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Vision & Intelligence

EVIDENCE BRIEF
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EVIDENCE BRIEF · DESTINATIONS AND IMPACT

Applause Abroad, Resistance at Home

Do mega-events win local legitimacy?

Mega-events are staged for two audiences: the world, which hosts court for image and competitiveness, and the host community, whose consent the event needs. Studies of Olympic Games and FIFA World Cups show that hosts can gain image abroad, while support at home must be earned through venue design and event strategy.

By Eventamin · How we work 12 November 2026 Worldwide, UK, South Africa, Qatar

4 studies · 4 industry sources

mega-events | Olympic Games | FIFA World Cup | host city | community resistance | social license | soft power | destination competitiveness | venue legacy | event-driven hotel demand

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KEY FINDING

Organized local resistance has accompanied every recent Olympic Games, driven by costs, evictions, environmental damage and security measures. Hosts earn local legitimacy where venue design and event strategy answer these concerns, and international image can improve during an event.

Four studies of four Olympic Games and two World Cups, 2013–2025; industry data 2026

Key findings

- **Resistance is the norm.** Organized resistance accompanied all ten Summer and Winter Olympic Games from Beijing 2008 to Beijing 2022, driven by costs, evictions, environmental damage and security measures[1].
- **Venue design can answer the cost concern.** Of the 36 competition venues of the London 2012 Olympic Games, six were new permanent buildings, around ten were existing venues and the rest temporary or adapted[2].
- **London built more temporary space than earlier hosts.** The temporary venue area of London 2012 was 2.5 times that of Sydney 2000 and four times that of Athens 2004 and Beijing 2008[2].
- **Strategy decides whether a host gains.** All 20 tourism stakeholders interviewed in Tshwane before the 2010 FIFA World Cup considered an event strategy essential for the city's competitiveness[3].
- **International image can improve during an event.** During the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, positive posts on cultural inclusion and alcohol rose by 123 percent between the opening and closing days, and negative posts fell by 40 percent[4].

FOR THE MARKET

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Market outcomes

What the studies mean for each part of the industry.

Venues & destinations	Reuse of existing venues and temporary construction are the most visible answers to concerns about unused venues after the event. A venue plan published with its post-event use addresses the objection before it forms.
Hotels	Event demand and displaced demand occur together in host cities: corporate and group business may avoid a city during a mega-event. Forecasts gain accuracy when both are modeled.
Investors & advisers	Local legitimacy and international image are separate risks that move independently and are best assessed separately.
Organisers & associations	For bid teams, organized opposition is a planning assumption from the bid stage. Engaging existing movements on costs, housing and security comes before coalitions form against the event.

Mega-events and the demand they move

The business case for mega-events rests on demand that can turn. CoStar and Tourism Economics raised their 2026 forecast for U.S. hotel performance partly because of the FIFA World Cup and the America 250 celebrations[5]. At the same time, some hotels in host cities lost corporate and group business that avoided those cities during the events[6].

Regional conflict shows how quickly event demand can move. Arabian Travel Market in Dubai was postponed to August 2026 and Middle East Energy to September, and international arrivals in the Middle East fell by 22 percent in the first half of 2026, according to UN Tourism[7,8]. Whether a host wins consent at home and image abroad decides whether the next bid goes ahead.

Resistance in host cities

Organized resistance has become a recurring feature of the Olympic Games. A review of documents covering ten Summer and Winter Games, from Beijing 2008 to Beijing 2022, found resistance in every host city[1]. It identified 25 tactics, from marches and street theater to dedicated websites, livestreams and alliances with trade unions, and 26 reasons[1].

Most reasons recur at every Games: economic cost, displacement through evictions and gentrification, environmental damage and the security measures imposed on the city[1]. Beijing 2008 alone displaced an estimated 1.5 million people for infrastructure projects[1]. Other reasons are local, such as Indigenous rights in Vancouver and LGBTQI+ rights in Sochi[1].

Resistance usually grows out of existing social movements, which then form coalitions such as London's Counter Olympics Network and Rio de Janeiro's Popular Committee[1]. Its claims are mostly directed at the organizing committees and governments that deliver the projects. For hosts, legitimacy is therefore negotiated with organized local coalitions rather than with a passive public.

