



Eurovision 2023

After Eurovision: assessing the legacy of
mega-events on urban economies

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Key takeaways

1. Liverpool has wholeheartedly embraced Eurovision, with a packed fan village and enthusiastic audiences visiting the city from across the UK and Europe.
2. With an estimated 100,000 additional visitors to the city over Eurovision week, the immediate impact on the local visitor economy is likely to be significant. However, experience of previous 'mega' events suggests it is harder to assess longer-term economic and social impacts.
3. Official assessments of Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture 2008 emphasised successes in attracting inward investment and improving perceptions of the city. However, some later research considers these impact indicators to be too narrow and highlighted areas where evaluation of the long-term effects of mega events could be improved.
4. Mega events such as Eurovision are perhaps most beneficial in developing and projecting a narrative about the host city, particularly with an anticipated global TV audience of at least 150 million for this year's final. Liverpool has an opportunity to build on its strong record of place branding by utilising the positive images of the city broadcast to TV screens across Europe.
5. As Liverpool City Region seeks to build on its existing devolved powers over the coming years, Eurovision highlights some of the region's less heralded strengths – its future-facing cultural offer, its organisational capacity and, most importantly, its people.

1. Introduction

With an estimated 100,000 additional visitors, Eurovision looks set to be the largest single event in Liverpool City Region for many years – perhaps since Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture in 2008. Once the dust settles on a week in which the eyes of Eurovision fans across the world will be on the M&S Bank Arena, attention will turn to evaluating the economic, social and cultural impact of this internationally recognised set piece. Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) has commissioned [four separate studies](#) to assess Eurovision's local impact:

- Economy: LCRCA along with Liverpool City Council, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Arts and Humanities Research Council have commissioned AMION

Consulting to evaluate the immediate and short-term (up to one year post-event) impact of Eurovision on the LCR economy. This will incorporate analysis of inward investment, visitor numbers and jobs created.

- Cultural Relations and Soft Power: The University of Hull's Dr Catherine Baker, author of the [first briefing](#) in this special Eurovision series, is overseeing a [research project](#) assessing the impact of Eurovision on perceptions of Liverpool and the UK, commissioned by the British Council.
- Wellbeing: Researchers from the University of Liverpool are conducting research with around 1,300 residents on their attitudes towards Eurovision and its contribution to civic pride. Participants will be asked their views through surveys and focus groups.
- Health: Liverpool John Moores University is tasked with assessing the

impact on health of nightlife activity during Eurovision, with a survey of people attending events looking at drink and drug consumption, and perceptions of safety.

We can expect results from some of this work soon after the curtain has closed on the event, and researchers at the University of Liverpool will be collating these studies into an overall evaluation report by the end of 2023. However, policymakers in Liverpool City Region will already be considering how to build on the legacy of Eurovision and reflecting on how it can contribute to wider local strategies on investment, tourism, place-branding, employment and skills.

This policy briefing discusses the economic and social legacy of previous ‘mega events’ – earlier editions of Eurovision, recent Commonwealth Games, and experiences of Liverpool’s year as European Capital of Culture in 2008. It concludes with a discussion of how Eurovision might contribute to Liverpool’s longer-term approach to developing and wielding its social and economic power.

2. Evidence on the legacy of previous ‘mega’ events

Liverpool: Capital of Culture 2008

Liverpool won the competition to host the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) prize in 2003, with events held throughout 2008. [Professor Michael Parkinson](#) (Ambassador for the Heseltine Institute and chronicler of Liverpool’s regeneration since the 1980s) argues that it “dramatically changed the city’s ability to deliver major projects. It increased external confidence and later investment. It raised its profile with politicians and the media. It was the beginning of a new phase of Liverpool’s creativity and culture” (Parkinson, 2019: 91).

The official impact report published after the event is similarly positive. An estimated 2.6 million visits to Liverpool from abroad were motivated by ECoC, with 97% of these first-time visitors to the city. Total visits to Liverpool were up 34% on the previous year and over £750 million of additional direct visitor spending was generated across the North West. Perceptions of Liverpool in the national media were considered to have improved, and 85% of Liverpool residents surveyed agreed that the city was “a better place than before the ECoC award” (Garcia et al, 2010).

However, while the event undoubtedly boosted Liverpool’s profile and significantly increased visitor numbers, some subsequent research is more equivocal about the longer-term impact of ECoC. Connolly (2013) highlights various measures absent from the official evaluation, such as a detailed breakdown of the types of jobs created during and after the event. Recent work by the University of Liverpool’s [Tamara West](#), meanwhile, examines the legacy in light of UNESCO’s decision to ‘delist’ the city of its world heritage status in 2021. She suggests there remains too much focus on the “visitor economy or ‘wow’ events that fail to take into account the different meanings and values of the city’s embedded tangible and intangible heritage” (West, 2022: 548). An [evaluation by the Institute of Cultural Capital](#) ten years on from Liverpool’s year as ECoC did however find positive impacts on local cultural activity as a result of the event, with a 50% growth in grassroots cultural initiatives in Liverpool’s inner city between 2005 and 2018.

It will be crucial for Liverpool’s post-Eurovision evaluation to assess a broad range of impacts, and to assess how the legacy of the event evolves over time. As a [previous policy briefing by Mathew Flynn](#) highlighted, it will be particularly important

that the city region's live music industry – which suffered during the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequently due to cost of living pressures – benefits in the long-term from the event. Liverpool's status as a UNESCO City of Music (granted in 2015), demonstrates that perceptions of places and their heritage are not fixed, and that successful place branding requires understanding the contemporary cultural offer of cities as well as their heritage.

