

WEIGHING UP THE MEGA-EVENT

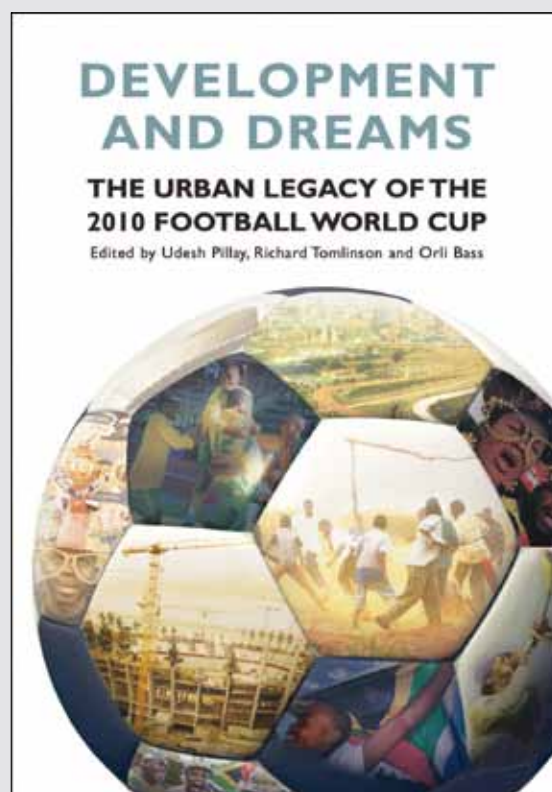
With less than a year to go before the start of the 2010 Fifa World Cup, is it too late or too soon to talk about what legacy the mega-event will leave behind?

The Human Sciences Research Council thinks the time is just right to get the conversation going.

The HSRC has undertaken “comprehensive” research on the urban impacts of the 2010 mega-event and has compiled the findings in the book *Development and Dreams: the Urban Legacy of the 2010 World Cup*.

The Fifa world cups are the world’s largest sporting and media events. They are mega-events at the summit of a hierarchy of sporting events, and there is considerable pressure from governments to not only win the host bid, but to then deliver the stadiums, support infrastructure and other necessary facilities. Often, traditional participatory planning processes are by-passed by an aggressive corporate sports-media-business focus and alliance. The competition within a country between cities lobbying vigorously for host city status also puts governments under intense political pressure.

Mega-sporting events held in developing countries come to be seen as symbolic representations of prestige and power. Undoubtedly, the 2010 World Cup has



provided South Africans with a wonderful opportunity to air a range of views, some directly related to the event and others

peripherally but no less connected. With its research-driven approach, *Development and Dreams*, (edited by Udesb Pillay, Richard Tomlinson and Orli Bass) focuses on many of the topics inspired by these debates.

The first section of the book, “The build-up”, describes football world cups in the context of mega-events. It outlines the evolution of football in South Africa, reflects on past racial divisions as a basis for the ultimate unification of football in the country, and maps the winning bid for the 2010 World Cup. It also explains the institutional arrangements for managing the event, and provides a framework in which to situate the key themes of the book: the material and intangible consequences of the World Cup on South Africa’s cities.

The second section, “Development”, explains and questions the more tangible development impacts. It includes a comparison between South Africa and Germany (which hosted the previous World Cup), and includes essays expressing concern about uncertain economic benefits and the poten-

tial for poverty reduction. The displacement of people (by stadiums), the urban-rural divide and sports tourism are also considered.

The third section, “Dreams”, explores the less tangible hopes and aspirations associated with the 2010 World Cup. Approaching the subject from social and cultural perspectives, the chapters consider expectations of benefit, African identity and gender.

Four main viewpoints emerge. The first is that the contribution of the World Cup to economic development and the reduction of unemployment in South Africa has been overstated. The second is that host cities and the economy may benefit from the investment in transport and information and communication technology. The third viewpoint expresses doubt about the financial sustainability of the new stadiums. The fourth viewpoint suggests that the event could significantly contribute to reducing Afro-pessimism.

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