Age and Eurovision: The Euro-Ageism

Written by Jesús Manuel Rodrigo Céspedes (@Euronumerics) 11/04/2024

At 55 years old, Mery Bas will represent Spain in Eurovision as part of Nebulossa. Will this data harm the results of the festival? We are going to expose ageism in the contest with a complete analysis of the age of the participants in Eurovision.

INTRODUCTION: AGE DATA

Before moving on to the results, a brief comment on this study. The work has consisted of collecting the dates of birth of all the Eurovision representatives so that, by crossing it with the date of each year's contest, we obtain the age of each singer in its edition. 2 problems have arisen.

First, there are many missing data. The further back in time, the more difficult it has been to compile some dates and not all of them are included. Perhaps by diving deeper I would find them, but efficiency has been prioritized and I do not rule out investigating further in the future to make the study more precise.
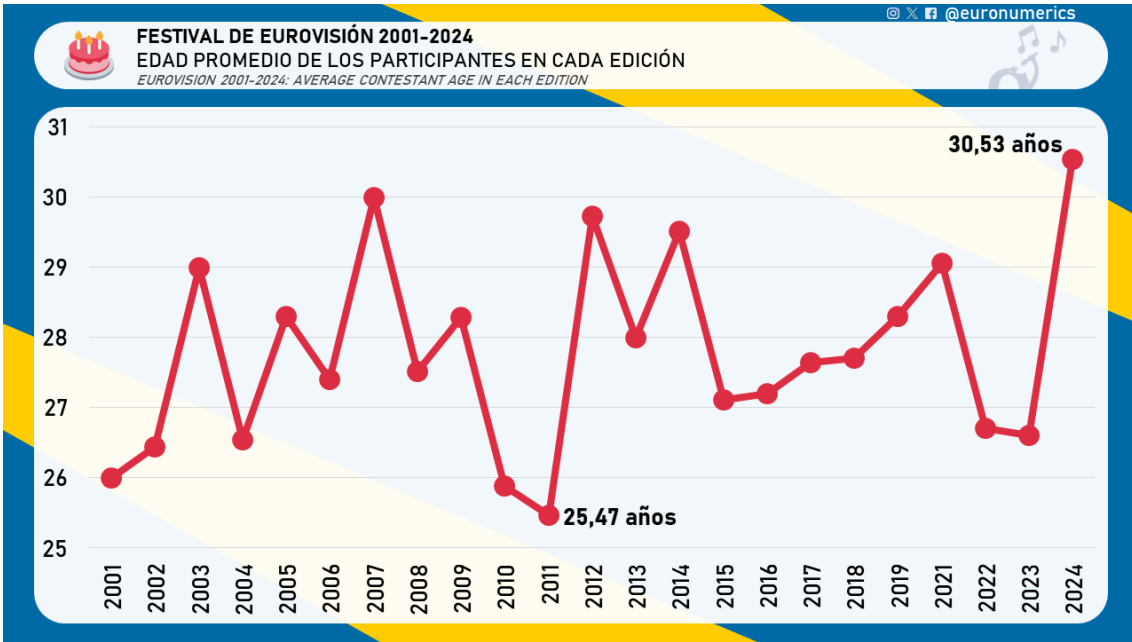
The second issue has been the number of participants. When it comes to a soloist it's easy, give the date of birth and that's it. But how to consider it when there are more than one? It could be the average of all those who make up the group or only of those singing voices. For example, in the case of Megara, the singing voice is young but the rest of the members would raise the average age. What would be the age that we should take into account? In this analysis I have decided to cut corners and not take groups into account, so in this study only soloists or twins who share a date of birth are analyzed, such as Marcus & Martinus. Specific cases have also been included such as that of Nebulossa where, despite there being two, the leading voice and the leading role is that of Mery.

On the other hand, in this first blog we are only going to see the editions of the 21st century, that is, since 2001. Probably in a second part of this blog we will expand to all the editions to see the evolution from the beginning.

In summary, this study includes the age of soloists, twins and other cases, excluding most groups, of participants since 2001, whose date of birth is known.

