



A protester shouting slogans at the 2021 G20 world leaders' summit in Rome

The cost of conferences

Treffen sich Staats- und Regierungschefs zum Gipfel, wird es teuer. Allein die Sicherheitskosten gehen in die Millionen. Hat der Gastgeber also gar nichts davon?

Von MELITA CAMERON-WOOD

MEDIUM

The pandemic may have led to the rise of online conferences, but many high-profile international events continue to be hosted in person. The 2022 G20 summit and the UN climate change conference COP27 have delegates travelling across the world to Bali, Indonesia, and to Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, respectively. Both events bring publicity and prestige to their host countries, as well as high costs and a lot of disruption. So, what is the real cost of conferences?

Security measures

The 2022 G7 summit, at Schloss Elmau, in Bavaria, lasted just three days but cost Germany about €180 million. Security measures included border controls, train cancellations and airspace closures, causing great disruption for locals and visitors.

Such procedures are standard at any international summit. G7 leaders and delegates were flown in from Munich Airport on about 30 helicopters. A helipad was built at an airfield 18 kilometres from Schloss Elmau. The location was chosen for security reasons, as it allows a quick exit in case of a terrorist attack. More than two weeks before the summit began, the airfield was closed to the public and the airfield's owners.

From that point on, German Federal Police ran the operation. From the day before the summit, until the end of the event, volunteer fire brigades were stationed at the airfield with renewed fleets.

The G7 summit took place in a quiet, rural location, but the Munich Security Conference (MSC) is held every year at the Hotel Bayerischer Hof, in the

“Security experts come months beforehand to get an idea of the place”

disruption

- Störung;
- hier auch: Beeinträchtigungen

fire brigade UK

- Feuerwehr

helipad ['helɪpæd]

- Hubschrauberlandeplatz

high-profile

- im Fokus der Öffentlichkeit stehend

host sth.

- etw. veranstalten

in person

- persönlich

prestige [pre'sti:ʒ]

- [wg. Aussprache]

run sth.

- hier: etw. leiten

rural ['rʊərəl]

- ländlich

summit ['sʌmɪt]

- Gipfel

volunteer

- [,vɒlən'tiə]
- freiwillig, ehrenamtlich

city centre, causing major disruption to residents, businesses and commuters. As soon as one conference is over, the MSC organizers start planning the next one. Inside the hotel, everything must run like clockwork, but outside, extensive security measures cause traffic disruption, with the area around the hotel closed off, and residents asked to use public transport. However, these services are also affected, as trams are suspended and diverted.

The hotel staff of 550 expands to around 700 during the three-day event. A spokesperson for Bayerischer Hof told *Business Spotlight*: “Individual delegation representatives and security experts come to the premises months beforehand to get an idea of the place. But most security officers come four weeks before the conference and take a look at the exit routes. That’s when the meticulous preparations start.”

Environmental impact

Another important consideration is the environmental costs of large conferences. Are event organizers doing enough to minimize their impact? The UN Climate Change Conference UK 2021 website says that at COP26, in Glasgow in November 2021, efforts were made to reduce the environmental impact. And yet, the two-week summit is estimated to have caused 102,500 tonnes of CO₂ emissions, equal to the average yearly output of more than 8,000 UK residents.

Large-scale environmental damage and lack of sufficient political action are key reasons why people take to the streets in protest. COP26 attracted over 100,000 protestors. Globally, more than 300 other rallies were organized in relation to the summit, spreading disruption far beyond the event’s location.

Keeping up appearances

Some host cities have been accused of greenwashing. Sharm El-Sheikh, the venue for COP27, for example, received a \$7 million grant from the Global Environment Facility to transform it into a “green city”, but it is questionable whether it deserves this label.

Magdi Allam, an environmental expert, told Al-Monitor: “Before the conference, any smokestacks inside the city will be moved outside to the desert area.” This suggests that some host countries may keep up appearances rather than solve problems.

While big conferences can inspire improvements in their host cities, these are often limited to small areas visible to world leaders and the media. Preparations for the two-day G20 Bali Summit, for example, include safety checks for all roads and bridges that the participants will travel on, new landscaping of certain parts of the planned route and the restructuring of a mangrove forest in Ngurah Rai Grand Forest

Park, the backdrop against which delegates will be introduced to Indonesia’s green economy. Antara News reported that Indonesia’s Ministry of Public Works and Public Housing had allocated Rp505.9 billion (about €34 million) to “preparations for the Indonesian presidency for the G20 Summit in Bali”.

