

Impact of a sports mega-event on the perception of the image of a tourist destination: The case of the 2018 FIFA World Cup

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Abstract

Given a changing global context, there is a need to understand if sports mega-events that are now often hosted by the BRICS countries can serve as a tool to improve their international perception as attractive tourist destinations. The study presented in the paper analyzes the perception of Russia and host cities of the 2018 FIFA World Cup by visiting fans. The problem was examined using the available secondary data, as well as empirical data obtained in the spring of 2021 by means of semi-structured interviews and survey methods. The study confirms that hosting of a sports mega-event affects the perception of the destination by its visitors. Organizing such an event encourages people to choose a location that has not been considered before and helps to dispel negative myths and stereotypes imposed by the media. The results also confirm that attending a sports mega-event may lead to an intention to revisit its venue. The results of the study are useful to an international audience, both academics and practitioners, including policy makers.

Keywords: image of the destination, inbound tourism, sports event, visiting fans, FIFA World Cup, Russia.

JEL: L83, M31, D12, P36.

Introduction

“We came to watch football, but I love the city!” These words of a Swiss fan after the European Football Championship match in St. Petersburg on July 2, 2021 can serve

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as a good illustration of the role of sports events in attracting positive attention to tourist destinations. At the end of the 20th — beginning of the 21st century, a large number of people got the opportunity to travel around the world. When planning a trip, tourists can choose from numerous destinations that are now competing for travelers' money. Taking into account this wide choice, any tourist destination should provide not only the standard needs of travelers, such as good accommodation, varied food or well-groomed areas, but also something more that “hooks” a person and creates loyalty to the place.

Among the sources of such additional experiences, a special place belongs to sports mega-events (Teigland, 1999; Duignan, 2021). This is a promising opportunity for countries and cities to present themselves, convey their advantages to the target audience, as well as to stimulate interest in visiting them. Sports mega-events attract a huge number of tourists, media and investors to the host country. Studies show that such events have a positive impact, making the city and the country more visible and, with the proper use of various marketing tools and involvement of stakeholders, creating an enabling environment for the development of tourism (Essex & Chalkley, 1998; Knott et al., 2013; Jeong & Kim, 2019a).

In the last century, most of the sports mega-events, especially the Olympic Games, were held in developed countries. The only exceptions were the Summer Olympic Games in Mexico (1968) and in the USSR (Russia, Moscow) in 1980. However, in the new millennium, the BRICS countries¹ have already hosted the Olympic Games four times: the Summer Games in China (2008) and Brazil (2016), the Winter Games in Russia (2014), and the future Winter Games-2022 again in China.

As for football mega-events, in the 20th century, developing countries hosted the FIFA World Cups more often: Uruguay (1930), Brazil (1950), Chile (1962), Mexico (1970), Argentina (1978), Mexico (1986). In the 21st century, three consecutive championships took place in the BRICS countries: South Africa (2010), Brazil (2014), and Russia (2018). According to Nordea Markets, the preparation costs for the FIFA World Cup 2010 in South Africa amounted to about \$2.9 billion, for the FIFA World Cup 2014 in Brazil — \$15 billion, and for the FIFA World Cup 2018 in Russia — \$13.2 billion (Davydov & Evdokimova, 2018). It is necessary to better understand whether such events are worth substantial investments not only in terms of improving infrastructure but also as a tool to dispel some negative myths about host countries and improve their international perception as an attractive tourist destination.

Our research intended to fill this gap by addressing the perception of Russia and the host cities of the 2018 FIFA World Cup by visiting fans. The Russian Federation currently ranks 27th (as of 2020) in the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands IndexSM (NBI)²

¹ Since 2001, the acronym BRIC has represented the fast-growing middle-income economies of Brazil, Russia, India, and China. In 2010, South Africa became the fifth partner, and the acronym evolved into BRICS. The role of the five BRICS countries is now quite significant in terms of their economic relevance. Together, they account for more than 40% of the world's population and over 20% of global GDP (BRICS, 2020).

² Conducted annually since 2008, the NBISM examines the reputation of 50 countries. Each year, approximately 20,000 adults aged 18 and over in the 20 core panel countries are interviewed online.

rating based on the following underlying indicators: “*exports*,” “*governance*,” “*culture*,” “*people*,” “*tourism*,” “*investment*,” and “*immigration*”. According to the parameter “Tourism,” Russia is included in the list of the top 30 countries but, as the study shows, the unwillingness of foreign citizens to visit the country for the first time is its weakest point.

Over the past decade, Russia hosted several major sporting events: the 2013 World Summer Universiade in Kazan, the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, the FINA World Championships (Aquatics 2015) in Kazan, the 2018 FIFA World Cup, and the UEFA EURO 2020 games in St. Petersburg. There are statistics indicating that during these events, the inbound tourist flow to the country increased, as well as media coverage of the country by all news channels. In particular, in 2018, 11 cities of the Russian Federation became venues for the FIFA World Cup and were visited by about 6.8 million tourists, half of whom were foreign citizens. This event was broadcast all over the world, many articles were written and many reports filmed. At the same time, its effect on the overall image of the country has not yet been widely studied.

To fill this gap, we analyzed both academic literature and secondary data sourced from government documents and officially published reports, as well as empirical data obtained through semi-structured interviews and surveys, to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Does hosting of a sports mega-event affect the perception of the destination by its visitors?

RQ2: Does attending a sports mega-event lead to the intention to revisit the hosting destination?

Empirical data were obtained using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, namely semi-structured interviews, surveys, content analysis of secondary data.

Following the introductory section, the structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 comprises a review of the literature on event tourism, the image of a tourist destination and the impact of sports events on the perception of the host destination that serves as the theoretical background of the present research. In Section 3, the empirical research design and methodology, research questions and hypotheses are described. Section 4 presents an empirical analysis and results. Section 5 contains conclusions, research limitations, recommendations, and directions for future research.

1. Literature review

Research on the issues of the image of tourist destinations was carried out back in the 1970s (Mayo, 1973; Goodrich, 1978; Pike, 2002). Researchers analyzing the image of destinations have different approaches to its assessment, demonstrating different models that include cognitive, emotional, and behavioral factors (Chon, 1991; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Gallarza et al., 2002; Pike, 2002; 2007; Tasci et al., 2007). Nowadays, a growing amount of literature is devoted to the issues of event tourism and the image of tourist destinations (Jeong & Kim, 2019b; Wang & Jin, 2019; Ziyadin et al., 2019; Jia, 2020).

In the research on the impact of events on the image of a destination, three types of events attract the most attention:

- *local events* that are relatively small and focused primarily on local communities or showcasing and preserving cultural values and traditions (Stankova & Vassenska, 2015);
- *hallmark events* — large one-off or recurring events of limited duration, designed primarily to increase the awareness, attractiveness and profitability of a tourist destination (Ritchie, 1984; Getz et al., 2012);
- *mega-events* that affect the image of a destination due to its worldwide fame, attracting numerous mass media and visitors from different countries (Madinatos et al., 2006; Arnegger & Herz, 2016).

An event and a destination can become inextricably linked over time, for example, Oktoberfest and Munich in Germany; the Venice Carnival and Venice in Italy, etc.

As for sports events, there are many of them in the world due to their comprehensive nature and high attractiveness for numerous sports fans. Despite a serious blow that the event tourism segment had to endure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, forecasts for the sports events market segment are still very impressive (Statista, 2021):

- revenue in the sports events segment is projected to reach \$6,545 million in 2021;
- revenue is expected to show an annual growth rate (CAGR 2021–2025) of 49%, resulting in a projected market volume of \$32,264 million by 2025;
- the number of users is expected to reach \$319.4 million by 2025.

