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## ALLIES OR RIVALS? SHAPING IMAGES OF CO-HOST COUNTRIES VIA COMMON MEGA EVENT. THE CASE OF POLAND AND UKRAINE AND EURO 2012

**ABSTRACT.** This paper discusses the determinants of shaping images of host countries through one, shared mega event. In particular, it presents possible relationships between the overlapping sets of images of event organizer, host countries, host cities and other country's destinations and consequently, between their communication strategies. Identification of the these interdependencies, areas of competition and possible synergies is vital for destinations in order to capitalize on the common mega event – together and separately. The possible benefits and limitations of exploitation of mega event for both countries image purposes are shown through a case study of Poland and Ukraine hosting UEFA EURO 2012.

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**Keywords:** destination image, country branding, EURO 2012, Poland, Ukraine.

### Introduction

Although organization of mega events, such as FIFA (*Fédération Internationale de Football Association*) World or UEFA (*Union of European Football Associations*) European Championships, delivers all kinds of benefits (among others economic, environmental, social, and political), its economic profits have been called into question recently and therefore widely criticized. For example the analytics of Credit Suisse Bank calculated that thanks to hosting EURO 2008 the gross domestic product of Switzerland will rise only about 0,1 – 0,2 percent. The growth of GDP in the case of Austria is estimated similarly - at 0,15 percent. According to the report of Austrian Economic Chamber, 11.000 jobs were created thanks the event, but the majority of them were low paid positions in gastronomy (Kowanda, 2008).

In this light, the long-term benefits are being put forward as the most significant for the host country. These include the image related effects, such as increased awareness of a country as a destination, stronger profile, prestige, trustworthiness for a country, positive word of mouth, community pride, increased potential for investment and commercial activity in the region, recommendation and repeated visitation.

In the case of Germany and FIFA World Cup 2006, image effects are evaluated as the most valuable results of hosting the event. According to country branding consultant Simon Anholt (2006), Germany took advantage and left its controversial past behind in order to

achieve a more balanced national image, demonstrating its softer attributes such as being warm and welcoming. The World Cup has definitely helped not only to soften and boost Germany's image, but also to show its potential as a destination for fun and friendliness. Several studies have been conducted to examine if positive change in perception of Germany occurred after the event. In the third and fourth quarter of 2007, Germany occupied the number one spot in the Nation Brands Index for the very first time (Anholt, 2006). Research carried out by TNS Infratest on behalf of the German National Tourist Board confirmed that "Destination Germany had successfully capitalised on the opportunity provided by the World Cup to enhance its image". For example, for Brazil and the US, the most improvement is seen in tourism strong points such as culture, friendliness and natural beauty. In Switzerland, Germany scored higher than other countries for its heritage, contemporary culture and friendliness (GNTB, 2008)<sup>1</sup>.

According to the British BBC radio station's poll conducted in 2009, in 21 countries, it is Germany that has the best image in the world (61% of positive opinions)<sup>2</sup> (Rybńska, 2009). What is more and very important, Germans themselves think that thanks to World Cup the image of their country improved abroad. The results of TNS Infratest opinion poll carried out in July 2006 among 1000 respondents, show that 93 percent are of the opinion that the event helped to enhance Germany's image (TVP, 2006).

The image related effects of mega events on host country are therefore more and more often discussed in detail, being the subject of intentional efforts and complex strategies.

### **The nature and benefits of mega events**

Improvement or enhancement of host country image is seen as one of the potential benefits of organising or hosting mega events, among others international sport competitions.

Getz (in Fayos-Sola, 1998, p. 242) defines mega events as "planned occurrences of limited duration which have an extraordinary impact on the host area in terms of one or more of the following: tourist volumes; visitor expenditures; publicity leading to a heightened awareness and a more positive image; related infrastructural and organizational developments which substantially increase the destination's capacity and attractiveness". What distinguishes mega events is their large scale, vast impacts, international range and worldwide significance.

