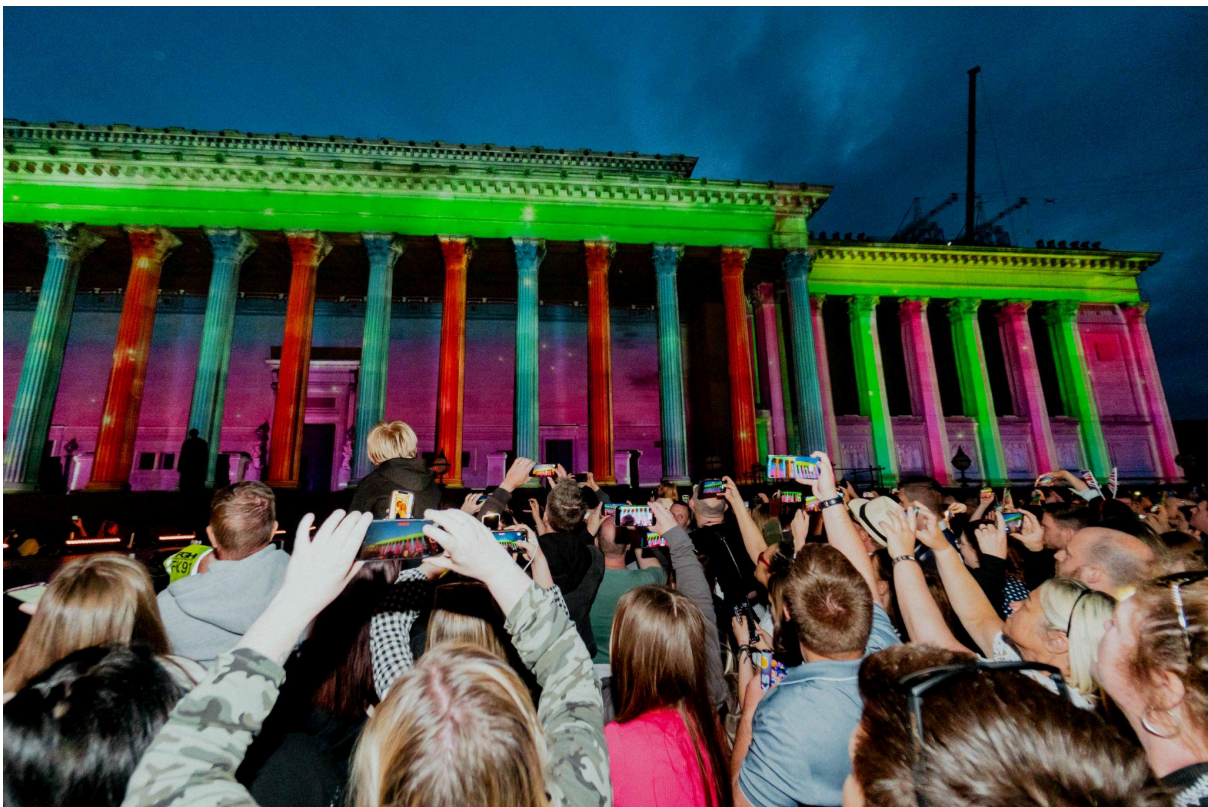


# Community and wellbeing evaluation of a unique international cultural event: Liverpool's hosting of Eurovision 2023 for Ukraine

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*Photo credit: photographer Jack Finnigan, courtesy of Marketing Liverpool*

## About Professor Rhiannon Corcoran

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## About the paper

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## About the What Works Centre for Wellbeing

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# Introduction

In May 2023, building on its rich cultural history and status as a UNESCO City Of Music, Liverpool hosted the 67th edition of the [Eurovision Song Contest](#) on behalf of 2022 winners Ukraine.

The annual competition, televised internationally and organised by the European Broadcasting Union, is a cultural mega event involving over 50 countries.

Anecdotally referred to as ‘the best song contest so far’, Eurovision 2023 involved communities across the city region geography, ages, genders and ethnic backgrounds.

To understand the economic, cultural and wellbeing impacts of winning and delivering the fortnight, Liverpool City Council commissioned [five in-depth, independent evaluations](#).

