

CHOCOLATE IN THE TERRITORIAL IDENTITY OF TURIN

Rituals and Iconic Products as part of Turin's Identity Heritage

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ABSTRACT

This research offers a detailed analysis of how Turin's chocolate tradition has become an essential part of its identity. The study begins by defining the concept of city branding as a strategy that must be rooted in the territorial identity and culture of its inhabitants in order to be successful. The document explains that Turin, historically known for its industrial development, has strategically redefined itself around chocolate, a legacy dating back to the 17th century. The research focuses on identifying historical elements (such as the creation of gianduiotto and bicerón) and cultural elements (such as the Caffè Storici and the CioccolaTò festival) that demonstrate the deep integration of chocolate into the social and economic fabric of the city. Finally, it concludes that this gastronomic heritage provides a narrative of authenticity that is crucial to Turin's global positioning and sense of local belonging.

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1. Introduction

The proliferation of city, country or destination brands is a constant feature of today's world, with visually appealing visuals that seek to reposition these territories on different levels: cultural, social, economic and tourist. However, what is known as *city branding* goes beyond a simple logo or advertising campaign (Kavaratzis, 2004, 2012; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013) and becomes a strategic act of meaning creation that must be built from and for its citizens with the intention of showing the heart of the city (Källström & Siljeklint, 2023).

In an increasingly competitive global landscape governed by the laws of the free market, cities seek to demonstrate their potential, attract investors and talent, develop consumer brands and build a sense of belonging and identity among their inhabitants. The best strategists recognise that the main resource and determining factor in the essence of a place brand are the people who live there, their beliefs, qualities and aspirations, as well as the activities carried out and the products made in the place (Kavaratzis, 2012).

What is known as *city branding*, or territory branding, is a key urban governance strategy that aims to project images and manage perceptions of a destination in order to boost economic growth and attract tourists, investors and talent (Morales Holguín & Cabrera Becerra, 2016; Nursanty *et al.*, 2023; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2019). This process has evolved beyond mere promotion, becoming a complex and multidimensional tool that articulates an identity narrative around the territory (Cruz Matuz *et al.*, 2025). For this reason, for a city brand to be strong and competitive, it is essential that it integrates and is sustained by its territorial identity and culture (Morales Holguín & Cabrera Becerra, 2016).

From a historical point of view, Turin has been identified with the historical events that have taken place there and with the significant industrial development that has occurred in the city. However, what was once Italy's first capital after the unification of the country has undergone a process of transformation in recent decades with a clear objective: to project a new image of a creative city (Vanolo, 2008).

In this context, Turin stands out as a prime example of a city that has managed to forge its identity around a single element: chocolate. Turin's tradition of chocolate production dates back to the 17th century and has given rise to products that are now considered icons of the city, such as *gianduiotto* and *bicerón*. In addition, linked to the chocolate industry, events such as the CioccolaTò festival and exhibition centres dedicated to this product have emerged, such as the Choco-Story Museum (Choco-Story Torino, 2025; Turismo Torino e Provincia, 2025). All of this has cemented Turin's reputation as the "Italian capital of chocolate," making this product not only a culinary attraction but also an indisputable component of the city's urban identity and a key element in its positioning and development.

Local identity can be defined as the set of unique qualities that a settlement has and that are manifested both in its physical and spatial patterns and in the way its inhabitants relate to the natural characteristics of the landscape (González-Varas Ibáñez, 2014, p. 42; Herrera Valencia, 2023, p. 4). This essential quality is referred to in urban design theory as *genius loci*, a concept that has its origins in an Ancient Roman belief that each place has a "guardian spirit" that determines its character or essence (Butina Watson, 1997). The unique characteristics of a city stem from various factors, among which the mode of economic production is particularly noteworthy. The study of the chocolate tradition in Turin is therefore justified as a determining factor of its character, as it has historically influenced the local economy and culture.

