

## The Football World Cup 2018 as a booster of fame through media on the web for the city of Ekaterinburg?

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### Introduction

How Ekaterinburg is currently mentioned in media available through the web when talking about the upcoming Football World Championship 2018 in Russia? This topic is interesting as large events such as the Football Cup are said to be a booster for development and the image of a city and so, the huge amount of costs for the preparations of the event are leveraged by the organizing bodies. It is thus in the interest of the investing private and public institutions to realize these promises.

By focusing on and analyzing this issue, the simple method of web search was applied.

I am currently living in Ekaterinburg for a period of 5 ½ months to write my master thesis about the allocation of resources by the city of Ekaterinburg within large events and if these investments are actually boosting urban development as advertised. These events include in Ekaterinburg the upcoming Football Cup in 2018 and the passed BRICS- summit in 2009.

I am writing my thesis in the research group of Space & Organization at the University of Zurich with Prof. Dr. Martin Müller as its head. Here in Ekaterinburg, I am collaborating with Prof. Dr. Elena Trubina from the Institute of Social and Political Studies at the Ural Federal University.

The main purpose of my stay is to get access and to analyse documents and carry out interviews with representative people in administration and linked to large events. Also, it offers me the chance to learn the Russian language.

After the completion of my master studies this summer, I would like to work in the sector of urban development, if possible in Russia.

### General discourse of why hosting a mega- event

As it is advertised by event governing bodies, mega- events such as the Football World Cup shall bring a lot of benefits for hosting places: They shall act as an immense catalyst for regional and urban development and give momentum to investment for infrastructure such as transport and living areas. This shall result in economic development, reducing poverty and improvement of quality of life for the local population.

(Andranovich and Burbank 2011, Ernst and Young 2011, Gaffney 2010, Zubko 2010) Among these benefits, it is also said that through the improvement of the level of wealth of a city, mega- events draw international attention to the hosting places and produce a good image. (Kinossian 2012, Makarychev and Yatsyk 2014, Preuss 2004) This should give an incentive for cities to apply.

### **“Case study” - Question and method**

Consequently, there can be put the following question: Does this image boost apply for Ekaterinburg? To look for an answer , I scanned the web through Google if and when Ekaterinburg is mentioned together with The World Cup 2018. I did this in the languages I have learnt: German, English, French, Spanish and Romanian. I typed in Google the words “Ekaterinburg World Cup 2018” or the corresponding translations “Ekaterinburg WM 2018”, “Iekaterinbourg championnat football 2018”, “Ekaterimburgo copa fútbol 2018” and “Ekaterinburg campionat fotbal 2018”. Of course, a lot of results were expected to be shown, but to get the best matches, the first 2 Google pages were considered.

### **Results**

In the following, I am showing for each language what main kind of information I found regarding my search commands. If similar results were found in another language, they are shown together. Through this, it will be possible to describe after the more general situation how Ekaterinburg is currently represented on the web when talking about the World Cup 2018.

Of course, there are the official sites which represent the locations, ambassadors and stadiums in nice ways like these first examples. It contains a lot of information with pictures about Ekaterinburg and its role as the host for the World Cup 2018. But in the case of this research, I was more interested in media representation outside of FIFA and World Cup Websites. Neither did I focus on sides which were specially created for services during the event such as tourist organisations, as the third example shows.

It goes without saying that there are also articles which are negatively reporting about the preparations, like this one about the downsizing of seat and training capacity due to saving measures. The most critical report which coming up with this search command, however, is a comment by Prof. Dr. Martin Müller describing the critical financial situation of the preparations in Ekaterinburg.

As a positive example, I could find not just news media, but also forums and blogs in different languages where the city and its usability to host the World Cup was discussed already in 2010 and after. Also, there are traveling agencies who advertise the city and mention the World Cup as an upcoming event.

Generally, in every language (examples in German, French and Romanian) there was a vast amount of articles where Ekaterinburg was mentioned in the end of the article with all other hosts and maybe also when it was about distances, as it is, like I said, the most Eastern city in the Cup.

