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World Cup Add Topic

World Cup hosts, be careful what you wish for

Recent host cities of the Olympics and the World Cup endured damaging impacts: Opposing view

Sven Daniel Wolfe

Updated June 13, 2018, 7:22 p.m. ET

Mega-events such as the Olympics and the World Cup are global celebrations, and it is easy to get caught up in the excitement of the party. But behind the glory of sport lie severe risks that too often are ignored.

Even for wealthier nations such as those in North America, hosting means fulfilling a variety of infrastructure and security requirements, which include building or upgrading airports, roads and hotels. Despite organizers' promises and best intentions, these projects always cost more than planned.

While it might sound appealing to imagine an influx of investment into the host cities, the problem is that these investments target the short-term needs of the event and not necessarily the long-term needs of the people who live in the cities. It is not often the case that these needs overlap.

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Research shows that every recent host city of the Olympics and the World Cup has endured damaging urban impacts. Market-oriented democracies have fared better in being able to limit negative outcomes, but no host city emerged unscathed.

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Hosting mega-events also tends to exacerbate social inequalities, pushing marginalized people even further into the shadows as local public space is sanitized for the global audience. On top of this, the 2026 World Cup will be the first in history co-hosted by three nations and featuring 48 teams.

Despite the rhetoric of international cooperation that comes alongside this expansion, is sport really the best forum for either urban development or diplomacy? Will trade wars cease and border walls fall just because the nations share hosting? Given these dangers, does it make sense to risk busted budgets, broken cities and marginalized citizens all just for a party?

Sven Daniel Wolfe is a researcher with the Institute of Geography and Sustainability at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland.

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