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The Local and Global Scope of The Year of the Ox

Rethinking Barcelona's Chinese New Year Festival in Pandemic Times

牛年的本地和全球范围：疫情期间的巴塞罗那的中国新年

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Received 26 January 2023 | Accepted 18 June 2023 |

Published online 31 October 2023

Abstract

The arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic brought significant life changes and acted as a point of rupture for many people around the world. Using mixed methods research, this article explores how the pandemic scenario affected the organization and conceptualization of the Chinese New Year Festival in Barcelona, as well as how people participated in the festivities. Having been canceled in 2020, when everything was ready to go in 2021, its transition to a virtual event entailed changes in its format, content, and scope, leading to new synergies and ways of understanding the festival. First, the virtual format enabled the participation of new actors within and beyond the Chinese diaspora, resulting in a shift of visibility. Second, new (non-folkloric) spaces for participation served to diversify the esthetics, aims and scope of the festival, with the global economic crisis and its local impacts as key factors. Finally, while the virtual format limited the festival's local impact, it stimulated new transnational dynamics and facilitated an increase in the number of global attendees.

Keywords

Chinese New Year Festival – Covid-19 – migration – online

摘要

新冠肺炎大流行的到来给人们的生活带来了重大变化，是世界各地人们生活的一个断裂点。本文采用混合方法研究，探讨了疫情是如何影响在巴塞罗那的中国春节的组织 and 概念化，以及人们如何参与到活动中来。在2020年被取消后，当来到2021年转变为虚拟活动，她的形式，内容和范围发生变化，从而产生新的协同效应和理解节日的方式。首先，虚拟的模式使得海内外华人得以参与进来，从而提升了节日的知名度。其次，新的（非民俗的）参与空间使节日的美学、目的和范围多样化，全球经济危机及其对当地的影响是关键因素。最后，虽然虚拟形式限制了中国春节在当地的影响，但它促进了新的跨国动态和更多的全球参与者。

关键词

春节活动 – Covid-19 – 移民 – 线上

1 Introduction

The Chinese community is the third most populous foreign nationality in the Catalan capital, numbering 21,295 people in 2021 (Ayuntamiento de Barcelona 2022). Therefore, the Lunar New Year ultimately becomes a public celebration, where the streets are filled with a colorful parade, music, dance and a fireworks display, drawing big crowds. This picture changed in 2020, due to the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic. Based on mixed methods research, this article provides a panoramic overview of the Chinese New Year festival in Barcelona (hereinafter, the CNYF), with an in-depth exploration of how the new and uncertain scenario affected how people participated in the festival, as well as its organization and conceptualization, in the 2021 edition and subsequently.

Located at the crossroads between migration studies and critical event studies, this article presents some of the results of a European-financed research project entitled “FestSpace: Festivals, events and inclusive urban public spaces

in Europe”¹ and is organized as follows. First, it provides a literature review, including a brief introduction to festivals and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on cultural events, on the one hand, and to diasporic festivals and Chinese New Year Festivals abroad, on the other. Second, it describes the context of Chinese migration to Spain and the history and evolution of the CNYF in Barcelona. Third, it introduces the research design and methodology. Fourth, it presents the results: focusing on the Spanish pandemic context, the changes in the scope and impacts of the 2021 festival, and future prospects for the CNYF. Finally, some concluding reflections are provided.

2 Literature Review

2.1 *Introducing Festivals as Social Encounters in Uncertain Times*

Festivals are generally described as a universal social phenomenon where subjects participate in different ways and at different times, making distinct contributions. At the beginning of the 20th century, studies began to appear that approached the concept of events and festivals from the perspective of nascent modern sociology and anthropology. By observing and taking part in activities in ancestral groups in Papua New Guinea, the functionalist Malinowski (1935 [2002]) sought to understand the meanings and purposes behind their rituals, ceremonies, and events. He made the claim that events served a broad range of purposes, including the reinforcement of social norms, expression of social solidarity, and resolution of conflicts. Along the same lines, Firth (1967 [2011]) believed that it was important to understand events in terms of their social functions. Both authors argued that events fulfill specific functions that contribute to the overall stability and continuity of a society. By studying events, functionalist anthropologists sought to uncover the underlying social and cultural mechanisms that govern human behavior and maintain social harmony. Nevertheless, functionalism has come under criticism over time, detractors contending that its primary focus on the effective functioning of social institutions means that it tends to ignore inequality, power relationships, and conflicts within societies. Emile Durkheim, in his pioneering study entitled *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Durkheim 1912 [1995]) considered

1 Established by HERA (Humanities in the European Research Area, European funding consortium). Public Spaces: Culture and Integration in Europe programme (2019–2022) (PCI2019-103745).

festivals to be a form of collective effervescence where the consciousness of collective solidarity found both a form of expression and consolidation. For Durkheim, festivals are not only religious events, but activities in which there are moments of exaltation, passion and loss of control that exceed the norms of everyday life. Events and rituals have also been analyzed for their binary oppositions, symbolic codes, and underlying patterns in structuralist anthropology, since they are considered symbolic activities that reflect and repeat the underlying cognitive structures and cultural meanings in a community. Victor Turner focused on the study of rituals and symbolic action in his work *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969 [1995]), offering insightful perspectives on rituals and events as transformative processes which allow individuals and societies to navigate moments of transition and crisis, through three phases of separation, liminality, and incorporation. However, critics contend that the structuralist perspective can minimize the complexity of cultural structures while ignoring the agency and individuality of human experience. In this sense, Falassi (1987) defined festivals as periodic social occasions in which people participate to celebrate different types of bonds (ethnic, religious, historical, etc.), also contending that the word *festival* can designate a broad range of events and linking bonds of different forms and strengths, becoming complex and dynamic “sites of cultural practice and experience” (Frost 2015: 569). Despite its growing heterogeneity, the *Durkheimian* approach to festivals as moments to celebrate “life in its ‘time out of time’” (Falassi 1987: 7) is still frequently used.

In recent decades, several disciplines have focused on studying events and, more specifically, cultural events and festivities, as platforms for social transformation. Authors such as Finkel, Queen and Getz have helped underline the importance of gaining a critical understanding of events’ potential for exchange and social interaction, possibly leading to certain social effects and impacts, desired or not. Such is the case of the interaction between host societies and migrant communities, as will be addressed in the next section. In this vein, the authors place particular emphasis on the role of festivals in supporting established power, while noting their potential to produce the inverse effect, as potential sites for contestation where subversive or alternative forms can find expression.