This discussion paper is based on the [final report of the community and wellbeing strand of Eurovision 2023](#), which aimed to enhance and nuance our understanding of what mega-events do to support communities of place and the wellbeing of individuals living there. The co-produced evaluation was funded by [Spirit of 2012](#) and the Department for Culture Media and Sport.

Here, the research team explores the community and wellbeing evaluation’s rationale, design and delivery, as well as impact findings and methodological learnings. The author highlights insights into mechanisms of subjective and community wellbeing improvement, illustrates affinities and disparities between quantitative and qualitative findings, and discusses issues related to ensuring and sustaining legacy.

The [full report](#) is available for download, alongside the [four other evaluation strands](#) and a synthesis that pulls together the main messages across the strands.

## The research aims

We wanted to find out the extent to which the impacts of hosting Eurovision spread into the household, streets, schools and organisations of Liverpool’s city region. How much did residents benefit from the opportunity? How well did the streets accommodate and spread Eurovision activities? How did the city region’s young people get involved, through their schools, to mark the occasion?

# Methodology

## The study design

Thanks to the extensive knowledge synthesised in the evidence reviews of the [Culture and Sport](#) and [Community Wellbeing](#) evidence programmes of the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, we had a strong handle on the kinds of factors that might change in response to involvement in large-scale events. We therefore focussed on assessing subjective and community wellbeing, civic pride, sense of belonging to different scales of place and on tolerance of diversity.

We used a mixed-methods design to quantitatively and qualitatively evaluate the community and wellbeing impacts of a range of Eurovision 2023 activities. This included:

1. **a household survey**, with baseline data collected from 1398 representative Liverpool residents across 30 different city wards prior to the event and two follow ups collected after the completion of Eurovision 2023 and its associated community activities (n=646 and n= 303 respectively);
2. **six focus groups and two interviews** to explore the outcomes of events hosted by a selection of community organisations and schools in the weeks following Eurovision;
3. a **thematic synthesis** of the feedback forms sent back to the City Council from the many organisations supported by small grants to run Eurovision- and Ukraine-themed events;
4. a separate **Event Feelings Questionnaire** to understand audiences' 'in the moment' affective responses to the live Eurovision events put on in the city, distributed to the public by volunteers (n = 47).

We commissioned [M.E.L Research](#), an experienced social research organisation, to conduct the household survey. They established a sampling framework and recruitment strategy, using face-to-face and panel-based data collection methods at baseline with remote data collection via email, SMS or WhatsApp at follow-up.

## The measures

To capture **subjective wellbeing** in the household survey, we chose to use both the seven-item short [Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale](#) (SWEMWBS) and the Office for National Statistics [four personal wellbeing measures](#) (ONS4). Including two different measures had more benefits than costs in terms of the potential learning it could support: these well-tolerated, widely used tools would be sensitive to change in hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing. Using the measures together gave us options

to look at their correlation and also to test whether they diverged in terms of their relationships with potential mechanisms of wellbeing. Furthermore, using the SWEMWBS would allow one of our evaluation partners to conduct a social return on investment analysis.

To measure **community wellbeing** we used section two of the [recently published Wellbeing in Place Perceptions Scale](#). This brief index explores respondents' perceptions about how well a place contributes to its residents' capacity to feel good and function well. Here, to maintain consistency with other measures in the survey, a Likert scale from one to five was used with all statements referring directly to Liverpool.

**Civic pride** was measured using Wood's (2006) Civic Pride Scale. This was particularly well suited for this evaluation as it is designed to be sensitive to the social impacts of local authority events. The measure incorporates 13 statements using a five-point Likert scale. Each statement began "Liverpool is..." with seven statements reflecting positive and six reflecting more negative opinions.

**Tolerance of Difference** was measured using the scale developed by Hjerm et al. (2020) which has eight items incorporating subscales of acceptance of difference, respect for difference and appreciation of difference. It uses a 5-point rating scale and all items are positively worded.

Although published scales exist to measure extent of felt citizenship (for example, Morais and Ogden, 2011), they tend to be long and complex, which was inappropriate for our purposes. To gauge change in **sense of citizenship** according to scale of place, we devised a simple ranking task where participants were asked to rank their sense of identity to places from one (most) to eight (least) moving from hyper-local to global-scale.