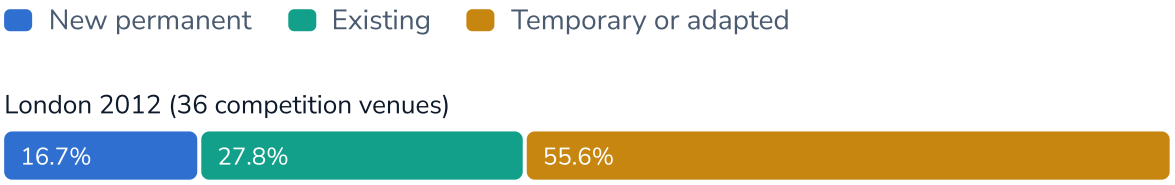
Venue design and event strategy

London 2012 shows how venue design can answer the most common objection. Concern about venues left unused after the Games shaped the venue strategy: only six of 36 competition venues were new permanent buildings, around ten were existing venues and the rest were temporary or adapted[2]. The program set a target of reusing or recycling 90 percent of demolition waste and achieved 98 percent, and the Olympic Park was planned around its post-Games use[2].

The main stadium shows the limits of the approach. Planned to shrink from 80,000 to 25,000 seats after the Games, it was rebuilt for a Premier League football club as anchor tenant[2].

Competition venues of the London 2012 Olympic Games, by type

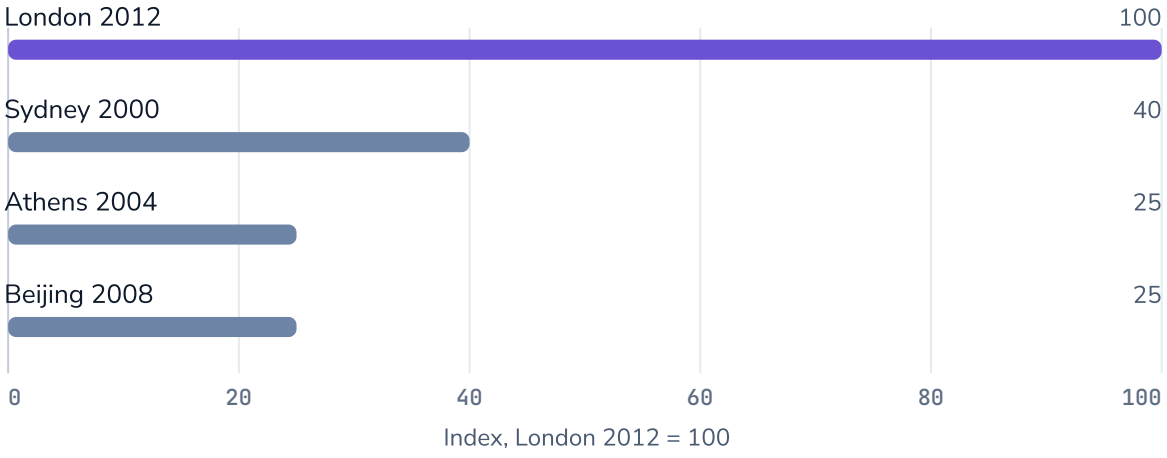
Share of 36 competition venues.



Source: Thiel & Grabher · Release date: 2015 · Region: United Kingdom (London) · Number of interviews: 34

Temporary venue area of Summer Olympic Games from 2000 to 2012 compared with London 2012

Index: London 2012 = 100.



Source: Thiel & Grabher · Release date: 2015 · Region: Worldwide

Event strategy and competitiveness

A mega-event raises a destination's competitiveness only as part of a wider strategy. All 20 tourism stakeholders interviewed in the City of Tshwane, South Africa, before the 2010 FIFA World Cup considered an event strategy essential,

together with strong leadership and clearly defined roles[3]. The city had no regional tourism organization, and its own event strategy was on hold pending a national one[3]. A temporary tourism action team was the partial remedy, praised by eight of the 20 interviewees[3].