As such, exploring participants’ experience(s) and their social implications has been the primary focus of festival studies although, in recent decades, festivals have attracted the attention of other disciplines, with an increasing number of works focused on areas such as festival management or tourism (Getz 2010). Another emerging area of research in festival studies is that of mediated experiences, involving technologies. In this sense, the most important

development in the 21st century has been the emergence of virtual and hybrid events (Duffy and Mair 2021), as well as experiences mediated by social media, implying participation at different times: before, during and after festivals (Danielse and Kjun 2019). That new technologies have become widespread in music and arts festivals is well-known, but traditional and religious festivals are no strangers to this trend, research having shown them also to be sites of ubiquitous new media use. During the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a global trend toward digitizing and virtualizing events, festivals, and celebrations: from live streaming to social media debates, events have rapidly adapted to the digital age in many different ways. The digitization of film festivals is another example of this trend that has become extremely common during the pandemic, as James Vail, Theresa Heath, Lesley-Ann Dickson and Rebecca Finkel (2023) have observed, taking into account the modularity and malleability of the domestic media space. They argue that festivals face specific challenges in finding the appropriate mode of addressing audiences, and in working out how to make time matter online by carving out a new temporal space in the daily routine of the home: between the immediacy of streaming and the “asynchronous flexibility of video-on-demand” (De Valck and Damiens 2023:8). To avoid cancellation, the Berlin International Film Festival decided to generate a virtual platform to cover activities and screenings for its 2021 edition. The same decision was made for Barcelona’s D’A Film Festival,² whose entire program was transferred to a local streaming platform (Filmin.es). Several traditional cultural celebrations took a similar path, as they largely shifted to internet platforms, allowing people to watch them via live streaming and social media and even in virtual environments. In cases when events were neither postponed nor canceled, organizers chose to hold them without an audience and broadcast them live, as Estanyol (2022) notes. This was what occurred with the community and popular neighborhood festival called the Festa Major de Gràcia,³ which moved a portion of its program from Barcelona’s streets and squares to the online world, by streaming both physical events and entirely digital acts.

This event-digitalization trend, which began a couple of decades ago, found a further catalyst in the Covid-19 pandemic, having a profound impact on festivals worldwide. The medium- and long-term impacts are still unknown, but digital and hybrid events have been shown to enable new opportunities for festival development. For example, Bachman and Hull (2021), in their research on the Vancouver Queer Film Festival, which went online in 2020, showed that there was a continuity between how attendees perceived the physical and the

2 For more information, please visit <https://dafilmfestival.com/>.

3 For more details about this event, please visit <https://www.festamajordegracia.cat/>.

virtual festival, while the online format also facilitated wider participation, with a more diverse range of viewer profiles. The iconic Burning Man, normally held in the Nevada desert, was another event that went virtual in 2020. This festival focuses on fostering community, cooperation, creativity, self-sufficiency, and spiritual practices. In the 2020 edition, access to the temple was virtual, and the attendees experienced the festival through three different bodies: the physical one (seated at the computer), their avatar, and remembered bodies, who had been at the festival in the past (Pike 2022). In this process, memory is key in providing an experience that Pike defines as fluid, where boundaries between the virtual and physical versions of the festival are blurred. Additionally, this new format of the festival allowed attendees to create sacred spaces within their daily activities and places, while also extending the festival in a temporal sense, with rituals remaining accessible after the event ended (Pike 2022). The festivals and celebrations in Barcelona, and the other global events described above, provide just a few examples of events that have rapidly adapted to Covid-19 by incorporating technologies into their proceedings. This is a phenomenon that is growing exponentially, offering new possibilities in terms of how festivals organize themselves spatially and temporally.

2.2 *Diasporic Festivals and the Chinese New Year Festival*

Although globalization is not a new phenomenon, the unprecedented scale and speed of fluxes during the last few decades have led to significant growth in social encounters and cultural exchange. Giddens (1990) defined globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice-versa” (Giddens 1990: 64). On the one hand, festivals are a means through which culture is consumed and experienced, in which both local and global dynamics are meaningful (Bennet and Taylor 2016). On the other hand, as occurs with other dimensions of culture like religion (Wong and Levitt 2014), festivities and rituals may travel together with the ethnic communities, but they do not necessarily remain static.

In festival studies, diaspora-community festivals are defined as those which celebrate “the identities, cultures and traditions of diverse minority, ethnic, diaspora communities” (Fu, Long and Thomas 2015: 201). As Faist (2010) points out, the term diaspora originally served to designate the historic experiences of forced dispersal of specific groups, referring to religious or national collectives (such as Jews and Armenians) who had an aspiration to return to the homeland and did not fully participate in the host society. In contrast, nowadays the term may refer to any kind of migration dispersal, with populations who maintain continuous cross-border or transnational links and take part in

the cultural, social and political spheres of the host countries. It is also worth mentioning diasporic festivals' potential as practices of "publicness" (Neal et al. 2015), helping to make their communities and their goals visible within the broader society. Further, festivals have been recognized as potential sites for promoting social cohesion and integration, as well as subversion and alienation (Frost 2015). In contemporary societies, diasporic festivals may serve as a site in which cultural differences are encountered (Bennet et al. 2014). In such an encounter, a dual perspective also applies: of understanding cultural difference as meaningful and enriching; and of constructing diversity as difference, or even as a danger or threat to mainstream society. In any case, by providing moments of "cultural destabilisation" (Amin 2002), festivals provide an opportunity to break away from fixed relations and interactions. However, sometimes they may risk becoming a "window to the exotic" (Murillo 1997: 278) through the commodification of otherness (Hassanlia et al. 2020). A key point is who retains power: whether migrant groups have agency or are used as puppets within a top-down model.

Within festival studies, little attention has been paid to the festivals of the migrant populations from China and other East Asian countries (Fu and Kim 2015; Fu et al. 2014; Johnson 2005). San Francisco's first Chinese New Year celebration dates from the 1850s, being the oldest public celebration of the Lunar New Year outside Asia. Contrary to what most people believe, its celebration in the United States is not a practice transplanted from ancient China, rather, these festivals are "invented public celebrations" (Yeh 2009) established by pioneer migrants. These invented public celebrations have involved deep cultural, social, and political claims related to both the home and destination countries, taking on issues such as racism in the United States and the political regime in China.