Topic guides and activities used in the focus groups and interviews are available in the [full report](#). Generally, the guides covered the same outcomes as measured in the survey while also allowing more discussion around them and wider issues.

The first part of the Event Feelings Questionnaire (EFQ) used the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (Watson et al., 1988) a 20-item questionnaire in which respondents indicate whether they are currently experiencing a given emotion or affect on a five point Likert scale. In the second part, a total of 65 unique words were offered by the respondents to best describe the event.



# Findings

## Key impacts

### Host City – does size matter?

When we looked at the pre-Eurovision 2023 baseline survey data we found that 74% of Liverpool citizens sampled were enthusiastic about Liverpool hosting Eurovision on behalf of Ukraine. Only 8% stated that they were not enthusiastic and 18% reported feeling indifferent.

Reflecting on this, both the scale of the city and the effectiveness of the communications behind Liverpool's successful bid are likely to have played their parts in determining enthusiasm. Does the Goldilocks principle apply? Was the size of Liverpool just right? There was evidence in the qualitative data that the social and physical fabric of the city was part of the magic of Eurovision 2023.

Would a larger city such as London struggle to effectively spread the message and generate the optimum 'buzz' that contributes to the success of mega-cultural events? Would a city the size of Lichfield, for example, be overwhelmed by the scale and flamboyance of an event like Eurovision?

More research into the nature of the urban population as well as the affordances of the city fabric to diffuse the buzz and contain the events is warranted to understand the wellbeing impacts in other UK settings.

### The relationship between enthusiasm and subjective wellbeing

Baseline SWEMWBS subjective wellbeing of the whole sample seemed higher than national average (Fat et al. ;2017 and Kousheda et al, 2019). It seemed that during the baseline data collection period (mid-April to early May), Liverpool residents were feeling good and functioning well. This didn't prevent us being surprised by the statistically significant decline in subjective wellbeing at follow-up collected between 1- and 4-weeks post Eurovision. In fact, SWEMWBS wellbeing scores declined to levels more in keeping with the national average. Notably, personal wellbeing (ONS4 total score) remained stable from baseline to follow-up.

There seemed to be three possible reasons for the decline in subjective wellbeing:

- 1) The **drop out** at follow-up may have affected the sample mean and distribution of wellbeing score. We were able to quickly dismiss this explanation because the follow-up sample comprised a higher

proportion of Eurovision fans than the baseline had with more reporting having got involved in Eurovision events compared to stated intentions about involvement collected at baseline. With 92% of this follow-up sample reporting being proud of how Liverpool hosted Eurovision 2023, it seemed clear this smaller follow-up sample was not made up of less enthusiastic individuals.

- 2) An **anticipation effect** whereby the anticipatory wellbeing associated with hosting Eurovision swamped any uplift in wellbeing we might have seen at follow-up.
- 3) Related to anticipation, we sensed that we might be seeing **a slump** – that all too familiar drop in wellbeing we feel when good things come to an end.

We decided a second follow-up would help us to determine if the finding was more consistent with anticipation or slump. We reasoned that if the effect was due to unusually high wellbeing at baseline (anticipatory), then a second follow-up would see wellbeing scores remain at the level of the first follow-up. If, on the other hand, the effect was due to a drop in level of wellbeing at follow-up (slump), we may see wellbeing increase at second follow-up compared to first.

Although an even smaller sample responded at second follow-up in September, the data clearly indicated that the change over time in wellbeing was driven by high levels at baseline such that a significant difference existed between baseline and second follow-up SWEMWBS score that was not seen between first and second follow-up. It seemed that the city's enthusiasm at hosting Eurovision translated into higher than usual levels of wellbeing which declined in the aftermath of Eurovision between June and September.

Looking forward to things is good for our wellbeing and, according to our findings, is measurable at city-wide scale as much as at individual level, making the timing of 'baseline' data collection critical. If we hope to capture anticipatory wellbeing, then a baseline collected close to the event is appropriate. On the other hand, if we aim to gather baseline data that is more reflective of everyday functioning, we should gather data, possibly routinely, well ahead of event(s). In short, we were reminded of just how important the timing of data collection is.

