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Eurovision 2023: Exploring Liverpool's Multi-Agency Approach to a Large-Scale Event

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Overview

This research aims to explore Liverpool's multi-agency approach to Eurovision 2023, with a specific focus on multi-agency relationships and information sharing. A mixed methods approach was adopted, with four stages to data collection: i.) field observations; ii.) survey; iii.) interviews and focus groups; and iv.) policy documents. As data collection and analysis are currently ongoing, initial findings are highlighted in this report. It is evident that practitioners from various agencies agree that the multi-agency approach to Eurovision was a success. Participants commented on the positive attitudes of others, the sense of Liverpool pride, and the importance of certain individuals in driving an effective approach. Prior relationships and experiences from other city events offer a strong foundation to deliver successful MA working, yet this enthusiasm and collaboration also extended to those who were new to the MA relationship. Areas for learning and development were also raised, from a strategic (i.e. clarifying chain of command) to a practical (i.e. frequency and attendance at meetings) level. Upon completion of analysis, good practice and recommendations will be shared.

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Research Team

This project is led by [Dr Mike Smith](#) and [Dr Becky Phythian](#), with colleagues at the School of Law, Criminology and Policing at Edge Hill University ([Dr Lauren Swan-Keig](#) and [Lawrence Forrest](#)).

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In May 2023, Liverpool hosted the Eurovision Song Contest on behalf of Ukraine, involving 37 competing nations. With over 12,000 accredited staff involved in the planning and delivery of Eurovision, it is the largest and most complex multi-agency (MA) event that Liverpool has ever hosted.

Supported by Merseyside Police and Liverpool Culture, this research explores MA working for a major live event. Ethical approval was obtained from Edge Hill University's Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (SSREC).

Aim

There are two core aims. In relation to the preparation and delivery of the Eurovision Song Contest 2023 (ESC23), the research will:

- i.) examine the relationships and benefits of a MA approach, identifying the key themes around relationship building, consistency, longevity, and trust (led by Dr Mike Smith).
- ii.) investigate the ways in which MA information sharing takes place (informing a UK Research and Innovation Future Leaders Fellowship project on law enforcement information exchange; led by Dr Becky Phythian).

Method

Four approaches to data collection (mixed methods) were adopted and are summarised below. Quantitative data is descriptively analysed in SPSS, with qualitative data explored using content/thematic analyses in NVivo. Note: data collection and analysis are ongoing.

i.) Field observations

Observations were carried out by the researchers during both the planning and delivery of ESC23. Observations during the planning stage commenced in January 2023 and included MA meetings (in person and Teams), and a MA tabletop exercise (at the M&S Bank Arena). Observations during the delivery of Eurovision took place in May 2023 (i.e. at the opening ceremony, semi-finals and final), with researchers situated at the Joint Command Centre (including attendance at the Tactical Coordination Group meetings), Liverpool City Centre (various Eurovision locations) and the M&S Bank Arena.

The unequivocal access provided to the research team and the open invitation to witness all aspects of the event offers the opportunity for a rich and unfiltered analysis of the strengths of the MA approach in Liverpool, as well as areas for learning and development. The observations provided the research team with a contextual awareness for later data collection stages (i.e. examples given from ESC23 in survey responses or during interviews). Moreover, the relationships fostered whilst researchers were embedded in the MA

environment facilitated the recruitment of participants through establishing trust and familiarity with the research team, and an awareness of the research.

ii.) Survey

An online survey was shared via email and social media with practitioners from various agencies involved in the planning and delivery of ESC23. The survey was live from May to July 2023, and featured a range of open and closed questions (a copy is available upon request). Questions explored various aspects of MA working (e.g. about partners, meetings) and information sharing (e.g. how and what information was shared, with who), in addition to asking participants to reflect on the success of Eurovision, the barriers and facilitators, and to compare this experience with previous instances of MA working during events.

Participants: A total of 29 participants completed the survey; see table 1 for a list of agencies and roles. Most participants (48.3%, n=14) have been in their current role for 5 years or more; 17.2% (n=5) had been in their role for 2 to 3 years, 13.8% (n=4) for 6 to 12 months, and 10.3% (n=3) for both 1 to 2 years and 4 to 5 years.