In fact, the political changes in China during the 20th century profoundly affected the celebration of the New Year in China. In 1912, the Republican government (1912–1949) abolished the lunar calendar and therefore the festivity itself. In 1949, when Mao Zedong came into power, he restored it as a national public holiday, but many religious and traditional practices were banned, resulting in their progressive erosion. Since the start of China's Reform Era (1979), gathering together as a family to watch the Spring Festival Gala on China Central Television (CCTV) has become a central custom in the celebration of the New Year. This is a new folk custom in which the profane time of the show replaces the time formerly dedicated to worshipping deities and ancestors (Zhu and Berry 2009).

During the various political eras in China, public celebration of the Chinese New Year in cities such as San Francisco and Los Angeles continued, albeit to

different degrees and with variability in terms of incorporating different traditional elements such as the lion dance (Yeh 2009). Additionally, although the private and family-centered ways in which the festival is celebrated are present in Chinese families worldwide, public celebrations have emerged in countries where the Chinese population settled at both earlier and later dates. Elements of traditional Chinese culture have been recovered and used as a tool for celebrating cultural heritage and identity, gaining visibility or marketizing ethnicity (Fu et al. 2014; Fu and Kim 2015; Johnson 2005; Wang 2013). The latter phenomenon involves not only a process of Orientalism (Said, 1978) but of self-Orientalism, through presenting an idealized version of the socially constructed Other. In other words, such communities reclaim the exotic as a resource and reify cultural elements themselves: making reference to the millenarian tradition having become a particularly prevalent example of this (Beltrán Antolín 2009). In this process, Chinese New Year festivals become an invented or represented tradition (Hoon 2009; Wang 2013; Yeh 2009) through the “aestheticization of the public festival” (Wang 2013: 16).

3 Chinese Migration and Barcelona's CNYF

Chinese migration to Spain became quantitatively important from the 1980s onwards, reaching its peak at the end of the 1990s. Most of the Chinese migrants in Spain originate in the south of Zhejiang province, particularly from Qingtian county and the neighboring city of Wenzhou. Generally, their migration project is family-based and linked to entrepreneurial activity, with the goal of achieving reunification in Spain (Beltrán Antolín 2003, 2006; Sáiz López 2005) although they tend to sustain a large number of transnational ties (Lamas-Abraira 2021; Masdeu Torruella 2020). However, over the last decade, Chinese migration to Spain has started to diversify, including fluxes of people arriving from Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and southern and northern provinces like Fujian, Shandong, Liaoning, Heilongjiang and Jilin. In contrast to people from Zhejiang Province, these recent migrants often move alone, do not have a settlement project in Spain, are more likely to be employees, have an urban background and on average have a higher level of education (Beltrán Antolín 2006; Beltrán Antolín and Sáiz López 2015). This heterogeneity is particularly salient in big cities such as Barcelona or Madrid, where a higher proportion of new migrants such as international students or investors are present. As has been demonstrated in other European contexts, the Chinese community is not homogeneous (it has different origins, languages, social classes, etc.) and often there is a lack of contact between the different groups

(Benton 2011; Wang 2022). Therefore, we cannot talk about a single Chinese community in Spain or Barcelona. It is also worth mentioning that, although Catalonia has a distinctive political and cultural context, previous research (Beltrán Antolín 2009; Beltrán Antolín and Sáiz López 2001) has shown that Chinese migrants in Catalonia follow the same patterns as in Spain as a whole and do not have any specific traits. While business or cultural associations may serve to build cross-group ties under generic names, an inner logic of segregation by area or province of origin in China is still prevalent. This context makes the Chinese New Year Festival particularly interesting to explore. Still, very little is known about Chinese New Year Festivals in Spain: existing studies focus on Madrid and how forming associations and organizing festivals acted as a source of prestige at the end of the 20th century (Nieto 2000), as well as cultural diversity management (Pinilla 2014); to date, no study has focused exclusively on the CNYFs held in Barcelona.

From the broader research within which this article is framed, we know that a CNYF was celebrated for the first time in the public space of Barcelona in 2011, when it was organized by a large, prestigious Chinese business association with the support of the city council. This earlier version of the festival lasted for two years. It was canceled in 2013 due to the discontent of the Chinese community in Spain that resulted from the biased and stigmatizing media treatment of a police case related to the Chinese mafia in the country. Consequently, in 2014, Barcelona City Council decided to create a larger intercultural festival to celebrate the arrival of the Lunar New Year. Although it took place in a very central, touristy part of the city in its first year, from the second year onwards it has been held around the Arc de Triomphe, in the Fort Pienc neighborhood, which has the largest percentage of Chinese residents and businesses in the city.

Since 2015, the Chinese New Year Festival in Barcelona has grown in visibility, becoming a key intercultural event in the city: the edition prior to the pandemic (2019) attracted 4,500 attendees and more than 800 participants from 50 different cultural groups.

The CNYF is organized by a core group led by four women, representing four entities: an open network of Chinese institutions based in the city (including Chinese associations, cultural groups, schools, etc.), the Confucius Institute,⁴

4 The Confucius Institute Foundation of Barcelona (Fundació Institut Confuci de Barcelona) is defined on its website as a non-profit institution which promotes teaching the Chinese language in Catalonia. Confucius Institutes (Kongzi Xueyuan/孔子学院) worldwide are funded by the Chinese International Education Foundation, an institution that is dependent on the Chinese government. [<https://www.confucio-barcelona.es/>].

Casa Asia⁵ (Asia House), and Barcelona City Council, which provides economic and infrastructural support and the expertise of an intercultural mediator: the fourth woman in the core group. Finally, they also have the institutional support of the Chinese consulate in Barcelona. Despite having been created and supported by the Catalan institutions, the group of Chinese entities is directly involved in the festival's planning and implementation process through a bottom-up decision-making model, which enables it to decide on the content of the festival (Mason and Scollen 2018). However, as has occurred in other contexts (Fu and Kim 2015; Johnson 2005), some generational conflicts have been documented outside the organizing group, particularly regarding the esthetics, name and scope of the festival, with some calling for a Lunar New Year that is open to other Asian communities.

The CNYF and other cultural diversity festivals supported by Barcelona City Council (including the National Days of Ecuador and Pakistan, the Kalayaan Filipino festival, and many others) often serve as a showcase of elements that are portrayed as representative of the ethnic communities living in Barcelona that celebrate their festive days in the city's public space. Folkloric elements such as the color red, the dragons, lions, and Chinese traditional costumes define the esthetics of a normal edition of the festival, which is structured around: (1) a parade, (2) a stage with performances, and (3) a food and cultural fair.