1.1. Basic Concepts

Before addressing the specific case of Turin, it is important to clearly define what is meant by "territorial identity". This term refers to a dynamic and complex concept that arises from the link between the inhabitants of a place and the space they inhabit (Gómez Pérez & Pelayo Pérez, 2024). Without a doubt, it can be said that it constitutes the essence of the place and includes cultural traits, values, traditions, history and the particular idiosyncrasies of its society. This term has been addressed by different authors from different perspectives. For example, Anssi Paasi refers to "territorial identity" as a social and historical process that is transformed and reproduced through

discourses, institutions, and practices carried out in that territory (Paasi, 2003). For Gómez Pérez and Pelayo Pérez (2024), "territorial identity" is nourished by lived and perceived experiences, including material elements—such as architecture or landscape, among others—and immaterial elements—such as gastronomy or customs.

Closely linked to the term "territorial identity" is that of "collective identity", which has been referred to by authors from various disciplines such as sociology, psychology and anthropology. Among the most prominent are Alain Touraine and Alberto Melucci who, from the field of sociology, conceive of "collective identity" as the component that articulates and gives consistency to social movements (Mercado Maldonado & Hernández Oliva, 2010, p.231). Other authors, such as Manuel Castells and Gilberto Giménez, argue that "collective identity" is a subjective construct. For Castells, it is a "process of constructing meaning based on a cultural attribute, or a related set of cultural attributes, which is given priority over other sources of meaning" (Castells, 1999, p. 28). Meanwhile, Giménez refers to it as "a set of internalised cultural repertoires (representations, values, symbols) through which social actors demarcate their boundaries and distinguish themselves from others in a given situation" (Giménez, 2000, p. 54).

The other term that should be highlighted here, so as not to confuse it with "territorial identity", is *city branding*, which is linked to the former but is different in nature. In this case, it is a branding approach applied to the identity of a territory and, unlike *city marketing*, is not limited to promotional tactics (Kavaratzis, 2004). This process of managing the territory's brand should be understood as an ongoing dialogue between internal actors, who define identity, and external actors, who shape image (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Therefore, the core of the *city branding* concept is *co-creation* and collaborative governance based on the relationships between these actors (Hankinson, 2004).

Taking into account the concept of "territorial identity" outlined above, successful *city branding* must be anchored in this identity in order to be meaningful (Pasquinelli & Teräs, 2013), since consistency between the projected identity and the lived reality is crucial and any disconnect between the two can lead to rejection. To create a strong territorial brand, it is essential to have a commitment from territorial managers that transcends political issues and promotes cultural and natural diversity, placing the inhabitants of that territory as protagonists of their own history (Cruz Matuz *et al.*, 2025). The challenge, therefore, lies in striking a balance between the desire for a powerful brand and the need to preserve the authenticity and unique identity of a territory (Nursanty *et al.*, 2023).

1.2. Previous Studies

Turin's identity has been studied from various perspectives, focusing on its transition from an industrial (*Fordist*) powerhouse to a *post-Fordist*, creative and cultural city (Mehan, 2017). However, the role of chocolate in the city's identity has not been a central element in this research. The studies carried out have used methodologies ranging from critical analysis of urban *branding* and major events to qualitative research and analysis of local regeneration projects (Della Sala, 2023; O'Sullivan, 2021). The analysis of existing scientific literature is crucial in this research, as it allows us to understand not only what image the capital of Piedmont projects, but also how and why certain narratives, such as 'the creative city', emerged and evolved in the face of economic crises and possible taboos (Vanolo, 2015).

The contributions made by different authors over recent years can be grouped into three main areas: the shift towards urban branding; the legacy of major events; and, finally, the contemporary reconfiguration of identity through planning and heritage. Thus, it can be said that the academic literature reflects the fact that Turin's identity is not static, but rather a project in constant reinvention in the face of economic uncertainties and social challenges (Caruso *et al.*, 2019). This process has been realised through *city marketing* policies (Vanolo, 2008), the hosting of mega-events (Vanolo, 2015), the revaluation of industrial and historical heritage (Adamo *et al.*, 2019; Tamborrino & Rinaudo, 2015) and the implementation of sustainability strategies (Dogan *et al.*, 2023; Maspoli, 2018, 2022).