Table 1. The agency and role of participants

Agency	% (n)	Role	% (n)
Merseyside Police	17.2 (5)	Director	6.9 (2)
Culture Liverpool	13.8 (4)	Event Manager	6.9 (2)
Liverpool City Council	10.3 (3)	Chief Inspector	6.9 (2)
BBC	6.9 (2)	Head of Protective Security Operations	3.4 (1)
Liverpool One	6.9 (2)	Detective Sergeant	3.4 (1)
Other police force (mutual aid) ¹	6.9 (2)	Police Search Coordinator	3.4 (1)
British Transport Police	3.4 (1)	Major Events Lead	3.4 (1)
Camp and Furnace	3.4 (1)	NVTMU Sergeant	3.4 (1)
DCMS	3.4 (1)	EPRR Team	3.4 (1)
Department for Transport	3.4 (1)	Physical Protective Security Adviser	3.4 (1)
Eventdesign.co	3.4 (1)	Head of Finance and Governance for ESC23 (Strategic Lead for Major Sports Events)	3.4 (1)
FGH Security	3.4 (1)	Head of Corporate Security	3.4 (1)
Home Office	3.4 (1)	Detective Sergeant	3.4 (1)
Maritime and Coastguard Agency	3.4 (1)	Head of ICT	3.4 (1)
Mersey Tunnel Police	3.4 (1)	Head of City Events	3.4 (1)
NHS	3.4 (1)	Head of City Assets	3.4 (1)
Other ²	3.4 (1)	Area Commander	3.4 (1)
		Regulatory and Compliance	3.4 (1)
		Sustainability Manager	3.4 (1)
		BBC Security Consultant	3.4 (1)
		Head of Events	3.4 (1)
		Constable (Events Planning)	3.4 (1)
		Director of Place	3.4 (1)
		Project Manager	3.4 (1)
		Visitor Experience Manager (Events)	3.4 (1)
		DfT Representative	3.4 (1)

¹ National Counter Terrorism and North West Regional Organised Crime Unit

² MI5

iii.) Interviews and focus groups

Practitioners involved in the planning and delivery of Eurovision were invited to participate in either an in-person or Teams semi-structured interview (or focus group, with colleagues). Interviews commenced in July 2023 and are currently ongoing (expected completion: end of November 2023). All interviews are audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Participants: To date, 32 practitioners have participated. They represent a range of roles (i.e. Area Commander, Bronze/ Silver/ Gold Commanders, Contingency Planner, CT Security Coordinator, Director, Fire Safety Inspector, Head Of Cruise and Operations, Head of Protective Security, ESC23 Managing Director, Safety Advisory Group Chair, Security Officer, Tactical Commanders, Traffic Management) and agencies (i.e. ACC Liverpool, BBC, Culture Liverpool, FGH Security, Liverpool City Council, Maritime and Coastguard Agency, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, Merseyside Police, NHS, TBI Media).

iv.) Policy documents

Relevant policy documents will be reviewed to understand the processes in place to facilitate a MA approach and information sharing between partners during a major event.

Initial Findings

As data collection and analysis is ongoing, initial findings from the i.) field observations, ii.) survey, and iii.) interviews and focus groups are summarised below.

i.) Field observations

During the observations of MA working and information sharing, it was evident that trust, relationships and communication were critical - and were facilitated by a dedicated time and space (i.e. MA meetings) and co-location (i.e. the Joint Command Centre).

ii.) Survey

MA working: 100% of participants stated that they engaged with other agencies for the planning and delivery of Eurovision. Of the 31 agencies identified by participants as the key agencies they worked with, the five most frequently mentioned were:

1. Merseyside Police (79.3%, n=23)
2. BBC (55.2%, n=16)
3. Culture Liverpool (51.7%, n=15)
4. Liverpool City Council (44.8%, n=13)
5. ACC Liverpool (34.5%, n=10)

When asked to rate how well they worked with partner agencies during Eurovision, most participants thought they worked 'well' or 'very well'; table 2 outlines the ratings and accompanying comments provided by participants.

Table 2. 'How well did working with partner agencies go during this event?': Participant ratings and views