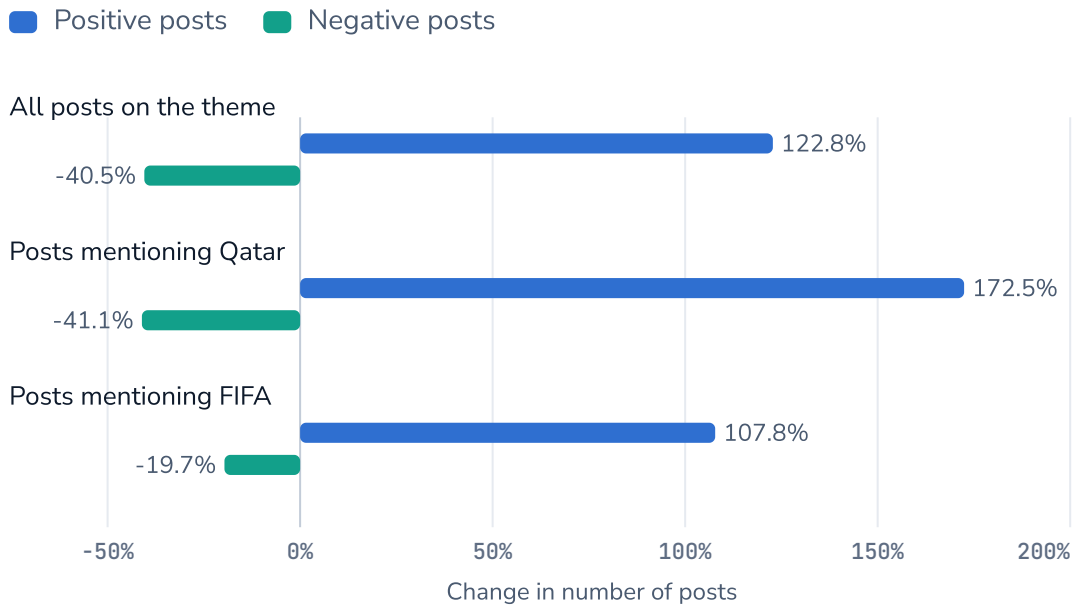
International image during the event

A host's international image can improve during the event. An analysis of 370,397 social media posts on four themes around the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar found that, between the opening and closing days, positive posts on cultural inclusion and alcohol rose by 123 percent and negative posts fell by 40 percent[4]. The improvement was stronger in posts mentioning Qatar, with positive posts up 172 percent[4].

Posts mentioning FIFA improved less: negative posts fell by only 20 percent, and the theme still carried the most negative posts of the four analyzed[4]. Results on security and geopolitics were affected by events beyond the host's control[4]. Image abroad can shift during an event, but it is not the same as consent at home.

Change in social media posts on cultural inclusion and alcohol during the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar, by sentiment

Change between the opening and closing days of the tournament.



Source: Farrag et al. · Release date: 2025 · Region: Worldwide · Survey period: November to December 2022 · Number of posts analyzed: 370,397

Notes on the data

The figures are based on four studies published between 2013 and 2025: a review of documents on ten Olympic Games from 2008 to 2022, 34 interviews on the London 2012 construction program, 20 interviews in Tshwane before the 2010 FIFA World Cup and a sentiment analysis of 370,397 social media posts on the 2022 FIFA World Cup [1–4]. No study measures resident support before and after an event among the same people, and social media sentiment is not a measure of local consent. The temporary area index is calculated from the ratios reported for London 2012. Industry figures on hotels, event postponements and arrivals are taken from press coverage and publishers' summaries.

Sources

● Study ○ Industry source

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2 Thiel, J., & Grabher, G. (2015). Crossing boundaries: Exploring the London Olympics 2012 as a field-configuring event [Journal article]. *Industry and Innovation, 22(3), 229–249*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13662716.2015.1033841 First-hand

3 Kruger, E. A., & Heath, E. T. (2013). Along came a mega-event: Prospects of competitiveness for a 2010 FIFA World Cup host city [Journal article]. *Current Issues in Tourism, 16(6), 570–590*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2012.714748 First-hand

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The evidence

4 studies · 4 industry sources

SAMPLE

Four studies: documents on ten Olympic Games, 54 stakeholder interviews and 370,397 social media posts

YEARS

2013–2025 (studies); 2026 (industry data)

METHOD

Document analysis of Olympic resistance, case studies of London 2012 and Tshwane 2010, sentiment analysis of Qatar 2022

About Eventamin

Eventamin reads the peer-reviewed research on events, exhibitions and hospitality, sets it against industry data and states what it means for the market. Every brief is published by Eventamin as an organisation: its sources, method and corrections are open.

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