Hosting events, especially mega events, present a wide range of benefits to be gained through event itself and related sectors. Matos (2006) presents 13 main areas of its influence: financial outcome (e.g. revenues for the organising committee or sports body); economic impact (e.g. increase in expenditure but also opportunity cost and potential inflation); tourism and international marketing (e.g. image promotion triggering further expenditure and investment); infrastructure; urban structure (e.g. regeneration projects which also influence of property and rent prices); environmental impacts (positive e.g. if former industrial areas are

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<sup>1</sup> The first stage of the survey was carried out in November 2005, the second two months after the Word Cup (the survey sample consisted of fans who travelled to Germany from the seven countries whose teams were in the final round). Results show that Germany's image improved in the intervening period, with 55% of Dutch, 48% of Italian and 55% Brazilians describing Germany as "cosmopolitan and hospitable" (higher comparing to the first stage by 8%, 5% and 20% respectively). After the 2006 FIFA Word Cup, 60% of the French respondents and 63% of Italians described Germany as an "ideal host country" (a 7 and 12 point increase). For Italians for example, the host country's image improved significantly in all categories, especially in terms of its importance for culture-related holidays and city breaks and in their assessment of German hotels (both up by 11%). Quality of the hotels was also appreciated by Japanese visitors (increase of 11%). Value for money was perceived to be better after the event, rising by 9% in the Italian group and 4% among Swedes. At the second stage of the survey, 7% more Swedes questioned said that Germany has "exciting nightlife" (GNTB, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> France, United Kingdom and Japan are next. USA is evaluated negative in 43 percent. Iran, Israel and North Korea come in last positions (less than 20 percent of positive opinions) (Rybńska, 2009).

regenerated and higher technological standards are promoted); technological development (a factor supporting sustained economic growth); human capital (e.g. transfer of skills and knowledge to people involved in hosting the event); institutional setup (e.g. new and efficient ways of public-private-partnerships); political capital (mainly evolving for local politicians from the global focus and expectations in the pre-event phase and the successful organisation in the post-event phase); social structure (e.g. changes in individual's and group's structure and interaction triggered by the event); cultural and psychological changes (e.g. regional or national pride); and finally, intangibles (especially the affirmation of cities in the national or international stages).

The trend in destination (city, region or country) management to create new events and bid for existing ones is raising, since events offer organizers the valuable platform to build the host destination's image (Brown et al., 2004; Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Kim and Morrison, 2005; Lee et al. 2005; Smith, 2005; Matos, 2006) or better communicate its identity (Getz, 1989). The most prized events that are targeted by destination include the Olympic Games, Football World Cup, Trade and Political Forums, EXPO Expositions or Fairs, and Miss World contests (DeGroote, 2005; IBnGR, 2006). As such mega events can be related to sports, business, religion or other areas of life (Getz, 1991; Roche, 2000). However, it is the sports mega events that attract prominent attention, possibly because they are the most visible and spectacular kinds of 'a dense social eco-system' (Roche, 2000).

Sport mega events are considered to be one of the most meaningful and considered to be a attractive tool to shape a country's international image. Due to their attributes they offer a unique basis for creation, support or modification of host country perception. Sport mega events provide impressions of host countries to sports spectators, television viewers and additional indirect audiences (Getz, 1997; Lee et al. 2005; Kim and Morrison, 2005) counting their number in millions. The final tournaments themselves in England, Belgium/Netherlands and Portugal (with 16 teams and 31 matches) have been attended by more than 1 million fans (UEFA, 2008).

As a result, sport mega events offers the opportunity to project the desired image of host country going far beyond the event itself and enable to communicate the country assets that can be attractive for diverse types of audiences such as tourists, students, even investors (Florek et. al, 2008). Events, such as the UEFA European Championship, being linked to other complementary events can reinforce the desired image of the country. According to Chalip and McGuirty (2004) the possibility of attending an event increases if additional non-event attractions are incorporated into the host destination. Particularly, as Kim and Morrison (2005) argue, mega-sports events provide a possibility of incorporating "supporting events" and attractions of social and cultural nature that promote the host country's culture and traditions. These supplemental attractions or visit activities might encompass: heritage sites, landscape, theme parks, nightlife or shopping (Swarbrooke, 2002; Jansen-Verbeke, 1990; Dellaert et al, 1995 cited in Chalip and McGuirty, 2004). Visitors' satisfaction of complementary assets and events can be transferred to overall destination satisfaction, strengthening its image and support its character. At the end, it can result in recommendations, positive word-of-mouth and next visits. For example in the case of EURO2008 56% of visitors will recommend visiting Austria (27% are likely to do it) and 34% declared follow-up visit (31% likely to) (JGUM&MCI, 2008).

