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Article

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Amfiteatru Economic Journal

Provided in Cooperation with:

The Bucharest University of Economic Studies

Suggested Citation: Pop, Iuliana; Kanovici, Adrian; Ghic, Grațiela; Andrei, Mădălina (2016) : The Economic Effects of the Mega Sport Events on Tourism in the BRICS Countries Case, Amfiteatru Economic Journal, ISSN 2247-9104, The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Vol. 18, Iss. Special Issue No. 10, pp. 960-975

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/169048>

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THE ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF THE MEGA SPORT EVENTS ON TOURISM
IN THE BRICS COUNTRIES CASE**Iuliana Pop^{1*}, Adrian Kanovici², Grațiela Ghic³ and Mădălina Andrei⁴**¹⁾²⁾ Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania³⁾ “Dimitrie Cantemir” Christian University, Bucharest, Romania⁴⁾ “Spiru Haret” University, Bucharest, Romania**Please cite this article as:**Pop, I., Kanovici, A., Ghic, G. and Andrei, M., 2016.
The Economic Effects of the Mega Sport Events on
Tourism in the BRICS Countries Case. *Amfiteatru
Economic*, 18(Special Issue No. 10), pp. 960-975**Article History:**

Received: 21 June 2016

Revised: 29 August 2016

Accepted: 28 September 2016

Abstract

At the beginning of the 21st century, events tourism witnessed an impressive development in a series of countries due to the increase of the spare time and of the people's income, to the cheaper and more diversified world transport, especially the air transport and due to the emergence of new destinations. Emergent countries, such as China and Russia, recorded not only an increase in the number of tourists but also in the revenues from tourism activities. One of the reasons is the opening of these countries frontiers in order to reaffirm their power on international level (Golubchikov, 2016). Besides the relaxation, business and religious tourism, the sport tourism becomes more and more important. It also comprises the tourism for mega sport events, such as the Summer and Winter Olympics or the World Championships in different sports. For the organising countries, there is a real challenge to ensure the investments for the infrastructure, although it supports their economic development, being used after the sport events conclusion.

Considering the available data from the World Bank and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the authors make a quantitative investigation regarding the impact of the mega sport events on the tourism phenomenon in the BRICS countries. The article also researches a small and specific group of countries (BRICS), considering a niche tourism phenomenon. The article aims to emphasize the role of the mega sport events in the BRICS countries, directly connected with their capacity to economically support the organization of these events and also with the desire to internationally promote their national values.

Keywords: events tourism, mega sport events, emerging countries, BRICS countries**JEL Classification:** L 83, O 18, O 57

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Introduction

Tourism is a dynamic phenomenon with an impressive development at the beginning of the 21st century in barely accessible countries so far because of the geographical distance and the political, social and economic conditions. On the world map we can see an increasing number of new tourism destinations comprising a series of emerging countries with rising flows of international tourists. Some of these countries are the BRICS ones (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) which have become well-known both for a sustainable economic growth in the early 21st century (Pop, 2014) and an increased attractiveness due to the borders' opening and to the people's desire to know more about far away histories and ancient civilizations. The substantial increase of the tourists' number, especially in China, India, South Africa, mostly supported the upgoing revenues of tourism to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in these countries (WTTC, 2015).

The tourism's fast development in countries with emergent economies is a typical phenomenon in the post-industrial age, supported by the international tourists' access to the cultural, religious establishments, by sport events organization, and so forth. The concern for the surrounding places and for sustainable development in tourism represents a propelling factor that entails its development (Dinu, 2005; Tăchiciu and Dinu, 2009; Dabija and Băbuț, 2013). Among the many positive consequences of the tourism for mega sport events, one can spell out the increase of the money locally spent by tourists, the economic development of the respective area, the improvement of the overall and tourism infrastructure, the increase of the quality and of the tourism standards in the accommodation units and the foreign investors' enhanced interest in developing certain facilities and business in the respective areas and also the improvement of the local inhabitants' living standard (Cudny, 2013; Song, 2010).

