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© 2024

Communication & Society

ISSN 0214-0039

E ISSN 2386-7876

[www.communication-society.com](http://www.communication-society.com)

2024 – Vol. 37(2)

pp. 217-219

**How to cite this book review:**

Pérez-Rufi, J. P. (2024). The Eurovision Song Contest as a Cultural Phenomenon. From Concert Halls to the Halls of Academia (Bibliography. Book review). *Communication & Society*, 37(2), 217-219.

Bibliography. Book review

## ***The Eurovision Song Contest as a Cultural Phenomenon. From Concert Halls to the Halls of Academia***

Adam Dubin, Dean Vuletic and Antonio Obregón (Eds.)

Published by Routledge, New York (2023), 275 pp.

Annually, the Eurovision Song Contest, preceded by dozens of national pre-selections and various public or media-related events, generates an enormous amount of information and communication involving numerous stakeholders. This fact has finally captured the attention of the academic community, and the book coordinated by Adam Dubin, Dean Vuletic and Antonio Obregón calls for the due consideration and seriousness that the Eurovision Song Contest deserves as a subject worthy of analysis. Pajala (p. 188) highlights that as a friendly competition among countries centred on music (and not only music), the event has much to offer to Media Studies.

From a necessarily multidisciplinary perspective, as should be the case, each of the seventeen chapters in this volume (organised into three major sections) advocates for the event's significance within academia. Each chapter aims to contribute to the scholarly understanding of the event by proposing robust methodologies, specific objectives, in-depth analyses and revealing results. While originally devised for television, the Festival has progressively embraced the communicative potential of the current media and transmedia ecosystem, raising issues of interest across social, political, historical and, of course, cultural dimensions.

The editors' first and foremost achievement lies in bringing together leading experts in academic research on the Eurovision Song Contest within a single volume. Each expert has left an indelible mark on the studies of the Festival and set a crucial precedent in the subsequent academic literature. The collective works in this volume assert, with varying degrees of subtlety, the Festival's legitimacy as a subject of study and advocate for diverse disciplinary approaches, encompassing cultural or media studies, which analyse contemporary popular culture.

This publication serves as foundational work, even considering the prior academic works from which it originates, forming what I would venture to call Eurovision Studies –a multidimensional discipline open to diverse approaches, analytical perspectives and reflections. While academic works on the contest can be traced back to the 1950s (Pollock & Lyndon, 1959), it is the turbulent geopolitical landscape in Europe from the 1990s onward that sparks interest in the contest from a political standpoint (Yair, 1995; Fricker & Gluhovic, 2013; Raykoff & Tobin, 2016; Vuletic, 2018). As highlighted in the bibliography compiled by Obregón (pp. 25-35), the focus on the Festival later expands to encompass Media Studies, Cultural Studies and Eurovision Analytics.

The book begins with a preface written by Martin Österdahl, the current executive producer of the show, expressing the enthusiasm and interest that academic works on the Festival generate among the organisers. Österdahl's involvement provides the creator's perspective, often absent in much of the research on media events and audiovisual production. This inclusion reinforces the intention to establish this publication as an essential reference for future research on the Festival.

Examining the various chapters comprising the volume provides an opportunity to highlight specific ideas or reflections. In the first section, Vuletic contends that the history of Europe can be effectively narrated through the lens of the Festival, extending beyond the scope of media history. Obregón conducts a metainvestigation, emphasising the diverse disciplines that have explored Eurovision within academia, identifying it as a highly productive area of study. Dublin analyses the event from the lens of human rights, an unconventional approach that bravely confronts the ambiguity of the event that endeavours, albeit with difficulty, to maintain distance from international political issues.

Commencing the second section, Raykoff delineates a continuity between the Festival and similar musical events in classical Greece, as ritualised cultural and social practices. Lewis and Hajek present their teaching activities related to European history education in connection with the Festival, emphasising the strategies employed by participants in shaping their national identity during the contest. Cremona also employs the analysis of the show for pedagogical purposes, aiming to identify the values propagated by the European Union. From an ethical and ethnomusicological perspective, James analyses the values inherent in the European contest and compares them with those of the OTI Song Contest, emphasising the representation of a moral ideal of the individual in both contexts.

Yair and Ozeri's political perspective will provide readers with an understanding of the event's complexity by examining the performative and cultural models embraced by participating nations. Baker links the concept of "Europeanisation" to gender diversity, LGBTQ visibility policies in Europe, as well as the conflicts associated with these policies in some states. While maintaining the national and political perspective, this time from a statistical standpoint, Arroyo-Barrigüete, Fernández and Obregón demonstrate what fans have long suspected: the order of performance influences both audience and jury ratings.

Beginning the third section, Carniel compares the early editions of the Festival with the latest ones, examining aesthetics, production modes, and consumption patterns while emphasising the idealisation of the represented Europe and its values. Tobin explores the camp and queer perspectives of the event through the analysis of a film by Zulueta, critical of Francoism. Pajala accurately defines Eurovision's contemporary status as a media event, demonstrating a profound understanding of the Festival and its dynamics. Wolther reflects on the interconnected role of the press and fan-generated information. In one of the most engaging chapters, Panea analyses the stage designs of the contest from an aesthetic perspective, providing valuable and insightful conclusions. Hay and Carniel reflect on the methodologies for analysing the event from the researcher's standpoint. Concluding the volume, Vieira Lopes and Soeiro de Carvalho analyse the "Sobral phenomenon" (2017 winner) from ethnomusicology, highlighting Eurovision's extraordinary social and cultural role.

This volume will be of interest to both academics and students in the fields of cultural, media and communication studies. As with any commendable academic endeavour, *The Eurovision Song Contest as a Cultural Phenomenon* prompts the imperative to enhance one's understanding of the Eurovision Song Contest, encourages future research on the subject, and aims to serve as the cornerstone for future research that comprehensively explores the phenomenon in all its complexity.

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[https://www.doi.org/10.1016/0378-8733\(95\)00253-K](https://www.doi.org/10.1016/0378-8733(95)00253-K)