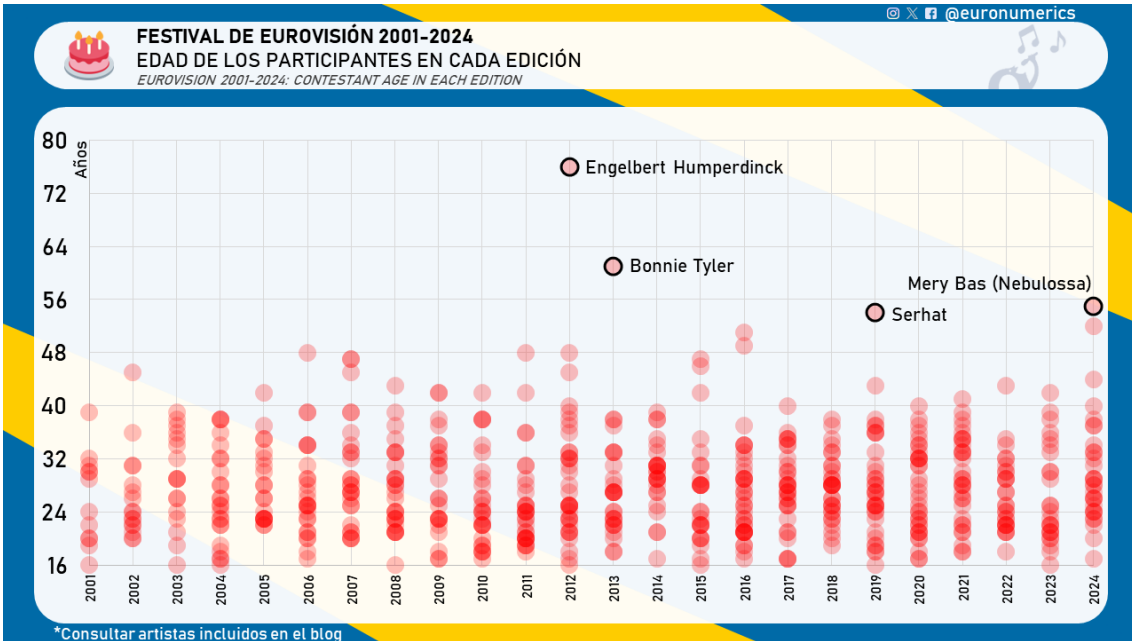**THE AGE TREND IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

To get started, we are going to study the average age of the contestants in each edition, within the limits of the previous section. Each point on the graph represents this average age at festivals from 2001 to the present.

FESTIVAL DE EUROVISIÓN 2001-2024
EDAD PROMEDIO DE LOS PARTICIPANTES EN CADA EDICIÓN
EUROVISION 2001-2024: AVERAGE CONTESTANT AGE IN EACH EDITION

30,53 años

25,47 años

At a glance we can see that there is no clear trend, although it seems that the artists are getting older, slightly. Until last year, the average age ranged from 25.47 years, which reached a minimum at Eurovision 2011 in Germany, to 30 years at Eurovision 2007 in Helsinki. This year this upper limit has been exceeded with an average of 30.53 years. It represents an increase in the 4-year average compared to last year.

It is probably a coincidence, but the 2010-2012 pattern has been repeated: after 2 years of a very low average, a year with a very high average has followed.

The following graph represents with a point all the singers that are included in this analysis. The older the color, the greater the number of artists with that age. It also allows us to observe outliers, those furthest from the rest.

FESTIVAL DE EUROVISIÓN 2001-2024
EDAD DE LOS PARTICIPANTES EN CADA EDICIÓN
EUROVISION 2001-2024: CONTESTANT AGE IN EACH EDITION

Engelbert Humperdinck

Bonnie Tyler

Mery Bas (Nebulossa)

