

THE IMPACT OF SPORTING EVENTS. NOVARA “ON FIELD”.

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Abstract

Urban tourism plays a key role in regenerating medium-sized European cities by creating economic, social, and cultural opportunities. Through events, especially sports, cities like Novara transform public spaces, attract visitors, and strengthen local identity. Tourism-driven regeneration reshapes infrastructure, fosters community engagement, and enhances the city's image. Major events, such as the 2024 Rink Hockey World Championships, illustrate how strategic planning links urban transformation, socio-spatial dynamics, and city branding, supporting sustainable development and global visibility.

1. Introduction

Extensive literature highlights how events drive territorial development and tourism, with a primary focus on mega and hallmark events (Getz, 2009; Getz and Page, 2016; Jafari, 1988). Prior studies examine various socio-economic benefits and drawbacks for destinations (Barclay, 2009), noting that these impacts depend strictly on event scale, duration, and capacity to attract public and private investments in infrastructure and services (d'Angella et al., 2024).

In the contemporary globalized economy, urban tourism has increasingly emerged as a cornerstone of strategic territorial development. While extensive literature (Basso, 2017; Basso Di Vita, 2018; Bolocan Goldstein, 2015; Cohen and Watt, 2017; Essex and Chalkley, 2002; Evans, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2020; Lin et al., 2018; Richards and Wilson, 2004; Roche, 2000; Smith, 2012) exists on how primary metropolitan hubs leverage mega-events for urban transformation, fewer studies focus on secondary urban centres. Medium-sized cities face unique structural pressures, caught between the risk of industrial stagnation and the need to forge new civic identities.

In this context, event-driven urban tourism, particularly sports competitions, represents a dynamic alternative for urban development. To critically analyse these territorial adaptations, this article focuses on a central question: How can medium-sized cities strategically leverage international sporting events as catalysts for sustainable urban regeneration, tourism development, and socio-economic revitalization?

To address this question, this study analyses the specific case of Novara, an Italian city of approximately one hundred thousand inhabitants situated in a strategic flat area between the major metropolitan networks of Milan and Turin. Historically

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rooted in the primary sector and chemical manufacturing, Novara has recently sought to diversify its socio-economic profile by leveraging its century-long sporting tradition, culminating in its designation as the European City of Sport 2025. Examining Novara's role as the host for the 2024 Rink Hockey World Championships offers important insights into how medium-sized territories can utilize localized infrastructure and proximity to international transport hubs to absorb global tourist flows.

2. Methodology

The methodology adopted in this article combines two approaches: a review of the academic literature on the impacts of hosting mega-events, and an empirical investigation through the case study of Novara. The literature review provided the main theoretical frameworks to understand why cities choose to host cultural and sporting events as tools for urban and territorial development. At the same time, the Novara case study offered concrete insights into the reasons why a medium-sized city can represent a strategic option for international events. Key factors include its proximity to Milan, good accessibility through airports and motorways, the availability of underused facilities, lower costs, and reduced competition with larger urban centres.

Furthermore, the contribution emphasizes the importance of a critical geographical approach in understanding urban tourism dynamics. This perspective considers not only the physical transformations of urban space but also the social-economic practices and relationships that shape and are shaped by these changes.

By adopting a critical geographical perspective, this study moves beyond a merely descriptive or economic evaluation of event impacts, framing the 2024 Rink Hockey World Championships within broader dynamics of power, spatial justice, and uneven territorial development. Critical tourism geography regards tourism spaces as not neutral containers of activities, but actively contested arenas where global capital intersects with localized socio-economic needs. Consequently, rather than viewing urban regeneration solely as a positive aesthetic or functional upgrade, this approach requires an interrogation of «for whom» the space is being remade. It demands a balanced examination of both the tangible investments (hard inputs) and the potential and unequal socio-spatial outcomes (soft effects).

Operationally, this theoretical framing directly informs our research design in three distinct ways. First, the selection of analytical dimensions (inputs, outputs, and outcomes) is explicitly linked to the contemporary debate on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). This updates older pre-2015 impact frameworks by evaluating whether localized investments translate into resilient community assets or remain isolated tourism enclaves. Second, it guides the spatial interpretation of our case study; for instance, the decision to prioritize the renovation of Pala Igor—located in the suburban and traditionally marginalized neighbourhood of Sant'Agabio—is evaluated not just through seat capacity, but as an intervention in peripheral urban regeneration. Third, the critical approach shapes our data triangulation. By cross-referencing hard economic indicators (credit card spending volumes and ticket sales) with localized civic indicators (museum footfall and resident-visitor dynamics), the methodology aims to

uncover the tensions between immediate global visibility and long-term territorial rootedness, ensuring a socio-spatially nuanced assessment of Novara's transition toward the 2025 European City of Sport.

In particular, the analysis focuses on the impacts of major sports events hosted by Novara, such as the Rink Hockey World Championships in 2024, which serve as a prelude to the nomination as European City of Sport 2025.

These events provide an opportunity to examine the interactions between tourism, urban space, and socio-spatial dynamics. Beyond the immediate economic benefits, sporting events influence patterns of mobility, public space usage, and social interaction, contributing to the redefinition of the city's identity and image. By studying the processes and outcomes of these events, the contribution identifies lessons that can inform future urban planning strategies, both in Novara and in similar medium-sized European cities.

