

Aftermath of a Tremendous Fiesta

The World Soccer Cup is over, but people are still talking about what happened in the city's streets.

The Mexican government's decision to hold the 1986 World Soccer Cup in our country gave rise to a national debate on the convenience of hosting the event, given the country's socio-economic problems. Yet the fact is that nearly everybody followed the games once the championship actually got underway, and the Mexican team's third victory was celebrated by a million people in Mexico City.

The reasons for holding the World Cup in our country are to be found in a peculiarity of the Mexican mentality: a need to show the world that any and all adversity can be overcome by the people's determination and unity. Ours is a fortitude tested over the centuries, now strengthened by the tragic September earthquake and by the exactions of a crisis suffered by millions. Only this can explain the need for the fiesta, *the urgency of the celebration.*

FIFA* president Joao Havelange anticipated the event's economic success a year ago when he announced that his organization expected earnings of \$57 million from ticket sales, and an additional \$34 million from the sale of television rights and publicity.

* The Federation of International Football Associations.

Guillermo Cañedo, president of the World Cup's Organizing Committee and high-ranking official of Televisa (the private Mexican television consortium), and Rafael del Castillo, president of the Mexican Football Federation, had both declared that the event would bring over 50,000 tourists to Mexico, would project a positive image of the country and "above all, it will not cost the government one cent."

Although some government officials publicly agreed with these ideas, the security aspect alone—according to the World Cup Security Plan—involved expenditures of close to \$1 million in installations, training for special forces, fuel and communications equipment. Under-Secretary of the Interior Jorge Carrillo Olea announced that 20,000 men, both security agents and military personnel, would be involved in the security plan, which also included an undisclosed number of FBI agents. The cost of this whole operation was around \$5 million.

Considerable expense was also involved in the use of the Department of Communications and Transport's telecommunications facilities, which were used to transmit television signals to some 8 billion viewers in 112 countries. The Department used its ground and space facilities (the Morelos Satellite System), to provide 12 television signals and 480 telephone lines. The cost of this service, and of building and operating the International Press and Radio Centers, has not been publicized.

Two further indicators should be added to this "great investment." One is the cost of remodeling the Azteca Stadium, the main arena for the matches between the 24 contending teams, and this was just over \$3 million. The other is the high price of tickets, (for local spectators, that is). The cheapest were between \$10 and \$15, while the most expensive, the opening and final games, with prices rising as the games neared the final, were \$280 a seat.

VOICES IN THE FIESTA

Given the expectations and contradictions, the World Cup was experienced by a population anxious for new events and protagonists, a community that both enjoyed and opposed it.



The euphoria of victory.

Photo by Jesús Carlos.

the nation

Two weeks before the games began, we carried out an opinion survey, talking to 62 people chosen at random in different parts of Mexico City. We asked them how they felt about our country hosting the World Cup and about the destination of income from the games. Of these 62 people, 33 were totally opposed to hosting the championship, 19 were in favor of it and 10 had no opinion. Here are some of the more typical answers.

León Gutiérrez, brick-layer, 5 children.

"We owe a lot of money, and that's what should turn the government's head, instead of hosting soccer matches. I'd like to know where all that money is going to end up. This tournament isn't going to benefit us at all, because the organizers are going to fill their pockets. The money could be invested in food, or in paving a lot of streets, they're full of potholes. My son and I couldn't afford to buy a single ticket even if we pooled our resources. All we're going to get out of the World Cup are some new foreign friends."

Oscar Riva Palacio, 28 year old doctor, single.

"Given our present situation, the World Cup is a show put on by Televisa, and will not benefit us at all. Psychologically, it will help people relax, but this doesn't mean it's a necessary event, since people have other means of getting rid of tension. The repercussions will be felt as soon as the championship is over. I would use the money from the games to improve health care and the Mexican people's diet, and also to create jobs."

Lupita Chávez, cashier, 26 years old, single.

I think the event will have positive effects because a lot of people will come from abroad and bring foreign currency, and this benefits the people, doesn't it? I'd use the money to benefit the people of this country.

The Tourist's Point of View

Many foreigners came to our country for the World Soccer Cup, and celebrated in the streets, alongside thousands of Mexicans. In the course of our informal opinion poll, we spoke with visitors from Colombia, Germany, New Zealand, Venezuela, the United States, France, Uruguay, Denmark and Ireland.

Most of those we interviewed thought the World Cup provided a good opportunity for the Mexican people to forget their daily cares and express their nationalism in a healthy and festive setting. There was also the idea that the sports festivities would cheer people up, following the earthquake and the stress of the economic situation.