The phenomenon of Turin's transformation has been addressed from multiple disciplines and approaches, which enriches the research by offering a vision that does not ignore existing internal tensions. The most significant contributions in this field can be grouped around three fundamental axes: the *post-Fordist* shift and *branding*; the role of events; and, thirdly, the integration of new narratives of sustainability and heritage. Within the first axis, among the authors who have analysed this phenomenon, Alberto Vanolo stands out, whose contributions are of great value in guiding this research and the analysis proposed here. His work examines issues such as the balance between external representation, i.e. the image that is projected to tourists and investors, and the internal social realities of the city (Vanolo, 2008). In this way, the author explores both the basis of the transformation and the evolution and limits of branding (Vanolo, 2008, 2015). For her part, Asma Mehan, also within this *post-Fordist* transformation, brings a critical and political perspective to branding, analysing how brand strategies select or conceal certain urban representations and produce socio-spatial effects such as exclusion or revaluation (Mehan, 2017).

Within the second axis, related to the role of mega-events, it is worth highlighting Valerio Della Sala's vision of the tangible and intangible legacy of the Winter Olympic Games held in Turin in 2006. This author offers an analysis of how this international event reconfigured urban identity and governance, emphasising the need for long-term post-Olympic plans to consolidate the transformation of the city's image (Della Sala, 2023). Furthermore, documents such as the *Torino 2006 Marketing Report* provide an insight into how the event's specific brand strategy was articulated, taking advantage of the Olympic platform to promote local iconography, as was the case with the Mole Antonelliana (Della Sala, 2023).

Finally, examples of studies that have addressed the issue from the perspective of heritage reinvention and sustainability include that carried out by Rosella Maspoli, which addresses the symbolic value of automotive heritage, its conservation and how public engagement helps to rebuild a sense of community based on that memory, demonstrating how industrial identity remains present and is reinterpreted (Maspoli, 2022). Meanwhile, other research shows how *urban greening* policies and the regeneration of post-industrial landscapes contribute to a new territorial identity based on sustainability and quality of life (Dogan *et al.*, 2023).

1.3. Objectives

Taking the above into account, the main purpose of this research is to analyse how Turin's deep connection with chocolate has contributed to the construction and projection of its urban identity, turning it into an effective city branding tool that transcends mere tourist promotion and strengthens the city's sense of belonging and global projection.

The objectives are:

- To identify the key historical and cultural elements that have cemented the relationship between Turin and chocolate over time.
- To understand the role of chocolate and its rituals as intangible heritage in the territorial identity.
- To determine the role of the *Caffè Storici* as guardians of Turin's *genius loci*.

This research has focused on three key questions:

- How has the link between chocolate and Turin's identity been historically constructed, and what products or innovations have been fundamental in this process?
- How do the historical narratives of chocolate in Turin shape a discourse of authenticity and identity differentiation that transcends simple promotion and supports the hypothesis that chocolate is an essential component of the city's identity?
- How do spaces such as the *Caffè Storici* and social rituals such as the *Merenda Reale* contribute to the durability and reproduction of Turin's collective identity and *genius loci*, insofar as they are perceived as places that maintain an atmosphere linked to the chocolate-making tradition?

1.4. Justification

The justification and novelty of this work lies in the fact that research on 'territorial identity' is a growing multidisciplinary field with a need for studies that delve deeper into the relationship between cultural identity and urban development. This work provides an integrative and holistic view of how a gastronomic product can transcend its initial function to become a central axis of a city's identity and brand strategy (Bessière, 1998; Muñoz-Martínez & Florek, 2023). The study seeks to offer a detailed understanding of the factors that allow a city like Turin to project a coherent image that is differentiated and rooted in its cultural soul. Furthermore, the focus on gastronomy as cultural and material heritage that instils identity and continuity provides a novel perspective for the analysis of *city branding*, which is often centred on more macroeconomic or urbanistic aspects.

2. Design and Method

The object of study in this research is the configuration of chocolate as an integrating axis of Turin's urban identity, analysing how this culinary heritage has been transformed into a strategic asset for the city. It therefore explores the bidirectional relationship between the chocolate-making tradition and the perception of Turin within the framework of 'city brand' and 'collective identity' theory.