A standard edition of the festival starts with a parade along the neighborhood's streets, which lasts for about two hours, in which the local Chinese entities march and/or perform (depending on the entity in question), as do the Catalan cultural groups formally invited to join them for the day, in an attempt to boost interculturality. New groups are invited to join each edition, but groups performing with fire and fireworks are always present, as this is an important element in both cultures. Those entities that do not put on a performance simply march in the parade, carrying huge banners displaying the name of their association, normally wearing traditional dress. This is the case, for example, of the business associations. Once the parade arrives at the Arc de Triomphe, around midday, the performances on the stage start, continuing until 8 PM (including a three-hour break for lunch between 2 PM and 5 PM). The scheduled performances are described on the CNYF website as "traditional Chinese

5 CASA ASIA is a public consortium comprising the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the regional government of Catalonia and the Barcelona and Madrid city councils, with its main headquarters in Barcelona and another center in Madrid. It aims to foster institutional, economic, cultural, and educational relationships between Asia, the Pacific and Spain [<https://www.casaasia.es/quienes-somos/>].

cultural shows.” Traditional dance and martial arts performances make up a particularly significant part of the program. However, on a few occasions, the line-up has also included other genres, such as K-pop dancing performed by young Chinese migrants or migrants’ descendants, and performances of local Bollywood dances by invited groups. Beyond these global influences, a normal edition of the CNYF does not have direct transnational links or dynamics. However, the first online exchange activity was scheduled in 2020, between a school in Zhejiang province and another in the Fort Pienc neighborhood, although this had to be canceled due to the pandemic. As a peripheral activity, the food and cultural fair was introduced in 2018, in response to a formal request the Chinese entities made to the city council. It includes approximately 10–15 stands, where people can buy Chinese snacks and get to know a little about Chinese culture through food, as well as through activities such as Chinese calligraphy or paper cutting, or meeting Chinese cultural associations. While the fair’s food stands are undoubtedly an economic activity, they are still directly linked to Chinese culture and, in line with the whole festival, have an exotic esthetic, looking very different from a standard street stand of the sort you might find in any Chinese city or town.

In summary, in a normal edition of the CNYF the folkloric and self-Orientalist approach to Chinese culture prevails over any other non-cultural element and the festival remains a local one. It is also worth mentioning that, although the CNYF takes place in the neighborhood with the highest percentage of Chinese people in the city, most of the event’s audience is from the non-Chinese population.

4 Design and Methodology

As mentioned earlier, this research is framed within the “FestSpace: Festivals, events and inclusive urban public spaces in Europe” research project, which studies the socio-cultural potential of events that take place in the public space of various European cities as regards inclusivity and cultural diversity. This article focuses on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the organization and conceptualization of the CNYF in Barcelona, as well as how people participated in the festival.

The research took a sociological approach, including qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data was collected through a five-month period of fieldwork (January to May 2021), which included: (1) 15 semi-structured interviews with 20 people (four organizers, two collaborators and 14 representatives of participant entities); (2) participant observation while attending virtual

festival activities; and (3) 73 responses to an online survey available in three different languages (Mandarin, Spanish and Catalan), which was distributed among the organizers, collaborators and participant entities of this and previous festival editions. The interviews were conducted in either Mandarin or Spanish, mostly through video calls, due to pandemic-related restrictions. The sampling strategy for the interviews was intended to provide different points of view, including people with different positions in power relationships and decision-making (it incorporates three different categories: organizers, collaborators and representatives, with further internal differences having been documented). However, power relationships are beyond the scope of this article, whose length restrictions make it impossible to focus on all issues of interest, more of which will be discussed in future works.

All interview transcripts and notes resulting from participant observation and analysis of secondary sources⁶ were analyzed using Atlas.ti software, taking an inductive-iterative approach (O'Reilly 2012). To preserve informants' privacy, all names have been removed from interview quotes, using informant categories (ORG organizer/ COL collaborators / PAR participants) and a reference number (1,2,3, etc.) to identify them.

5 Results

5.1 *The Pandemic Context: Making Decisions*

The year 2020 brought about significant life changes and acted as a point of rupture for many people around the world. In Spain, a country deeply affected by the pandemic, mobility restrictions within cities and regions and social-distancing rules became a recurrent theme, affecting the way we experienced life, and in parallel, how we experienced festivals and other cultural events or activities. This process of getting used to a new life involved more hardship for the Chinese-origin people living in the country who, besides having to deal with the fear and uncertainty of this new scenario while away from

6 Due to length restrictions and the large number of documents (more than 50), only general sources are provided here: (1) the Spanish/Catalan press: *La Vanguardia* (<https://www.lavanguardia.com/>); *El Confidencial* (<https://www.elconfidencial.com/>) *El Periódico* (<https://www.elperiodico.com/es/>); *Diari Ara* (<https://es.ara.cat/>); *Betevé* (<https://betve.cat/>); (2) the Chinese press in Spain: *Periódico Ouhua* 欧华报 (<http://www.ouhua.info/>); *El Mandarin* (<http://elmandarin.es/>); (3) Consulate press releases during the Covid-19 period: <http://es.china-embassy.gov.cn/esp/>; (4) the Barcelona City Council website: www.barcelona.cat; (5) WeChat accounts and Facebook groups of migrants' descendants (anonymized).

their loved ones, faced increasingly racist attitudes, as many of them described on their individual and collective social media accounts, and as has been reported in Spain and other European countries (Beltrán Antolín and Sáiz López 2023; Gao and Sai 2020; Wang et al. 2021). From the beginning of the virus outbreak in early 2020, they were pointed to and blamed for – theoretically – importing the virus to Spain. During that period, some people expressed their fears on TV and in other media about going inside Chinese businesses, whereas it was owners of Chinese businesses who closed their doors during the official lockdown, or even weeks in advance of it, because they were afraid of getting infected. The verbal and physical aggression toward Chinese people on social networks and the street became an everyday matter. Echoing the movement initiated in France, the “I am not a virus” (*No soy un virus*) campaign arrived in Spain, through which young people of Chinese origin protested against these circumstances. This phrase was widely reproduced on social media and in other public cultural and institutional spaces.

