

Transformation of Public Space into Private Space during the World Soccer Championship 2006 in Germany

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Abstract

In this article, the commercial use of sports venues is examined as a means to explore the commercialization and privatization of urban spaces through marketing and sponsorship at public events. It reveals how Berlin was dominated by commercialization during the World Soccer Championship 2006 in Germany in several ways.

Sponsorship of the World Soccer Championship

Everywhere in our cities public spaces are imprinted with advertisements for brand names. Facades of buildings as well as whole buildings are often plastered with a single, gigantic ad. Even public festivals and events now have sponsors who demand to display their logos in public space. Municipalities often see sponsors as a chance to realize cultural events but they do not realize that at the same time they hand over the responsibility for the public space to the private sector. During the World Soccer Championship 2006 in Germany, Berlin and other German cities were dominated by commercialization in several ways. Besides flags and soccer balls being displayed everywhere huge banners and advertisements dominated the public spaces.

The international sponsors of the championship were adidas, Anheuser-Busch, Avaya, Coca-Cola, Continental, Deutsche Telekom, Emirates, Fujifilm, Gillette, Hyundai, MasterCard, McDonalds, Philips, Toshiba and Yahoo. Each of these enterprises paid approximately 40 million Euro, in order to be allowed to use the World Championship exclusively for advertising purposes. This included the board advertisement in the stadiums and the use of the official WM (Weltmeisterschaft) logos internationally.

“Public“ Viewing

Another effect of the commercialization of public space during the championship was the commercial closing-off of public spaces and streets. Several areas were closed to the traffic and transformed into commercial areas featuring common viewing of the soccer games on large screens. People could not enter these publicly owned but privately run spaces freely. Everyone was searched for items that were not allowed inside, this often included drinks and food. Therefore visitors were forced to buy their drinks inside these self-contained areas which reinforced the commercialization. At some public viewing locations an entrance fee was required.

Viewing in the Fan Zone

The core zone of public viewing in Berlin was called “Fanmeile,” a part of the central street called “Strasse des 17. Juni“ which is located in the central park of Berlin, the Tiergarten. The stretch of one mile from the Brandenburg Gate to the Victory Column was closed off to the traffic for the four weeks of the championship. Numerous screens were set up in this area. Tens of thousands of people could watch the games at the same time in this space.



Fig. 1: Fan Zone at Brandenburg Gate

One of the main viewing areas was around the Brandenburg Gate. The gate is directly located at the former border of East and West Berlin, and it therefore is an important symbol of Berlin and the reunification. During the championship it was wholly covered with advertisements, with a television screen put in the middle. The Brandenburg Gate could not be seen anymore. The banners and the screen blocked the view of the historic axis.



Fig. 2: Viewing “Gate” in Fan Zone

Different viewing stations were set up along the avenue. They all looked like gates, in a way mimicing the Brandenburg Gate. Each one was sponsored by a company that displayed its logo and dominated the space visually.



Fig. 3: Viewing Area in Fan Zone

The relationship of the television screen to the advertisement “gate” was disproportional and out of scale. There was much more space reserved for advertisement than for the original purpose of this event: watching the games on tv screens in public space. Due to increased attention while watching a game people were especially receptive. This way the unconscious impact through advertisement was intensified. This mechanism also worked through peripheral seeing and perceiving of the gigantic ads surrounding the screens. The size of the banners amplified this phenomenon.



Fig. 4: Advertisement in Fan Zone

In addition to the banners surrounding the screens there was constant advertisement on the screens during the breaks of the game. During the games, the boards of the stadiums were covered with banners and logos of the sponsors which spectators inevitably saw while watching the game. In some cases the boards turned over after some seconds, so that three times as many advertisements could be accommodated on the surface. The advertisement on the boards had originally been invented for tv watchers.

Consumption in the Fan Zone

The selection of the vending booths in the fan zone was regulated. The operating companies had to pay enormous fees in order to set up a stand and sell their products. Therefore it was obvious that mainly the sponsors and big companies got permission and could afford their presence in this viewing area. They not only dominated the space visually with advertisements, they also regulated what people consumed here. Therefore

it was not possible to buy local drinks from small micro breweries or local lemonade producers in the whole fan zone. (In Germany it is allowed to drink alcohol in public space.) There were no water fountains installed, it was not allowed to bring drinks in, it was a hot summer, so visitors had to buy drinks, another factor of the commercialization.



Fig. 5: Vending Booth in Fan Zone

Scale in the Fan Zone

Not only the gate but also the soccer ball as a symbol of the championship was used for advertisement. Blown up balls covered with commercial symbols dominated the space. The fan zone did not relate to the human scale. In parts visitors were surrounded by huge advertisement walls. Being in the middle of the central park of Berlin it was not possible to see or experience it.



Fig. 6: Huge Boards in Fan Zone

Beyond the Fan Zone

Even the television tower was temporarily covered with a soccer ball. This tower represents one of the mayor landmarks of Berlin and can be seen from a very far distance. This “decoration“ was not neutral because it featured the colors of the main telecommunication company. The magenta color would be subtly associated with its products. This meant commercialization to a large degree not only in the fan zone but beyond.