The research presented here takes a qualitative and exploratory approach to the information gathered from the sources used, which include studies on *city branding*, articles on the history of chocolate in Turin, and descriptions of iconic events and places. This approach seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of the subject of study through the analysis of discourses and situations in their natural context (Arroyo Rodríguez *et al.*, 2023).

This design is considered appropriate for this work as it is a phenomenon that has been little studied in the literature, requiring an inductive approach aimed at understanding meanings and processes (Creswell, 2009; Maxwell, 2013). Likewise, it is assumed that qualitative research is a valid and rigorous tool for addressing complex phenomena linked to culture and urban identity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Malterud, 2001). On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that exploratory studies are useful for obtaining preliminary information on a field or problem for which there is not much data available, or for reducing and limiting the scope of subsequent research (Obando, 2017).

The proposed data collection is based on explicit and implicit information from the sources provided, focusing on the industrial and cultural heritage linked to chocolate. In this regard, it should be noted that this research prioritises those sources that allow for a rich and contextualised understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Finally, it should be noted that, in order to ensure quality and transparency in the presentation of results and to account for the validity of the findings, this research adopts the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR) (O'Brien *et al.*, 2014).

Table 1. Research design and method

	Description
Subject of study	Chocolate as an integrating axis of Turin's territorial identity and a strategic asset in the field of city branding.
Title Methodological approach	Exploratory qualitative, aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in its natural context.
Research design	Inductive approach to study a little-explored phenomenon, focusing on meanings and processes.
Justification of the approach	Qualitative research is appropriate for complex phenomena linked to culture and urban identity.
Type of study	Exploratory, useful for defining the field and obtaining preliminary information on a poorly documented phenomenon such as the one presented here.

Data sources	Studies on the history of chocolate in Turin, economic data, events, iconic locations, <i>city branding</i> , etc.
Type of data	Explicit and implicit information on industrial and cultural heritage linked to chocolate.
Source selection criteria	Priority given to sources that provide a rich and contextualised understanding of the phenomenon.
Quality standards	Application of the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR) to ensure validity and transparency.
Source(s): Own work, 2025.	

The central hypothesis of this study asserts that Turin's chocolate-making tradition is not simply a cultural or tourist attraction but an essential and authentic component of its cultural and economic identity that has been strategically leveraged to build a strong and distinctive city brand in the global market, boosting both its economic development and its inhabitants' sense of belonging.

3. Chocolate: A Defining Feature of Turin

3.1. The History of Chocolate in Turin

Legend attributes the symbolic origin of the link between Turin and chocolate to Emanuel Filiberto of Savoy, who supposedly offered a cup of hot chocolate to the people of Turin in 1560 to celebrate the transfer of the ducal capital from Chambéry to Turin (Cioccolato Torino, n.d.; La Redazione Di Infinito, 2018). This gesture, although probably mythical and unsupported by archival sources, sealed a fundamental historical moment as a wedding toast, assigning a central role to chocolate in the mythology of the Italian Royal House (On the road, 2025). However, the most likely introduction came through marriages between heirs of the Spanish and Italian Royal Houses. Catalina Micaela of Spain exported the custom of chocolate drinking from Spain to Turin in 1585, when she married Carlo Emanuel I of Savoy (Calcagno1946, 2018; Padovani & Padovani, 2023).

During the early period, chocolate consumption was exclusive to the royal court (Autori Vari, 2019). The drink became the star of aristocratic afternoon teas, which were often enriched with numerous sweets, known as *bagnati*, thus encouraging the work of many court pastry chefs. It was in this context that the first chocolate bonbon, of which Turin is proud to have created, was born. This was the *diablottino*, a flavoured chocolate praline sweet that became popular in European courts (Terrerealidelpiemonte, 2024).