The sport tourism, especially during certain international competitions has a huge business potential being already one of the main activity fields that highly contributes to the tourism promotion worldwide. Actually, the tourism industry has started to consider the sport tourism an important market as the places for the sport events are getting more famous and manage to gradually attract more international tourists. Certainly, more tourists bring about a high profit for this type of tourism, especially due to the high revenues for the local, regional or even national budget (Brunet and Xinwen, 2009). For instance, the finals of the 2014 Football World Cup, hosted on Maracana stadium, recorded 74,738 spectators, the highest number of attendants in the competition, the cost of the tickets being between USD 440 and 990 (Rogers, 2014). The total number of the sold tickets during the competition amounted 3,429,873. Of the total number of tickets allocated for this competition, the Brazilian supporters had 64%, whereas the foreign supporters, having travelled there especially for that event, got only 36% (FIFA, 2014).

The last editions of the Olympics or of the Football World Cup were hosted by emerging countries of the BRICS group. Thus, the Summer Olympic Games were hosted, in 2008, by China, a communist country. It was the second time throughout the Olympic editions when a communist country hosted the Olympics (the first time being in 1980, when the Soviet Union was the host), but the first time after the Cold War (Merkel, 2014). In 2014, the Winter Olympics were hosted by Russia in Sochi. The next Summer Olympics were in Rio de Janeiro, in 2016, and the next Winter Olympics will take place in Beijing, in 2022 (Piper, 2015). The Football World Cup were hosted by South Africa, in 2010 and by Brazil, in 2014 (first time in 1950), the next one being scheduled to take place in Russia in 2018

(Hayward, 2014). Other two very important sport events, especially at the regional level, were the Rugby and Cricket World Cups. South Africa hosted the Rugby World Cup in 1995 and it's bidding for hosting its 2023 edition (Osmond, 2016). India was chosen as host for the 1987, 1996 and 2011 editions of the Cricket World Cup, and South Africa for its 2003 edition (Sen, 2015).

After an introductory section, the authors make a review of the specialized literature pointing out mega sport events' significance and place in literature and their contribution to the proliferation of the world tourism phenomenon. In the case study are analysed the BRICS countries, which managed to be on an upward trend regarding the mega sport events organization, the latter contributing at enhancing the attractiveness of these tourism destinations. In this section, the authors use the statistical data provided by the World Bank and the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) to connect the GDP of the BRICS countries to the expenses for the mega sport events organisation. Finally, the article presents its conclusions with a view to improve the capacity of organizing this type of events.

1. The sport tourism in the specialized literature

Nowadays people are more and more interested in travelling to the tourism destinations where sport events are organized and they may attend or participate to a wide range of sport activities. The sport tourism is a kind of entertainment tourism and it is chosen by those who want to enjoy the beauty of nature, new places and customs. From this point of view, there is a slight interference with the cultural tourism (Neacșu et al., 2011), i.e. sightseeing heritage buildings, monuments, archeological sites, and so forth (Todt and Dabija, 2008).

"Events tourism" gained more fame at the beginning of the new millennium. Different authors approach the sports and events tourism, highlighting the common traits, differences, features as well as their impact on local communities (Getz, 2008; Deery, Jago and Fredline, 2004). Jago (1997) underscores the special events and the consumer behaviour, emphasizing the mass-media role as a crucial factor for the development of the mega events attractiveness, such as the different Olympics editions or Formula One competitions.

The Olympic tourism is also the topic dealt with by Weed (2008), who underlines the tourists' spectacular evolution due to the different sports contests and competitions. Weeds analyses the connection between sport and tourism, considering the sport tourism as an important component for the Olympic tourism. He exemplifies the contribution of sport tourism to the intensification of tourism on the whole and the increase of some tourism destinations attractiveness, taking China as example: after the failure to obtain the possibility to organize the 2000 Summer Olympics, Beijing had the honour of being the host of the Summer Olympic seight years later. This contributed not only to the improvement of China's image abroad, but it also attracted an impressive number of athletes and visitors, who spent USD 4.5 billion for tourism purposes (ETOA, 2009). Basically, this Olympics had a major role in the development of the local and regional economy.

Sport tourism means the travel experience to take part or attend to sport-related activities. According to Ross (2001), there are three types of sport tourism: sport events tourism, active sport tourism and nostalgia sport tourism. A special category within sport events tourism is represented by the major sport events, sometimes called also „mega" sport events. Among these there are the Olympic Games, world and continental cups conducted on different sport

disciplines (e.g. Football World Cup, Rugby World Cup, South American Football Cup or others). They have a local and especially regional and even national impact.