## Country Image

A destination's image can be defined as "a mental or attitudinal construct developed on the basis of a few selected impressions from among the flood of total impressions through a creative process in which those selected are elaborated, embellished and ordered" (Reynolds

1965, cited in Lee et. al, 2005, p.840). Image thus, is a relative concept in which objective information and facts are replaced by subjective opinions and judgments. Perception may thus vary among individuals depending, for example, on their experience with the destination (often based on single event), their knowledge about it, their experience with other places, attitudes, expectations, motivations, simplistic stereotypes they hold or their personal goals (Florek et al., 2008). As a result, the audiences' perceptions are often beyond marketers' control. What is possible to manage is a destination identity, understood as 'the sum of its characteristic features and activities which differentiate it from other entities' (Klage, 1991, p.27). It is therefore subject to planning and intentional arrangement of activities within a place. Consequently, image is the reflection of this identity, the reaction to this message in the minds of recipients. In terms of roles of entities in the process: 'image is on the receiver's side while identity is on the sender's side' (Kepferer, 1992, p.34).

By deliberately communicating the destination identity it is then possible to induce desired image of a place and together with the on-site experience to support the promotional messages and prove place's promise. However, some mega events host countries or cities have suffered negative publicity and a critical image, as for example Germany after the terrorism attacks on the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich (Merkel, 2006 in Florek et al. 2009). Also, some research demonstrates lack of relationship between mega event and country image (e.g. Rivenburgh et al. (2002) shows no change in Australia perception after the Sydney Olympics; Fayos-Sola (1998) reports on no image changes after the 1995 World Championships in Athletics in Gothenburg) and/or scepticism about the benefits of image change on destination (Ritchie and Smith 1991; Chalip et al., 2003; Smith, 2005 in Florek et al 2008). Shaping country's destination via mega event needs then to be adequately prepared and implemented to benefit from the event in the short and long perspective.

According to Gunn (1972) destination image may be seen in three forms, at the same time representing stages of image creation process: (1) organic image, which is formed by "independent" information delivered from independent sources such as media, word-of-mouth, etc; (2) induced image, that is shaped by promoted information emitted via promotional campaigns, travel agencies, etc.; and (3) modified-induced image as a result of personal experience of the destination.

Potential change in place (country, region or city) perception, resulting in modified-induced image, is one of the reasons and also outcomes of hosting mega-events (e.g. Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Baloglu and Brindberg, 1997; Matos 2006; Brown et al., 2004; Kim and Morrsion, 2005; Lee et al., 2005; Smith, 2005; Gethard, 2006). As Matos (2006, p.5) states: "image promotion is one of the most waved benefits of mega sports events". The feeling, atmosphere of the place and event, and enthusiasm of the host people trigger further benefits of internal and external consequences". Host country's particular destinations such as host- and other cities in the country offer powerful opportunities to promote the country even further as they can strengthen and support its identity and desired image.

## **UEFA European Championship and EURO 2012**

The UEFA European Championship is a football competition held every four years featuring the national teams of European countries. The modern UEFA European Championship has two parts: a series of qualifying groups played in the two years preceding its second part, a finals tournament. The finals are staged every four years in a different country. So far the finals tournament has been played in 13 countries: France (1960, 1984), Spain (1964), Italy (1968, 1980), Belgium (1972), Yugoslavia (1976), Germany (1988), Sweden (1992), England (1996), Belgium and the Netherlands (joint hosts 2000), Portugal

(2004), Austria and Switzerland (joint hosts 2008). Two times the organization of the event was entrusted simultaneously two countries (Wilde, 2009).

For the third time in the history Poland and Ukraine have been chosen to co-host UEFA EURO 2012 after a vote by UEFA on 18 April 2007. They won the battle to host the quadrennial tournament involving Europe's top nations ahead of one bid from Italy and another joint-effort from Hungary and Croatia. The Polish-Ukrainian hosting is seen as a way of shifting the focus towards regions and nations of central and eastern Europe, whose population demonstrates a strong feeling for football, but are less developed in terms of the quality of the local leagues and football infrastructure, when compared with western Europe (wikipedia, 2009).

Ukraine president Viktor Yushchenko said in a statement that the decision offered a great opportunity to both countries to host an "extraordinary" sporting event - "*Holding the 2012 European Championship will be a wonderful opportunity for Ukrainians and Poles to welcome the best representatives of Europe's soccer family and produce an extraordinary sporting event. Ukraine and Poland will be able to show millions of fans the unforgettable charm of their cities and the history they have preserved so beautifully and put on display of Slav hospitality and culture*" (FIFA, 2007).

The initial enthusiasm has been cooled down in 2009 when in August Michelle Platini stated that Poland, unlike Ukraine, was almost prepared to host the tournament, while suggesting UEFA could cut number of Ukrainian cities hosting Euro 2012 (Interfax-Ukraine, 2009a). Both countries being perceived as similar, are still relatively little known and in the West evoke mixed feelings, thus have much more to win than Austria and Switzerland. Consequently, negative publicity regarding its preparation steps, will have enormous prestige implications (Kowanda, 2008). Ukraine, deeper than Poland, also suffers from the social support. A July 2009 Ukrainian poll found that 56% of respondents believed that Ukraine would cope with hosting Euro 2012 and that 32% of respondents believed that their country would fail to stage Euro 2012 properly (Interfax-Ukraine, 2009b).