Serhat

*Consultar artistas incluidos en el blog

As we see, the range where points accumulate the most is between 18 and 30 years old, more or less. As for the outliers, we find Engelbert Humperdinck who represented the United Kingdom in Baku at the age of 76. Just a year later, Bonnie Tyler sang for the same country at 61 years old. Mery Bas will occupy the third step of the podium this year at 55 years old. Not far away, Serhat (San Marino), the oldest soloist to reach the final since the semifinals in 2019.
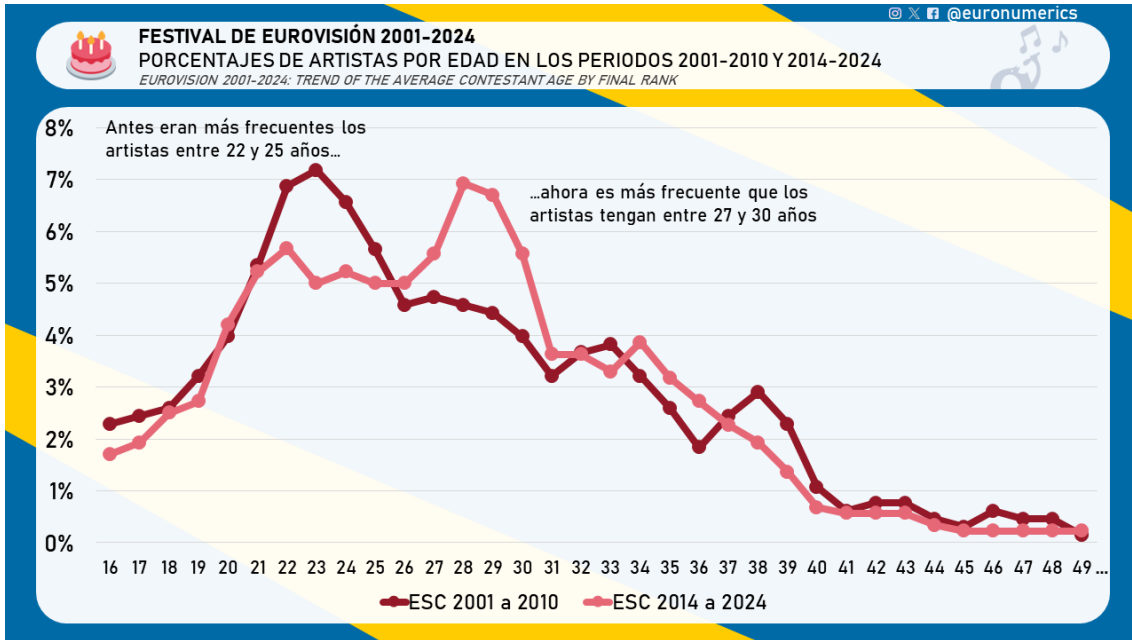
With this other graph we can better appreciate the frequencies, that is, how many artists have participated by each age.
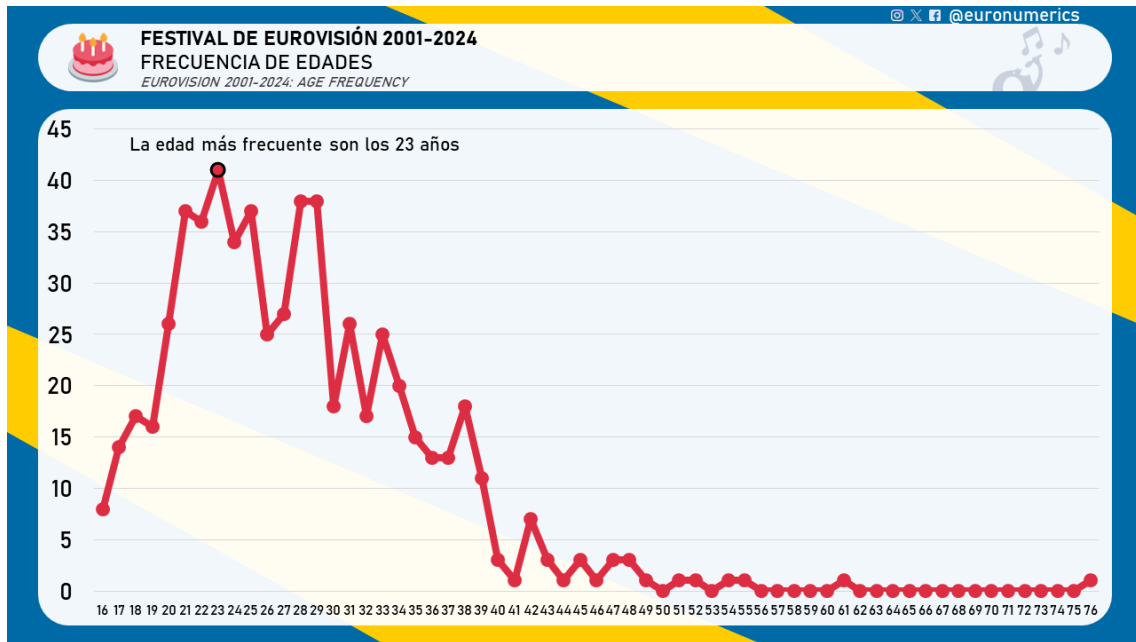
The funny thing is that the graph is distributed brilliantly by decade: the bulk accumulates with twenty-somethings. From the age of 30 you can already see that it decreases, giving another drop from the age of 40. And from the age of 50 the number is almost anecdotal. The mode, the most repeated value, occurs at 23 years of age.