From a conceptual perspective, the challenge consists in the precise delineation of large sport events and the major ones, called "mega" events. Literature provides various suggestions in this respect and the difference can be made depending on the number of athletes involved in the competition, the number of events, the number of attendants to the competition or the (tele)viewers ("armchair-travelling") as well as the event location, i.e. the costs involved in its organization (Muller, 2015). It is estimated that the Summer Olympics in Beijing in 2008 were watched by 4.7 billion viewers, meaning about 70% of the world population, 21% more than the previous edition held in Athens in 2004 (3.9 billion viewers) (Maenning and Zimbalist, 2012). The impressive number of viewers of the Olympics in Beijing, due to the size and population of China, greatly contributed to the increase in audience of this competition.

From an economic perspective, mega sport events differ from the traditional ones by their impact. From one edition to another there is a substantial increase in the budget allocated by different countries, particularly by the emerging ones for the organization of major sport events (Taylor, 2014). Until the Winter Olympics in Sochi in 2014, the Beijing Olympics had been regarded as the most expensive competition, the Chinese state investing around USD 42 billion (Fowler and Meichtry, 2008). The Olympics in Sochi was even more costly, the Russian state spending around USD 50 billion (Taylor, 2014). As compared to the initial estimates which amounted USD 12 billion, the final costs, which were about four times higher, seem to highlight a strong desire of the host country to prove its financial capacity to achieve substantial investments and also to contribute to a sustained promotion of this event, in order to attract a larger number of tourists. Examples of some very large budgets for different competitions can be observed in the case of South Africa, which invested around USD 3.9 billion (USD 1.3 billion in stadiums) at the 2010 edition of the Football World Cup (Maenning and Zimbalist, 2012). Brazil invested over USD 3 billion in the stadiums construction and renovation for the Football World Cup in 2014 (Manfred, 2015). Forecasts for this competition which will be organised in 2018 in Russia are considering significant investment, USD several billion (FIFA, 2013).

Mega events, by their magnitude, have an influence on the vast area where they are held, on the local economy and inhabitants, infrastructure and the full accommodation units. Such events are broadcast globally by the media, the attention being given not only to the athletes and their performances, but also to the region, respectively to the host. The high audience is also due to the fact that many nations bring their athletes to participate in these competitions (Fourie and Santana-Gallego, 2010). When a city acquires the privilege to host a mega sport event, it is compelled to develop the infrastructure in order to accommodate the large number of visitors who are expected to attend the event. The improved infrastructure represents somewhat of a mega sport event "legacy", its tangible results at the national or local level (Minnaert, 2011). The impact of mega sport events is very strong in particular by their visibility at the international level, through the interest in promoting the event and location, which is a factor of attractiveness for many countries striving to become hosts for such events through investments in sport infrastructure.

The economic impact of sport tourism is extensively dealt within the specialized literature. Song (2010) discusses the relationship between Olympics, namely between trade exports and the number of visitors. The author tries to quantify the Olympics effects both on the

respective trade area and the number of attracted visitors, concluding that after such a mega event, the number of tourists who will visit the location hosting such a competition will increase, entailing an improvement in its economic development.

The benefits of the Olympics tourism are also analysed by Chalip (2002), who makes an economic comparison of the Olympics effects, using the data collected during the progress thereof, respectively two years after their conclusion. Based on econometric tools it determines the coverage degree of the initial investments based on the revenues subsequently generated by the travel destination increasing attractiveness.

The environmental impact and sustainability of sport contests represent the subject of a research regarding the environmental effects of the Green Olympics in Beijing (Cheung, 2010). The author calculates the cost of the measures taken by authorities to conduct this competition in order to reduce pollution, to take care of the surrounding area, to ensure a cleaner air as well as to cut down consumption of raw materials and other resources.

Recent studies attempt to make cost-benefit analyses of the Sochi Olympics in 2014 (Pilipenko, 2013; Golubchikov, 2016) and of some high-profile sport competitions. Ganguly (2012) deals with the economic impact of mega sport events organised by Brazil, highlighting the opportunities brought to this South American country by the 2014 Football World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics.