All the messages, covering by media, have significant influence on both country perceptions yet at the preparation stage. So far, mutual support given by country leaders, aims to leverage the images. In May 2009 prior to the UEFA meeting in Bucharest, the Prime Minister of Poland Donald Tusk stated: "We would be ready to host Euro 2012 in not four but in five to six cities if need be, but I think we should stick to the four plus four formula and not undermine our partnership with Ukraine." (Wasilewski, 2009).

At the same time, each country when co-hosting mega event, such as Poland and Ukraine EURO 2012, wants utilize the common event to communicate and enhance its image separately, especially when unfavourable aspects of one destination can influence perception of the other country. Consequently, the process of shaping and communication of country image via one shared event meets many challenges and various determinants have to be taken into consideration to succeed.

### **Relations between particular images as determinants of the image strategy**

In order to maximize the image related benefits for both: event organizers and the host destinations, it is suggested identifying the relations and possible synergies between them. It should be done at the level of particular countries as well as between the co-hosts.

In the case of event, such as European football competitions EURO2012, several types of relationships can be identified that influence the promotion of images of host countries (figure 1).

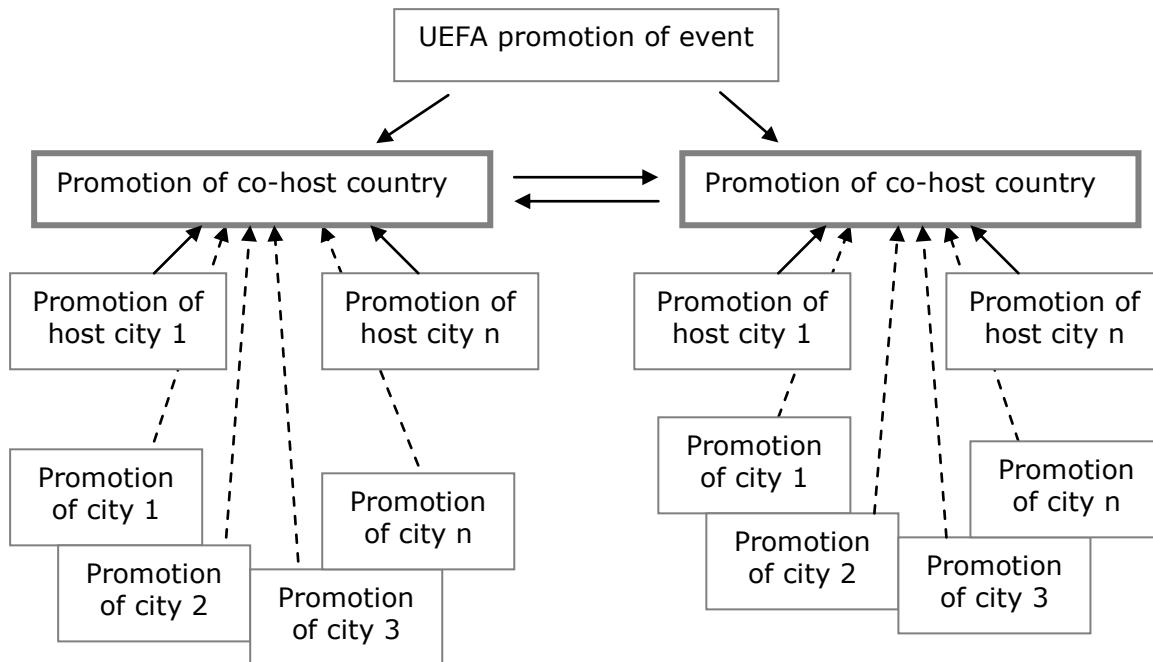


Figure 1. Relationships between promotion centres and their influence on shaping co-host country image

Source: own compilation.

