

CHANGING THE GAME:

A critical analysis of Mega Sport Events

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Learning the lessons of history, discussing the challenges of the present and re-evaluating the role and impact of Mega Sport Events.

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Sport has a tremendous – and in many ways unique – power to unite. So-called ‘mega sport events’, such as the World Cup and the Olympic and Paralympic Games, can spread that spirit of unity in mega-ways. These events gather thousands of athletes and millions of fans. They attract media attention and inspire people from all over the globe. It is a privilege for countries to host such events. Their influence can also extend far beyond the world of sports. With planning and vision, mega sport events can advance social development, economic growth, educational opportunity and environmental protection. They also provide a platform to promote the values and objectives of the United Nations, including peace and human rights. As we look ahead, mega sport events can and should contribute to realizing the newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals. This will not happen on its own. Ample experience has shown that the benefits of mega sport events have not always been long-lasting, sustainable or widely shared. It is therefore crucially important that we learn the lessons of this history

Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon

We believe that the infrastructure of the 21st century must foster inclusive growth and social equity. It must provide value for money and value for people, combine decent jobs with gender equality and deliver high quality public goods and services. The governance of infrastructure should also be transparent and

accountable to beneficiaries, from project appraisal to delivery, operations and maintenance.

Mega Sport Events (MSEs) are a special kind of 21st century infrastructure. They involve a complex process which includes implementing different types

of infrastructure (sports and non-sports related); a multitude of stakeholders involved in bidding, preparation and delivery (governments, international sports organisations, corporate sponsors, construction firms); and costs which have grown exponentially over the years. While France spent under US \$ 30 million to host the 1998 World Cup, it is estimated that Qatar will spend between US \$ 220 to US \$ 222 billion to deliver the 2022 tournament.

MSEs merit close attention for other reasons too. Corruption scandals involving host governments and sports organisations abound, from bribery in the selection of host countries and contract awards, to illegal ticket schemes. Human rights abuses are also extensive and claims of modern day slavery have been raised in the preparation of almost every event, including those implemented in developed countries (“[The Dark Side of the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics](#)”). We may have reached a point where hosting MSEs may not be economically or socially defensible.

Firstly, this is because the tangible economic benefits generated by sports facilities are sometimes *minor*, a fact that is intensified by the curse of ‘white elephant’ projects with little use to the public after the events. It is also debatable whether sports facilities can be considered a conventional form of public good, built to meet the general public interest. Regardless of that, large sums of public money continue to be allocated to the construction of infrastructure required for MSEs without proper accountability and control.



The World Cup’s contribution to economic growth has been negligible. It was great fun. Nothing more, nothing less

Gert Wagner, Director of the German Institute for Economic Research



Our approach to the World Cup has been that it was never going to be a revenue raising exercise. Certainly it would be wrong to view the World Cup as a significant contributor in itself. The concessions we had to give to FIFA are simply too demanding and overwhelming for us to have material monetary benefits

Adrian Lackey, South African Revenue Services (page 137)

MSEs also demand the construction of non-sports related infrastructure. This means airports, roads, ports, metros and rail networks are built to support the events, which may not have a function after they are over. But instead of being treated as a public matter, investment in MSEs remain insulated and are rarely open to citizen scrutiny at the design and implementation stages.

Labour abuse is another reason for major concern. Host countries typically experience a massive influx of migrant workers during the preparation stages – sources refer to at least **1.8 million migrant workers in Qatar** –, but governments, sponsors, sports organisers and construction companies tend to turn the blind eye to discussions related to labour standards, unsustainable employment and the vulnerability of the workforce.

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic made a bad situation worse. Low-wage migrant workers with no access to health care continue to work and live in poor, unsanitary conditions. Social distancing is a luxury they cannot afford. **Even after cases have been confirmed** by the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, FIFA did not request any action from authorities or businesses to improve the substandard

labour conditions. Teaming up with the World Health Organization for a “[health comes first](#)” campaign, when no reference had been made to workers in its [public statement](#), is a gesture of public handwashing by FIFA which signals to the world that marketing trumps safety.



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But how workers will keep social distances since every day they have to go factory were more than 200 peoples are working together and sharing same bus !!!! Please think about workers also,they are also human.Please implement total lockdown atleast for 14 days or send them back 🙏

1:26 AM - 23 Mar 2020

Qatari Worker reported by Foreign Policy

These features make MSEs an unconventional form of public infrastructure in the 21st century, which require a critical analysis with less rhetoric and more data. As citizens become increasingly vocal in their opposition to MSEs being held in their communities, the argument that MSEs can spread a “*spirit of unity*” and advance the Sustainable Development Goals cannot be taken at face value.

One of our goals is to produce innovative evidence-based research that can feed into policy discussions and help create the conditions for change. Given the huge costs associated with MSEs and the apparent low return to taxpayers, providing an objective assessment of MSEs is essential to improving policy and practise around these events. We will do this whilst considering their level of transparency, value for money and value for people.

In addition, the high level of visibility generated by MSEs – the World Cup in Russia drew [3.5 billion viewers](#) around the world – can be used to bring attention to reforming the way MSE infrastructure is designed and implemented, leading to long-term improvements and

a positive legacy that can hopefully go beyond the infrastructure itself.

With abuses regularly reported in Qatar and a [growing financial pressure on the world of sport](#) due to the temporary stoppage of games and other restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, we have chosen to kick-off our *EAP Insights* series with a focus on MSEs.

The MSE briefings includes a series of three focussing on the topics labour exploitation, corruption and the lack of social accountability in the delivery of MSE infrastructure. Over the course of this series, we will develop policy and governance recommendations which can offer guidance to stakeholders involved in these events. Our intention is to learn from the lessons of history, discuss the challenges of the present and trigger a reflection which re-evaluates the role and impact of MSEs.

There are many perspectives to examine MSEs which fall within [our areas of work and expertise](#). One relates to the governance of MSEs and the design arrangements which can create opportunities for corruption, leading to cost overruns and collusive practices. Another is a lack of citizen and stakeholder participation which limits scrutiny and social accountability during the design and delivery of MSEs. The social legacies left by MSEs bring into question issues of inclusion, growth and (un)fair opportunity. These are complementary topics that help to pinpoint the many risks associated with MSEs. For the first Insights briefing in the MSE series we focus on an issue of social equity that appears time and time again: labour exploitation during the construction of infrastructure associated with MSEs.