## Synthesis

Interestingly, matches of big media sites were rare and if, they were of Russian origin. However, information going beyond the listing and the stadium were found in every language. Most of these sites were topic and football related sites, though. On more general news sites, a lot of critical reports were found. One of the advantages for Ekaterinburg to get mentioned more than others is that it is the most Eastern city and false information about its location in Asia is circulating.

At this point, I would like to mention one specific Swiss example:

<http://www.nzz.ch/lebensart/reise/von-moerdern-und-monumenten-1.18685385>

This is a recent article in one of the biggest and most reputable newspapers in Switzerland. It advertises the city Ekaterinburg as a travel destination, but the World Cup is not mentioned in one single word. It shows for me in a very exemplary way that the non- football- related public is not seeing the place of where the Cup will take place as a city with character, culture and attraction. If this will change until the Cup is to be seen.

## Reasons?

Why has Ekaterinburg not got fame status through the World Cup? As I heard from my thesis supervisor Martin Müller who has been in contact with representative staff and visited Ekaterinburg this autumn, but also from my own experience by asking local residents, the World Cup is yet not very present in the heads of Ekaterinburg. And if, I have heard a lot of complaints about the huge amount of money invested for the stadium which was already expensively renovated. Thus, the media broadcasting of the event linked to the city may not have developed.

This opinion is reinforced by the current critical voices about the event which I mentioned in the results. - <http://www.playthegame.org/news/comments/2014/world-cup-russia-2018-headingtowards-excesses/> (Russian Google) - <http://footballperspectives.org/2018-world-cup-russia-heading-towards-excesses>

This article I already mentioned before was published on 2./25.06.2014 on these sites and represents a comment by Prof. Dr. Martin Müller about the World Cup 2018. I will quote a short extract:

“Since opposition candidate Evgeniy Roizman became mayor of Ekaterinburg in 2013 and ousted the incumbent from the party United Russia, the debate has become more heated. He has fuelled controversies

over whether it would be cheaper and less detrimental to the protected architecture to build a new stadium rather than revamp the existing one. Roizman is even skeptical of Ekaterinburg hosting the World Cup at all: "I don't know if it's worth spending 12 to 15 billion [USD \$390 to \$490 million] for four games in Ekaterinburg. I wouldn't hurry to open the city budget to fund an enormous international event that the city might not be interested in." (Quote from the mentioned Websites)

Other reasons could also be what scholars have shown: there are 3 typical reasons of hosting an event, but they do not apply to Russia or the Football World Cup 2018. The boost of "urban entrepreneurialism" as a first phenomenon plays a marginal role, as the process of preparation is mainly led by the state. Market mechanisms play thus an unimportant role. Coordination for the event is led by Ministry of Sports, which has established two separate organisations: first, the Local Organising Committee (LOC) responsible for the operational aspects of the event preparation and being the connecting element to FIFA. Second, the Sport Engineering which is a federal enterprise dealing with issues around the football stadia.

Moreover, even the cities themselves have a small stake: It is the regional and the central government that could steer development by planning and supervising preparations. Neither does the phenomenon of "spectacle" apply to the World Cup. It shall show a unified society without inequalities in the interest of capital accumulation. But the mega- event in Sochi with this aim is still very recent and the current recession is forcing the government to save money, even more when regarding the poor excitement of Russia for football.

## **Conclusion**

It can be concluded that the current representation of Ekaterinburg is not as it could be expected from the advertisement of hosting the event: the city is present on football- related topics and on sites with Russian origin, but marginally or mentioned in a criticizing way by general international news. So, it is badly advertised. The advantage of the city is to be the most Eastern host so when it is about distance, the city name is appearing more often. This is concerning, as the huge investments done and planned to be done by the city should get a reward with development and with international attention. However, it is too early to call it a fail of image construction as the event is not very present on public and even not on administrative levels.

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