Firstly, UEFA's promotion of the event itself will influence the way the both countries are perceived. UEFA is the biggest beneficiary of the event, thus interested in its effective communication and image. For example, the profits UEFA made from EURO2008 puts the organization in the position of the biggest winner – income amounts to 1,3 million EURO, it is 40 percent higher than four years earlier in Portugal (Kowanda, 2009). More broadly, UEFA's various messages the audience is exposed to before, during after the event, will significantly shape the perception of Poland and Ukraine. Although both countries want to benefit on the common event and the synergy effect, it can be seen at the preparation stage the messages are of different nature (regarding the level of preparation) putting both countries in rivalry (for example for the number of host cities). Regarding the event to be held in 2012, the character of communication strategy of UEFA will evidently influence the way the host countries will be seen and evaluated. From the general values behind the promotional concept to the number of stories and country/cities advertisements in media reports, UEFA's way of communication of the event will co-shape Poland and Ukraine image. It is key therefore, to realize the determinants set by event organizer and its possibilities as well as limitations.

Secondly, the perception of single host country is dependent on the communication and promotion activities of its co-host. On the one hand, each country separately wants to distinguish itself and present its own assets and characteristics to the audience. While implementing adequate campaigns, both countries want to attract attention and communicate desired images. On the other hand, as co-organizers, they are fated to common perception. As a result, many communication messages emitted by one country will be looked through prism of the second one. Therefore, failure in communication and consequently in perception of one co-host might harm the perception of another one and vice versa. In addition, there is a threat of emitting the contradictory messages to the targets. Simultaneously, unified promotion gives the effect of synergy and strengthens the efforts to build attractive image of co-hosts. The relations between two host promotion strategies should be then identified before they implementations start in order to search for common ground and avoid possible incoherence.

Another area of relations and influence on host country image might be seen in internal, country level. Firstly, the cities where particular parts of event will take place, will derive from country image related activities. Promoting a country in general attracts the public attention of its cities, especially those where the particular games are planned to take place in (according to initial plan four cities in Poland and four in Ukraine). Also, each individual host city while promoting itself will indirectly pass on information about the host country, thereby influencing and strengthening its overall perception. This is possible because of the nature of image that enables to transfer the image of one object to another one. Thus, the impact of image is of mutual character and both, the country and destinations within its borders, can benefit from this process. On the other hand, each host city wants to take the opportunity the mega event offers, and will emit its own messages, again, in order to stand out over the other country destinations. Accordingly, the audience might be exposed to a enormous number of communiqués with the danger of dispersed images.

Together with the host cities, other places, foremost such as tourism and aspiring destinations, will like to take the advantage of unusual number of visitors to the country and focus of media. According to Hinch's and Higham's opinion (2001) for many sport tourists a specific sporting event may function as the primary attraction in a destination, but the cluster of other features, particular places included, found in the surrounding area may finalise the decision to travel. Therefore, promotion of such places will additionally trigger the initial interest (before event) and additional attraction when attending the event. They may also have significant influence on the country impressions, presenting its complementary values and attractions. It might be expected that these indirectly related to the character of the event, cities and towns, will promote themselves quite intense and in addition will affect the host country perception. Although, their impact might be lesser (since the priority is given to promotion of the host country and host cities) their messages will no doubt diversify the superior promotion but at the same time also disrupt the general transmission. Again, the above described relations need to be analysed and leveraged in broader context.

The number of messages and image related activities undertaken by particular promotion centres: organizer of the event (FIFA in this case), host countries (Poland and Ukraine), host cities (four in each country) and other places (cities, town or even regions) together with the existing relations between them cause a number of determiners and deliver specific consequences for shaping co-host country image. As such, it is suggested identifying and analysing them before the exact image campaign starts to overcome their limitations and utilize synergy they enable.

It needs to be stressed, that the promotion of the event is also disrupted by promotion activities of particular event sponsors and other commercial brands. As a result the large amount of promotions and complexity of communication in the marketplace during this special time might extent people's ability to interact in a meaningful way with market propositions (Florek et. al, 2008) which is termed by Matos (2006) as 'opportunity cost' of impacts of sport mega events.

## **Summary**

In the case of destinations, the images of a country's products (understood as commercial goods, particular places and, in the discussed context, events, etc.) are transferred to the country's overall image, and, equally important, vice versa. As a result, events, especially those of international scale such as forthcoming EURO 2012, are seen as a platform to communicate country identity, modify and enhance its image. These highly prestigious events reported in the global media have large impact on the host country economy but also affect its international, long-lasting perception. Therefore it is crucial to

understand how the perception via event is formed and what kind of determinants influence the activities aimed at its enhancement.

The interrelationships between the overlapping sets of images and communication strategies – by UEFA, host countries, host cities and other country's destinations are the ingredients from which impressions are formed. Their sum and combination form the images of the single host country. Identification of the these interdependencies, areas of competition and possible synergies is vital for destinations in order to capitalize on the common mega event – together and separately. Such analysis provide information about what kind of activities might be effective in the image shaping process and its future potential benefits.

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