Data collection was carried out with the support of the Statistical Office of Visit Piemonte, Italian Roller Sports Federation - FISR, the Municipality of Novara and Vicolungo «The Style Outlets», which provided both quantitative and qualitative information. In particular, the analysis considered tourist flows, visitor spending, and ticket sales for hockey matches, allowing for an assessment of the event's economic and social impact.

3. Economic and social impacts and tourism

The impacts of events extend across economic and social dimensions. Economically, events can generate direct income through ticket sales, hospitality, and local commerce, while also attracting new investors and boosting property values.

Socially, they foster community engagement, strengthen local identity, and provide opportunities for cultural exchange. There is also another perspective: events can increase the visibility of a city, attract domestic and international visitors, and encourage longer stays, thereby supporting a more diversified urban economy.

Properly managed events promote sustainable tourism and mitigate seasonality by targeting specific visitor segments. Furthermore, their governance often relies on public-private partnerships, driving sustainable competitive advantage (Dickson et al., 2017). Within a destination's portfolio, cultural events represent a critical component that not only generates these economic benefits but also enhances residents' quality of life.

While early studies focused strictly on direct macroeconomic returns, the subsequent evolution of event tourism literature, deeply accelerated by the introduction of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), demands a multidimensional tracking framework (Sharma et al., 2024; Gratton et al., 2021). In secondary urban centres and medium-sized cities, assessing these impacts requires balancing tangible infrastructure investments with digital soft outputs, such as transactional tracking data (Li and Blake, 2022).

An important initial distinction is undoubtedly the one between hallmark events and occasional events. According to Getz et al. (2012), hallmark events are expected to deliver greater and distinct benefits to host communities and to take full responsibility for addressing any negative impacts. Economically, residents expect long-term job creation and strong support for local businesses through backward

linkages. One-time events cannot achieve these lasting outcomes, though hosting multiple events can help generate some more enduring benefits.

Nonetheless, the preponderance of empirical insights in this domain originates from research primarily dedicated to large-scale operations, such as mega-events and hallmark occasions, or projects of substantial temporal duration. To the best of our knowledge, small-to-medium sporting initiatives remain under-scrutinized within academic literature, despite occurring recurrently across a myriad of locales and offering more cost-effective, manageable alternatives to their larger counterparts (d'Angella et al., 2021).

For our analysis, it's useful to distinguish between two different levels of positive impacts that events have on a city. The first is a hard effect, which involves the construction of major transport infrastructures or the creation of new economic uses for urban land (regeneration).

The second is a soft effect, which can be both economic and social. The economic soft effects include immediate incomes from sources such as ticket sales and tourist spending. The social soft effects relate to the confidence, enthusiasm, and pride that the local population gains from hosting an event. This local pride can indirectly lead to economic benefits, such as an increase in domestic and international tourism.

Event programs can generate a wide range of risks that need to be carefully managed to ensure long-term benefits. One of the most significant concerns relates to image and reputation, as poor delivery, lack of strategic control, or direct competition from other cities may damage the destination's attractiveness. Similarly, events often entail substantial financial risks, particularly when programming proves unsustainable, when public or private funding is withdrawn, or when high operational and maintenance costs for purpose-built facilities burden local budgets. In operational terms, the success of events may be undermined by limited organizational capacity, low audience engagement, or event fatigue caused by oversaturation. Furthermore, large-scale events pose environmental challenges, including excessive waste generation, poor waste management, and negative impacts on local biodiversity. The cultural and social sphere is also vulnerable: repeated programming of the same event may reduce its appeal, while a failure to foster inclusivity risks eroding the sense of belonging among residents. In some cases, events may even exacerbate social inequalities, fuelling property speculation, displacement, and homelessness. These issues highlight a paradox noted by Richards et al. (2002), who observe that while visitors often form positive impressions of destinations, residents are more sensitive to the negative consequences of event programs.

Most frameworks for measuring event impacts are built around three key components: inputs, outputs, and outcomes (figure 1). Inputs refer to the resources required to organize an event program, including staff time, facilities, equipment, and materials. Outputs represent the services or experiences generated by the event, typically expressed in quantitative terms such as tickets sold, number of performances, or visitor counts. Outcomes describe the effects of these outputs, such as changes in public perception, behaviour, or attitudes. Outcomes are generally tied to the overarching goals of the event or the city hosting (Richards and Palmer, 2010). Consequently, outputs function as the direct, empirical evidence of an event's

operational capacity and its initial interaction with the tourism market. While inputs reflect the use of resources and outcomes capture the ultimate socio-spatial legacy, outputs serve as the baseline data. In the context of medium-sized cities, analysing these short-term outputs, ranging from event ticket sales to immediate cultural site footfall, is crucial. They provide the primary indicators of market absorption and visitor engagement, serving as the quantitative bridge that allows planners to evaluate whether institutional and financial inputs are effectively translating into the desired long-term socio-economic outcomes.

In an event context, impacts refer to the effects the programme had. According to Landry et al. (1993), “impact” is a dynamic concept based on a cause-and-effect relationship. It is possible to measure impacts by evaluating the outcomes of specific actions, policies, or strategies.