In general, sporting events fall into four categories, each type of event playing a different role in the branding of a destination:

- *Local events*, mainly based on the regional level (Premier League matches, regional championships, etc.);
- *Major events* that are not destination-specific but provide significant economic benefits, media coverage, and a sufficient number of visitors, depending on the scale of the event (e.g. World Figure Skating Championships, the UEFA Cup, the NFL Super Cup);
- *High-profile events* associated with a specific destination, which results in a higher status of this specific location (e.g. Tour de France, London Marathon, Melbourne Cup);
- *Mega-events* focused on the international tourism market (Olympic and Paralympic Games, World Cup, etc.). They are usually classified as “spectator competitions” due to the proportionally larger number of spectators attracted than the participants (Gratton & Taylor, 2000). Their attendance rate, target market, public participation in funding, political consequences, TV coverage, facilities, economic and social impact are enormous. These events take place in new locations each time, which makes them especially unique.

The impact of sports events on their venues attracted academic interest two decades ago and has remained in the focus of research ever since (Gripsrud & Nes, 1996; Dwyer & Spurr, 2006; Horne, 2006; Gibson et al., 2009; Gripsrud et al., 2010; Lee, 2014; Alm et al., 2016; Arnegger & Herz, 2016; Lai, 2018; Duignan, 2021; Zouni et al., 2021). Their

conclusions differ to some extent, possibly due to the great difference between the host countries and their initial position in the international tourism.

The authors who focus their research on the effects of sports mega-events that attract a large number of viewers from different countries emphasize both positive and negative externalities. On the one hand, such events create a variety of opportunities for communities: advertising local products to a global audience, attracting new businesses and strengthening citizens' pride (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007). One of the important effects is the improvement of the transport system to ensure the efficient movement of goods and people around the venue of the event (Kassens-Noor, 2013; McGillivray et al., 2020). On the other hand, mega-events that attract a significant number of people to a certain place put enormous pressure on the local environment and infrastructure, for example, causing inconvenience to local residents or destroying natural ecosystems (Parkes et al., 2016; Grix et al., 2017).

Although sports mega-events usually last only a few weeks, their huge scale implies lengthy preparations of venues over several years. A wide range of stakeholders contribute to the preparation, while it is necessary to maintain a balance between modernizing the destination and preserving the cultural identity of local residents (Kruger et al., 2012; Jones & Ponzini, 2018).

Many studies devoted to the Olympic Games (Gripsrud & Nes, 1996; Teigland, 1999; Kyriaki, 2006; Lai, 2018; Duignan, 2021) and the FIFA World Cups (Florek et al., 2008; Kruger et al., 2012; Knott et al., 2013) confirm their positive effects on tourism, primarily due to the media and local residents. These studies emphasize that these mega-events, which attract significant media attention and are international in nature, have the greatest potential for a long-term impact on tourism, while community support and a good strategic and cultural fit with the venue are the necessary basis for including them in destination branding (Jago et al., 2003). As a rule, their impact on the image of a destination is higher than that of "average" sports events. By being able to position themselves through wide coverage, countries can attract investors and other stakeholders. However, some studies show that sports mega-events do not attract more direct investments to the host country after they are completed (Kasimati, 2009; Jakobsen, 2012).

The high costs of hosting sports mega-events necessitate the development of marketing strategies to maximize the number of visitors. Higher traffic increases ticket revenues and the value of sponsorship. Although economic impact studies initially focused on visitor spending in the host city (Putsis, 1998; Dwyer et al., 2000; Swart & Bob, 2012), marketing aimed at increasing traffic requires a broader approach and deeper understanding of visitors. As a result, the number of studies on the behavior of sports fans and spectators is gradually increasing (Izzo et al., 2011; Doyle et al., 2013; Koenig-Lewis et al., 2018). Many of these studies argue that understanding the motives and behavioral intentions of sports fans and spectators is becoming increasingly important for building effective event marketing strategies (Woo et al., 2009). It is also helpful to distinguish visitors whose primary purpose was to attend the event from those who attend the event, but are in the location for other reasons. The nature and level of motives associated with traveling specifically to participate in any event may be very different from the nature and level

of motives associated with attending the event for tourists who are at this destination for other reasons (Funk & Bruun, 2007; Snelgrove et al., 2008; Hungenberg et al., 2016).

Research on behavioral intentions focuses on their connections with service quality and customer satisfaction (Su et al., 2011; Awad, 2012; Eusébio & Vieira, 2013). When studying behavioral intentions of tourists, it is also important to understand the impact of transport accessibility and proximity to the venues. For example, long distances to free and natural attractions are likely to result in reduced frequency of tourist visits due to cost and inconvenience. However, these connections are far from unambiguous. In addition to travel distance, many other factors affect the behavioral intentions of tourists, such as the activities performed in that location. If these activities are attractive or important to travelers, they can overcome the distance barrier to return to attractive tourist destinations.

The behavior of sports fans and sports spectators is dictated by two basic needs (Trail & James, 2001): social (for example, spending time with family and friends) and psychological (for example, escaping reality, having fun).

Ritchie et al. (2002) compared the behavior of different types of tourists and came to the conclusion that sports tourists visit a venue for the first time more often than ordinary tourists. They also more often stay in the city overnight and visit less cultural places, such as theaters, cinemas, exhibitions. True sports fans more often stay at the venue for only one day, while tourists with other motives and tourists who did not come to the event stay at the destination for a longer period.

The literature suggests at least three types of motives that may be associated with trips to sports events (Green, 2001; Kim & Chalip, 2004; Daniels & Norman, 2005): (1) desire to “cheer for your favorite team,” (2) leisure preferences, (3) identification with the subculture of sports at the event. Trail et al. (2000) believe that sports spectators can be guided by up to nine different motives for attending an event, namely: achieving success, acquiring new knowledge, aesthetic perception of sports events, the need for social interaction with other participants, escape from reality, etc. Thus, the better an event can meet the needs of visitors with different motives, the more attractive it will be.

This means that passion for sports and the possibility of attracting fans should be weighed against a variety of broader cultural, economic, and physical factors and circumstances, such as price, venue, fan income, the probability of winning for a certain team, interest in the opposing team, etc. There is also empirical evidence that there is no guaranteed relationship between tourists’ satisfaction with a sports event and their desire to visit the same destination again in order to attend another sports event (Gripsrud, 2010). Therefore, it is important for the organizers to ensure that the journey to the destination provides tourists with experiences that will turn sports fans into fans of the host destination.

2. Research design and hypotheses

The empirical research presented in this paper is based on the literature reviewed above, which notes that a major sporting event attracts people with different motivations,

including visiting a new place, communicating with other sports fans, learning more about the venue, feeling the atmosphere of a major event, seeing favorite athletes, etc. Therefore, the visitors' behavior at the event venue is very different. The perceived value of a trip to a major sporting event depends not only on the competition itself but also on many other factors, including destination logistics, the overall state of the service sector, friendliness of local residents, etc. (Kyriaki, 2006; Florek, 2008; Wafi, 2017).

According to statistics, after the Universiade in Kazan in 2013, the tourist flow to the destination doubled, and the average duration of a tourist trip and the diversity of age groups of tourists also increased³ (Committee for Tourism Development of Kazan, 2019). On the other hand, in contrast to the growth of the domestic tourist flow, there was no significant growth in the inbound tourist flow to the city where the event was held either after the 2013 Universiade or after the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. In addition, according to a study conducted by the European Association of Tour Operators, none of the cities that hosted the Summer Olympic Games in recent decades (Seoul, Barcelona, Atlanta, Sydney, Athens, Beijing) experienced a steady increase in tourist flow after the Olympics.

In this regard, based on the analysis of the literature, we put forward the following hypotheses, which were tested in the course of the empirical research:

H1. Favorable experiences at a major sporting event have a positive effect on the image of a destination in tourists' perception.

H2. The image of a major sporting event has a positive effect on the desire to visit or revisit the destination.

H3. A tourist's impressions of a sporting event consist of many components that begin to be laid even before arriving in the host country and do not end immediately after the event:

3a. logistics (flight, taxi, public transport);

3b. openness of local residents;

3c. price levels in the service sector;

3d. gastronomic diversity;

3e. variety of recreation places;

3f. organization of individual competitions.

H4. A visitor of a major sporting event is more likely to visit this destination again when more events are held there.

To test the above hypotheses, we collected and analyzed empirical data obtained by both qualitative and quantitative methods, namely semi-structured interviews and surveys.

Qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews, allow researchers to deviate from the order of questions outlined in the guide to better understand respondents' opinions, attitudes and experiences (Legard et al. 2003) and, thus, get insights into consumer experiences that cannot be obtained using research methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 Russian respondents who attended the 2018 FIFA World Cup matches in cities that were not their places of

³ https://kazan.aif.ru/society/v_kazani_so_vremen_universiady_stalo_v_dva_raza_bolshe_turistov

residence. The sample included four women and eleven men aged 20 to 37 years from different Russian regions. Each interview lasted from 22 to 54 minutes, and each interview was recorded and transcribed. The respondents were recruited by means of information letters to the participants of the 2018 FIFA World Cup group on the social network VKontakte, as well as by the snowball method, since the first respondents gave contacts of friends who had also attended the World Cup matches.

In addition to the Russian respondents, 5 foreign citizens from Mexico, India, Portugal and the USA participated in the interview, two of whom provided answers to questions in writing due to the inconvenience of participating in an online interview (Table 1). The respondents were found using snowball method, as well as using groups on Facebook.

Table 1. General information about respondents

	Gender	Age	City/country of residence	Cities visited to attend matches
Respondent 1	male	26	Moscow	Nizhny Novgorod
Respondent 2	female	23	Moscow	Rostov-on-Don
Respondent 3	male	23	Moscow	Nizhny Novgorod
Respondent 4	male	22	Moscow	Rostov-on-Don
Respondent 5	male	20	Moscow	Samara
Respondent 6	male	33	Moscow	Sochi
Respondent 7	female	37	Moscow	Kazan
Respondent 8	female	23	Ryazan	Kaliningrad
Respondent 9	male	27	Voronezh	Kazan
Respondent 10	male	29	St. Petersburg	Kazan, Saransk, Sochi, Samara
Respondent 11	male	28	St. Petersburg	Kazan, Sochi
Respondent 12	male	27	St. Petersburg	Kazan
Respondent 13	female	28	Kirov	Kazan
Respondent 14	male	24	Moscow	Samara
Respondent 15	male	28	India	Moscow, Kazan, St. Petersburg, Samara, Rostov-on-Don
Respondent 16	female	25	Mexico	Moscow
Respondent 17	male	27	USA	Moscow, Sochi, Samara
Respondent 18	male	26	Mexico	Moscow, St. Petersburg, Rostov-on-Don, Ekaterinburg
Respondent 19	male	28	Portugal	Moscow, St. Petersburg, Rostov-on-Don

Source: compiled by the authors based on the respondents' replies.

After analyzing the interviews, two surveys were conducted.

The first one was for foreign citizens who attended the matches of the 2018 FIFA World Cup. The second one was for Russians who attended championship matches in cities that were not their places of residence.

The first survey with a questionnaire of 29 questions was launched on the questionstar.ru platform and distributed on facebook.com for 11 days (April 16–27, 2021). The link to the survey was posted in groups dedicated to football (such as *Argentinos al Mundial de Qatar 2022*, *US soccer*, *Perú a Qatar 2022*, etc.), as well as in groups for travelers (*Travel in the world*, *Traveling in Europe*, *Solo travelers*, etc.).

633 people from 24 countries took part in the survey. 21 of them did not visit the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia and answered only one filter question, the remaining 612 people completed the survey. 83% of the respondents were men and 17% were women. 53% of respondents were aged 26–35, 26% of respondents were aged 36–45.

The majority of the respondents were from Latin America (65% of Mexicans, 21% of Argentines, 4% from other Latin American countries). Such a bias towards Latin America may be the result of more active participation of these countries' representatives in the groups in which the survey was disseminated, their higher interest in this topic, as well as a more positive attitude of these respondents towards the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia.

The second survey, conducted among Russians, was posted on the anketolog.ru platform and distributed on VKontakte in a group dedicated to the 2018 FIFA World Cup. Additionally, we used the snowball method, as respondents sent a link to the survey to their friends. 47 respondents took part in the second survey with a questionnaire of 25 questions, and 43 of them were present at the matches of the 2018 FIFA World Cup in cities that were not their places of residence. 75% of respondents were men, 25% women, 39% were 26–35 years old, 29% were 36–45 years old.

The data were processed and analyzed using SPSS and Excel programs.

Hereafter, we analyze the results of the survey conducted among foreigners, while the results of the second survey were used as a control group, since the number of respondents was insufficient to extrapolate the data.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results of the qualitative research

In the qualitative part of the empirical research, the dialogue with each respondent (after qualification) began with the following question: “Tell us please, in which cities of the World Cup did you attend the matches and why in these particular cities?” Then the informants talked about their opinion about the organization of the championship, as well as about their leisure time in the host cities. Follow-up questions focused on the respondents' answers to the questions, such as overall impressions of the trip, the most memorable moments, and a change of opinion about the host city. After answering the above questions, the respondents were asked about their interests (whether the respondent

plays football, how often he or she travels, and how often he or she watches football matches). After all the information about the trip to the 2018 FIFA World Cup and the respondent's preferences was provided, the participants indicated their age.

The verbatim records were analyzed using the QDA miner program. Based on this analysis, five blocks of data were identified reflecting various responses of the 2018 FIFA World Cup visitors: the reason for choosing the city of the match, leisure activities, the most memorable moments of the trip, the organization of the match, and a possible change of opinion about the city.

The reason for choosing the city of the match. The respondents were asked how they had chosen the city to attend the match. After analyzing the data using the QDA miner program, four main reasons were found. Since the tickets for the matches were purchased after submitting an application and the subsequent drawing of lots, half of the respondents stated that they had submitted a large number of applications to different cities and, as a result, had gone to those where they had received tickets by the drawing of lots.

Two respondents who visited Kazan wanted to watch the matches of a certain team, and it was based on the games that the route was built:

"Initially, we bought tickets for three matches. All three were games of the German national team." (Respondent 9).

"As I am a huge fan of Germany, for many years, more than ... 15 years, that's why I initially wanted, when the World Cup started, I wanted to see Team Germany, and in general to go to all their matches." (Respondent 13).

Some of the respondents wanted to go only to those cities where they had not been before, and two respondents who attended the matches in Sochi had chosen this city because they had wanted to relax by the sea.

Thus, when purchasing tickets for the World Cup matches, the respondents did not seek to visit any specific cities. The main reasons for choosing a destination were available tickets and a game of the team of interest.

Leisure activities in the host city. To understand the behavioral characteristics of fans of the 2018 FIFA World Cup, we asked the respondents how they spent time in the host cities, other than visiting the stadium, and how they were exploring these cities.

The majority of respondents got acquainted with the city while walking in the downtown, as well as independently exploring the main attractions (Table 2). None of the respondents took guided excursions, which leads to the assumption that the audience of the World Cup does not coincide with the one that goes on excursions, and that the attractiveness of the city for them does not depend on their availability and diversity. In order to test this assumption, questions about leisure activities were added to the survey questionnaire, as well as how the respondents chose a place to rest.

Analyzing the leisure time of the respondents, it can be noted that besides walking around the city, they visited the public fan zone, met with other fans (Russians and foreign citizens) and local residents, and visited pubs and restaurants to watch matches.

The respondents spoke positively about meeting people, and those who did not know English regretted that they did not have an opportunity to communicate with foreigners:

“We communicated heartily and warmly, and talked there with all the foreigners, with Panamanians, and with Italians, I also remember we talked and it was all, but it was great, what else to say.” (Respondent 5).

“I also met a young man from Finland there, we are friends on Facebook now, but I don’t remember his name, and one person was from Australia. Now imagine two Russian guys and two foreigners are meeting, and we actually had such a cool time.” (Respondent 3).

Table 2. Leisure activities in the city of the match

Points touched upon	Cases	% of cases
Meeting other Russian fans	4	29
Meeting foreigners	4	29
Fans train	6	43
Resting by the sea	3	21
Fan zone	5	36
Pubs	5	36
Meeting locals	2	14

Source: on the basis of the respondents’ replies.

The most memorable moments of the trip to the 2018 FIFA World Cup. The festive atmosphere, as well as the matches themselves, turned out to be the most memorable moments for the respondents (Table 3).