Fourie and Santana-Gallego (2010) deal with the impact of mega sport events on the international tourists' incomings in the Olympics and the World Cups on different disciplines (football, rugby, cricket) between 1995 and 2006. The authors test several hypotheses, including the one that a mega sport event contributes to the increase in number of tourists who visit a specific tourism destination during the year of such a mega event organisation. The authors take into account the different events taking place during high season compared to those in the off-season, globally, in the case of the host member states of OECD and non-OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), finally noticing that these states are highly interested in hosting such a high-profile sport competition.

2. Research methodology

In order to highlight the economic effects of mega sport events on tourism, the authors chose to develop a quantitative research based on statistical data available at the World Bank and United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), over a twenty-year period for the BRICS countries. The analyses are performed in accordance with the stipulations of the economic specialized literature (Dinu et al., 2016). Although the first BRICS summit took place in 2009 in Ekaterinburg, in Russia (Faulconbridge, 2009), the analysis was done between 1996 and 2015, the data being available in international official statistics for each country separately. The aspects analysed include: the place held by these countries in the global tourist ranking, the dynamics of foreign visitors, the evolution of the GDP (1996-2015).

The authors put forward also some correlations between those indicators and the main mega sport events hosted by the BRICS countries, highlighting to what extent the mega sport events contributed to the economic progress of these countries. At the same time, reference is made to the correlation between the GDP of the BRICS countries and the costs incurred by organizing mega sport events.

The economic growth of the states under consideration, particularly its dynamics due to the increase in incoming international tourists is analysed through the evolution of the GDP of each country of the BRICS group throughout the period under consideration. The authors conclude the analysis by determining the ratio between the GDP of the countries which organized the mega sport events and the costs incurred by hosting them.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. The place of the BRICS countries on the global tourism ranking

Tourism is one of the most dynamic economic branch (Bădulescu and Rusu, 2009), being characterized by spectacular changes as far as the evolution of the number of tourists (see Table no.1), and the revenues are concerned. For the analysed time period, 1996-2015, one sees a global increase of the revenues from tourism from USD 526 billion to USD 1.434 billion (World Bank, 2015). At the same time, tourism is influenced by political, social, demographic, natural, economic, ecological aspects. The BRICS countries have a major contribution to the international tourist flows. While globally in 2012 the first billion of international tourists was registered, in 2014 there were 1.1 billion tourists. The BRICS countries are those which have had a major contribution to the international tourism dynamics, both on the incoming and outgoing segment.

Actually, according to the data provided by UNWTO for 2014, in the top ten states on the incoming segment there are two BRICS countries: China on the fourth place, with 55.6 million tourists, and Russia on the ninth place, with 29.8 million foreign visitors. The other BRICS countries – South Africa, India and Brazil – hold more modest places in this ranking (see Table no.1), the number of incoming tourists being smaller, as they are not able yet to attract a considerable number of visitors. But analysing the evolution of the number of visitors throughout the 1996-2014 period, we conclude that it doubled or even tripled for countries such as India and Brazil, which means also a significant increase with revenues generated by the tourist activity.

Table no.1: The number of foreign tourists received in 2014 by the BRICS countries (in million)

Place	Country	No. of foreign tourists	Place	Country	No. of foreign tourists
1	France	83.70	8	UK	32.61
2	USA	74.76	9	Russia	29.85
3	Spain	64.95	10	Mexico	29.09
4	China ¹	55.62		
5	Italy	48.57	33	South Africa	9.55
6	Turkey	39.81	41	India	7.70
7	Germany	33.00	44	Brazil	6.43

Obs.: ¹ Hong Kong and Macao are not included

Source: processed after UNWTO, 2015

3.2. The dynamics of foreign visitors in the BRICS countries between 1996 and 2014

Among the factors which contributed to the increase in the number of tourists are also the mega sport events. They attract visitors and enhance the global audience, doing justice to new tourist destinations. Cities which hosted mega sport events such as the Olympics, the World Cups on different sport branches, rallies, and other competitions of regional, national

and local significance, in the aftermath of the event are benefiting from the notoriety of the tourist destination, the name of the area and/or the location being engraved in the tourists' minds, but also from the infrastructure investments, i.e. from the development of the local businesses (Golubchikov, 2016).