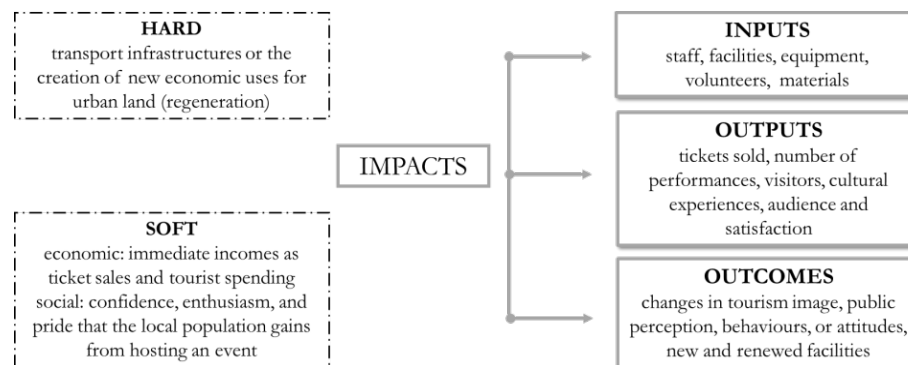


Figure 1: Impact measurement. Source: author’s adaptation from Richards and Palmer, 2010.

Many economic and social impacts are not so easy to calculable, or if calculable, they are possibly considered as estimates only, but they have the potential to boost the economy in local regions due to their ability to provide various opportunities for positive tourism and commercial outcomes (Arcodia and Whitford, 2007). Other outcomes, such as the development of cultural networks and the stimulation of cultural participation and production, will only become apparent through the long-term evaluation of an entire events programme.

Clearly, the impact measures adopted by an eventful city can be highly diverse and should capture different aspects of the results achieved. When determining which performance measures to apply, several basic criteria should guide the selection. These include:

- Measurability: the city must be able to quantify the results it has achieved;
- Alignment with organizational goals: the measures should reflect the objectives of the eventful city;
- Manageability: the measures should relate to aspects of performance that managers can control, rather than being influenced by external factors such as the weather;
- Comparability: events should be compared year on year and against competitors or peers in other cities;
- Readability: all stakeholders should be able to understand and interpret the measures;

- Capability of monitoring change: measures should be sensitive to changes occurring in the form, scale, or nature of the events over time (Richards and Palmer, 2010).

The renovation of sports facilities today often incorporates multiple uses, hosting not only sporting activities but also leisure functions such as restaurants, shops, and museums. These visually striking constructions, frequently designed by renowned architects, serve as prominent landmarks within the urban fabric, functioning as entertainment hubs that continue to attract visitors long after the event concludes (Usai, 2011).

Events also play a strategic role in city branding and image building. They provide a platform for communicating a city's identity, values, and vision to a wider audience. Well-executed events can position a city as vibrant, innovative, and culturally rich, enhancing perceptions among residents, investors, and tourists alike. Over time, this improved image can support sustainable tourism development, attract talent, and stimulate ongoing urban regeneration initiatives.

Major events have increasingly become a form of cultural capital, largely due to their effects on city image. As Hall (1992) observes, such events can shape perceptions of the host community, increasing its appeal as a tourist destination. Consequently, they are often used as tools for image promotion and city branding, particularly by large urban centres (Richards and Wilson, 2004).

One of the contemporary challenges in urban dynamics concerns the role that urban tourism plays in generating economic, social, and cultural opportunities within cities. As urban areas evolve, the transformation of tourist sites and the strategic development of urban spaces have become central to urban regeneration processes. By revitalizing neglected areas, enhancing infrastructure, and promoting cultural and recreational activities, urban tourism not only contributes to the economic vitality of cities but also reshapes their social fabric and cultural identity. The capacity of tourism to influence urban form, public perception, and city branding makes it a powerful instrument for municipalities seeking to navigate the complex demands of contemporary urban life. In recent years, this has increasingly included event-based urban tourism, as festivals, exhibitions, and sports competitions are able to generate temporary yet intense flows of visitors, stimulate local economies, foster international visibility, and leave lasting legacies in terms of cultural capital and urban infrastructure. However, while events can act as drivers of renewal, they also risk producing uneven benefits, exacerbating issues of accessibility, and generating short-lived impacts if not embedded within broader, long-term urban development strategies.

4. The role of events in urban development

Large-scale events are organized for a variety of purposes. They serve as occasions for community gathering, recognition of accomplishments, commemorations, and instruments of political messaging. In today's context, such events have evolved into platforms for promoting a wide range of offerings, including the city that hosts them. Moreover, major events are increasingly linked to efforts aimed at revitalizing and transforming urban areas (Smith, 2012).

However, the planning complexity and extensive urban interventions required for event preparations (especially sporting and mega-events) are accompanied by equally substantial costs for the host community. As they moved towards a service-based economy, a new approach was necessary to secure their role in a globalized world. Thus, urban governance gradually shifts from the managerial to a more entrepreneurial approach that aims to create the necessary conditions for the city to compete globally for jobs and the investment brought by the mobile capital (Harvey, 1989).

Over the past two decades, the use of sport events as a motor of urban development has become a common trend of urban policies in the context of the globalizing economy. These types of urban growth strategies have spread from country to country through the diffusion of policy knowledge (Miles and Paddison, 2005). Individual cities, however, have different developmental contexts and strategic approaches.

Events play an important role in urban changing, acting as catalysts for revitalizing underused or declining areas of a city. Festivals, cultural exhibitions, sports competitions, and public gatherings can attract attention to neglected neighbourhoods and buildings, encourage investment, and stimulate both physical and social renewal. By creating temporary hubs of activity, events can showcase the potential of an area, fostering long-term interest from residents, businesses, and visitors.

The concept of territorial added value (Dematteis and Governa, 2005) is particularly suitable for analysing events in their dual relationship with the territory: what the event adds to the territory, and what the territory can add to the event, contributing to its reorientation in the future (Dansero and Mela, 2007). The theme of rootedness concerns every locality, in fact, as each one deals with its own events, both large and small.

