

Selling the city or selling it out?

Mega-events rarely benefit those who need it most and often lead to forced evictions



Often local populations look in vain for the benefits to them when their cities host a mega-event. In Beijing for instance, many people have been displaced and their homes demolished to make room for magnificent Olympic buildings like the Bird's nest.

Photo: Scanpix/AFP

if they resist eviction, they often face brutal and violent intimidation or even being sentenced without any legal proceedings.

“Sport is good for you always”

According to Schimmel, the incitement to host a mega-event is the pursuit of social and economic benefits including benefits for the local population. Critics claim that a substantial part of the residents, mainly the lower class, experiences the downside more than the benefits.

Being critical towards sports mega events is not popular as the inherent beliefs that “Sport is good for you, sport creates better citizens, and sport benefits the community as a whole”, are extremely hard to argue against.

Kim Schimmel recommended that if mega-events are to retain public support and become more democratically accountable achievements, more accurate evaluations should be carried out, and social impact assessments and full public consultation should be practiced before submitting bids.

by Maria Suurballe

“There is not much to gain and a whole lot to lose.” Kim Schimmel, Associate Professor of the Sociology of Sport, Kent State University, was clear when she spoke at the mega-event session at Play the Game 2007. She believes there is no clear evidence that a mega-event creates any big economic profit.

“Sport mega-events are inherently controversial and problematic. They require massive infrastructural development, massive ideological support and massive funding, and all of this is usually pushed against a forced timeline,” Schimmel said.

Kim Schimmel agrees that some people will benefit from a mega-event, but it rarely tends to be the people who need it the most. On the other hand, when making up the account from hosting these big sports mega-events, she numbers a series of disadvantages: loss of public space, environmental damage and redirecting public money away from much needed social services.

Many forced evictions

A serious cost of hosting a mega-event is the forced evictions that are executed in the name of the progress.

According to the report, “Fair Play for Housing Rights: Mega Events, Olympic Games and Housing Rights”, published by the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions in 2007, 20 per cent of all forced evictions in 2004 were related to a mega-event.

As for the Olympic Games, more than two million people have been displaced in the last 20 years, disproportionately affecting minorities such as the homeless, the poor, Roma and African-Americans. Also in Beijing, there is ample evidence of people being forcefully evicted from their homes and forced to live in the street in order to make space for the Olympic Games.

China promised to approve its appalling human rights record, but in some ways, the Games have made things worse. The compensation people are offered for being evicted are pitifully low, and

World Cup 2006 research



According to Markus Kurscheidt, some cities benefitted economically from hosting the World Cup 2006.

It is possible for local communities to benefit economically from hosting a mega-event. Research carried out by economist Markus Kurscheidt from Ruhr-Bochum University in Germany on the FIFA 2006 World Cup shows that a positive legacy can be achieved only through careful and efficient management.

For international associations like the IOC and FIFA, mega-events are big money-spinners. “FIFA made a 2 billion euro turnover on World Cup 2006. When you look at the whole marketing chain of a world cup, it might even be double as a result of licences and so on,” says Kurscheidt.