In finding anticipatory wellbeing, we feel we have advanced the understanding of the impact of mega-events at city scale by showing just how 'looked forward to' they can be and how this translates into



measurably positive wellbeing. This may be particularly the case for cities that don't usually have the opportunity to host such big occasions.

### **Decline in Tolerance of Difference**

Perhaps more surprising than the pre- to post-Eurovision decline in subjective wellbeing was the significant declines we found within the overall sample in the respect for difference and appreciation of diversity subscale scores of the Tolerance of Difference measure.

Although possibly also an anticipatory effect, it is harder to intuitively understand these findings in this way, although being in a 'good mood' is likely to impact openness to experience and inclusivity.

At the time of writing, we have not examined the data on these subscales in the second follow-up so cannot yet comment on whether these declines were retained four months later. If they turn out to be, then they may be a truer reflection of the tolerance of Liverpool residents than the corresponding baseline data is.

### **Mechanisms associated with changes in place-based wellbeing**

Neither civic pride nor community wellbeing scores changed from baseline to follow-up in the household survey data, but did remain highly correlated with each other. However, felt scale of citizenship did alter from baseline to follow-up. Pre-Eurovision, the majority of survey respondents considered themselves as citizens of Liverpool first, rather than of Merseyside, the North West, Northern England, England, UK, Europe or the world. Responses after Eurovision significantly changed towards a sense of citizenship to wider areas than just the local city, with percentages significantly decreasing for citizenship of Liverpool and England, and significantly increasing for citizenship of the world. This was indicative of the international togetherness that the Song Contest embraces that was experienced beyond feeling European. These changes appear to relate to the ethos of Eurovision, rather than to subjective or community wellbeing.

When we broke the survey data into groupings reflecting reduced, stable or increased subjective wellbeing based upon standard deviation of SWEMWBS change score (>, =, <), clearer mechanisms began to emerge such that increase in subjective wellbeing was predicted by baseline SWEMWBS score, sexuality and involvement in Eurovision 2023 activities. By contrast, decline in subjective wellbeing was only predicted by baseline SWEMWBS score.

The qualitative data was rich in information about sources associated with positive community and individual wellbeing outcomes. Although not

'measurable' in the same way and only indirectly reported by organisers on behalf of beneficiaries, the themes identified in this data tell a nuanced mechanism-rich story.

The generation of emotion was everywhere in this data. Joy was emphasised but there were also tenuous dualities of emotional experience related both to the contrast of Eurovision fun with the hostilities and sadness of the war in Ukraine and to the restorative nature of involvement in activities after the isolation of COVID and cost of living stresses.

These emotional experiences were very clearly related to wellbeing uplift. So too were themes of solidarity, collaboration, inclusion, space and place, the making of memories and the power of music. All these aspects of the Eurovision 2023 community experience contributed to the sense of feeling good and functioning well as individuals and in togetherness.

## Methodological learning

### **Implications of survey drop out**

Contrary to our expectations, collecting the follow-up data online proved challenging. We had purposefully over-sampled at baseline in anticipation of attrition and we had collected all email contacts of baseline participants to enable a rapid, remote follow-up. Less than 50% of our sample maintained enough enthusiasm to respond to the survey after the Song Contest was over, and this was with up to three reminder emails.

The drop out from baseline survey to first follow-up was a significant factor that determined what we could meaningfully do with the data. We had planned specific foci on minority groups and some intersectional analyses. Unfortunately, these were largely ruled out by final numbers.

The extent to which shifting from door knocking to remote delivery at follow-up contributed to the high attrition is unclear. However, we learned that it is probably unwise to switch delivery methods in this way for the collection of follow-up data aiming to examine the impact of events which, when they have been and gone, inevitably means less interest in the issues for individuals recruited pre-event. Even with limited funding, it may prove better overall value for money to collect follow-up data face-to-face.

### **Involving volunteers in evaluation is not a convenient shortcut**

We had been keen to involve the large volunteer group recruited by Culture Liverpool to support Eurovision 2023. We figured we could collect a large set of data that reflected the affective wellbeing felt by the audience during the free live events by asking volunteers to distribute and collect a

simple questionnaire that was able to measure and describe these ‘in the moment’ feelings. We worked with the volunteer co-ordinators to arrange this and provided the questionnaires with clear and simple administration instructions so that the volunteers could easily, effectively and efficiently collect this data.