Table 3. The most memorable moments of the trip to the 2018 FIFA World Cup

The most memorable moments	Count	Codes (%)	Cases	% of cases
Festive atmosphere	9	4.6	8	57.1
Match	6	3.1	5	35.7
Walks around the city	6	3.1	5	35.7
Stadium infrastructure	3	1.5	3	21.4
Watching foreign fans	3	1.5	3	21.4
Communication with foreign fans	2	1.0	2	14.3
Travel to the city of the match	1	0.5	1	7.1
Communication with local residents	1	0.5	1	7.1
Local food	1	0.5	1	7.1

Source: on the basis of the respondents’ replies.

Russian respondents were extremely interested in watching how foreigners cheer for their teams, how they dress and how they behave on the streets:

“We saw such a picture: a group of Germans... and on the opposite side — a group of Swedes ... And first, the Germans sing and embrace... they jump, dance, some others shout out

some chants... Then they fall silent. And then the Swedes begin to shout some kind of "chants" in response to the Germans, and sing some songs ... It's real fun. The Germans and Swedes hug each other, like this — in a circle, by the shoulders they jump and shout: "Russia, thank you!" And we ... it was so nice, very cool, very cool!" (Respondent 9).

"Of the time spent in the city, the most memorable was the atmosphere created by the fans of the Argentine national team. On the day of the match against France, at the stadium and in the center... it seemed as if they had literally taken over the city. The Argentines sang and danced almost continuously, while behaving very friendly and having fun, without creating problems for others." (Respondent 10).

"The match was very average in terms of the game, but in terms of emotions, in terms of the atmosphere of the championship, it was incredible. This is one of the unforgettable moments of life, when you put these memories right in your heart, they are stored there for a long time. So, I really liked the atmosphere." (Respondent 7).

5 respondents also noted that walking around the host city was one of the most memorable moments, however, this was partly or mainly due to the prevailing festive atmosphere.

"The match itself was somehow unmemorable, I liked the city more, there were always people in the city center, and it was clear where to go, even without any signs and outside help." (Respondent 1).

In addition, respondents noted that they had liked the trip on the fan train (because of the atmosphere of unity reigning in it), the feeling of conditional freedom (due to the fact that a large number of law enforcement officers could be seen in the city, but at the same time there were no sense of supervision and strictness).

Organization of the World Cup 2018. According to the answers, all respondents were satisfied with the quality of organization, assessing it as positively as possible. The answers of foreign respondents show that their opinion about the organization of matches coincided with that of the Russians.

Among the elements of the organization, easy access to the stadium, the work of volunteers and entertainment activities near the stadium before the game were highlighted.

"I remember the city as a very pleasant place, largely thanks to this atmosphere created by fans, and local residents, and volunteers." (Respondent 12).

"If we consider the football match (speaking of what I liked the most) and my opinion, then, of course, the organization of the match." (Respondent 8).

"The organization made a great impression, because we were able to enter, exit, find a place very quickly and easily, there were a lot of volunteers, administrators. No difficulties arose." (Respondent 7).

Change of opinion about the city and country. Seven out of 19 respondents noted a positive change in their opinion about the city they visited, five respondents said that their opinion had not changed, some said that they had had no opinion at all before the visit, and it had formed as quite positive, and only one respondent changed his opinion for the worse. The majority of respondents said they would have liked to visit the city again (9 answers) or had already done so (3 answers). These answers indicate that a good organization of a mega event can lead to a positive change in opinion about the host city and country.

Foreign respondents also spoke about their prejudices, referring to bad knowledge of the English language by Russians, coldness of local residents, and brutality of the police.

“There are always stereotypes about Russians. If you see them in the movies, or in general, they are a little stubborn or something like that. The stereotypes still exist, but it did not play a role in my mind, because I knew that since that is football, people will generally be happy... The only thing I knew was that Russians speak little or no English.” (Respondent 15).

“Many people had a lot of stereotypes ... I might not have been a little afraid, or maybe I was scared, because... we hear that Russian people are very tough, and the police are the same.” (Respondent 18).

This means that there is an obvious need to work with the information flow about the country. The results also confirm that sporting mega events are an impetus for a trip to the country and a way to destroy existing negative stereotypes.

It should be underlined that all four foreign respondents changed their opinion about Russia, and all noted that they would have liked to visit the country again:

“I would like to visit again and visit all the places, especially Lake Baikal, this train, which is very beautiful.” (Respondent 15).

“I would visit Russia again. I feel that, for example, in Moscow, there were many places that I did not go to, or, perhaps, did not delve deeper into them because of all the celebrations on the streets and the World Cup.” (Respondent 18).

The results of the interviews allow us to put forward a hypothesis that people who attended the 2018 FIFA World Cup wanted to re-visit the Russian Federation again. If this hypothesis is confirmed, we will come to the conclusion that sports mega-events can help destroy the information barrier and become a pretext for the first acquaintance with the country and then a basis of the desire to visit the destination again.

3.2. Survey results

The questionnaire included questions about the host cities, the respondents' concerns about staying in the Russian Federation, their assessment of the elements of hospitality (leisure, service, transport, local residents), and the organization of the event (volunteers' work, police work, organization of entrances, fan IDs, conditions at the stadium), the respondents' behavior during the championship, the most memorable moments and assessment of the event and the country as a whole. The questionnaire also included questions clarifying whether the respondents changed their opinion about Russia, whether they wanted to come here again, and whether they recommended the visited cities to their friends.

The majority of the respondents visited the following cities: Moscow, St. Petersburg, Rostov-on-Don, Yekaterinburg, and Kazan. They evaluated their experience of travelling around Russia as a whole, regardless of individual cities.

48% of all foreign respondents note that they had no fears and prejudices before traveling to Russia. If we analyze the answers by country, the percentage of respondents is approximately equal to the overall ratio (Table 4).

Table 4. Percentage of respondents by country compared to percentage of respondents who initially did not worry about traveling to Russia

Country of residence	Total number of respondents to the questionnaire (%)	Respondents who were not worried before arriving at the 2018 FIFA World Cup (%)
Mexico	65.36	62.2
Argentina	21.57	24.1
USA	5.88	7.1
Peru	1.14	1.2
Brazil	0.98	0.8
Pakistan	0.49	0.8

Source: calculated using Excel program based on the answers of foreign respondents.

The rest of the respondents noted that they had had some concerns, namely the following:

- 343 respondents (56%) were worried about language barriers, i.e. that the respondents' languages or the English language were poorly understood in Russia;
- 51 respondents (8%) were afraid of poor service;
- 50 respondents (8%) were afraid that their stay in Russia would be unsafe (including due to the strictness of the police, unrighteous laws, theft, and crime);
- 16 respondents (2%) believed that local residents would be unfriendly or aggressive (including hatred towards representatives of sexual minorities).

The content analysis of the comments left by the respondents after completing the survey in the last (open) question of the questionnaire contains the following phrases about prejudice:

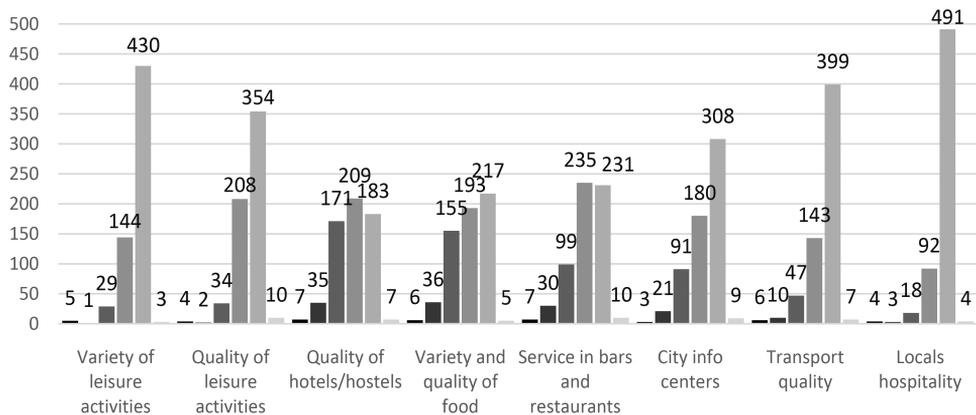
Before the trip, I was afraid, because I have heard a lot of myths about the Russian people; We used to think that Russians were cold and rude. In the US army, we were taught the Soviet Union/Russia was bad;

In the movies, Russians are always "bad guys." Another thing that worried me was the attitude of the police, before the trip I had an idea that they were very strict and I was afraid of them.

