
Eurovision 2023 Cultural Relations Snapshot

**A snapshot from the forthcoming
cultural relations, soft power and
shared values research.**

October 2023

About this research

In May 2023, Liverpool and the BBC hosted the Eurovision Song Contest on Ukraine's behalf. This was the first time since 1980 that Eurovision has not been hosted in the previous winning country, and the first time a winner has ever been unable to host because the country is under attack.

Researchers at the University of Hull with consultants from the University of Brighton, University of Glasgow, and Royal Holloway, University of London are investigating the cultural relations and 'soft power' impact of Eurovision for a study commissioned by the British Council in partnership with Liverpool City Council and DCMS. The study has three pillars:

- A literature review surveying the state of the art in research on Eurovision and other large-scale cultural and competitive events.
- A tracker survey exploring the impact of Eurovision on members of the public in 5 European countries.
- Interviews exploring how stakeholders co-operated to create the narrative of Liverpool, the BBC and the UK hosting Eurovision on behalf of Ukraine.

We've prepared this snapshot ahead of the publication of the full research in January 2023 for the upcoming event 'Liverpool Calling – And the results are in!'.



Emerging findings

Our **literature review** finds that Eurovision today is a mega-event with features of sports mega-events like the Olympics and large-scale cultural events like Capital/City of Culture. We can learn much from studies of these other events and the cultural relations opportunities they create, and from studies of how conflict and international aggression have affected them. But Eurovision is also unique as an international, televised popular music competition produced by an alliance of public service broadcasters, the European Broadcasting Union, which has reinvented itself to engage youth audiences in the digital age. The contest allows participants and hosts to broadcast narratives about their city's and country's identity to a mass international audience. Moreover, it also promotes cultural exchange across borders and encourages gateways that facilitate engagement with other countries' music, languages, and culture. No other international event of its scale has gained such significance to LGBTQ+ communities. Taken together, Eurovision and its artists, producers, volunteers, and fans construct and reinforce people-to-people cultural relations as they breathe life into the event they love.

Our **tracker survey**, conducted by Information By Design, completed its first wave of polling between 31 May and 14 June 2023, with 5,000 participants across Estonia, France, Poland, Romania and Spain. Headlines from wave 1 include:

- 62.4% of respondents had watched at least one broadcast Eurovision 2023 live show.
- 30.4% of those who watched at least one live show were aged 18-34.
- Almost two thirds of those who watched at least one live show described Eurovision as an event hosted by the UK on Ukraine's behalf (46.3%) or a joint UK/Ukrainian event (18.9%).
- 35.3% of those who watched at least one live show associated Liverpool with diversity, and 31.7% associated Liverpool with creativity (as opposed to 20.7%/17.0% among people who did not).
- 32.5% of people who watched Eurovision this year, and even 10.6% of people who did not watch it, said that Liverpool hosting Eurovision had made them more likely to visit Liverpool.

These results come from respondents 2-4 weeks after the event and therefore capture Eurovision's short-term impact. Longer-term impacts of large-scale events like Eurovision are researched less often, but Wave 2 of the survey in October-November 2023 will discover how far these initial results stand up over time.

Our **interviews** began in May 2023 and are concluding in October. Respondents include representatives from Eurovision's production team, Liverpool City Council, Culture Liverpool, the BBC, DCMS, the EBU, Liverpool's cultural sector, Ukraine's public service broadcaster and foreign ministry, the Ukrainian Institute, and a range of UK and Ukrainian artists and producers. Interview analysis will be complete later this autumn, but some themes are already clear. Liverpool's global standing as a music city aligned naturally with Eurovision's own brand and offered a high-profile platform for the event's narrative. Eurovision 2023 was an event delivered not even just 'on behalf of' Ukraine, but with Ukrainian participation embedded throughout the live shows' production and the cultural programme. On-screen UK/Ukrainian collaborations like the Postcard films, emotive interval/opening performances, and Ukrainian acts' appearances in the Flag Parade were matched behind the scenes by involvement of Ukrainian producers and crew at many levels. The wider context required each show to strike the balance between celebrating Eurovision's sense of fun while understanding the need for solidarity with Ukraine during Russia's ongoing attack.

Passion to represent Ukraine sensitively and authentically was equally strong in Eurofestival, the largest cultural programme ever built around a Eurovision contest, where 19 of the 24 commissions ended up being collaborations between UK and Ukrainian artists.

The Ukrainian Institute added value to Liverpool's own commitments to authentic representation by facilitating direct connections to Ukraine's cultural scene: in collaboration with the British Council, it became an invaluable partner in selecting and developing commissions reflecting the resilience, courage, diversity, and innovation of contemporary Ukraine, and these commissions could deal with the war's impact on Ukrainian culture in ways the Eurovision live shows could not. British Council support for the bilateral UK/Ukraine Season of Culture (June 2022-May 2023) also equipped some artists with the capacity and networks to successfully propose commissions. Further, Eurofestival's funding partners meanwhile helped take Eurovision's cultural relations deep into the local community through EuroStreet, EuroLearn and EuroGrant, which supported activities engaging people of all ages with Ukrainian culture, European languages, and Eurovision's party spirit.

Stakeholders' experiences from London 2012, the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, and Liverpool's notable track record of hosting large cultural events since European Capital of Culture 2008 all helped to make Eurovision 2023 a success – and to deliver it in only six months, an even shorter timeframe than Eurovision's usual challenging pace.

Despite the context that obliged Eurovision 2023 to be hosted outside Ukraine, Liverpool has delivered a historic Eurovision and unlocked new ways for future hosts to facilitate international cultural exchange.

The British Council

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We support peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide. We work directly with individuals to help them gain the skills, confidence and connections to transform their lives and shape a better world in partnership with the UK. We support them to build networks and explore creative ideas, to learn English, to get a high-quality education and to gain internationally recognised qualifications.

Copyright

© British Council 2023.

The cultural relations, soft power and shared values research was commissioned by the British Council in partnership with Liverpool City Council and DCMS.

Authors

Dr Catherine Baker (project director)
Prof David Atkinson
Prof Glenn Burgess
Dr Barbara Grabher
Dr Michael Howcroft

Contributors

Dr Aoife Curran
Dr Anna Daupare
Prof Ben O'Loughlin