However, the assumption that a mega sport event is attracting a big number of visitors during and after it is not always confirmed. Analysing the situation of China, which organized in 2008 the Summer Olympic Games in Beijing, one could note that before the competition, in 2007 there were 54.72 million tourists, in the year of the competition 53.05 million tourists were registered, in 2009 50.87 million, and in 2010 55.66 million (UNWTO, 2015). This sinuous evolution of the number of tourists could have multiple explanations. China's reputation for organizing the 2008 Summer Olympic Games was known for several years, thus the premise of visiting the country by tourists being in place before the mega sport event. Since the outburst of global economic and financial crisis in 2008 (Pop et al., 2011), one could notice a decrease in the number of international tourists at the global level, the tourist flows being heavily diminished (UNWTO, 2015), especially due to the fact that the western states hit by the recession were also those which were providing international tourists. Thus, even the Summer Olympics was hit by a decrease of the number of international tourists on the incoming segment, in 2009 the decreasing trend being confirmed. Since 2010 one could notice a comeback, China as a tourist destination being again sought of by tourists.

The Olympics in Sochi in 2014 had a significant number of international visitors, the tourist flows in Russia being constant also in 2014 (29.85 million tourists), despite the political and military instability in Crimea. Compared to 1996 (16.21 million foreign visitors), the number of the incoming tourists almost doubled (UNWTO, 2015). For sure, although Russia has a huge tourist potential, it is not able yet to attract a sufficiently big number of tourists.

Between 1996 (4.91 million) and 2014 (9.55 million), the number of foreign visitors doubled also in the case of South Africa (UNWTO, 2015). In 1995, this country hosted a major sport competition, i.e. the Rugby World Cup (Steenveld, Strelitz, 1998). This sport event was the first one following the first democratic elections in South Africa, representing for the entire area a tourist, social, economic and trade opening. The global economic and financial crisis hit also the African continent, the number of tourists decreasing in 2009, but bouncing back in 2010. South Africa's increase of the incoming tourist flows was favoured by its hosting of the 2003 Rugby World Cup and the 2010 Football World Cup. South Africa bids for hosting the tenth edition of the Rugby World Cup in 2023, celebrating 200 years from the invention of this sport by William Webb Ellis (Baker, 1981, Majumdar and Mangan, 2004).

A spectacular increase of the number of the incoming tourists is registered in India, a country with a fabulous tourist potential. While between 1996 and 2003, the increase of the incoming tourist flows was more modest, from 2.29 million tourists to 2.73 million, between 2004 and 2014 the increase was a spectacular one, from 3.46 million to 7.70 million tourists (UNWTO, 2015). Although India has a population of more than 1 billion people and an emerging economy, it is the only one country from the BRICS group which has not yet hosted a mega sport event of such magnitude as the Olympics. However, India was three times the host of the Cricket World Cup: in 1987 together with Pakistan, in 1996 with Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and in 2011, the sole organizer of the Cup (Coakley and Dunning, 2000; ICC, 2016). To what extent the international tourist flows were influenced by these sport events is rather hard to quantify.

In the case of Brazil, the strong increase of the number of incoming foreign tourists took place at the end of the 20th century, the trend being maintained as a result of organizing in 2014 the Football World Cup, and the Summer Olympic Games in 2016 in Rio de Janeiro (EMBRATUR, 2016). The expectations of the international organizations regarding the increase of the incoming tourists are supported by the fact that Brazil is the first country on the South American continent which hosts a Summer Olympics (UNWTO, 2015).

Analysing the incoming tourists for each country member of the BRICS group, one can state that the mega sports events contribute to the choosing of those countries as destinations by international tourists (Figure no.1).