The royal family facilitated the commercialisation of chocolate, allowing it to spread beyond the court and catalysing the development of the bourgeoisie and the chocolate industry. However, chocolate did not become truly popular until 1678, when Maria Giovanna Battista of Savoy granted the first licence to sell chocolate as a drink to Giovanni Antonio Ari, considered the first legally recognised *cicôlatè*, as recorded in the licence preserved in the Royal Library and collected by Alberto Virgilio in his *Voci e cose del vechio Piemonte* (1917):

Avendoci Giovanni Antonio Ari fatto supplicare di concedergli il privilegio di vendere pubblicamente la cioccolata in bevanda nella presente città per anni sei dalla data della presente, abbiamo accondisceso volentieri alla sua domanda, per esserne stato lui il primo inventore. [Giovanni Antonio Ari having requested that he be granted the privilege of publicly selling chocolate as a beverage in this city for six years from the date of this document, we have willingly granted his request, as he was its first inventor]. (pp. 110-111)

This led to the liberalisation of trade, allowing chocolate to spread from the halls of the court to the halls of the rest of the city, expanding to the bourgeoisie and subsequently involving artisans and industrialists (Autori Vari, 2019; La Redazione Di Infinito, 2018). And so, it was until the 19th century, known as the golden age of Turin's historic cafés, which were key meeting places for the society of the time (Terrerealidelpiemonte, 2024). In these salons, bourgeois, aristocrats,

reactionaries and liberals gathered to exchange ideas and promote unitary thinking, in the context of *the Risorgimento* and the Unification of Italy. Various documents from the period record how influential figures from the bourgeoisie, such as Camilo Benso Conte di Cavour, among others, frequented establishments such as *Al Bicerin* (On the road, 2025).

However, in the early 19th century, the naval blockade imposed by Napoleon prevented the arrival of raw materials, including cocoa. This had a serious impact on Turin's chocolatiers, as cocoa, imported from America, became a luxury item, expensive and difficult to obtain, so they had to look for alternatives (Padovani & Padovani, 2011). The solution they opted for was to take advantage of the abundance of Piedmontese hazelnuts (*nocciola tonda gentile trilobata*) and, once roasted and chopped, mix them with the cocoa paste. This is how *gianduia* came about, a mixture that became very popular, boosting the cultivation of hazelnuts in Piedmont and leading, years later, to the creation of *gianduioto* (Terrerealidelpiemonte, 2024).

After that crisis, chocolate production began to increase and its manufacturing centres moved from shops in the city centre to the suburbs, to larger facilities where it was produced on a larger scale. An example of this development is Paolo Caffarel, who, at the beginning of the 19th century, marked the beginning of industrial production by incorporating hydraulic machinery into his factory (La Redazione Di Infinito, 2018). During that century, the sector experienced remarkable expansion, with the establishment of numerous chocolate companies such as Talmone, Prochet e Gay, Riso, Beata e Perrone, Moriondo e Gargiglio and Querio e Leone (Ainardi, 2006). Turin thus became one of the first places in Europe to institutionalise chocolate production, marking a milestone in its urban identity (Campanile, 2016).

Today, the business landscape has changed, with some of the most iconic companies, such as Caffarel, being sold to foreign groups, but chocolate still has a significant presence in Turin life, as demonstrated by the figures for the chocolate sector in Turin. More than 250 companies dedicated to the production of confectionery products operate in the province of Turin, many of which specialise in chocolate. Among the best known are Caffarel, Baratti & Milano, Peyano, Guido Gobino, La perla di Torino, Feletti, Venchi and Domori, among others. Piedmont produces 40% of Italy's artisan chocolate, making it the leading region in this segment. The Piedmont chocolate sector employs around 6,000 people (Ujetto, 2025).

3.2. Chocolate in Turin's Urban Social Fabric

Today, Turin's chocolate sector is valued for its quality and for the cultural impact it has on the local population, an impact that is not new. Shortly after its arrival in Turin, chocolate became integrated into the city's social rituals and infrastructure, contributing to the construction of its cultural image (Voyager Magazine, 2025). Chocolate soon became a staple of the so-called 'royal afternoon teas', playing a leading role in the daily lives of Turin's wealthiest sectors of society. Today, the *Merenda Reale* is an activity that continues to thrive and forms part of the programme of experiences aimed at Turin's residents and tourists visiting the city (Turismo Torino e Provincia, n.d.).

