

Who evaluates UK Cities and Capitals of Culture?

AUDIO CLIP TRANSCRIPT - Governance models

Jonothan Neelands, Professor, University of Warwick

I'm Jonothan Neelands. I'm Academic Director of Cultural Partnerships, University of Warwick, and Professor in the Business School, and I was the academic lead for research and evaluation for City of Culture 2021. So not just the impact evaluation, but the whole kind of programme which sits on our website.

Mark Scott, Research Fellow at Warwick Business School

I'm Mark Scott, and I'm currently a research fellow at Warwick Business School. I undertook the evaluation of Coventry City of Culture. But before that, I was the Monitoring and Data Manager for the City of Culture Trust in Coventry, so the lead responsible person within the delivery organisation for evaluation.

Jonothan Neelands, Professor, University of Warwick

I think it's that core problem of the temporary delivery organisation being at the heart of it, and responsibility being taken away from the city for the period of the programme. And I think a lot of the other problems, and a lot of the challenges that are made around evaluation of major events come from that core problem. And the ripples that then carry on carry on from that.

So it creates the illusion that the Trust, the temporary organisation on its own, can bring about the success, the ambitions that deliver it. And of course, it can't. But because of the way that it was set up, it meant our evaluation was basically evaluation of the Trust, not of the whole city, and what happened across the whole city and the contributions that others made. Now, once it becomes about the Trust, you begin to understand some of the other issues that have been raised around evaluation. So the Trust is very determined that evaluation should say what a great job the Trust is doing. And once you say what a great job the Trust is doing, the Trust, instead of wanting to be a temporary organisation wants now to become a permanent organisation.

Mark Scott, Research Fellow at Warwick Business School

But in terms of the positioning of any evaluation, I think the fundamental issue comes down to the identity crisis that Cities of Culture have at a local level. And I think that's

because obviously, when you're bidding for the City of Culture title, it's very much a piece of place marketing to get the title. So you big up, some of the issues that are in the city to say, and culture will tackle this, and culture will sort this and culture will hit all of these issues. But culture can't fix everything. But at that local level, because of what could have been promised in the bidding process means it's hard to position the evaluation to where it actually needs to sit properly.