The city can be understood as a dynamic and complex socio-territorial system, a hub of local and supra-local networks with which it continuously interacts through multiple forms of relationships that shape its structural and evolutionary dimensions. Cities are best interpreted as spaces where diverse flows converge, functioning as nodes within overlapping material and immaterial networks (Harvey, 1989; Sassen, 1991). In this perspective, urban regeneration emerges as a strategic process through which cities redefine their role within these networks, enhancing their capacity to adapt, attract resources, and foster sustainable development.

The choice to host events is mainly aimed at improving or strengthening a city's image and is usually part of a broader territorial development strategy. This strategy not only seeks to position the city in competition with others in the reference area but also involves urban regeneration measures such as the construction of new facilities, the renovation of existing buildings, and the improvement of transport infrastructure. Furthermore, the highly controlled nature of modern urban events is indirectly linked to urban regeneration efforts. Government regulations designed to protect participants and spectators have created opportunities to use events as catalysts for redeveloping brownfield sites (Smith, 2012). A tragic example occurred in 1989, when ninety-six people lost their lives in a crowded lower tier at Hillsborough Stadium in Sheffield, UK. This disaster, following earlier incidents at outdated stadiums in Glasgow (1971), Heysel (1985), and Bradford (1987), compelled football clubs to renovate, rebuild, or relocate their venues to comply with updated safety standards (*ibidem*).

5. Why Novara?

Contemporary cities face a choice between embracing transformation or risking stagnation in an era of rapid global change. To remain competitive amid unpredictable economic conditions, cities increasingly rely on their own cultural and creative resources, including historical heritage, urban spaces, and local talents. Globalization pressures, economic restructuring, and the need to forge new civic identities have encouraged cities to leverage these resources to stand out, regenerate the urban environment, and foster economic, social, and cultural prosperity. In this context, the creation and promotion of events – such as festivals, shows, exhibitions, fairs, and championships – have become key instruments of urban development (Richards and Palmer, 2010). Today, cities of all sizes consider event planning and production a viable strategy to assert themselves in the competitive global urban landscape (*ibidem*).

Several medium-sized cities have successfully leveraged events for urban regeneration. For instance, Ghent in Belgium revitalized its historical district through cultural festivals, combining heritage preservation with contemporary artistic programming. In Spain, Zaragoza used the Expo 2008 to transform former industrial areas into public parks, cultural venues, and new residential spaces. Similarly, Leeds in the UK has hosted music and arts festivals that have not only drawn tourists but also strengthened local creative industries.

In this context, Novara – located in the Piedmont region of Northern Italy with about one hundred thousand inhabitants – offers an illustrative example of a medium-sized city with a long-standing tradition of event-based identity building.

The city is in a flat area between the metropolitan centres of Milan and Turin. Novara is easily accessible thanks to major motorways linking the city to the cited metropolitan areas, to Genoa, to the Border with Switzerland, and to the International Airport of Malpensa (Tadini, 2010).

In the past, the city of Novara developed economically primarily thanks to the primary sector (Gavinelli, 2006; Afferni, 2012). It has always been associated with rice production, and today, the area around the city continues this traditional production, along with that of Gorgonzola cheese, and events of supra-local importance dedicated to these products are also organised.

The city has developed as a chemical and petrochemical industrial hub (Radici chemical group, Novamont - biodegradable and compostable bioplastics, MEMC – GlobalWafers – manufactures semiconductor devices) (Baici, 2003; Casalone, 2004), and is known for the publishing company De Agostini, but in the recent past the proximity to Milan Malpensa Airport played a very important role for Novara and has contributed to the development of logistics activities (i.e. Amazon) (Tadini and Violi, 2013; Gavinelli and Molinari, 2015).

As for sport, Novara is a city renowned for its footballing history, with the historic Novara Calcio team having played in the main series, and for roller sports, in particular rink hockey that has a century-long tradition. Its most prominent team, Hockey Novara, has enjoyed remarkable success, winning 32 Italian championships alongside numerous Coppa Italia trophies and international titles, establishing the sport as an integral part of the city's cultural fabric. Novara has also positioned itself on the global stage by hosting major international tournaments, such as the 1984

Men's Rink Hockey World Championship held at the Palasport Dal Lago (Aimo, 2024; Devecchi, 2024).

Today, Novara still nurtures hockey talent through clubs like Azzurra Hockey Novara (currently competing in Serie A2) and the Polisportiva San Giacomo hockey section. The city's rich legacy and modern revival make it a living testament to the enduring spirit and international allure of rink hockey.

Designated by ACES (European Capitals and Cities of Sport Federation) as the European City of Sport 2025, Novara exemplifies how cities of this scale can manage the transition from traditional industrial economies to contemporary urban models that address global challenges. Historically, Novara's economic base relied heavily on manufacturing and industrial activities; however, the city has increasingly sought to diversify its economic and social profile through urban tourism, cultural initiatives, and strategic events. By leveraging sports as a vehicle for urban regeneration, Novara aims to attract visitors, improve the quality of urban life, and reinforce its regional and international reputation.

The experience of Novara highlights several key strategies adopted by the local administration in reshaping urban space to encourage incoming tourism. Investments in infrastructure, such as the modernization of sports facilities, the enhancement of public squares have been coupled with programs to activate cultural and recreational events. This integrated approach demonstrates how urban tourism can be embedded within broader urban planning and regeneration agendas. By aligning infrastructure development with social and cultural programming, Novara seeks to create multifunctional spaces that appeal both to residents and visitors, enhancing the city's overall attractiveness.