Despite possible disruptions, some businesses welcome big summits. After the impact of Covid-19 on Bali’s tourism-dependent economy, many locals hope the G20 will help the island’s recovery. “The G20 gives us new hope. Our spirit has been uplifted to see hotels are now filled again. Villagers have begun to sell souvenirs and are ready for traditional dance shows,” Putu Edy, a tour operator providing transport for many G20 participants, told *China Daily*. Similarly, I Nyoman Giri Prasta, district head of Badung, a regency of Bali, told Antara News: “The G20 Summit has a positive impact on the growth of tourist arrivals and economic growth in Badung, in particular, and Bali, in



Police in Garmisch-Partenkirchen during the 2022 G7 summit

affected ▶ betroffen

allocate sth.

▶ etw. zuteilen

backdrop ▶ Hintergrund

billion ▶ Milliarde(n)

clockwork: run like ~

▶ wie am Schnürchen laufen

closed off

▶ abgesperrt

commuter [kə'mju:tə]

▶ Pendler(in)

divert sth. [daɪ'vɜ:t]

▶ etw. umleiten

exit route [ru:t]

▶ Fluchtweg

grant ▶ Zuschuss,

Fördermittel

greenwashing

▶ ökologischer Etikettenschwindel

impact ▶ Auswirkung

keep up appearances

▶ den Schein wahren

label ▶ hier: Bezeichnung,

Name

landscaping

▶ Landschaftsgestaltung;
hier: Geländebearbeitung

large-scale

▶ großformatig, Groß-

mangrove forest

[ˈmæŋgrəʊv]

▶ Mangrovenwald

meticulous

[mə'tɪkjʊləs]

▶ akribisch

output ▶ Produktion;

hier: Ausstoß

premises ['premɪsɪs]

▶ Räumlichkeiten

rally ['ræli]

▶ Kundgebung

regency

['rɪdʒənəsi]

▶ Regierungsbezirk

restructuring

▶ Umgestaltung

smokestack

▶ Schornstein

spokesperson

▶ Sprecher(in)

suspend sth.

▶ etw. (vorübergehend)
außer Betrieb setzen

take to the streets

▶ auf die Straße gehen

uplift sth.

▶ etw. (moralisch)
aufrichten, neue Hoffnung
geben

venue ['venju:]

▶ Veranstaltungsort

visible ['vɪzəbəl]

▶ sichtbar



President Joe Biden speaking with other world leaders at the 2022 G7 summit at Schloss Elmau in Germany

general. This is proven by the fulfillment of the Badung District Government’s local tax revenue (PAD) target from the tourism sector.”

By contrast, COP26 brought 35,000 delegates to Glasgow in 2021 but the summit did not benefit all business owners. Oli Norman, who owns several pubs and restaurants in the city, told *The Herald*: “We are lucky because most of our businesses are in good locations, but for most publicans, restaurant owners, bars, etc., their trade has been down, often up to 50 per cent, throughout COP.” The UK government’s Covid-related stay-at-home message, combined with the fact that many of the delegates weren’t staying in the city but were bussed in for events, made for a difficult couple of weeks for many businesses.

Temporary shop closures are common during major conferences. Katharina Pachmayr from the Munich Security Conference press team, says: “The MSC is in constant exchange with local businesses in close proximity to the Hotel Bayerischer Hof. With the consent of the owners, local businesses are partially closed for the February weekend and converted into premises for the conference.” This means that the period is by no means business as usual.

Ultimately, hosting an international conference is both a blessing and a curse. High-profile events shine an international spotlight on their host countries and cities, giving them a chance to show themselves off in the best possible light. But these events also come with a huge amount of pressure to deliver a secure, safe environment for conference participants, local residents and protestors. The events are temporary, but the effects, positive and negative, can be long-lasting.

Improvements are often limited to small areas visible to world leaders and the media

blessing

- Segen

bus sb. in

- jmdn. mit dem Bus an einen Ort bringen

curse [kɜ:s]

- Fluch

make for sth.

- zu etw. beitragen

proximity

- [prɒkˈsɪməti]
- Nähe

publican

- [ˈpʌblɪkən] UK
- Gastwirt(in)

spotlight: shine a ~ on sth.

- etw. ins Rampenlicht rücken

target

- [ˈtɑ:ɡɪt]
- Ziel

tax revenue

- [ˈtæksˌri:vju:]
- Steuereinnahmen, -aufkommen