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All hell breaks loose in the cities

Well over 100,000 Dutch football fans visited Berne and Basel during the European Football Championship, turning both cities orange for a few hours. Those who were there will long recall this peaceful invasion in the name of football. So many people wearing orange shirts crowded the streets that some public transport had to stop operating in both cities. There were people in Dutch national colours supporting their national football team for as far as the eye could see.

500,000 litres of beer were drunk in Basel before, during and after the Holland-Russia match alone. The street-cleaning department had to dispose of 40 tonnes of rubbish after the departure of 150,000 to 180,000 Dutch fans and 10,000 Russians. 800 people received medical treatment and 65 required hospitalisation. 50 thugs were arrested by Basel police. All things considered, the organisers and security personnel were very happy at the end of this celebration of football, which had taken over half the city, causing all hell to break loose.

In the run-up to the biggest sporting event ever held in Switzerland, organisers estimated that Euro 2008 would provide Switzerland with CHF 1.5 billion in revenues. Many business people found the prospect of making so much money mouth-watering. But because the weather failed to play its part at the start of the competition and generally fewer people visited the numerous fan zones, lots of stall holders, who, in Zurich for example, had had to pay a fee of CHF 15,000 for a stall space, were left with piles of sausages and crates of beer.

Many people were also unhappy at UEFA's demands, every single one of which had to be met by the authorities. For instance, even listed buildings were used for the advertising activities of sponsors, bars in the fan zones were obliged to sell Carlsberg and there were even dress codes that had to be respected. Only T-shirts featuring sponsors' advertising were permitted in the fan zones. Anyone wearing a Heineken shirt had to get changed... And, for weeks, the local people had to weave their way through the cities through stalls, mobile toilets and grandstands for public viewing.

People also found it difficult to understand why UEFA – alongside FIFA one of the most successful money-making machines in international sport – is able to benefit from the advantages of a charitable organisation and does not therefore have to pay tax on the revenues of CHF 1.2 billion.

It will probably never be possible to put an exact figure on the long-term benefit for Switzerland of co-hosting Euro 2008. Certainly, many landlords and hoteliers did a roaring trade. However, Switzerland clearly did not obtain the economic or emotional boost that was predicted by the organisers. But how and why should this have happened in the first place?

In terms of image, Euro 2008 probably merely confirmed to other countries what they all already knew – that Switzerland is a beautiful, clean and well-run country.

HEINZ ECKERT, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Heinz Eckert



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