Eurovision: evidence from previous events

Evidence from recent Eurovision events suggests the immediate economic impact of the event is significant. In its [official post-event evaluation](#), 2022 hosts Turin estimate that an initial spend of €14 million on organising and hosting the event resulted in €23 million direct, indirect and induced additional spending in the city. Assessment of earlier editions find similar impacts on tourism. Tel Aviv (the 2019 host) saw a significant increase in tourism with 76% of visitors reporting that it was their first time in Israel. Lisbon estimated a net economic benefit for the city of €100 million for its 2018 hosting of the event.

There is some evidence to suggest that the impact of Eurovision on tourism in the longer-term may be more significant for host cities with less mature visitor economies. A study of Baku's hosting of the 2012 event, for example, found that perceptions of Azerbaijan improved through the event and that these perceptions were sustained over following years – even amongst people who did not watch Eurovision (Arnegger and Herz, 2016).

As a popular tourist destination with a long-standing cultural and heritage offer, it may be harder to disentangle the visitor impact of Eurovision on Liverpool from a broader post-Covid recovery in travel and leisure. However, evidence from previous events suggests there may be place-

branding benefits to hosting the event, with at least 150 million people across the world expected to watch this year's final on television.

Commonwealth Games: Manchester, Glasgow and Birmingham

Comparison with other mega events such as the Olympic Games is difficult to compare with Eurovision due to the scale of physical infrastructure involved in hosting large sporting competitions. However, the UK's hosting of three Commonwealth Games since the turn of the millennium (Manchester in 2002, Glasgow in 2014 and Birmingham in 2022) does provide some lessons for evaluating economic and social impact.

Extensive regeneration of previously underdeveloped parts of east Manchester, including a new stadium which now plays host to Manchester City FC, is the most obvious legacy of the Manchester Commonwealth Games - one that remains evident to visitors to the city today. While the Birmingham games used a pre-existing stadium, a recent evaluation suggests the event had positive impacts on the reputation of the host city. Perceptions of the city amongst games volunteers, staff and participants were found to have improved following the event, and experience of hosting the games was also considered beneficial in organising future major events (KPMG, 2023).

Glasgow focused its legacy activity for the 2014 Commonwealth Games on 'reinventing and regenerating' the city. There were fears before the games that infrastructure developed to support the event might result in 'white elephants', and concerns about the cost of bidding for, organising and hosting the games during an era of local government austerity. For this reason, legacy projects were aimed to tie into long-term regeneration programmes, such as the development of

Glasgow's east end through the Clyde Gateway Urban Regeneration Company, which was launched six weeks after the city was awarded the games (Scottish Government, 2018). Experience from each of the UK's 21st century Commonwealth Games demonstrates that an enduring legacy can emerge from mega events if local partners are clear about what they are seeking to achieve in hosting them. By doing so, existing planning and regeneration strategies can be tied into planning for the event.

3. Liverpool after Eurovision

Liverpool has wholeheartedly embraced its status as Eurovision host city in a way unsurprising to those of us who live or work in the city. As one [Twitter user](#) put it, "Liverpool has thrown itself at Eurovision in a way I don't believe any of the bidders would have". The Eurovision Village was packed during semi-finals week, and local partners have worked hard to include Liverpool City Region residents in the celebrations, as well as visitors. The fact that Liverpool is hosting on behalf of Ukraine has been emphasised through extensive engagement with the UK's Ukrainian population, including [recent events with local schools](#). There have already been some significant employment outcomes, as detailed in the [second policy briefing](#) in this series. In a period where Liverpool, a city with a sizeable visitor economy, is attempting to rebuild its hospitality sector following the pandemic, the event is a welcome fillip for local businesses.

However, evidence from Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture, previous Eurovision events, and recent experiences of Commonwealth Games highlight the importance of understanding what a long-term legacy might look like – and how it can be evaluated. Liverpool City Region has a strong record of place branding and, over recent years, has refreshed its approach to marketing its cultural and

visitor offer (Parkinson et al., 2017). The Covid-19 pandemic both highlighted the importance of the visitor economy to the city-region and emphasised its vulnerability, a dilemma recognised in the [Liverpool City Region recovery plan](#) published during the pandemic. Eurovision highlights the opportunity to build on recent developments in [marketing Liverpool as 'different'](#), by projecting a vision familiar to local residents and regular visitors of an optimistic, modern urban economy building but not reliant on its cultural and musical heritage. The task of distinguishing the city-region from other medium-sized UK cities will also bleed into other policy areas, such as planning and development, industrial strategy and skills. Its geographical position and built heritage are significant strengths in attracting trade and investment. As Eurovision has demonstrated, its people are perhaps Liverpool's biggest asset.

Following the recent award of 'trailblazer' devolution deals to Greater Manchester and the West Midlands, Liverpool will seek to be part of the next round of decentralisation which would see new powers over skills, transport and housing devolved to the metro mayor and combined authority. LCRCA's [Plan for Prosperity](#) sets out a strategic agenda for attracting investment in the local economy and building the foundations for improved economic outcomes for LCR residents. Equally important will be developing a more critical understanding of what Liverpool's role in a post-Covid, post-Brexit, increasingly decentralised UK can be, and how perceptions of the city both domestic and international might shape this role. At the national level, arts and culture are often neglected in discussions about economic renewal and place marketing, but Liverpool's hosting of Eurovision highlights the importance of putting on a show – and what that show tells us about a city and its people.

4. References

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The Heseltine Institute is marking Liverpool's status as host city for *Eurovision 2023* with this special series of policy briefings. *Eurovision* is the subject of an increasingly rich, diverse field of research, with contributions from fields as diverse as political science, geography, history, cultural studies and social policy. This series explores the impact of *Eurovision* from a range of practitioner and academic perspectives, assessing the economic, social and cultural impacts of the event on Liverpool City Region and beyond.

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