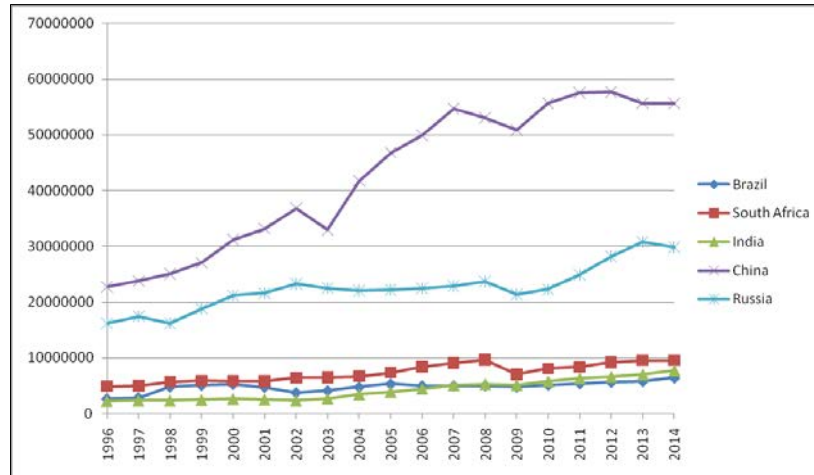


Figure no.1: A comparative dynamic of the incoming foreign visitors in the BRICS countries between 1996 and 2014

Source: processed after UNWTO, 2015

However, we have also to take into account other contextual factors which might affect those options. Although the BRICS countries have not directly been affected by the 2008 crisis is, their GDP continuing to grow, they have indirectly felt the effects of the crisis by a slight decrease of the number of the incoming foreign tourists. This moment coincided with important events, such as the Beijing Olympics in 2008, the Football World Cup in South Africa in 2010, respectively in Brazil in 2014, or the Winter Olympics in Sochi, the Russian Federation, in 2014 (IMF, 2016; World Bank, 2016).

3.3. The economic potential of the BRICS countries

Hosting mega sports events is a decision with profound implications at the state level, as it involves several factors. Probably the greatest challenge is to secure a sufficiently consistent investment budget as to allow further allocations, but also political will and social and technical capacity to implement such events. In such conditions, the economy of the host country must be solid enough to support such costs, particularly investment costs, which bring returns only over time. In spite of that, in the last couple of years an increasing number of states from the Asian and African continents try to attract such big sport events, being aware especially of the tourist potential involved in these events.

Lately, sport tourism has steadily become more popular, among the factors which contributed to its popularity being its capacity to generate revenues for the host country, its contribution to the technological progress and innovation, to investments, as well as to the changes in attitudes and values (Ross, 2001). This explains why an increasing number of countries without a long-held tradition in organizing big sport competitions such as Qatar, South Korea, China, India and Japan are bidding for organizing them. Qatar was designated host of the Football World Cup in 2022 (Booth, 2015), Japan, host of the Rugby World Cup in 2019 (English, 2016), and China, of the Winter Olympic Games in 2022, thus Beijing becoming host both the Summer and Winter Olympics.

The bid for organizing such a big sport event is announced several years ahead before the competition, and the selection is done by the competent institutions based on rigorous criteria. One of them pertains to the economic outlook of the host country and its capacity to support and attract sufficient investment funds (FIFA, 2015). As a rule, after lengthy debates, a short list of two or three candidates is arrived at. In the case of Olympics, the selections of the country and location takes place seven years ahead of the event. Figure no.2 describes the evolution of the GDP of the BRICS countries, one of the indicators taken into consideration for selecting a country as host of big international sports competitions.

Analyzing Brazil GDP between 1996 and 2015 (Figure no.2), one can notice a sinuous dynamics, generated by the economic outlook of the country. From 2004 on there has been an economic recovery which allowed Brazil to ask for hosting the Football World Cup and the Summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. China started its economic rise at the end of the 1990s. The moment coincides with the end of a long period of isolation, since then China becoming more and more visible on the international stage.