The above answers indicate that many foreigners have prejudices about Russia and fears about coming to the country. In this regard, it is very important to convey to foreign citizens the real picture, showing safe places, local residents, English-speaking people, etc.

During the survey, the respondents rated the elements of hospitality (variety and quality of leisure, quality of hotels, variety of food, service in restaurants, information services, transport system, local residents' hospitality) on a Likert scale (1 — completely dissatisfied, 5 — completely satisfied).

On average, the points were rated at 4.26 (Figure 1), with the highest rates for local hospitality (4.74) and variety of leisure activities (4.63), and the lowest points for quality of hostels and hotels (3.84) and diversity of food (3.94). This result is most likely due to certain expectations of some respondents regarding cold local residents, insecurity, and strict laws. In addition, targeted training of volunteers was carried out and, judging by the assessment of the respondents, it appeared to be very efficient.

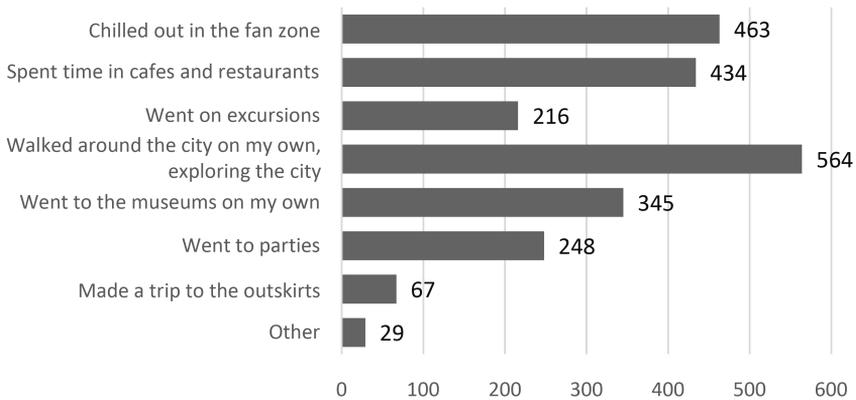


Source: calculated using MS Excel program based on the answers of foreign respondents.

Figure 1. Assessment of different elements of hospitality in the Russian Federation by foreign visitors of the 2018 FIFA World Cup

As for the quality of hotels and food, the respondents had fewer fears and expectations. Additionally, the assessment of these parameters is more subjective and is based on practical interaction with hospitality services. Objectively, the need to develop hospitality infrastructure in Russia has been obvious for decades (Balaeva et al., 2012; Sheresheva et al., 2016; 2018) and is now in the focus of attention of Russian authorities. Thus, according to the Decree No. 141 of February 9, 2021, a program for issuing concessional loans for the construction of hotels was launched in Russia. Entrepreneurs implementing investment projects in the hotel business will be able to receive financing at a rate of 3 to 5% per annum. The term of the loan agreement is up to 15 years inclusive. The funds received can be used for the construction or reconstruction of hotel buildings with an area of at least 5 thousand square meters or 120 rooms and more. It is also allowed to invest in hotels located in multifunctional complexes.

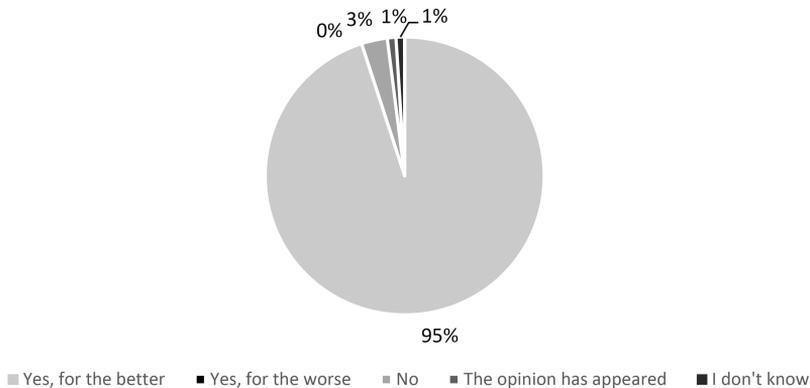
The survey data show that the majority of the respondents walked around cities, watched matches in public fan zones, went to bars and restaurants, and visited museums (Figure 2). Only 35% of the respondents indicated that they had spent their leisure time attending excursions, which once again confirms the fact that the audience of major sporting events prefers other types of leisure. In this regard, when promoting destinations among sports fans and event lovers, it is important to focus on events, interesting sights, and the development of bars and restaurants.



Source: calculated using MS Excel program based on the answers of foreign respondents.

Figure 2. Leisure of foreign citizens during their stay at the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia

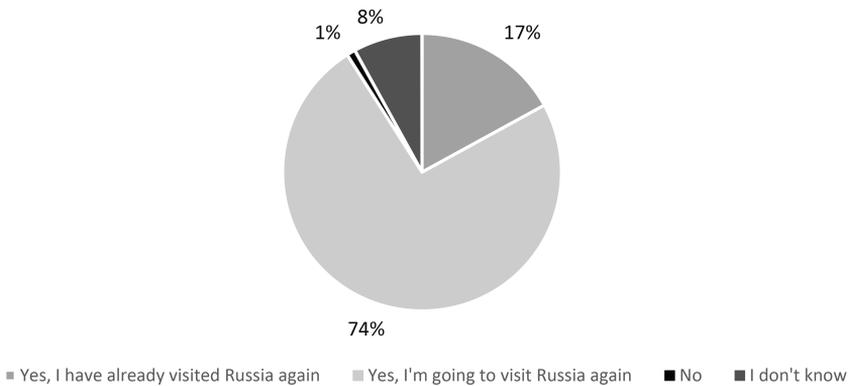
Speaking about a possible change of the respondents' opinion about Russia, 95% of the respondents stated that it had changed for the better (Figure 3). This indicates a high level of organization and that a major event can serve as a reason for a trip to a new country and a change of opinion about the destination. 74% of the respondents would like to visit the country again (Fig. 4), 17% of the respondents have already visited the Russian Federation after the 2018 FIFA World Cup with the purpose of visiting friends, a more detailed acquaintance with the city, trips to other cities.



Source: calculated using MS Excel program based on the answers of foreign respondents.

Figure 3. Change of respondents' opinion about Russia after the trip to the 2018 FIFA World Cup

In order to test H1 (Favorable experiences at a major sporting event have a positive effect on the image of a destination in tourists' perception), a correlation analysis was carried out, and differences between the groups of respondents were assessed by calculating the Mann-Whitney U test and analysis of the average values of the assessments.



Source: calculated using MS Excel program based on the answers of foreign respondents.

Figure 4. Respondents' desire to revisit Russia

The Mann-Whitney U test was applied to compare two independent samples, selected according to the following criteria related to the image of a destination:

- Dynamics of the image of a destination after attending a sporting event (Question: “*Has your opinion about Russia changed after your trip there?*”);
- A prospective aspect of the image of a destination associated with attending a sporting event (Question: “*Have you visited or would you like to visit Russia again?*”);
- A recommendatory aspect of the image of a destination (Question: “*Would you recommend the country to your friends as an interesting place to visit?*”).

In these groups, the following indicators (measured on a conventionally ordinal scale) related to the impression of the organization of a mega sporting event were compared:

- Level of satisfaction with hospitality at the destination (Question “*Please rate from 1 to 5 the level of hospitality in the cities during your trip, where 1 — not satisfied at all, 5 — completely satisfied*”);
- Level of satisfaction with the organization of the sporting event (Question “*Please rate the elements of the organization of the World Cup during your trips to the matches*”).

The Mann-Whitney U test allows us to identify differences in the value of any parameter between samples. This is a non-parametric statistical test used to compare two independent samples by the level of any characteristic measured quantitatively.

