

Cultural mega-events can adversely affect local residents

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This research was conducted by **Lasse Steiner, Bruno Frey and Simone Hotz** at the **University of Zurich, Switzerland**

Summary

This paper looked at what happens to people when their region hosts the European Capital of Culture (ECOC). Such events often involve a great deal of public investment, a programme of activity and some infrastructure development. This can demand an investment of hundreds of millions of Euros. All this stimulates economic activity: there are more jobs and people spend more. This paper looks beyond economics, and specifically at social welfare: the impact of hosting the ECOC on the wellbeing of residents in the host region or city. While ECOCs may increase economic activity, they have an overall negative impact on life satisfaction in that place during the year they are in operation.

Life satisfaction can increase as well as decrease

It might increase from a sense of pride, enjoyment of an improved cultural offer, enhanced local facilities and increased economic activity. It may decrease as a result of the disruption and pollution that such events inevitably generate.

The researchers analysed 30 years data from 24 countries that included 14 ECOCs. They simply looked at the relationship between a region hosting an ECOC and its relationship to life satisfaction, as measured in a long-running pan-European survey.

The research found that hosting the ECOC actually decreased life satisfaction

Looking at research into mega-events more widely, the authors suggest this may be the result of disruption, overcrowding, an increase in crime, rent and house prices and the diverting of funds away from local services that benefit local people. The negative impact is likely to be especially felt by the poorer people in those cities (who tend not to take advantage of the cultural opportunities the ECOC generates). The research also found that there was no legacy effect on life satisfaction two years after a region had hosted the ECOC: after this time people were neither more happy nor more unhappy.

Keywords

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