The period we are studying here covers, precisely, 23 years. Will there be differences at the extremes of this range? To do this, I have divided this graph into 2 sections: from 2001 to 2010 (the oldest decade) and from 2014 to 2024 (the most recent decade). The mode in the first section is again 23 years, but in the second, the mode is 28 years.

The following graph is a bit complex. Briefly, it represents the trend of each of the two sections that we saw before. In addition, it is modified with percentages so that they can be comparable.

FESTIVAL DE EUROVISIÓN 2001-2024
PORCENTAJES DE ARTISTAS POR EDAD EN LOS PERIODOS 2001-2010 Y 2014-2024
EUROVISION 2001-2024: TREND OF THE AVERAGE CONTESTANT AGE BY FINAL RANK

Antes eran más frecuentes los artistas entre 22 y 25 años…

…ahora es más frecuente que los artistas tengan entre 27 y 30 años
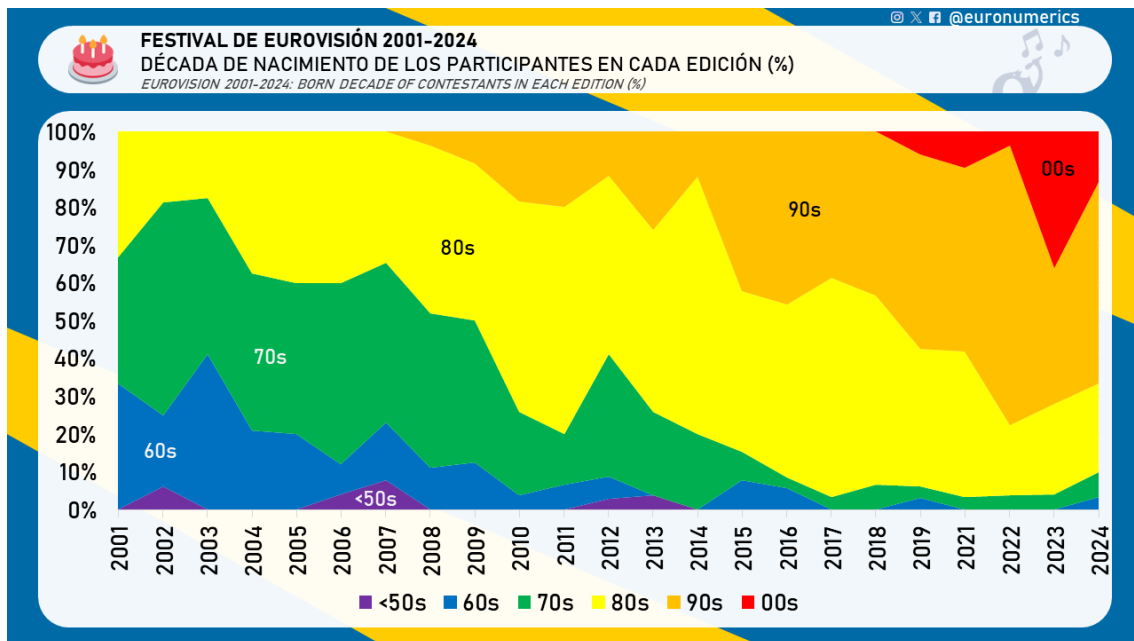
ESC 2001 a 2010   ESC 2014 a 2024

What you have to stay with is the shape of both graphs. In the period from 2001 to 2010, the highest frequencies were between 22 and 25 years old, while in the last decade the most frequent artists were between 27 and 30 years old. This shows a change in trend: in recent years the majority of Eurovision participants are older.

DECADES: THIS IS HOW YOU SEE THE FESTIVAL HAS CHANGED

Now we are going to change the chip slightly. We are going to stop looking at age and focus on the decade of birth of the performers. How has it evolved over the years?

With this area graph we have represented the evolution of those born in each decade with colors. We represent it in percentages to be able to compare the importance of each segment year by year. For example, those born in the 1950s or earlier are represented by the color purple while those born in the 1990s are represented by the orange area.

FESTIVAL DE EUROVISIÓN 2001-2024
DÉCADA DE NACIMIENTO DE LOS PARTICIPANTES EN CADA EDICIÓN (%)
EUROVISION 2001-2024: BORN DECADE OF CONTESTANTS IN EACH EDITION (%)

As expected, the older decades have been losing weight over the years. We see it very well with those born in the 70s (green). At the beginning of the century they were the majority, but they have progressively lost weight until they become residual. The 80s are now entering that decline phase, while the 90s are at their peak and the 00s are beginning to make themselves known.