Using the statistical Mann-Whitney U test, three pairs of groups were compared:

1st pair: respondents who noted ***the positive dynamics of the image of the destination*** (first subgroup) and respondents who noted ***the lack of positive dynamics of the image of the destination*** (second subgroup). These are the respondents who chose the answer “Yes, for the better” to the question “*Has your opinion about Russia changed after your trip there?*” (first subgroup), and respondents whose opinion either has not changed or has changed for the worse — they chose the answers “Yes, for the worse” or “No” to this question (second subgroup).

2nd pair: respondents who noted ***a positive prospective aspect of the image of the destination*** (first subgroup) and respondents who noted ***the absence of a positive prospective aspect of the***

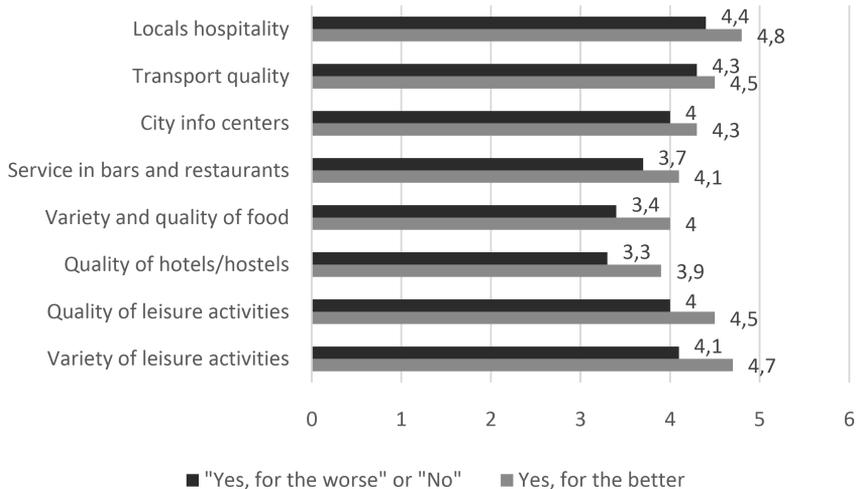
image of the destination (second subgroup). These are the respondents who chose the answer “Yes, I am going to visit the country again” or “Yes, I have already visited Russia again” to the question “Have you visited or would you like to visit Russia again?” (first subgroup), and the respondents who chose the answer “No” to this question (second subgroup).

3rd pair: respondents who were *ready to recommend the destination to their acquaintances* (first subgroup) and respondents who were *not going to recommend the destination to their acquaintances* (second subgroup). These are the respondents who chose the answer “Yes” to the question “Would you recommend the country to your friends as an interesting place to visit?” (first subgroup), and the respondents who chose the answer “No” to this question (second subgroup).

The above three pairs of groups were analyzed in terms of the magnitude of the following assessments:

- Parameters of the level of satisfaction with hospitality at the destination (on a 5-point scale from 1 to 5);
- Parameters of the level of satisfaction with the organization of the sporting event (on a 5-point scale from 1 to 5).

At the first stage, we calculated the average values of the scores of the respondents' assessments for each of the subgroups (Figures 5–9), at the second stage, we determined the reliability of differences between the groups according to the Mann-Whitney U test (tables 18–22).



Source: compiled by the authors using SPSS program based on the answers of foreign respondents.

Figure 5. The influence of the level of satisfaction with hospitality at the destination on the presence of positive dynamics in the image of the destination (“Has your opinion about Russia changed after your trip there?”)

Figure 5 shows that the average level of satisfaction with all the parameters of the destination’s hospitality is higher in the subgroup of those respondents who show a positive dynamic of the image of the destination (whose opinion about the country has changed

for the better after attending the event), compared to the second subgroup. At the same time, the differences in five out of eight parameters are reliable (Table 5).

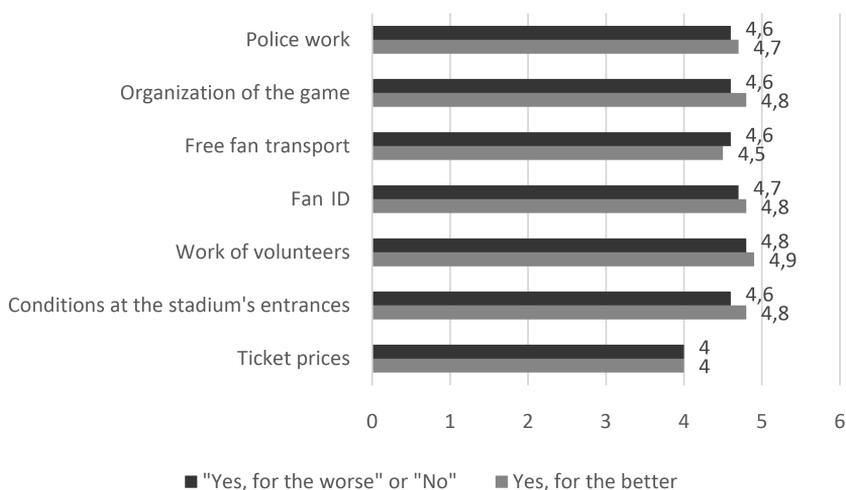
Thus, the hypothesis that there are reliable differences between the subgroups is confirmed when the value of the asymptotic significance is less than 0.05. In our case, this value is less than 0.05 for the following points:

- Variety of leisure activities
- Quality of leisure activities
- Quality of hotels/hostels
- Variety and quality of food
- Locals' hospitality

This indicates that the respondents who noted the positive dynamics of the image of the destination (the first subgroup) gave higher ratings to the parameters of the destination's hospitality listed above, compared to the respondents who noted the lack of positive dynamics of the image of the destination (the second subgroup).

Thus, according to the analysis of the respondents' answers, the positive dynamics of the image of the destination is significantly influenced by such characteristics of the destination's hospitality as the variety of leisure activities ($p = 0.002$), the quality of leisure activities ($p = 0.001$), the quality of hotels/hostels ($p = 0.002$), the variety and quality of food ($p = 0.005$), and the locals' hospitality ($p = 0.045$). The higher the respondents' assessment of these parameters of the hospitality of the destination, the higher the likelihood that they will have a better opinion of the city after attending the event.

At the same time, such characteristics of the destination's hospitality as service in bars and restaurants, city information centers, as well as the quality of transport do not significantly affect the positive dynamics of the destination's image.



Source: compiled by the authors using SPSS program based on the answers of foreign respondents.

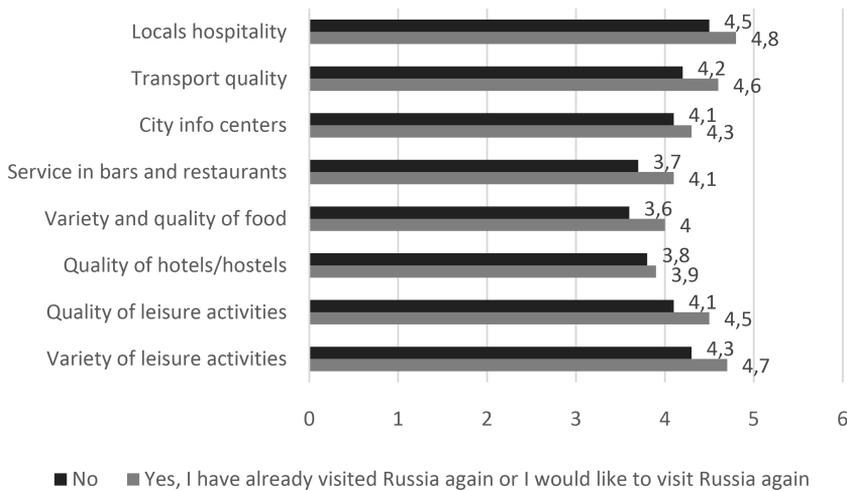
Figure 6. The influence of the level of satisfaction with the organization of the sporting event on the presence of positive dynamics in the image of a destination ("Has your opinion about Russia changed after your trip there?")