In 2020, the Chinese New Year Festival in Barcelona was initially scheduled for February. At that time, there was only one confirmed Covid-19 case in Spain and the official lockdown would not be decreed until six weeks later, on March 14. Therefore, during that time, public events were still allowed. Nevertheless, the CNYF was canceled: a decision made by its organizers just three days before starting. The reasons, shared on official event communication channels, centered on the complex pandemic situation in China at that time and solidarity with their compatriots. This could be seen in the statements made in some interviews:

PARI: Well, we were surprised, right? We canceled because of solidarity with China, not because there was anything here, we were not yet aware of what could come. And yes, well, we saw it in, like, double because here we were working and everything was okay but, in China, people were saying that everything was closed, lots of deaths (...) We didn't expect not to go out again. Two years! It's been two years [without going out]!

However, members of the organizing committee and collaborators who are ethnically Chinese expressed a different concern: the fear that the parade was later identified as a source of contagion.

COLI: Yes, that's what was done in the “Year of the Rat” [2020], the festival didn't go ahead, just in case there was a spread of the virus from there. That's why it was canceled. I don't know if you know it, if that's what has been said or not, but that is the truth.

Having been informed by the interviewer that the official version cited solidarity with China, the interviewee nuanced his words, aligning them with the most official version:

COL1: There are many factors that had an influence, and what you said about solidarity being the reason for doing that ... I mean, first it was done out of solidarity, but then you think that if the festival goes ahead, and people get infected and you get infected, you're going to feel guilty for having been the one who put on this parade, for getting everyone infected. Personally, thinking about it carefully, holding the festival, on the one hand, fighting the pandemic, on the other, well, it [the festival] was not the priority.

Therefore, a dual discourse has been articulated about the festival's cancellation. On the one hand, solidarity was presented as the sole, official reason; on the other hand, fear that the Chinese New Year parade would be a major source of contagion was a key factor. While many other public and even more large-scale events continued to be held during those weeks, the CNYF was one of the very few events canceled. Even though racism was not a primary (or even secondary) factor shaping the origin and nature of Barcelona's CNYF, as it was in other Chinese New Year festivals mentioned in the introduction to this article, the new scenario led racism to play a part in the 2021 festival. However, besides the influence of growing hostility toward the Chinese in Spain and the resulting stigmatizing and antagonistic scenario described above, transnational factors cannot be overlooked. The ethnically Chinese organizers and collaborators, whose day-to-day lives were embedded in the social transnational space⁷ (Faist 1998), were able to anticipate the forthcoming circumstances, which at that time were pictured as a faraway reality: the so-called Global North looking down on China to see how things would play out.

One year later, in 2021, the celebration to welcome in "the Year of the Ox" shifted to a virtual event although, for months, most organizers and participants had hoped to be able to celebrate it on the street and felt uncertain about the various alternative options:

ORG1 ... last year we couldn't show the city what we had prepared (...) We weren't able to, so this year [2021] we had to do something. Of course, next came: What shall we do? Well, we should do something. First, could

⁷ Transnational social spaces "denote the circular flow of persons, goods, information and symbols across countries" (Faist 1998: 214).

it be done on the street? No? Would it be a hybrid format? Would it be online?

While the idea of a hybrid or mixed event was sketched out many months in advance, in the end, the reality of the pandemic made social distancing and a virtual format necessary, as a last resort:

ORG2: We had to start preparing the New Year [festival] months in advance so, we were already in a lockdown period, around May [2020] or something like that, and we started to sketch it out. And we jumped the gun. The initial idea was maybe to do something hybrid, depending on what we were allowed to do, blah, blah, but of course, as time went by, we realized, listen: it is a health matter, and we have to do it this way [without any physical co-presence].

Once the core organizing group discarded the idea of having any events on the street, they started to hold online meetings with the associations and cultural groups. After months of measures restricting mobility, total or partial lockdowns, months without being able to be physically present with loved ones, a large-scale economic crisis and terrifying numbers of deaths and infections, people's energy and enthusiasm were affected:

ORG1: In October or November we started to hold [virtual] meetings with the cultural groups: "this year we plan to do it online, what do you think? What do you think you can do?" Well, on the first day, to tell you the truth, we were very happy to see each other, but because people hadn't gone out for a long time, the mood was a bit downbeat. And we said: "Come on, in ten days we will meet again." And the next time, they came with their proposals.

This shows how keen the organizations were to go ahead with a community event at a very difficult and complex time. In the end, the 2021 Chinese New Year in Barcelona was brought into being through a website that collected and displayed the contributions of the various groups and associations: mostly pictures or videos, together with additional live-streaming activities. While the quote given by the organizer above (ORG1) emphasized the importance of participation, this involvement was less collaborative than in previous editions, going by participants' accounts. For 2021, the meetings held prior to the event were mostly informative, the new circumstances leading to a more rigid festival format that was less open to ideas and proposals.

5.2 *The 2021 Edition: Social, Cultural, and Instrumental Dynamics*

The website was launched on February 12, featuring a video of Barcelona's mayor and the Chinese consul together at the city hall. In contrast to previous years, as well as simply being present, they considered it important to give a speech in this edition. In the inaugural video, the consul and mayor both emphasized the need for China and the city of Barcelona to work together to overcome the pandemic's effects by focusing on the economy, culture, and development. This approach was key to this edition of the festival, as the following paragraphs will show. The importance of this tentative coalition was also reflected in the city council's economic contribution to this edition: maintaining the original budget, despite the festival being held online. It was also evident in the inaugural video itself: a scene charged with symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1987), with the mayor receiving the Chinese consul at the *Salò de Cent*: the most important institutional and symbolic location in the city, where the Chinese lions and dragon mixed with Catalan mythical beasts. The emphasis placed by the consul on the festival's name had a similar effect: Chinese New Year with Barcelona, the "with" being endowed with more meaning that year than ever.