Rating	% (n)	Supporting quote
Very well	62.1% (n=18)	<p>"...very experienced and competent" (P1)</p> <p>"Exceptional joint working with partners" (P3)</p> <p>"...all were extremely willing / driven to deliver a premium service to make the event run smoothly and safely... It was an outstanding environment to work within" (P5)</p> <p>"The relationships between partners agencies in Liverpool is well established, with existing relationships there is trust and knowledge to work together" (P11)</p> <p>"This was the best Multi Agency working I've come across. All parties were fully engaged and communicated well" (P12)</p> <p>"This was partner agency working at its very best. With such a short amount of time to plan, all agencies imaginable came together to ensure a safe event was implemented" (P17)</p>
Well	20.7% (n=6)	<p>"...this is the first large scale event we have been involved in. We have not got them established relationships yet..." (P9)</p> <p>"Exam excellent inter-agency cooperation and communication. However as always there were a few rogue factions who didn't seem to gel and cooperate as well as others..." (P29)</p>
Mixed experience	13.8% (n=4)	<p>"Relationships with some agencies were challenging due to frequently changing information and event profile..." (P4)</p> <p>"Good relationship with local partners... Some challenges working with other government departments due to other priorities, changing personnel and experience levels of working on major events" (P7)</p> <p>"Some partners were better than others with communication..." (P20)</p>
Not well	3.4% (n=1)	<p>"Poor priority given to communication and ownership of actions" (P19)</p>

Whilst working on the planning and delivery of Eurovision, participants reported identifying strongly with MA colleagues (strongly agree: 62.1%, n=18), as well as feeling a strong sense of connection (strongly agree: 65.5%, n=19) and solidarity (strongly agree: 58.6%, n=17).

MA meetings: 96.6% (n=28) attended MA meetings for Eurovision. Overall, participants found such meetings to be 'very useful' for several different reasons, including having an awareness of the wider planning (82.1%, n= 23), meeting partner agencies (78.6%, n= 22), developing (75.0%, n= 21) and strengthening (75.0%, n= 21) relationships with partners, sharing information (71.4%, n=20) and asking questions or seeking advice (71.4%, n=20).

Of those who attended MA meetings (n=28), 85.7% (n=24) attended both in person and online. Many of the participants who attended meetings in both formats (n=24) reported that attending in person was more effective in terms of MA working (45.8%, n=11) and information sharing (41.7%, n=10).

Information sharing: 100% (n=29) of participants shared information with partner agencies during Eurovision.

86.2% (n=25) did not have any security concerns when sharing information. Although 13.8% (n=4) did have security concerns, all participants (n=4) stated that their concerns were

alleviated. This was achieved through understanding the processes in place to ensure appropriate and secure information sharing (n=3):

“I was informed who at what stage could be shown the plans” (P20)

“Formally documented how the data should be handled and disseminated. Assigned a single point of contact for each agency... and shared the protocols with that individual” (P22).

Of the 28 agencies identified by participants as key agencies with whom they shared information, the five most frequently mentioned were:

1. Merseyside Police (69.0%, n=20)
2. Culture Liverpool (51.7%, n=15)
3. BBC (48.3%, n=14)
4. Liverpool City Council (34.5%, n=10)
5. ACC Liverpool (34.5%, n=10)

58.6% (n=17) found it easier to share information with certain agencies or individuals compared to others; of those (n=17), 58.8% (n=10) thought information sharing is facilitated by a combination of individual personalities and the processes they are engaged in, with 41.2% (n=7) indicating that it relies on individual personalities.

Reflections: 96.6% (n=28) of participants reported that the MA approach to Eurovision was a success. Participants explained why they deemed it to be a success, including:

- Delivery of a safe event:
 - “The majority of parties worked well together to achieve its aim of a safe and secure event” (P12)*
 - “...we were able to work together across all agencies to provide a safe enjoyable space for those that attended Eurovision” (P20)*
- Positive working environment:
 - “all of the key stakeholders worked together and were co located... This made information sharing easy and facilitates clear communication and a collective response” (P2)*
 - “Strong working relationships between partners. Information shared quickly between partners when needed” (P7)*
 - “All agencies worked well together understanding their individual roles...” (P26)*
 - “Felt welcome...” (P28).*
- Existing relationships and past experience:
 - *“I don’t think the event would’ve been delivered to the success it was or within the time scales if we didn’t have these relationships across the city established” (P15)*
 - “We have a well rehearsed template for what works well and there are certain individuals that always go above and beyond to support” (P16)*
 - “...We do “multi-agency” very well on Merseyside and I believe Eurovision absolutely proved this” (P17)*
- Reputational benefits:
 - “...feedback from BBC and EBU was that this was the most successful ESC in its history” (P4)*

“...The event has been well received locally, regionally, nationally and internationally, giving a positive impression of the city and its people” (P22)

58.6% (n=17) reported that they would do something differently for a similar event in the future. This related to:

- Having more time and resources:
 - *“More time to plan” (P11)*
 - *“...There was not sufficient resources or resilience...” (P16)*
 - *“...Confirm partner agencies plans earlier and ensure that adequate resilience is scoped and funded earlier in the process...” (P22)*
- Building stronger relationships, earlier:
 - *“We would be looking to build stronger relationships...” (P9)*
 - *“The earlier agencies can come together the better...” (P20)*
- Offering guidance and information about agency-specific processes:
 - *“conduct a training guide on how to use the portal to other agencies...” (P21)*
 - *“I would consider developing an overview of the policing planning process to partner agencies to give them an understanding of how we plan, timeframes and officer regs/ considerations etc so that they understand from the off why we need certain information and how it fits into our planning role” (P24)*
- Reviewing governance structures and processes:
 - *“The split responsibility at certain events did lead to some confusion over roles and responsibilities” (P12)*
 - *“Streamline attendance - One person to act as Spoc from each area / agency” (P13)*
 - *“Communicate directly with suppliers who were installing structures on our site rather than going via the partner” (P27)*

58.6% (n=17) identified both unexpected challenges and benefits to taking part in hosting and delivering ESC23. 86.2% (n=25) felt that their working relationship with other agencies has improved as a result of working together for this event.

iii.) Interviews and focus groups

Whilst data collection is ongoing and thematic analyses have yet to be completed, the following areas have been identified by the researchers as being consistently discussed by participants:

- i.) **Existing relationships:** The strength of the existing relationship between agencies was a significant factor in enabling an effective MA approach and delivery of a successful event. At the outset, the engagement from Merseyside Police and cooperation with Culture Liverpool and Liverpool City Council was an attractive factor in the decision-making for the final host city. Prior relationships and experience of working on citywide events offered a degree of ‘muscle memory’ in terms of implementing MA practices.
- ii.) **Building relationships:** An approach based on relationships, both existing and newly formed, was promoted by all participants as being the bedrock of the successful delivery of ESC23. These relationships were not only evident at the strategic and tactical levels, but through to those operationally deployed "on the

- ground" and permeating throughout organisations. Such relationships fostered trust, which was deemed critical in facilitating effective partnership working and information sharing. Relationships, trust and communication were also enhanced by co-location during the live events. For an event of this magnitude and with limited timescales, regular MA meetings were crucial (i.e. to meet partners).
- iii.) **The right people:** Individual attitudes and engagement were applauded for fostering an enthusiastic and determined work ethic amongst all agencies. This was driven by a "can-do" attitude and sense of city pride, with many participants emphasising the importance of having the right people in the right roles.
 - iv.) **Leadership and decision making:** Leadership and decision making also emerged from experiences of participants as important factors in MA working. How decision makers moved through the roles of being a leader, manager and commander in response to different challenges, and how being co-located allowed decision makers from different organisations to navigate varied incidents and challenges in collaboration was discussed.
 - v.) **Information sharing:** Having processes in place to facilitate information sharing is crucial, but the need for reassurance and trust are also a necessity, particularly when multiple agencies are involved (i.e. with varied internal processes) and different types of information (with varying degrees of risk and security) are shared. Generally, no concerns with information sharing during ESC23 were raised, with partners detailing various examples of real-time, effective MA information exchange that were facilitated by co-location and clear communication.
 - vi.) **Liverpool's MA approach:** Practitioners who are based outside of Liverpool and have extensive experience working in various locations and with different agencies, highly commended the MA approach for Eurovision adopted by local agencies.
 - vii.) **Learning and development:** Areas for improvement and learning to be applied to future events were considered. Whilst the strengths of the MA approach for Eurovision are plentiful, an approach based on relationships is not without challenges. Participants described occasions where "lines were blurred" and relationships entailed a bypassing of traditional lines of command and control. It was also recognised that there was a risk of limited resilience, in terms of relationships (i.e. loss of a contact when someone leaves the organisation or moves role), and a balance needed between having the best people in role whilst still developing future leaders and building corporate and experiential memory. The areas of ensuring longevity and building experience will be further analysed in the recommendations emanating from the analysis of the interview data.

Summary

This research set out to explore Liverpool's MA approach to ESC23, with a focus on MA relationships and information sharing. Initial insights from this research highlight the importance of various factors to ensure an effective approach, such as building new and strengthening existing relationships, the right people, co-location, and trust. There was an overwhelming sense of collaboration and enthusiasm, with participants talking about having a shared goal to deliver a safe and successful event that reflected positively on the city.

Once data analysis is complete, learning will be shared, focusing on what works well and what could be improved when multiple agencies work together to plan and deliver a large-scale live event.