Figure 6 shows that the average level of satisfaction with most of the parameters of the organization of the sporting event in the subgroups of respondents who have and do not have a positive dynamic of the image of the destination differs insignificantly. At the same time, the difference is significant for one parameter out of eight (Table 5).

Table 5. The results of calculating the Mann-Whitney U test for comparing subsamples of respondents who noted the presence (first subgroup) or absence (second subgroup) of positive dynamics of the image of the destination on the grounds of “satisfaction with the destination’s hospitality” and “satisfaction with the organization of the sporting event”

		The Mann-Whitney U test	Wilcoxon W test	Z	Asymptotic (two-sided)
The level of hospitality in cities during the trip	Variety of leisure activities	5429.000	5754.000	-3.160	.002
	Quality of leisure activity	5090.000	5415.000	-3.213	.001
	Quality of hotels/hostels	5025.500	5350.500	-3.054	.002
	Variety and quality of food	5272.500	5597.500	-2.788	.005
	Service in bars and restaurants	6213.000	6538.000	-1.649	.099
	City info centers	6416.500	6741.500	-1.445	.149
	Transport quality	7624.000	7949.000	-.001	.999
	Locals	6438.000	6763.000	-2.002	.045
Elements of the organization of the World Cup	Ticket prices	7317.000	197353.000	-.446	.656
	Conditions at the stadiums’ entrances	6718.500	7043.500	-1.626	.104
	Work of volunteers	7465.000	7790.000	-.598	.550
	Fan ID	6626.500	6951.500	-2.013	.044
	Free fan transport	7542.000	196962.000	-.201	.840
	Organization of the game	7100.500	7425.500	-1.002	.316
	Police work	6786.500	7086.500	-.847	.397

Source: compiled by the authors using SPSS program based on the answers of foreign respondents.



Source: compiled by the authors using SPSS program based on the answers of foreign respondents.

Figure 7. The influence of the level of satisfaction with the destination's hospitality on the presence of a positive prospective aspect of the image of the destination ("Have you visited or are you going to visit Russia again?")

Figure 7 shows that the average level of satisfaction with all the parameters of the destination's hospitality is higher among those respondents who noted the presence of a positive prospective aspect of the image of the destination (first subgroup), compared with respondents who noted the absence of this aspect (second subgroup). At the same time, the differences in six out of eight parameters are significant (Table 6).

Table 6. The results of calculating the Mann-Whitney U test for comparing subsamples of the respondents who noted the presence (first subgroup) or absence (second subgroup) of a positive prospective aspect of the image of the destination on the grounds of "satisfaction with the destination's hospitality" and "satisfaction with the organization of the sporting event"

		The Mann-Whitney U test	Wilcoxon W test	Z	Asymptotic (two-sided)
The level of hospitality in cities during the trip	Variety of leisure activities	12374.000	14027.000	-4.166	.000
	Quality of leisure activities	11892.500	13488.500	-3.845	.000
	Quality of hotels/hostels	15610.000	17206.000	-.653	.514
	Variety and quality of food	13701.000	15354.000	-2.390	.017
	Service in bars and restaurants	12261.000	13746.000	-2.900	.004
	City info centers	14764.000	16360.000	-1.293	.196
	Transport quality	13996.500	15592.500	-2.159	.031
	Locals' hospitality	14379.500	16032.500	-2.572	.010

Table 6. Continued

		The Mann-Whitney U test	Wilcoxon W test	Z	Asymptotic (two-sided)
The elements of the organization of the World Cup	Ticket prices	13940.500	15536.500	-2.059	.040
	Conditions at the stadium's entrances	15240.000	16893.000	-1.745	.081
	Work of volunteers	16564.500	192685.500	-.495	.621
	Fan ID	15193.000	16846.000	-2.060	.039
	Free fan transport	15842.000	17495.000	-.832	.405
	Organization of the game	16060.000	17713.000	-.850	.395
	Police work	13722.000	15375.000	-2.963	.003

Source: compiled by the authors using SPSS program based on the answers of foreign respondents.

Thus, the hypothesis of significant differences between the subgroups is confirmed when the value of the asymptotic significance is less than 0.05. In this case, this value is less than 0.05 for the following indicators:

- Variety of leisure activities
- Quality of leisure activities
- Variety and quality of food
- Service in bars and restaurants
- Transport quality
- Locals' hospitality

This indicates that the respondents who noted the presence of a positive prospective aspect of the image of the destination (first subgroup) gave significantly higher assessments of the destination's hospitality parameters listed above, compared to the respondents who noted the absence of a positive prospective aspect of the image of the destination (second subgroup).

Thus, according to the analysis of the respondents' answers, the prospective aspect of the image of the destination is reliably influenced by such characteristics of the destination's hospitality as variety of leisure activities ($p = 0.000$), quality of leisure activities ($p = 0.000$), variety and quality of food ($p = 0.017$), service in bars and restaurants ($p = 0.004$), transport quality ($p = 0.031$), and locals' hospitality ($p = 0.010$). The higher the respondents' assessment of these parameters of hospitality at the destination, the more likely they are to visit the destination again.

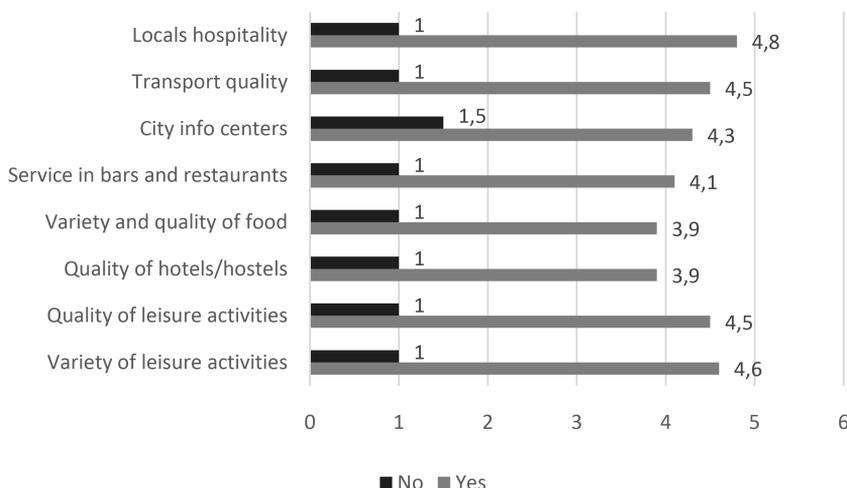
At the same time, such characteristics of the destination's hospitality as quality of hotels/hostels ($p = 0.514$) and city information centers ($p = 0.196$) do not significantly affect the prospective aspect of the image of the destination.

Figure 8 shows that the average level of satisfaction with all the parameters of the destination's hospitality is noticeably higher in the subgroup of those respondents who noted the presence of a positive recommendation aspect of the image of the destination (first subgroup), compared with the respondents who noted the absence of this aspect

(second subgroup). At the same time, the differences in seven parameters out of eight are significant (Table 7).

Thus, the hypothesis that there are significant differences between the subgroups is confirmed when the value of the asymptotic significance is less than 0.05. In this case, this value is less than 0.05 for seven out of eight indicators: variety of leisure activities, quality of leisure activities, variety and quality of food, service in bars and restaurants, city info centers, transport quality, and locals' hospitality.

This indicates that the respondents who noted the presence of a positive recommendation aspect of the image of the destination (first subgroup) gave significantly higher assessments to these parameters of the destination's hospitality, compared to the respondents who noted the absence of a positive promising aspect of the image of the destination (second subgroup).



Source: compiled by the authors using SPSS program based on the answers of foreign respondents.

Figure 8. The influence of the level of satisfaction with the destination's hospitality on the willingness to recommend the destination to friends ("Would you recommend the country to your friends as an interesting place to visit?")

Thus, according to the analysis of the respondents' answers, the recommendation aspect of the image of the destination is significantly influenced by such characteristics of the destination's hospitality as diversity of leisure activities ($p = 0.002$), quality of leisure activities ($p = 0.005$), variety and quality of food ($p = 0.011$), service in bars and restaurants ($p = 0.010$), city info centers ($p = 0.009$), transport quality ($p = 0.004$), and locals' hospitality ($p = 0.000$). The higher the respondents' assessment of these parameters of the destination's hospitality, the higher the likelihood that they will recommend the destination to their acquaintances.