"This is really incredible, I had never seen a people so moved and excited," said one German tourist. But other foreigners thought Mexico should not have organized the

competition, given the country's economic situation, though one added "I believe the Mexican people need to laugh, too." A Venezuelan professional gave the following opinion: "I think it is wonderful that the World Cup is being held here. I think it will cheer the people up after all the sadness they have been through."

On seeing the exultant street celebrations, a French visitor remarked: "I like the spectacle, I think the people need it, but I sense a strong undercurrent within it all. I wonder what will happen after the championship, the crisis is terrible and people need more than words to fill their stomachs." An Irishman added that the public celebrating "is impressive and fantastic. We feel happy among these people. Mexico has great inner strength; it is a great country that will soon be back on its feet."

Angélica Sandoval, 50 year old housewife, no children; she lost her home in the earthquake.

"Well, frankly speaking, I believe Mexico has enough serious problems without these people being here... Take the housing problem, for example... I would appoint technicians to build housing. If we are aware of the situation in Mexico, why do this, so that the government can dispose of the money and the rest of us never even see it? We are really sick and tired of this situation."

Oscar Ruiz, business administrator, 28 years old, three children.

"I believe the games are inadequate, given the country's situation. But the opinion of the majority is useless. Seeing how the community has so many problems, like housing, high prices..., I don't see why they want to distract people's attention, and also distract resources from the problems they should be aimed at. The games would be okay if the earnings were used to stop the increase in prices of basic goods to shore up the country's economy, but we all know this will not be the case."

Ana López, 47 year old street vendor, 7 children.

"We are kind of proud that the World Cup was held here, but all of us street vendors were hurt because we paid for permits, work clothes and name tags, and they won't let us work. It's not fair, we've been here since the Azteca was built. We thought the games would benefit us; all of us would like to be in the stadium, but we can't go in because it's too expensive. The way things stand, how are we going to cheer our team on?"



Celebration at the Independence Monument.

Despite opinions such as these, the celebrating that took place in Mexico City was unlike anything we had ever experienced. A million people came out to celebrate when the Mexican team defeated Bulgaria. Two hours after the game, the city's main streets —Reforma, Insurgentes, Tlalpan and the Beltway— all resembled huge parking-lots. Cars crept along at a snail's pace. People got out of their cars to chant and dance, joining others celebrating in the streets banging pots and pans, blowing trumpets and beating drums, all under the pouring rain.

Mexican music blared from car radios and household stereos. Many wore typical Mexican dress, while others, both men and women, painted their cheeks or even their whole face, with the colors of the Mexican flag. People of all ages joined the



Photo by Jesús Carlos.

"Pique", official emblem of the World Cup, parades through Mexico City.

celebrations. Women carried their babies, dressed in the red, white and green flag-colors. Some even attached tri-colored sashes to their pets and brought them out to celebrate.

There were, of course, different levels of consciousness. María Solís, a 31 year old housewife, said: "There is simply no connection between the country's crisis and this World Cup. PEMEX (the state-owned oil company) is responsible for the crisis, and soccer is just a sport."

"My girlfriend and I have celebrated in the streets. It's like a *fiesta*. Eleven people (the number of players on a soccer team) represent all of Mexico. If they win, we all win," exulted Francisco Javier, a 19 year old student.

Ramón Pérez, a 48 year old insurance salesman, had an opinion favorable to the government. "A victory of our national team makes me happy because they represent Mexico, and I am a Mexican. The government invested a lot of money,

they'll never tell us how much, but that money comes from the people. Yet they did organize a great *fiesta* for all of us and kept us happy for a while," was his comment.

The participants in the first street parties were mostly upper-class people who sped by in their cars on their way to the *Zócalo*, the city's central park. But people of all ages and social classes soon joined them. In different press reports, analysts agreed that the youth who partied in the streets to celebrate the victories were the same concerned, socially conscious and often heroic youngsters who helped out during the earthquake last year.

One such opinion came from researcher Dr. Manuel Villa, in an interview in the daily *La Jornada*. "Young people are beginning to feel that the streets are a common space where they can find kindred symbols, unifying symbols that contribute to the breaking down of social barriers so zealously erected by certain sectors. Just as in the aftermath of the earthquake, civil society felt confident about using public spaces again, and this is healthy."

Dr. Villa also believes that "the fact that (in the course of their celebrating) our young people destroyed patriotic symbols, is a painful reason for concern, but it can be explained. The masses tend to lash out at the symbols of power and authority, it always happens, it is part of their behaviour."

But, because of the country's dire economic situation, after the soccer *fiesta* comes the bitter awakening. After the temporary, collective amnesia, the country's harsh reality has pushed its way back to the forefront. ★

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