The evolving distribution of birth years, together with the fact that we all inevitably have birthdays, causes our perception of the festival to change. I'm going to take the example of mine, born in the 90s, who is now 33-34 years old and who became a follower of the festival thanks to Rosa from Spain back in 2002. In that year, obviously, all the artists were older than I. It was not until 2008, when there was a singer born later (Olta Boka for Albania). All this went from strength to strength until in 2012, those born in 1990 were the mode, the most common. Currently, only 25% of the performers of 2024 are older than me. And so it will continue to evolve unstoppably until one year everyone is younger than me. That's what time has.

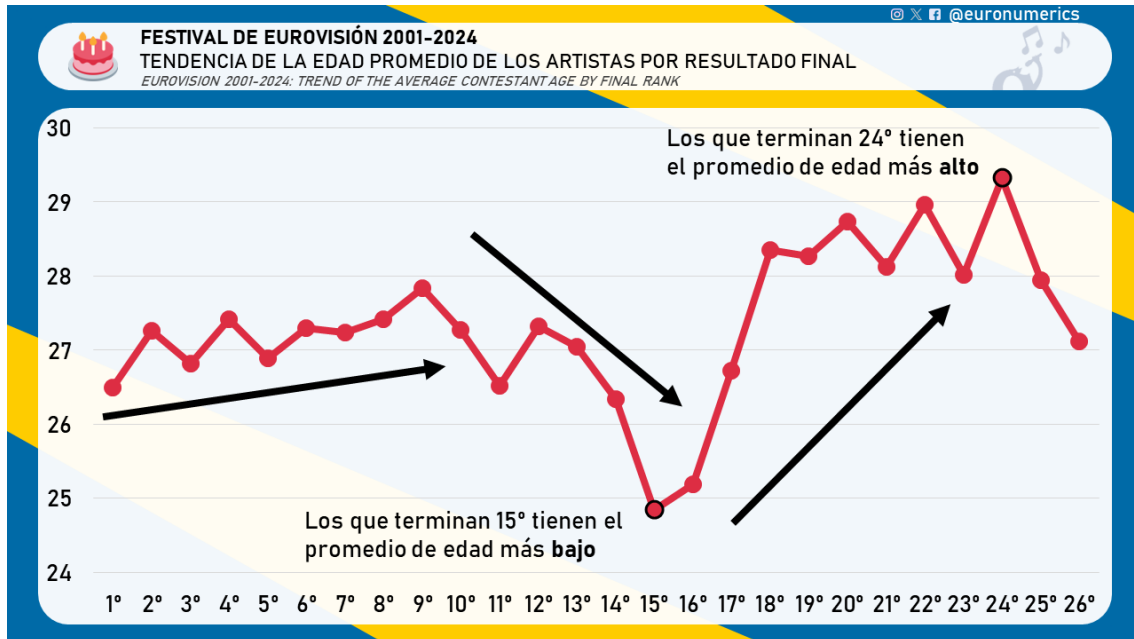**AGEISM IN EUROVISION: INDICATIONS OF DISCRIMINATION**

According to the *RAE*, ageism is discrimination based on age, especially of older people. Is there ageism in Eurovision? Well the answer is YES, but with nuances. To reach this conclusion we have done 2 studies.

In the first study we have compared the average ages of the artists who were top5 and those of those who were bottom5, that is, the last 5 ranked. In statistical terms, it is shown that equality of means is rejected, that is, there are differences between both groups for an acceptable level of confidence: the top5 has an average of 26.89 years while the bottom5 has an average of 28.86. They are 2 years apart.

However, if we review the data again, Engelbert Humperdinck's 76 years are a very atypical case. The English singer was bottom5 in 2012 and if we ignore this value, the average age of the

bottom5 drops to 28.20 years. This approach to the average of the top5 means that we cannot affirm so categorically that there is ageism.

The second analysis is more complex than the previous one. We have determined the average age for each final position. For example, the average age of all the winners, that of the runners-up, etc. Then we have retained the trend of these values and obtained the graph below. It is a very similar treatment to the one we did with the order of performance in the Eurovision final.