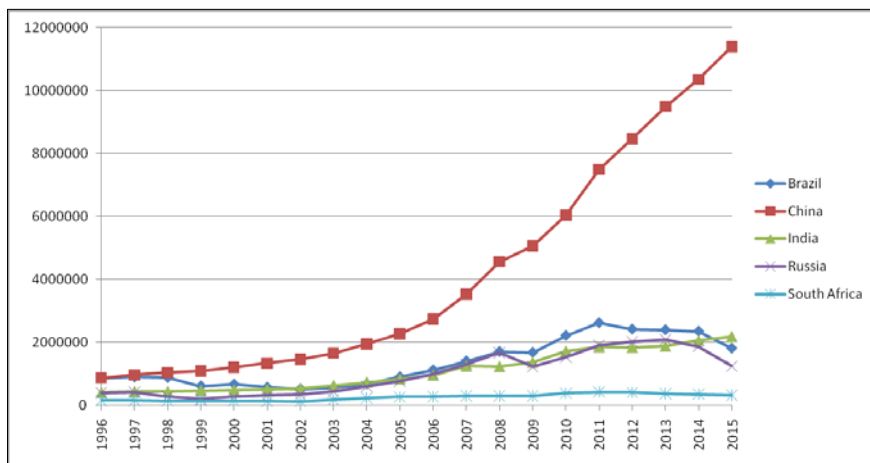


Figure no. 2: A comparative dynamic of the GDP value in the BRICS countries between 1996 and 2015 (USD million)

Source: processed after IMF and World Bank data, 2016

With China’s advancing in the post-industrial phase, the services sector, and especially tourism, have become more attractive and have witnessed a powerful development, which placed China among the first receiving countries of tourist flows. Today, China is one the fourth place globally in terms of incoming international tourists, totalling 55.6 million

tourists (UNWTO, 2015). The improvement of the communist state's image took place also due to its hosting the Beijing Olympics in 2008, which was a relatively green one. Throughout the time span of the sports competition, in order to provide a cleaner environment for tourists, China took drastic measures with a negative financial impact on its trade balance for reducing pollution, cutting off the industrial activity and putting restrictions on the auto traffic (Cheung, 2010).

Due to their attractiveness and uniqueness, the mega sports events anticipate a massive participation, which might result in significant gains out of them. Theoretically, organizing such big sport competitions as the Olympics should generate consistent revenues for the organizing country. In practice, the investments involved in it do not bring financial returns. Many Olympics, such as the one in Greece in 2004, ended up in financial failures, the only gains being the image, notoriety and social prestige for the host country, together with a positive image for the location or area in which the event took place (Pop and Dabija, 2009).

By relating the costs incurred for organizing such mega sports events to the GDP of the host country, one can see that they can be sustained by the emerging economies of the BRICS group. For instance, the costs of the Summer Olympic Games in Beijing, which totalled USD 42 billion, compared to China's GDP in 2008, which was USD 4.558 trillion, represented 0.92% from the latter. Although at the moment they were the most expensive in the history of those competitions, it is estimated that they did have a real financial positive impact on the further development of the Chinese economy (IMF, 2016; World Bank, 2016; Hille, 2009). In fact, China wanted to change its image associated often with the extremely polluting industrial country, being selected to organize in 2022 also the Winter Olympics in Beijing (Phillips, 2015).

The Winter Olympics have some particular features as compared to the Summer Olympics, as they must be organized in a suitable natural setting, capable to secure the best conditions for the specific sport activities. The cities chosen over time for hosting them are generally small in terms of the number of population, being located in the mountainous areas of the Earth. The flows of tourists attracted by these events ask for suitable accommodation which, more often than not, is insufficient, which leads to an overall increase of the costs of organizing the event, due to the necessity of erecting new accommodation facilities.

The Sochi Olympics in 2014 is an example for that, as it needed supplementary investments between 2000 and 2010 (Pillipenko, 2013). Choosing Russia for the first time as host for the Winter Olympics generated hot debates, but it was made possible due to the economic growth of this country. Between 1999 and 2006 the rate of economic growth was a relatively constant one of approximately 6.8% (Pillipenko, 2013).

Starting from the Olympics and Paralympics concept, the Sochi Olympics was promoted as being the most easy-to-reach Olympics in the history of those events, especially due to the fact that the distances from the airport to the areas in which the competitions took place (both the littoral and the mountain clusters) were very short. This was an important advantage and favoured the choosing of Sochi as host city for these sports competitions (Pillipenko, 2013). Although the total costs generated by the Sochi Olympics represented only 2.6% of Russia's GDP in 2014, it was the most expensive Olympics organized up till now. The economic power of the host country is a particular important factor for the capacity of hosting such a sport event.