Outside the salons of private homes, chocolate also gained popularity, as was the case in the typical Turin cafés, richly decorated with mirrors and velvet, which have been part of Turin life since 1628 (Sparavigna, 2024). The activity of these establishments, frequented throughout history by prominent politicians and intellectuals, architects of the Italian Risorgimento (Condulmer, 1970), is intertwined with Turin life, becoming places for meeting and socialising (Batlle Cardona, 2024). The so-called *Caffè Storici* or *Salottu Sabaudi* are perceived as places that maintain a particular atmosphere linked to history, tradition and legend, offering a specific distinction to Turin and contributing to its collective identity (Severi, 2020, p. 167).

These establishments are an integral part of the city's atmosphere. One example is the *Al Bicerin* café, known for the drink that bears its name, the *bicerin*, which has become one of the synonyms of the Piedmontese capital's identity. Another product par excellence is the *gianduitto*, the city's most emblematic chocolate sweet, considered one of the symbols of Turin. , it is the world's first individually wrapped chocolate (Padovani & Padovani, 2007). Furthermore, its name is linked to *Gianduia*, one of the quintessential characters of Turin culture, the mythical carnival

mask that personifies the Piedmontese archetype and gives its name to the aforementioned Piedmontese cocoa and hazelnut spread. Its constant presence in the shop windows of the numerous confectioners scattered throughout the city makes it one of the most common images of Turin.

Another place where chocolate plays an undisputed leading role is the Choco-Story Torino museum. Located beneath one of the city's most emblematic confectioners, Pfatisch, and inaugurated in 2024, it allows visitors to take a journey through the history of cocoa, from its consumption by the ancient Mayan and Aztec civilisations to its establishment in Turin. This museum space brings together more than 700 objects of different types, such as tools for processing cocoa and containers for its storage, preparation and consumption. In addition, practical activities and product tastings are offered (Choco-Story Torino, 2024).

Apart from the spaces linked to chocolate, it is also worth mentioning events that feature this product and highlight its connection with Turin. This is the case of CioccolaTò, a festival that has been held since 2003. The graphic identity of this event uses recognisable symbols of the city, such as the Mole Antonelliana, the Toret and the Caval ëd Bronz, thus sealing the city's deep connection with chocolate (CioccolaTò, 2025). This annual chocolate event plays a crucial role in promoting Turin's chocolate-making tradition, while fostering local pride and supporting small businesses in the sector (Duncan, 2025).

Table 2. Manifestations of chocolate in Turin's identity

	Element	Description
Cultural practices	Merenda Reale	Historical social ritual now offered as a tourist experience
Historical sites	Caffè Storici	Traditional establishments with Baroque décor that have been meeting places since the 17th century
Emblematic products	Gianduia	A cocoa and hazelnut spread created in response to the shortage of cocoa following Napoleon's blockade
	Gianduiotto	The first individually wrapped chocolate, linked to the Piedmontese carnival mask and now a symbol of the city
	Bicerin	Coffee invented in the historic Ai Bicerin café, containing coffee, chocolate and cream
Museums	Choco-Story Torino	Museum opened in 2024 offering an exhibition on the origin, transformation and presence of cocoa and chocolate in Turin life.
Cultural events	CioccolaTò	Annual festival held in Turin since 2003, celebrating the importance of chocolate in Turin over four days.

Source(s): Own work, 2025.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study reaffirm the fundamental premise of successful *city branding*: the brand strategy must be firmly anchored in the territorial identity in order to be meaningful. These results confirm the central hypothesis of the study, which argues that Turin's chocolate-making tradition is an essential and authentic component of its cultural and economic identity, driving both its development and its inhabitants' sense of belonging.

The concept of city branding is understood as a strategic act of meaning creation that must be built from and for its citizens (Källström & Siljeklint, 2023) and a key urban governance strategy aimed at projecting images to attract talent, investors and tourists (Nursanty et al., 2023; Rodrigues et al., 2019). The results obtained in the case of Turin illustrate that the successful of this strategy necessarily requires the brand to be anchored in the territorial identity and culture of the place (Morales Holguín & Cabrera Becerra, 2016).

On the other hand, Turin, which was historically identified with the historical events of important industrial development, presents itself as a paradigmatic case of a city that has managed to articulate its identity around a unique element such as chocolate (Vanolo, 2008). The

best strategists recognise that the determining factor in the essence of a place brand is the people, their beliefs and the products made in the place (Kavaratzis, 2012). Consistency between the projected identity and the lived reality is crucial; a disconnect between the two could lead to rejection (Pasquinelli & Teräs, 2013). In this sense, Turin's chocolate-making tradition provides a narrative of authenticity and identity differentiation that transcends mere promotion, as discussed in the second key question of this research.