FESTIVAL DE EUROVISIÓN 2001-2024
TENDENCIA DE LA EDAD PROMEDIO DE LOS ARTISTAS POR RESULTADO FINAL
EUROVISION 2001-2024: TREND OF THE AVERAGE CONTESTANT AGE BY FINAL RANK
@euronumerics

Los que terminan 24° tienen el promedio de edad más **alto**

Los que terminan 15° tienen el promedio de edad más **bajo**

The first thing we observe are the extreme cases: the lowest average age is for artists around 15th place (middle of the table), while the highest average age is around 24th place (within the bottom5).

But let's stay with the general trend. I have divided this into 3 sections represented by the black arrows. In the first section, which more or less occupies the top 10, there is a slight upward trend, that is, the further we go from the top positions, the more the age increases. After the top 10 there is a contrast: the average age sinks to around the middle of the table and then takes off and barely leaves the average age of 28 years.

Does this trend remind you of something we have already seen on this blog? When we have analyzed the impact of the neighborhood vote in Eurovision, we have shown that the diaspora does not affect the top 10 as much as the following positions. Here we see the same thing, age barely impacts the top 10: if the song is liked or good, it will have its prize regardless of the age of the person who sings it. But if the song does not stand out or is not liked, age seems to be a penalty: the older they are, the worse the position.

Therefore, it is observed that age influences, there is ageism, but this is more relevant when the song does not receive majority support. More complex studies would be needed but, like the running order, it seems that age does not have a linear influence but rather in sections.

OTHER AGE ANALYSIS

I am expanding and I want to close with some final notes. The following map reflects the average age of the contestants from each country during the 21st century. In general, it is observed that Mediterranean countries (except island nations) have higher averages. It stands out a lot in the Balkans. On the other hand, Eastern countries have lower average ages than the rest, the case of Czechia and Slovakia being particularly striking.
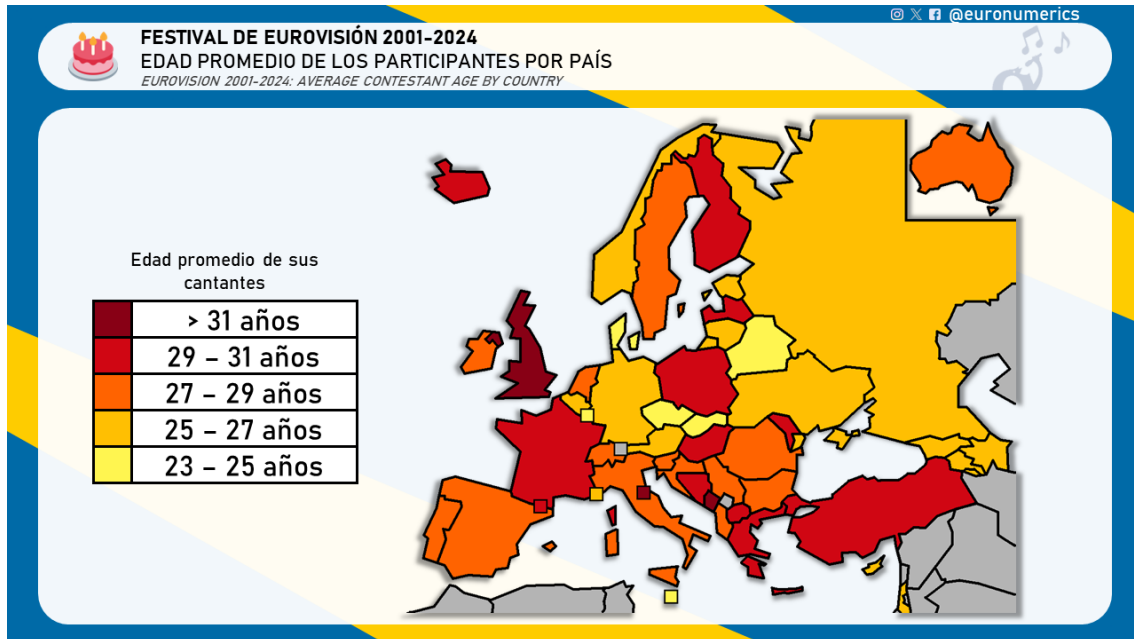
We have also crossed age with the musical attributes that Spotify offers us (energy, positivity, acoustics...) and that we have analyzed so much in this blog. However, with the available data no trend has come to light: there is no difference in the musicality of the songs depending on the age of the person singing them.

And here is the first part of this blog dedicated to age. As always, I will be waiting for your comments, questions and help to spread it. I'll probably make a second part. How has age evolved since the beginning of Eurovision? Will Nebulossa defeat ageism at the festival? Let's eat the world!