6. Research findings

This study draws on a combination of quantitative data sources compiled in collaboration with the Visit Piemonte Statistical Office, the Italian Roller Sports Federation (FISR), the Municipality of Novara and Vicolungo. The Style Outlets. The aim of the analysis is to examine visitor flows, collateral activities (e.g. museum visits), and participant spending during the event. In particular, based on the types of events identified in the literature review, the set of impacts analysed are the hard impacts relate to the strategy of renovation of sports facilities, and the soft impacts (tickets sold, tourist flows, visits to museums and tourist attractions, and tourism spending).

In order to ensure a detailed and structured analysis, hard and soft impacts were evaluated across the dimensions of inputs, outputs, and outcomes.

7. The input and outcomes: the Arenas

The hard impacts relate to the strategy of renovation of sports facilities to bring them into line with current safety regulations and the services provided.

In some cases, these visually striking constructions, frequently designed by renowned architects, serve as prominent landmarks within the urban fabric, functioning as entertainment hubs that continue to attract visitors long after the event concludes (Getz, 1991; Essex and Chalkley, 1999, 2002; Roche, 1994).

As for the inputs, the Rink Hockey World Championships hosting Arenas (Pala Igor, Pala Dal Lago, Palasport of Novarello and Pala Sartorio) in Novara and in Granozzo (10 km from the city) were renovated thanks to public investments (mainly from Municipality and Region).

Furthermore, for each facility, FISR has worked with the respective owners (the Municipality of Novara for public facilities and Polisystem s.r.l. for Novarello Villaggio Azzurro) to identify the best possible solutions in terms of both the quality of the playing surfaces to be used during the World Skate Games and the sustainability of costs for all parties involved.

Among all arenas, the event's Organising Local Committee, in agreement with FISR, chose the Pala Igor as the main venue for the games. Although the Pala Dal Lago (figure 2) hosted the 1984 Hockey World Championships and was considered by the local community to be the «ideal» venue for hosting competitions, Pala Igor is more recently built in a suburban neighbourhood (called Sant'Agabio) undergoing urban regeneration projects. For these characteristics and for the greater number of seats Pala Dal Lago, incorporates multiple sport uses, hosting not only hockey but also volleyball games, and is an accessible location, easily reachable by car from both the highway and nearby roads.



Figure 2: The “renewed” Pala Dal Lago. *Source:* Photo is courtesy of Roberto Pizzighello, official photographer of the event.

Beyond addressing the immediate demands of the competition, the renovation of sports facilities leaves a legacy for the local community, enhancing daily access to high-quality venues and bolstering the city's long-term appeal as a host for future sporting events.

8. Output: tickets sold

Events and cultural attractions represent interconnected tourism resources, as events often provide an opportunity to bring visitors closer to a destination's cultural heritage and encourage its enjoyment. Cultural attractions include monuments, historic residences, museums, and natural landscapes. In this context, indicators such

as the number of tickets sold – both for the event itself and for visits to the host city's cultural heritage sites – offer a tangible measure of an event's tourism impact, allowing an assessment of both visitor interest and the contribution to the enhancement and overall attractiveness of cultural heritage.

Thanks to data provided by FISR – Italian Roller Sports Federation, tickets sold were analysed for every day of the sporting event, both for the qualifying rounds and for the Junior and Senior, Men's and Women's finals. The data refers specifically to admission tickets to the two main venues (figure 3), Pala Igor and Pala Dal Lago, unlike the other two arenas where admission was free.

Tickets sold for hockey matches show how the final rounds reached the maximum capacity of the hosting Arena (in particular, Pala Igor), gaining a great success in public participation. The total number of tickets sold reached about 18,600, exceeding the organisers' expected attendance of 15,000 spectators.

Figure 3: Tickets sold per day per main Venue (Pala Dal Lago, Pala Igor, Total). Source: the authors, on data FISR.

The graph reveals a pronounced temporal discontinuity, characterized by phases of stability, sudden peaks, and sharp declines. This type of trend suggests the influence of external factors (for instance, September 19 was a rest day in the competition schedule) that significantly affected ticket sales. The overall series is essentially determined by the performance of the Pala Igor, while the Pala Dal Lago plays only a marginal, albeit constant, role. The latter consistently remains at low and almost stable levels, with minimal variations.

In the early days of the competition (8–13 September) ticket sales were low and stable, amounting to only a few thousand tickets overall. This corresponds to the opening phase of the event, when the public was beginning to engage but general interest remained limited. Afterwards, sales began to grow gradually (13–17 September), reflecting rising attention and attendance, most likely driven by the approach of the first key matches or by heightened media coverage. The final boom of the sales culminates in the last days of the event (semi-finals and finals), when sales reach their peak and public interest reaches its height.

In September 2024, the city of Novara also recorded an increase in ticket sales for visits to museums and tourist attractions. In particular, the data collected by the Department of Culture of the Municipality show that the museum tickets of the Paolo

and Adele Giannoni Modern Art Gallery (an important cultural institution showcasing a rich collection of modern art) and the Broletto complex (a medieval architectural complex consisting of four historic buildings arranged in a quadrangle around a courtyard named “Arengo”) increased by 37% compared to the previous year (from 3,686 visitors in September 2023 to 5,045 in 2024), while visits to the Cupola of San Gaudenzio grew by approximately 115% (529 tickets sold for internal and external climb in September 2023 to 1,129 in 2024).