The 'local identity' of a settlement is defined, in part, by the unique qualities manifested in its physical and spatial patterns, as well as in the natural characteristics of the landscape (González-Varas Ibáñez, 2014, p. 42; Herrera Valencia, 2023, p. 4). The mode of economic production is a prominent factor influencing these characteristics. In the Turin context, the tradition of chocolate is justified as a determining factor of its character, as it has historically mediated the local economy and culture. A key milestone in Turin's urban identity was the fact that it became one of the first places in Europe to institutionalise chocolate production. This fact, together with the creation of a cream made from cocoa and hazelnuts to overcome the shortage of the former ingredient in the early 19th century and the industrial development experienced by the Turin chocolate sector, shows that chocolate is not only a culinary attraction but also a strategic economic asset.

In terms of socio-cultural integration, territorial identity is nourished by lived experiences, including intangible elements such as gastronomy and customs (Gómez Pérez & Pelayo Pérez, 2024). Chocolate was integrated early on into social rituals such as *Merende Reale*, an activity that is still carried out today as part of the cultural tourism offering (Turismo Torino e Provincia, n.d.). This role in rituals and its iconic products (such as *bicerin* and *gianduiotto*) give it the function of intangible heritage in territorial identity. The *Caffè Storici* play an important role in this integration. Today, they continue to be guardians of tradition and, therefore, an important part of Turin's collective identity (Severi, 2020, p. 167).

In addition to these historic spaces, the tradition is projected through events and museums. The annual CioccolaTò festival uses recognisable symbols of the city to seal the link between chocolate and these iconic places and promote local pride (CioccolaTò, 2025; Duncan, 2025). Meanwhile, the Choco-Story Torino museum also capitalises on this heritage with its exhibitions and activities (Choco-Story Torino, 2024). All of this has cemented Turin's reputation as the 'Italian capital of chocolate'.

5. Conclusions

The city of Turin has undergone a significant transformation of identity, evolving from a heavily industrialised metropolis, characterised by the "factory city" model, dominated by FIAT and the manufacturing sector, to a creative and cultural city. In this process of redefining its profile, historical and cultural assets, such as the chocolate-making tradition, have proven to be crucial elements.

The research carried out validates the hypothesis presented and therefore affirms that Turin's chocolate-making tradition has transcended its role as a simple tourist or cultural attraction to become an essential and authentic component of its cultural and economic identity. The study confirms that chocolate is a determining factor in Turin's character, having historically influenced its local economy and culture. Chocolate in Turin is not limited to simple gastronomic production, but is an integral component of the social, economic and narrative fabric of the Piedmontese capital. Furthermore, the intangible and spatial elements linked to chocolate are crucial to the durability of collective identity.

The results presented and their subsequent discussion have made it possible to achieve the objectives set at the beginning of the study. The first of these, "to identify the key historical and cultural elements that have cemented the relationship between Turin and chocolate over time", has been achieved with the historical section of the research. The same is true of the second objective, "to understand the role of chocolate and its rituals as intangible heritage in territorial identity", which has been achieved through the analysis of the rituals developed around chocolate throughout history, some of which still exist today. Finally, the analysis of the *Caffè Storici*

concludes that these establishments are perceived as places that maintain a particular atmosphere linked to the chocolate tradition and contribute to the "collective identity", which means that the third objective has been achieved: "to determine the role of the *Caffè Storici* as guardians of *the genius loci* of Turin".

The research offers an integrative view by demonstrating how a gastronomic product such as chocolate can become a key element in a city's identity, thus differentiating itself from previous studies focused on the *post-Fordist* transition and major events. Thanks to this approach and the results obtained, the three questions posed at the beginning of the study have been answered, confirming that Turin's rich history and chocolate innovations provide it with a discourse of authenticity which, when reproduced in social and ritual spaces, becomes a central axis of its identity and an effective strategic tool for the development of its *city branding*.

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