At the same time, such a characteristic of the destination's hospitality as quality of hotels/hostels ($p = 0.073$) does not significantly affect the recommendation component of the destination's image.

Table 7. The results of calculating the Mann-Whitney U test for comparing the subsamples of respondents who noted the willingness (first subgroup) or unwillingness (second subgroup) to recommend the destination on the basis of “satisfaction with the destination’s hospitality” and “satisfaction with the organization of the sporting event”

		The Mann-Whitney U test	Wilcoxon W test	Z	Asymptotic (two-sided)
The level of hospitality in cities during the trip	Variety of leisure activities	3.000	6.000	-3.067	.002
	Quality of leisure activities	3.000	6.000	-2.794	.005
	Quality of hotels/hostels	3.500	4.500	-1.795	.073
	Variety and quality of food	5.000	8.000	-2.546	.011
	Service in bars and restaurants	5.000	8.000	-2.583	.010
	City info centers	13.000	16.000	-2.615	.009
	Transport quality	3.000	6.000	-2.913	.004
	Locals hospitality	2.000	5.000	-3.570	.000
Elements of the organization of the World Cup	Ticket prices	520.500	523.500	-.469	.639
	Conditions at the stadium entrances	369.500	372.500	-1.583	.113
	Work of volunteers	351.000	354.000	-2.198	.028
	Fan ID	378.000	381.000	-1.658	.097
	Free fan transport	454.500	457.500	-.865	.387
	Organization of the game	374.000	377.000	-1.530	.126
	Police work	398.000	401.000	-1.208	.227

Source: compiled by the authors using SPSS program based on the answers of foreign respondents.

In order to check the presence/absence of an interdependence between satisfaction with the level of hospitality and the level of organization, on the one hand, and assessment of the impressions from the event and attitude to the city/country after the trip, on the other hand, the Spearman correlation analysis method was applied.

Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient is a nonparametric method that is used to statistically study the relationship between phenomena. This method is used to conditionally assess the tightness of the relationship between the features, considering the coefficient values equal to 0.3 or less as indicators of weak relationship tightness; values higher than 0.4, but less than 0.7 as indicators of moderate tightness of communication, and values of 0.7 and more as indicators of high relationship tightness of communication.

The results of calculating the correlations are presented in Tables 8 and 9.

Table 8. The results of the correlation analysis between the level of hospitality in the cities during the trip and the assessment of the impressions from the event and the attitude towards the country after the trip

Please rate from 1 to 5 the level of hospitality in the cities during your trip, where 1 – not satisfied at all, 5 – completely satisfied	Please rate your impression of the trip to the 2018 FIFA World Cup	Please rate your attitude to the country after your trip
Variety of leisure activities	.195**	.257**
Quality of leisure activities	.222**	.220**
Quality of hotels/hostels	.166**	.161**
Variety and quality of food	.116**	.175**
Service in bars and restaurants	.147**	.168**
City info centers	.137**	.147**
Transport quality	.235**	.289**
Locals hospitality	.245**	.312**

Note: Correlation tables use the following designations for the significance of correlations: ** – correlation is significant at the level of 0.01 (two-sided), * – correlation is significant at the level of 0.05 (two-sided).

Source: compiled by the authors using SPSS program based on the answers of foreign respondents.

Table 9. The results of the correlation analysis between the level of respondents' satisfaction with the elements of the organization of the World Cup and the assessment of impressions from the event and the attitude towards the country after the trip

Please rate the elements of the organization of the World Cup during your trips to the matches	Please rate your impression of the trip to the 2018 FIFA World Cup	Please rate your attitude to the country after your trip
Ticket prices	.298**	.211**
Conditions at the stadium entrances	.308**	.241**
Volunteers' work	.206**	.170**
Fan ID	.354**	.272**
Free fan transport	.230**	.254**
Organization of the game	.333**	.273**
Police work	.273**	.239**

Note: Correlation tables use the following designations for the significance of correlations: ** – correlation is significant at the level of 0.01 (two-sided), * – correlation is significant at the level of 0.05 (two-sided).

Source: compiled by the authors using SPSS program based on the answers of foreign respondents.

According to Tables 8 and 9, there is a direct weak significant correlation between ratings of hospitality and post-trip experience and ratings of attitude to the country, as well as between ratings of satisfaction with the event and ratings of post-trip attitude to the event and the country.

Based on the results obtained, we can draw some conclusions:

- The more satisfied the respondents were with the hospitality in the cities during their trip, the higher was their overall assessment of the impressions of the event (the most significant factor of hospitality for the overall trip experience is the hospitality of local residents, $r = 0.25$);
- The more satisfied the respondents were with the hospitality in the cities during their trip, the higher was their overall assessment of the attitude towards the city/country after the trip (the most significant factor of hospitality for the overall assessment of the attitude towards the city is the quality of transportation, $r = 0.29$);
- The more satisfied the respondents were with the level of the organization of the World Cup during their trip, the higher was their overall assessment of the impressions of the event (the most significant organizational factors for the overall impression of the trip are the Fan ID, $r = 0.35$, and organization of the game, $r = 0.33$);
- The more satisfied the respondents were with the level of the organization of the World Cup during their trip, the higher was their overall assessment of the attitude towards the city/country after the trip (the most significant organizational factors for the overall assessment of the attitude towards the city are also the Fan ID, $r = 0.27$, and organization of the game, $r = 0.27$).

Conclusions and future research

In this paper, we focused on the perception of Russia and the host cities of the 2018 FIFA World Cup by spectators. The concluding remarks are as follows.

Hosting of a sports mega-event affects the perception of the destination by its visitors. In the short term, a sports mega-event can have a positive effect on the destination's image. Such events help to expand the target audience of the destination or make it more diverse. They encourage people to choose a location not previously considered by travelers.

Attending a sports mega-event may lead to the intention to revisit the hosting destination. According to the results of our study, we can state that the following characteristics of the destination's hospitality reliably and significantly influenced the positive dynamics of the image of the destination: variety and quality of leisure activities, quality of accommodation, variety and quality of food, and locals' hospitality. The prospective aspect of the image of the destination is reliably influenced by such characteristics of the destination's hospitality as variety and quality of leisure activities, variety and quality of food, service in bars and restaurants, transport quality, and locals' hospitality.

Additionally, the level of satisfaction with the organization of the sporting event is important, namely ticket prices, Fan ID, and quality of police work.

The higher is the respondents' assessment of these parameters, the higher the likelihood that they will visit the destination again. Some tourists are ready to return to the destination only to attend another event of their interest. Therefore, the infrastructure that allows for further events is very important. The majority of visitors to sporting events prefer bars and walks around the city, rather than excursions and museums. Therefore, to attract sports tourists and make them satisfied with their impressions, it is worth focusing not on traditional cultural attractions, but on informal activities.

In addition, we revealed the following patterns:

- The more satisfied the respondents are with the hospitality in the cities during their trip, the higher is their overall assessment of their experience at the event and their overall assessment of the attitude to the city/country after the trip.
- The more satisfied the respondents are with the level of the organization of the event during their trip, the higher is their overall assessment of their experience at the event, and the higher is their general assessment of the attitude towards the city/country after the trip.

The study contributes to the academic literature on event tourism and the image of a destination by unveiling the factors that are important for ensuring the satisfaction of visitors to sports events, eliminating the initial negative perception of the host destination, and increasing the desire to revisit the destination.

There are a number of limitations in this study. Currently, our results are based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative empirical data that gave us a number of valuable insights and allowed to answer the research questions. However, we surveyed the visitors to only one sports mega-event (the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia), and most of the respondents were from Argentina and Mexico. Therefore, empirical data obtained from a broader representative sample is needed. It is also necessary to improve the understanding of how visitors to sports mega-events adapt to the new situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemics, and what has changed in their behavior. As a promising direction for future research, we consider the collection of similar data on sports mega-events organized in other BRICS countries.

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