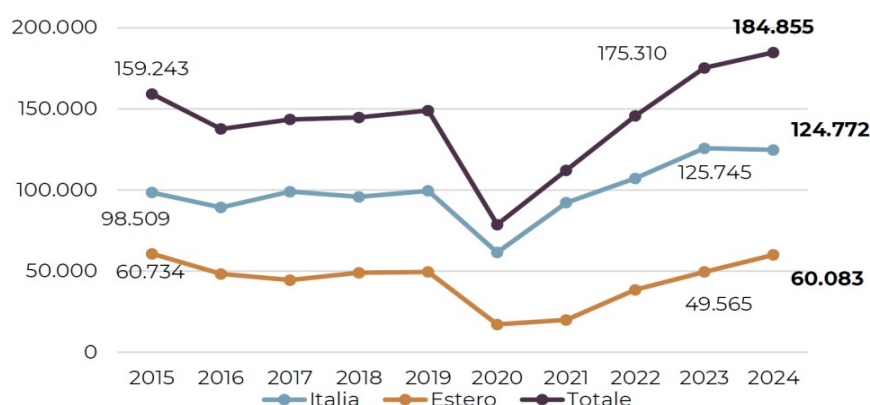
9. Output: tourist flows

Hosting an event can indirectly generate for a city, as Novara, economic benefits, such as an increase in domestic and international tourism.

Generally speaking, visitors can be an important factor in adding to the «atmosphere» of a city during an event. As Richards et al. (2001) states, atmosphere is extremely hard to define, but it always features highly as a motivation for city visitation and in the level of visitor satisfaction, particularly for cultural tourists.

Although having too many visitors may cause problems of overcrowding and competition for facilities, not having enough visitors can detract from the atmosphere and «cosmopolitan» feel of a city.

Data provided by Statistical Office of Visit Piemonte (the Official Agency that collects tourist data for Piedmont Region), and relating arrivals show no significant increase in 2024, but the overnight stays in the city’s hotels have been increasing.



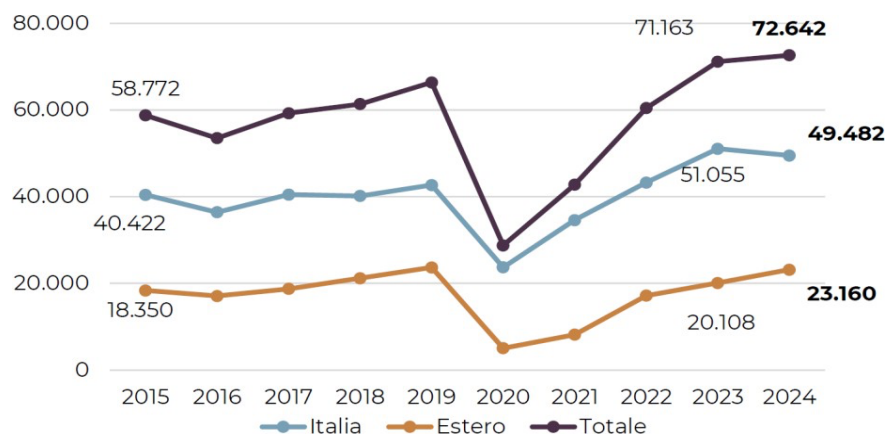
2024 vs 2023: +5.4%

2024 vs 2019: +24%

2024 vs 2015: +16.1%

Country of residence	2024 vs 2023	2024 vs 2019
Italy	-0.8%	+25.4%
Abroad	+21.2%	+21.3%

Figure 4: Municipality of Novara, Tourist overnights. Source: Statistical Office of Visit Piemonte, 2025.



2024 vs 2023: +2.1%
2024 vs 2019: +9.5%
2024 vs 2015: +23.6%

Country of residence	2024 vs 2023	2024 vs 2019
Italy	-3.1%	+15.9%
Abroad	+15.2%	-2.2%

Figure 5: Municipality of Novara, Tourist arrivals. *Source:* Statistical Office of Visit Piemonte, 2025.

The data point to a recovery in tourism in the city of Novara, suggesting a potential process of long-term consolidation. In particular, Novara exhibits a positive trend: +2.1% overnights and +5.4% arrivals compared to 2023 and +9.5% overnights and 24% arrivals relative to 2019, with a notable long-term increase of +23.6% and 16.1% since 2015 (figures 4 and 5)

Concerning visitors' Country of residence, domestic tourism overnights has declined slightly compared to 2023 (-0.8%) but still demonstrates strong growth relative to the pre-pandemic period (+25.4%). In contrast, international tourism arrivals have increased compared to 2023 (+15.2%), yet it has not fully recovered to 2019 levels (-2.2%), indicating a possible lag in the local recovery of international flows despite the generally positive impact of the global event (figures 4 and 5).

Overall, 2024 confirms an expanding tourism sector, primarily driven by strong international demand associated with sporting competitions. Nevertheless, the decrease in domestic visitors and the comparatively weaker performance of areas such as Novara raise important questions regarding the equitable distribution of growth benefits and the city's ability to sustain a diversified and resilient tourism flow over the long term, including in the post-event period.