Fig. 7: Television Tower

“Land of Ideas”

In addition to massive advertisement in the fan zone and other public viewing areas, in subways, streets, newspapers etc, an event called “Walk of Ideas“ was installed in the central area of Berlin over the summer. Six giant objects were placed in certain locations around the fan zone to promote the country of Germany as a “Land of Ideas.“ This initiative was “sponsored by the German government and commerce and industry, represented by the German Industry Association (BDI) and leading corporations.” The topics featured were called “Innovative Football Boots,” “Milestones of Medicine,” “The Automobile,” “Modern Book Printing,” “Masterpieces of Music” and “The Theory of Relativity.” The objects were exhibited at prominent locations. Each of the works was up to 12 meters in height and weighted up to 20 tonnes. They were made using a plastic material called Neopor®.

The object “Modern Book Printing” signified Gutenberg’s idea of the printing press. It was placed on the Bebelplatz near Humboldt University. This is the location where on 10 May 1933 National Socialists burned books of unwanted authors.



Fig. 8: “Book Printing”

The object “The Theory of Relativity“ was placed in front of the Altes Museum. It symbolized Albert Einstein’s ideas on physics. It had no relationship to this art museum and should have been positioned in front of a university or laboratory.



Fig. 9: “Theory of Relativity”

An object composed of giant notes called “Masterpieces of Music” was situated on the Gendarmenmarkt in front of a concert hall. A gigantic object resembling an automobile was displayed in front of the Brandenburg Gate before being moved to a different site due to the closing off of the street for the fan zone. The form of it reminded of a certain car that had just come out before the championship. This could be interpreted as a very subtle promotion of this product.

The object "Innovative Football Boots" was located in the Spreebogenpark near the new Berlin Central Station. The topic showed an invention by Adi Dassler who had developed soccer shoes that provided particularly firm grip on the soft ground that was soaked with rain. It is obvious that this object drew a connection between the championship and the product, but yet it only stood for a singular accomplishment of one of the main sponsors.



Fig. 10: "Football Boots"

The object entitled "Milestones in Medicine" featured a giant pill. The shape and the engraved cross very subtly reminded of a product by one of the national sponsors.



Fig. 11: "Medicine"

The objects in the cycle "Walk of Ideas" were to represent Germany as a country of ideas. However, the topics featured here were highly selective. Most objects showed blown up abstractions of industrial products. Due to a very little degree of abstraction they could easily be recognized and associated with a certain company. Therefore the aspect of advertisement seemed to be obvious. Through this selection and representation visitors received the one-sided impression that Germany mainly is a country of economy and business. This was reinforced by the fact that other aspects that make up a country were left out in this concept.

The objects were called "pieces of art" by the initiators but as revealed above they could easily be interpreted as disguised advertisements. This suggests the assumption that enterprises could not only promote their products and their image, but they could do this in the name of art. This certainly has nothing to do with the original idea and concept of art as a free, pluralistic and liberal way of thinking. The "Walk of Ideas" triggered off numerous debates. Artists felt being excluded of this "art project." They called the concept, process and realization hypocritical. Many citizens also did not feel represented by Germany being mainly presented as a country of economy.

Dominance of Economic Interests

The fan zone and the "Walk of Ideas" were gigantic events that were designed and dominated by economic interests under the cloak of public interest. Due to their size and presence in the city center they demanded a lot of space and attention. The center became a standardized area that hardly showed what Germany had to offer besides commercial products. It did not provide the space or the spirit of a public and local form of celebrating a festival. Local spirit was banned from the inner city. Therefore the

perception of Berlin during the championship was single-sided and always associated with the sponsors.

There were, however, many creative initiatives and spontaneous activities in the neighborhoods during the time of the championship. All the factors that make up urban life took place in numerous public spaces outside the city center through small-scale activities. Locals and visitors celebrated viewing, partying, sports and hospitality in a non-commercial manner in these locations. This was where the real land of ideas took place in a pluralistic, creative, inclusive and diverse way.

Commercialization is a process, during which economic criteria win a stronger influence in relation to idealistic aspects. The original motivation of athletes is mostly of idealistic nature. But the marketing of the sport has become increasingly more important, and the influence of brands and sponsors has become more and more powerful. Therefore the original idealistic objectives disappeared due to commercial considerations. The Soccer World Championship was used, almost misused, by sponsors. Multinational companies regulated the deals with the soccer stars, the marketing of souvenirs, the coverage rights, the advertising, and the utilization of space. In addition the monitoring industry used the event to introduce and refine observation devices and strategies in public space.

This development is not limited to Berlin, the world soccer championship, or sports. There exists a general tendency for privatization, commercialization, observation and manipulation in public space.

Outlook

When commercialization dominates the public space, a variety of points of view can no longer be heard. Communities have to reserve spaces free of commercialism, especially during a public event that attracts many visitors. Citizens have to be able to congregate or exchange ideas on an equal footing, and where those with the most money and influence do not necessarily speak in the loudest voice and dominate the space visually. Advertising is manipulative, and cities have to treat citizens equitably, neutrally, and fairly without the manipulation of private commercialization.

One essential quality of public open space is accessibility for everyone. Public spaces, that are only accessible to a limited part of the population, that are only serving one function, that are dominated by commercialization, or that require an entrance fee are not truly public. They have been transformed into temporary private spaces.

References

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