We felt a little disappointed when only 47 of these questionnaires, sampling a single event, were returned. Perhaps this is not surprising given the scale of the programme and the pace of getting everything sorted. We thought we’d sent out clear instructions but clearly, we hadn’t. The disappointment reminded us of the importance of building solid relationships behind the scenes to facilitate data collection, of never assuming things would go as planned and, the importance of researchers staying as connected as possible to data collection.

### **Is triangulation possible?**

We designed a mixed methods study involving different qualitative and quantitative techniques to do justice to the complex constructs that we conveniently summarise as wellbeing.

In some ways, we might claim to have achieved triangulation by amalgamating methods that can embrace the fullness of the wellbeing construct. In other ways, we simply delivered a mixed methods evaluation that focussed quantitatively on subjective or individual wellbeing and qualitatively on community wellbeing.

The findings across these methods were quite different, emphasising distinct things. While there was little in the survey data to convincingly point to positive individual wellbeing impacts for city residents who were largely uninvolved in the ‘making and doing’ of Eurovision, there was, in the qualitative data, strong evidence of a sense of community enhancement through the ‘doing of things’ together.

Therefore, involvement might be seen as a ‘triangulated’ finding because when wellbeing improvement was seen in the quantitative data it hinged on involvement and engagement, just as the positive outcomes reported qualitatively did.

### **A new role for qualitative evaluation**

We loved hearing the stories in the focus groups and interviews, and many memorable quotes in the final report capture the experience and success of Eurovision 2023. These are the experiences that make research a privilege. What we had not expected was the way the focus groups acted as ‘next steps’ for those involved. They enabled further contact between

group members; they facilitated further introductions, and they provided a reason to arrange more work together in the future. In a sense, the evaluation of Eurovision 2023 set in motion some of the first steps towards legacy.

## Eurovision 2023 Legacy

The issue of the value of large events is often discussed in terms of what they catalyse and what future opportunities they might support. The issue of legacy feels even more important when events are one-off or where host cities are unlikely to attract further events of similar scale and impact in the near future.

Similarly, in the context of strained global, national and local economies, the need for legacy is palpable and all the more pressing while being harder to achieve during periods of uncertainty.

All the focus groups and interviews we ran touched on legacy. In some cases, for example with the stakeholders group, this felt formalised and already factored in through partnership working that had either existed before the Song Contest or which had built from it. Plans for what to do next and how to do it together were openly discussed in this group. These were people well-versed in getting things off the ground. In a very real sense, their delivery of Eurovision together was a legacy of their prior collaborative endeavours. Trusted partner arrangements and anchor organisations enable this way of working to support their cities and regions so that one legacy can seamlessly lead to another. The focus groups provided space to discuss these opportunities and to arrange them.

Other focus groups, made up of community groups and their membership, talked more of how the funding provided by Culture Liverpool had allowed their participation. There was much talk of the vulnerability of cultural funding and the need for a resilient source of future arts budget. Without this, much less impact felt possible. There was talk too of the infrastructure that had been developed to support Eurovision 2023 and the opportunity to re-use or repurpose it to extend its value and benefits.

Finally, in these groups there was a strong sense of growing entrepreneurship in the culture sector, some of which had been tested and strengthened by the pace of the Eurovision context. Needing to get things up and running quickly tested entrepreneurial grit in a good way and this felt like a legacy that could be drawn on in the future.

## Conclusion

Drawing on the final report of the Community and Wellbeing evaluation of Eurovision 2023, this discussion paper has attempted to draw out matters that enhance our understanding of the impact of place-based cultural events and inform how we can effectively evaluate them, allowing findings that can support maximal wellbeing and community benefits from them in the future.

By engaging the communities of Liverpool City Region in the celebration of Eurovision and the sensitive representation of Ukraine, Liverpool put its stamp on Eurovision and can offer learning to future host cities. The community celebrations that were such a large part of Eurovision 2023 offer a blueprint to maximise the relational wellbeing value of cultural events.