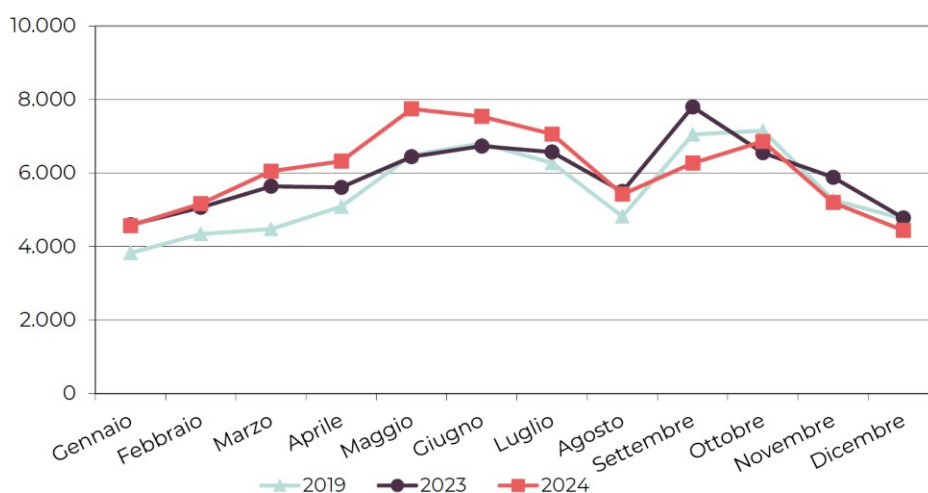


Figure 6: Municipality of Novara, Tourist arrivals monthly trend. Source: Statistical Office of Visit Piemonte, 2025.

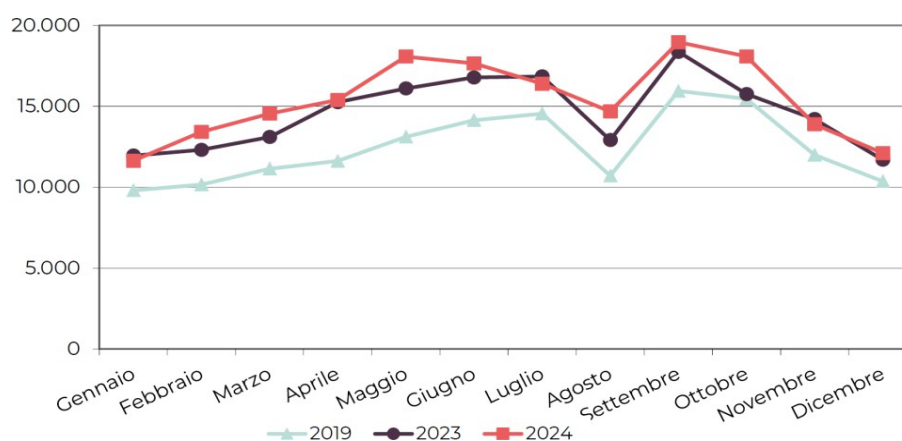


Figure 7: Municipality of Novara, Tourist arrivals monthly trend. Source: Statistical Office of Visit Piemonte, 2025.

Figures 6 and 7 show a 5.4% increase in the number of visitors on the period between September and November 2023 and the same months in 2024. September saw the highest number of overnight stays (almost 19,000), an increase of 3.2% compared to 2023. In the spring months of March, April and May, there was growth in both arrivals (+13.7%) and overnight stays (+8%) compared to the same period in 2023. The increase is also evident when compared to the pre-pandemic period: +25.3% in arrivals and +33.8% in overnight stays. In particular, the month of May saw the highest number of arrivals (over 7,700), with an increase of 20.2% compared to 2023.

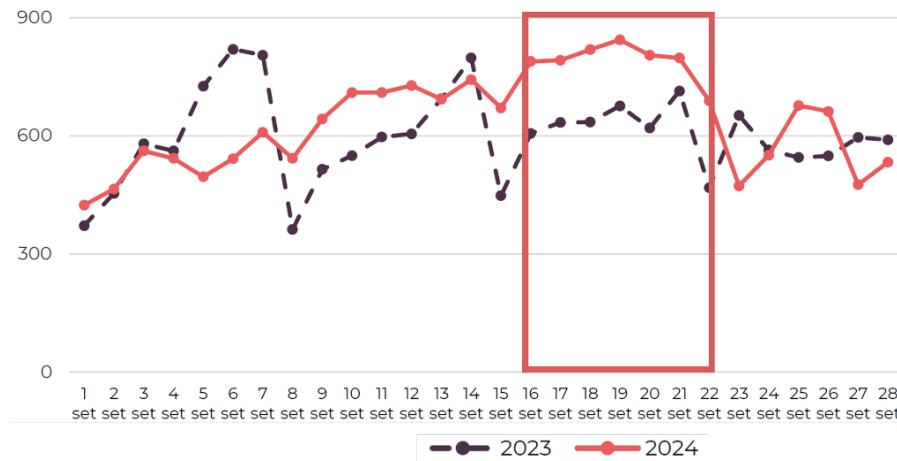


Figure 8: Municipality of Novara, Tourist overnights in September. Source: Statistical Office of Visit Piemonte, 2025

In the past, there has been a significant increase in foreign visitors. Usually, about 70% of overnight stays in the city's accommodation facilities are by Italian visitors, compared to 30% from abroad. During the main week of the international event, the percentage of domestic and foreign overnight stays is reversed.