As mentioned above, in previous editions, active participation in the festival had included marching in the parade, performing on the stage, or having a stall in the Chinese food and cultural fair, all of these events being held on a single day. In the 2021 edition, the space for cultural workshops that had previously been included among the cultural fair's stands was maintained but simply moved online, with live workshops being offered (Chinese lanterns, Chinese language, the art of paper cutting, Chinese calligraphy, the tea ceremony). However, as addressed in more detail below, the format affected public accessibility. Further, in contrast to the central role given to the parade and the onstage performances in the previous editions, these were replaced by offline amateur videos of performances by Chinese and Catalan cultural groups, maintaining the intended intercultural approach. And most importantly, live webinars focusing on non-cultural topics (e.g. tourism, international students, young entrepreneurship, Chinese investors) were described as the central activities of the festival, which was scheduled over two weeks. By diversifying the activities, virtual spaces and event times, the festival enabled the active participation of new actors, resulting in a shift of visibility among the different groups within (and beyond) the Chinese diaspora in Spain. The most obvious change was the loss of visibility of dancing and martial arts groups. Additionally, the list of participants from earlier editions and fieldwork interviews suggest that in previous years, there had been widespread attendance and participation of people from Zhejiang – the area from which most Chinese people in Spain originate – and,

to a lesser extent, from Dongbei (northeast China), while in 2021, the origin of participants was much more diverse. Similarly, in contrast to previous years, when the large, socially prestigious entrepreneurship associations were the most visible in the parade, carrying their big banners and wearing their smart traditional dress, in 2021, the young entrepreneurs – generally descendants of Chinese migrants – attracted a lot of attention, serving to rebalance spaces of power and visibility, albeit momentarily (Clarke and Jepson 2011). This was also the case for Chinese international students. Although they had previously been represented through the participation of several Chinese student associations in the parade, informants described this as more of a token presence than widespread participation. In 2021, they were the protagonists of one of the webinars, in which students connected from China and Spain to talk about their experiences studying and living in Spain. However, while this presence had great symbolic value, particularly from a generational point of view, the webinar format meant it was witnessed by very few people.

Therefore the 2021 edition broadened the scope of the festival, going beyond Chinese cultural heritage to include topics such as tourism, education, entrepreneurship, and investment, seeking to appeal to the Chinese population worldwide, and considering Chinese migration to Barcelona and transnational links as the best allies with which to fight the financial crisis derived from the Covid-19 pandemic. The importance of this transnational appeal was stressed by the organizing group during fieldwork interviews, in which promoting the city of Barcelona was cited as a key aim:

ORG1: This year, 2021, is a very important one, because it is the [year when], we hope, we will overcome the pandemic, [move] into the non-pandemic period. So, there will be the need to generate the city's economic recovery. This means that interculturality also has a part to play in all this. Because we are people in an interlinked world and we can present [...] Barcelona as an open city, a city of interculturality, intercultural, a modern city, a capable city that will be well prepared to move on after the pandemic.

Seeking to promote the city and communicate its strengths beyond Spain's borders, this year – in contrast to previous editions of the festival – the target audience was not local but global:

ORG1: We have created these round tables, which we think are very important, which we will project outside, and in some of which we are really seeking out the Chinese audience.

As the next section will detail, this attempt to reach a Chinese audience involved multiple strategies. However, the references above about appealing to interculturality and contact with the Chinese people to overcome the economic crisis in Barcelona are particularly meaningful. In relation to this, it is worth mentioning how festival organizers referred to the concept of *weiji* (危机): a concept invoked by the Chinese people very frequently during the pandemic, which is normally translated as “crisis”. Despite this translation, the word is composed of two different and apparently contradictory characters: *wei* (危) – danger, and *ji* (机) – opportunity. Referring to this concept implies a productive way of thinking about the pandemic and its dangerous effects. In this case, it means taking the CNYF as an opportunity to appeal to Chinese students, tourists, and investors to help reverse the impacts of the Covid-19 crisis in Barcelona. The conceptualization of the 2021 CNYF therefore incorporates both the danger-opportunity philosophy embedded in Chinese cultural logics (Hu, Zhang and Yang, 2020) and the transnational logic embedded in the day-to-day lives of the Chinese population in Spain. However, overall, this new approach taken by the festival reflects an instrumental orientation that surpasses the tangible cultural expressions and folkloric character associated with this type of festival (Hassanlia et al. 2020; Murillo 1997; Wang 2010).

Despite the enthusiasm transmitted by the core organizing group and the good intentions behind it, this instrumental orientation did not please everyone, as the quote below exemplifies:

COL1: I checked out the round table discussion with Chinese companies, and the Confucius Institute ones, but that was not culture, [it was] just about exchange between entrepreneurs and people. ... Because the Chinese New Year is a cultural and exchange festival, it is not an entrepreneurial festival: “let’s create a company” or “let’s invest in Barcelona so that the Chinese come to invest here” or what the Chinese exchange students say to inform people about and incentivize exchanges, this is not ...

This quote shows that, although the celebration was more global and intersectoral in 2021, and more diverse in terms of participant profiles and topics, it seems that there are some critical voices that continue to value the exclusively cultural and folkloric nature of the CNYF in its previous editions.

5.3 *Local and Global Impact*

CNYF organizers refer to the multiplicity of time and space as an essential feature of the 2021 edition. Unlike in previous years, when the event was located in a single neighborhood and took place on a single day, this year, attendees

could connect from anywhere and enjoy the different activities scheduled across two weeks, with the option of access to some of them at any time in the future, the website acting as a repository. Research has shown that this time-space multiplicity is a key outcome of online festivals (Bachman and Hull 2021; Han et al. 2016; Pike 2022). However, the local and global impacts are unevenly distributed.

As mentioned earlier, the CNYF in Barcelona used to take place in the Arc de Triomphe neighborhood, in a central area of the city of Barcelona characterized by the high percentage of Chinese-origin people living and working there. In previous editions, there was feedback between the space, the people living in the area and the festival: a mechanism that was absent from the 2021 edition. As a result, reduced local attendance at the city level was expected and the metrics from the festival website confirm this. Although the organizers did not provide us with the exact number of attendees, they reported that attendance was lower. Nevertheless, as a result of the expansive scope of the virtual format, the organizers highlighted the festival's significant global impact, pointing to a high level of connectivity with China and other countries. From a quantitative point of view, the percentage of connections with China is significant, accounting for 9% of the total visits. It is worth mentioning that, as a secondary effect of the pandemic, many Chinese residents in Spain have spent this period in China, due to a general perception of the greater safety and reliability of Chinese national institutions (Guo et al. 2021; Lamas-Abraira 2021). This is also reflected in the large number of participants in previous editions of the festival whose responses to our online survey arrived from China. However, as noted earlier, the 2021 CNYF sought to appeal to a worldwide Chinese audience. This intention is reflected in the festival's website and the options it offers: it is available in Mandarin and simultaneous translation was offered for the webinars, which also took a transnational approach, through the participation of speakers located in both countries and through Barcelona's institutional representation of different sectors. For example, besides the individuals and companies that participated in the roundtable discussions, other institutions such as the Education Council of the Spanish Embassy in Beijing also joined. Similarly, the Lishui Radio and TV Station – Lishui being the prefecture-level city to which Qingtian county belongs – also shared its content, creating a direct link to the area from which most Chinese migrants in Spain originate.

