel Salento Leccese*: Lecce: Capone Ed., 80-107.
- Trono, A. (2013) Culture, environment and society. Strengths, weaknesses and challenges for Lecce City. *Plurimondi*, VI (12).
- Trono A. and Rizzello K. (2014) Designing events for socio-cultural impacts: The Holy Week in Puglia (Italy). In Richards, G., Marques, L. and Mein, K. (eds) *Event Design: Social Perspectives and Practices*. London: Routledge, 92-108.