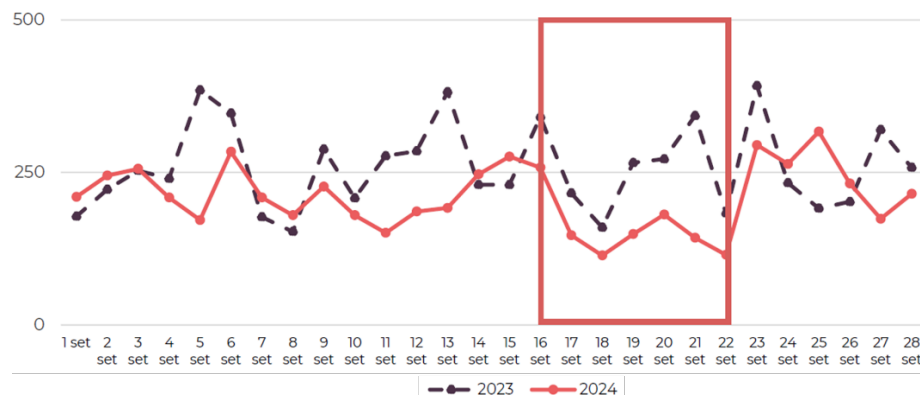


Figure 9: Municipality of Novara, Tourist arrivals in September. Source: Statistical Office of Visit Piemonte, 2025.

Figures 8 and 9 focus on the week in which the main competitions (the men's and women's senior finals) took place. The data show a significant increase in both overnights and arrivals in the city's hotels compared to the previous year. For a better understanding of the data of the graphics, the days of the week refer to the year 2024, and for 2023 the data have been shifted to match the days of the week of the year analysed.

10. Output: tourism spending

Thanks to Statistical Office of Visit Piemonte it was possible to calculate the spend index, which estimates the volume of expenditure generated by credit card use, which also grew when compared the data for September 2024 with that of the previous year (figure 10).

During the week of the Hockey World Cup (16–22 September 2024), spending increased by 70% and the number of cards (number of visitors) by 36.6% compared to the same week in 2023. The increase in spending, data obtained from anonymised data provided by Visa, was driven especially by the French and Swiss markets, and more generally by European market, as well as the United States.

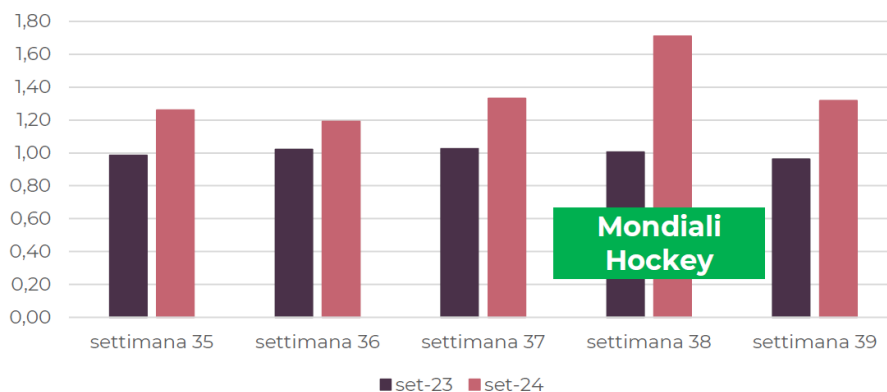


Figure 10: Municipality of Novara, Expenditure volumes weekly trend in September 2023 and 2024. Source: Statistical Office of visit Piemonte, 2025

Finally, thanks to data provided by the Vicolungo «The Style Out-lets», it was possible to highlight growth in both footfall and average spending at the centre. In the 38th week of 2024 (16-22 September), there was a 14% increase in sales and a 2% increase in average receipt value.

11.Conclusion.

An increasing number of European cities have identified tourism as a key driver of local development. As one of the fastest-growing sectors worldwide, tourism creates employment and generates income. By enhancing cultural assets and investing in urban infrastructure, cities aim to carve out a distinctive position on the international tourism map, fostering a sustainable industry that interacts synergistically with other vital sectors of the urban economy (Russo and van der Borg, 2002).

Considering these dynamics, the case of Novara has just offered an interesting opportunity to observe the immediate effects that an international event can generate on the city's tourism sector. The Rink Hockey World Championships were able to bring out benefits to the tourism sector of Novara within this short timeframe, but the real challenge for the city is to maintain this positive trend in the forthcoming years.

Stimulating people to visit it through events is therefore more than just an economic strategy – it can also have significant practical benefits for the social, cultural and political life of the city. As suggested earlier, it is also true that attracting large numbers of visitors in certain cities may cause several practical problems as well, such as crowding, traffic problems and litter. In order to maximize the benefits and reduce the problems, it is important to understand the nature of tourist audiences for events and the Municipality of the city and the main stakeholders of the community need to decide what kind of approach they are going to take to events tourism and how to manage the relationship between events, tourists and residents.

It's also worth noting that sports events are acquiring increasing importance for a substantial supply chain of actors, as sports clubs and federations. These events are

increasingly structured and skillfully combine the competitive aspect with amateur initiatives, as well as with promotional and commercialization activities for the host territories and stakeholders within the local tourism industry (Cinti, 2024).

This study examined how Novara can leverage international sporting events as catalysts for urban regeneration, tourism development, and socio-economic revitalization. The analysis demonstrates that the hosting of the Rink Hockey World Championships produced measurable short-term benefits, particularly in terms of increased visitor flows, museum attendance, ticket sales, and tourism-related expenditure. These results confirm that events can act as powerful drivers of visibility and attractiveness, reinforcing the city's strategic positioning both regionally and internationally.

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