Besides language, another key feature in providing accessibility to the 2021 CNYF was social media. Research has shown that using mobile technologies facilitates accessing and sharing festival-related information and experiences, with almost no restrictions on time (immediacy) or distance (Han et al. 2016). However, in this case there were several limitations to festival

accessibility. First, access required having an electronic device and digital skills, which therefore excluded many people. While in China there is general proficiency in the use of cell phones and WeChat by people in their sixties and above (Guo 2017; Sun and Yu 2022), this is not always the case in Spain. As a result, and feeding into the aforementioned trend toward a decreasing local impact, it can be assumed that many local people living in the neighborhood who used to join the festival – as both casual and non-casual observers – were not able to do so this year. Second, it is not possible to access all kinds of media from China because many international apps, such as Facebook and Instagram, are banned. However, the CNYF was present on WeChat, with videos also posted on Youku (a Chinese social media platform similar to Youtube).

WeChat is the most popular social media platform among Chinese people within and beyond China, and it has changed Mandarin-speakers' interactions at a distance, either through individual or group messaging or through the sharing of information (Sun and Yu 2022). In line with patterns in other countries such as France (Wang 2022), the media consumption habits of the Chinese-origin population vary across the generations. Most migrants' descendants born or raised in Spain are familiar with Chinese media such as WeChat, but mostly use other social media such as Instagram or Twitter in their day-to-day lives in Spain (Lamas-Abraira 2021). In contrast, the older generations and newcomers use WeChat and other Chinese social media. In line with this observation, in the festival's presence on social media, there was more interaction by users of the Chinese platforms than on those used in Spain.

By following the CNYF's WeChat account, users could receive updates and share the content by sending it as a message or sharing it in their WeChat Moments, making it available to their contacts. This provided "peripheral awareness of the actions of distant others" (Madianou 2016: 186) while also serving to reach other people that may not have direct links to Barcelona. From a qualitative point of view, the online format modified some CNYF-related information flows from Spain to China, which shifted from personal videos recorded in situ by relatives or friends – who would select the content and perspective themselves – to links to the website where a range of graphic and audio-visual material was posted. While missing the personal perspective, the online format brings a more holistic approach. As one of the festival's organizers pointed out: "now, being online, they can see everything we do" (ORG3).

In this regard, it is important to remember that the fundamental change created by the 2021 CNYF's virtual format was that the main celebration, namely the street parades and the in-person fair, could not be held, meaning that space and time were interpreted differently. De Valck and Damiens (2023) have made a similar point: the diversity of the virtual program went beyond public space

to reach the domestic sphere in the 2021 CNYF, providing the option to join the festivity with either synchronous immediacy or the asynchronous flexibility of on-demand content. Thus, the virtual adaptation of the event revealed that this shared space and time (whether asynchronous or not) is participated in by individuals locally, albeit situated in different global times and spaces, suggesting that the festival achieved greater worldwide accessibility.

5.4 *Evaluating the 2021 Edition: It's Not the Same*

As the previous sections have illustrated, organizers draw attention to the opportunities resulting from a broader scope and range of activities. As a result, in the core organizing group they talk about the benefits of a hybrid format in upcoming editions, using the current website as the base platform from which to expand and update content and to act as a repository for the roundtable discussions. However, despite the organizers' enthusiasm, many of the participants from previous editions said in their interviews and the online survey that they were not aware of the details of the 2021 edition. Moreover, most of them didn't take part in any of the programmed activities and some didn't even check the website, apathy being a common reaction. While aware of the limited options available under the circumstances and valuing the effort made, the result did not please most people. In broader terms, the common perception is that virtual co-presence did not serve to replace physical co-presence under these circumstances. The phrase "it is not the same" was the leitmotif.

First of all, it is worth reflecting on the extent to which a festival of this kind can dispense with physical co-presence and interaction. The physicality of the city fosters casual encounters among strangers. In fact, space can be understood as "constituted through interactions" (Massey 2005: 9) and street festivals in particular are seen as opportunities to bring people together and enhance a sense of belonging (Delgado 2016; Hassanli et al. 2020; Mason and Scollen 2018). The intercultural emphasis present in organizers' discourse is consistent with this vindication of the in-person celebration:

ORG4: In the future it will probably be a hybrid format, but co-presence must come back, particularly in relation to what you are studying: the closeness, the interculturality in the neighborhood and the city.

All informants, regardless of whether organizers or participants, thought that a virtual festival and one that takes place on the street could not be equated. In fact, for some informants, celebrating the festival online means not celebrating it, as reflected in the words of one informant, who stated: "[last year the festival] was canceled, but we did it online" (PAR2). While some informants

emphasized it more than others, a common element in their accounts was the centrality of physical space as the perfect background for a celebration, the streets being seen as the soul of the festival and the seed from which it grows:

ORG1: the streets are the soul [of the festival], let's say, they are the soul of all these entities that this year [2021] will be online.

ORG2: [in-person celebration] is the seed [of the festival], also, it's like the online [festival] cannot replace a celebration on the street, but well, this year we tried to be realistic.

Organizers pointed out that, while other kinds of activities, such as the on-stage performances, can be adapted to the virtual format (to some extent), it is difficult to fit the parade, which is the core of the Chinese New Year Festival in Barcelona, into an event without physical co-presence: “the parade dies in the virtual domain” (ORG4). Co-presence, face-to-face contact and interaction are considered to be the foundation of the festival, creating a particular atmosphere, and enabling participants to receive diverse sensorial inputs and interactional outcomes:

ORG3: (...) the atmosphere is different. The atmosphere of the street, with such a large amount of people on the street, being together celebrating, it is different (...) on the streets you see lots of people, [who are] very lively, wearing different clothes. Then all of them can say “hello!” and greet each other, but if you just see the performances on the internet, you cannot communicate directly with others.

It is worth mentioning that, besides the absence of physical co-presence, virtual co-presence and interaction in the 2021 festival edition was also limited. The 2021 Chinese New Year Festival was primarily conceived and experienced as a space not for interaction but for reviving the festival. The live workshops and webinars were an exception, in which a certain degree of interaction was possible, although this was limited, mediated by the media channel and platform (Teams software) and moderated by the organizers. A more open, free and interactive format could be explored to provide the audience with a more involved experience that is closer to that of a street festival.