3.4 Infrastructure: the main legacy of mega sport events

Preparing for hosting mega sports events is an opportunity for any state, as well for the revitalization of certain regions and cities, the development and modernization of the local infrastructure by constructing sports and accommodation facilities, a great deal of expenses being channelled towards transport networks (airport terminals, highways, metro lines) which are meant to facilitate the transportation of visitors and participants towards the sports events locations. Along with the development and maintenance of the urban infrastructure, considerable sums are allocated for the security of the event and its related ceremonies (Pop and Dabija, 2009; Kim, 2014). To what extent these investments are redeemed and generate returns in time is an aspect which fluctuates from competition to competition, and from country to country. For instance, the big stadiums built for the Beijing Olympics had a limited use after the event, generating huge costs for maintenance which led to the paradoxical situation in which it would have been cheaper to tear them down than to support their maintenance costs. The under-utilization of gigantic stadiums, with huge maintenance costs led some commentators to compare them with the “white elephants” (Ganguly, 2012), which are a legacy of major sport competitions organized by South Africa. China invested considerable sums of money in parks, in the extension of the metro network, in highways and in a new airport terminal, for Beijing these improvements having medium- and long-term economic effects. The capital city of China benefited from an unprecedented modernization, which propelled it in the top most appreciated metropolises of the world, attracting investors from all continents (Brunet and Xinwen, 2008).

A similar situation is to be noticed in Brazil, which hosted several major events, such as the UN Global Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 (UN, 2012), the FIFA Confederations’ Cup in 2013 (FIFA, 2013), the Football World Cup in 2014 and the Summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro in 2016 (FIFA, 2014, IOC, 2016). For the 2016 Olympic Games, Brazil invested a little more than USD 3 billion only in sports facilities for different sports competitions (Watts, 2016), although Rio de Janeiro had a fairly important sports infrastructure (FIFA, 1950, 2014).

Totally different is the situation in the case of the Sochi Olympics, Sochi being the first Olympic city for which the whole sport infrastructure was built from scratch, the transport and accommodation infrastructure being wholly refurbished. More than 800 facilities were erected in Sochi, from electric power station to sewer system, telecommunications, a massive transport network, and so forth. That explains the gap between the initially estimated costs of USD 11 billion and the final costs of approximately USD 50 billion (Golubchikov, 2016). The legacy of the Olympics for the city of Sochi resides precisely in the long-term utilization of this urban and regional infrastructure, the city presenting an increased interest for tourists attracted the new, modernized ski facilities, the Olympic parks and the littoral facilities (Muller, 2014). Some of these sports facilities will be used again in 2018, when Russia will organize the Football World Cup (FIFA, 2016).

Conclusions

Sport events of local, regional and global importance such as the Olympic Games, the World Cup for different sports, Formula One races, and so forth, are part of the urban life of cities able to host them. These events are become more and more important both for

local and regional economic development and for raising the living standard of city dwellers. Besides the infrastructure they are benefiting over the medium- and long-term, these cities use the mega sport events as an opportunity to present themselves to the world and for convincing more tourists to visit them. Each big sport event is unique, which makes it difficult to define a valid standard management model. Mega sport events must be well thought through and organized in order to have benefits both for organisers and participants. According to the quality of the event, the image of the tourist destination, product or service could be improved or, on the contrary, negatively affected.

The mega sport events are more often than not intensively promoted by media at the global level, due to their impact and the participation of great number of sport teams from all continents. Besides the specific promotion of the event through written and audio-video media as well as social media networks, another way of promoting it is through tourist agencies, which are offering tourist packages for the sport competition. The tourists' participation in this type of events has also a cultural, not only a sport dimension, the tourists having the opportunity to discover the history of the location, the city and the country which host the event, but also the people and their cultural traditions.

Hosting a mega sport event is an honour and privilege for organisers, as the attention of the whole world is directed for a short span of time towards the host city. The consequences are varied and diverse and could be analysed in cost-benefit economic terms, in terms of the image capital, as a signal for the manifestation of an emerging economic powerhouse, or in terms of the impact on the environment. More difficult to quantify is the impact on the tranquillity of the local population. However, the willingness to become host of a global sport event is continuously increasing, and new states are bidding for hosting the next editions even without having necessarily a traditional and solid relationship with this type of events.

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