In this sense, after a whole year dominated by mobility restrictions, total or partial lockdowns, prohibitions on private and public meetings and social distancing rules, celebrating together, side by side, took on a new meaning. When asking informants what they thought it would be like celebrating in “normality” again, they commented:

ORG3: um, I think that [being] together, [we will be] very happy because, to be honest, not only the Chinese New Year has been canceled, but all festivals have also been canceled and no one can meet their friends. The Chinese, particularly, we go to very few gatherings. I don't go to parties with other people and very rarely eat out.

The comment above, which refers to ethnically Chinese people exercising more caution, is in line with other informants' accounts, as the following quote exemplifies:

PAR3: I think people won't be afraid in Spain, but the Chinese community will be more scared because, to them, this whole Covid thing is much more important.

This "Covid thing is much more important" because of the direct and broader implications for Chinese people, as a group, as has been explored above. However, the following quotes captured the uncertainty and hope that dominated the festival's core organizing group at the time of the fieldwork in 2021:

ORG3: Everybody expects that the festival will be different next year, because the feeling on the street is different from [the feeling] on the internet ... We do not know what will happen in the future but, whatever happens, the Chinese New Year will be celebrated, Christmas will be celebrated, *it must be*.

It is worth noting that, at the time of this article's submission, the 2022 edition of the festival has already been held. In 2022, the festival recovered its face-to-face format, returning to the public space of the Arc of Triomphe area. However, it did not fully reinstate its program, as the parade through the Fort Pienc neighborhood was missing. Additionally, some Covid-19 prevention measures were still in place, such as wearing face masks. As well as the one-day food and cultural fair and performances on the stage, other activities were held face-to-face and online. While most activities were in-person, the organizers implemented a hybrid format, including online workshops and an online webinar entitled "Tourism 2022: When will the Chinese be back?"⁸ that served to continue the instrumentalist and productive approach to the CNYF initiated in 2021.

8 Turismo 2022: quan torna la Xina?

6 Concluding Reflections

To festival organizers, celebrating the Chinese New Year Festival in Barcelona is a must. However, in 2020, the global pandemic context resulted in its cancellation. In 2021, its shift to a virtual event entailed changes not only to its format but also to its content and scope, implying new synergies and understandings of what the CNYF means.

First, the virtual format enabled the active participation of new actors, resulting in a shift of visibility among the different groups within the Chinese diaspora and beyond, including those expected to come to Barcelona to study or invest. Second, new spaces for participation diversified the esthetics, scope and aims of the festival, with the pandemic and the resulting economic crisis being key. There was continuing advocacy for the connection between the city of Barcelona and China, and international migration and transnational relations were presented as a pathway to economic recovery, emphasizing the key role of China as a global economic power. As part of this, live webinars on tourism, entrepreneurship, investment, and education were introduced as core activities in the 2021 CNYF. The productive or instrumentalist orientation of the festival is embedded in the Chinese cultural logic captured by the concept of *weiji* (危机) or crisis, explained above, which encompasses both danger (pandemic) and opportunity (success). The 2021 CNYF was therefore conceived as a means to stimulate Barcelona's local economy, which was greatly affected by the Covid-19-derived crisis. As such, the 2021 CNYF went beyond the folkloric festival model (Murillo 1997; Hassanlia et al. 2020), by combining the esthetics of the invented-tradition approach prevalent in this and other CNY parades (Hoon 2009; Wang 2013; Yeh 2009) with a focus on a more pragmatic reality.

Third, although the virtual format limited the social impact at a local level, it also enabled collaborations to be set up with different individuals and institutions participating from China, and an increase in the number of global attendees. This was made possible by facilitating access to the festival's content for both Spanish and Chinese speakers and making it available on both international and Chinese social media. WeChat was particularly important in the circulation of content. It is also worth noting the key role of migrants' transnational ties and simultaneity in the transnational social space (Faist 1998) in channeling information, which had an influence on the cancellation of the CNYF's 2020 edition, as well as the 2021 festival's communication flows. This demonstrates that the re-erection of physical and institutional national borders in the new (post)pandemic global order stands in sharp contrast to the growing capacity of people to get connected across borders. Taking a more

structuralist view of the event, this preliminary exploration suggests that symbolic festival activities of a cultural, social, or economic nature have the potential to establish a transformative and conceptual space between both countries and societies.

Finally, the research results illustrate the opportunities but also the challenges arising from this new scenario. Interculturality is deemed to be at the core of the new version of the CNYF. Its celebration on the streets of Barcelona involves planned as well as spontaneous encounters, which are key in creating a truly intercultural event, as “much of the negotiation of difference occurs at the very local level” (Amin 2002: 959). In the online domain, the CNYF’s capacity to reach the local audience is greatly curtailed. The physically co-present celebration is defined by organizers as the “seed” and “soul” of the festival, creating a unique festive atmosphere that virtuality cannot replace. In this sense, the lack of in-person interaction with others became particularly meaningful after a year of social distancing rules resulting from efforts to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

Bearing in mind that community celebrations inherently encompass numerous contradictions, and that an event like the Barcelona CNYF often sparks controversy regarding representation, appropriation of the exotic is one of the distinctive features of events that celebrate elements of cultural identity. In this respect, the disruptive circumstances of Covid-19 created a fresh arena for debate. During the pandemic, various methods of virtualization were used for festivals and celebrations, encompassing live streaming, extensive platform and social media usage, and the emergence of the metaverse as a launch pad for events. This, coupled with the surge in event-related digital content, has led to a reconsideration of how shared space and time are utilized in the event experience, transforming it in a semiotic space that touches on both physical and symbolic (Lefebvre 1991) meanings. In terms of diasporic festivities, it is also worth reflecting on Appadurai’s global flows of culture (1996) which, in such contexts, rapidly become non-static and present numerous possibilities and drawbacks. To understand the longer-term implications, we will need to observe visitors’ responses when virtualization transitions from being a product of a challenging situation to part of normality.

Acknowledgments

This article was funded by HERA (Humanities in the European Research Area), Project “FestSpace: Festivals, events, and inclusive urban public spaces in

Europe” (PCI2019-103745) and grant RYC2021-031481-I funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and the “European Union NextGenerationEU/PRTR”.

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