

THE IMPACT OF THE FIRST EUROPEAN GAMES 2015

*Programme director Daniel Mason
Master's student Mustafazadeh M.T.
Azerbaijan State Academy of Physical
Education and Sport*

Nəşr tarixi

Qəbul edilib: 1 iyun 2019

Dərc olunub: 5 iyul 2019

©2019ADBTİA. Bütün hüquqlar qorunur.

Key words: Mega-sport, international, customer, symbol, community

Abstract. This article explores the staging of the first European Games in Baku, in 2015, and its impact on the country's sporting ambitions. The way in which the event was covered by the media is also considered, and the extent to which this coverage affected the politics and economy of Azerbaijan. All would agree that Baku 2015 was a major opportunity to represent Azerbaijan to the world. In fact, it represented a watershed in national strategy; the moment that Azerbaijan laid claim to a reputation as a global capital of sport, that this young country was taking the lead in the dynamic, young, exciting world of sport. It was a bold exercise in international positioning. With reference to some of the activities and ambitions that brought the European Games to reality, it can be seen that the objective to change the international perception of Azerbaijan, laying the foundation for future sporting success, was a resounding success.

Introduction. In the years after 2010, the Azerbaijan Government pursued a strategy of large-scale spending of oil revenues, aimed at increasing the profile of the capital and promoting the country's image as a Muslim, secular developed state. It was, however, aware of the need to develop economic and cultural channels not dependent on the oil sector. It therefore set its sight on the organisation and delivery of major sporting events, or "mega-events" (1).

A mega-event is a large-scale, internationally sponsored, public

entrepreneurship activity engaging a long-term multi-sector organization within the host city and nation with the double goal of supporting overall local and regional development and advancing universal values and principles to meet global challenges (1). Mega-events are:

- Place-making activities that help to redefine and reposition a city
- Assigned by international bodies to a "deserving" city after a bidding process
- A local and a global mandate to cooperate on key challenges and urban improvement (4).

These combined elements are essential to explain their transformational capabilities: mega-events bring an injection of new international investment often concentrated in a very short period of time. At the same time, they force a city to develop new activities that contribute to re-shape and strengthen its identity from many perspectives, including cultural, social, economic, sporting and political (3).

To prepare for and run such an event can take many months and sometimes years. Some of the preparation required includes:

- The creation of a local organising committee
- Facilities (or the locations with potential to build facilities) evaluated, scheduled and prepared
- Training programmes established
- Suitable accommodation identified
- Tickets and sponsorships sold

Prior to 2015, every continent had its own non-Olympic major sporting event, with the exception of Europe. The European Olympic Committees wanted to change this and in December 2012 they handed Azerbaijan the responsibility of hosting the first-ever European Games. For Baku, a crossroads between East and West, between secular modernity and rich Islamic heritage, this was the perfect opportunity to put sport at the heart of its social and economic development, and show the world what Azerbaijan can achieve.

The challenge was huge. Most hosting cities are given seven years to prepare for an event of this scale while Baku 2015 was given only 30 months. In this short time, the

city was transformed into a sporting capital with an infrastructure capable of hosting a world-class event.

The first steps on this historic journey were taken almost 21 years ago when Azerbaijan became a member of the International Olympic Committee and came to the moment of triumph in June 2015, when the country unified people across Europe in a joyous celebration of sport.

The European Games were created at the General Assembly of the European Olympic Committees on 9 December 2012 in Rome, when 84 per cent of the National Olympic Committees of Europe voted for the creation of the European Games. A multi-sport event for athletes from all over Europe, the European Games would be held every four years, and Baku was named as the first host city. The Games are owned, organized and regulated by the European Olympic Committees. The concept is a continental multi-sport event along the lines of an Olympic or Commonwealth Games. Asia had already been holding its equivalent games every four years since 1951, so the European Games had a strong precedent.

Baku was awarded the right to host the first European Games at the 41st EOC General Assembly in Rome, on 8 December 2012. The first European Games took place in Baku, Azerbaijan, from 12 to 28 June 2015, and

featured almost 6,000 athletes from 50 countries competing in 20 sports. (5)

While the primary aim of the event was to celebrate the achievements of athletes from the European nations, BEGOC (Baku European Games Operation Committee) was determined to grasp the opportunity to make a profound, positive and lasting impact on millions of people around around the world.

Azerbaijan's leaders were determined to make Baku the centre of attention; to showcase sport in a vibrant city with outstanding new venues, to display arenas full of spectators enjoying a vibrant atmosphere, to show the innovative spirit of Azerbaijan and celebrate community involvement and social impact. This was

Azerbaijan's chance to inspire young people and demonstrate the power of sport to benefit the social, physical and economic life of the nation's communities. BEGOC ran a hugely successful campaign to recruit volunteers. Over 16,000 people registered to fill around 12,000 roles. The interview process ran like clockwork to match volunteer candidates with the appropriate skills required, with successful volunteers being awarded the title of Flame-keepers. This name reflected the volunteers' central role in promoting the spirit of the event and is also a homage to Azerbaijan, the Land of Fire, and the passion and warmth of its people.

At the core of the Government's ambition for the European Games was a commitment to ensuring both a physical and human legacy of Baku 2015. These fundamental goals of the European Games formed a key part of Azerbaijan's 2020 vision, and a fundamental basis of President's Aliyev's strategy to turn black gold into human gold. First lady Mehriban Aliyeva was at the heart of the European Games strategy, a contribution recognised by President Aliyev when he commented: "I'd like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the First Lady of Azerbaijan, for her tireless support and engagement to ensure that the European Games are a world-class event" (7).

There were four clusters and 18 competition venues for the inaugural European Games, including 12 that were designed to become permanent venues. Five of the venues were new-builds: the National Gymnastics Arena, BMX Velopark, Baku Aquatics Centre, Baku Shooting Centre and National Stadium. There were six temporary venues: Water Polo Arena, Beach Arena, Basketball Arena, Mountain Bike Velopark, and Triathlon, Cycling road race and time trial.

Baku 2015 was a major opportunity to present Azerbaijan to the world. Television rights were brokered not only within Europe, but also the rest of the globe, with contracts signed in the US and Canada, Latin America, India, China, Hong Kong, the Arab world and Australia.

The official logo for the Baku 2015

European Games was unveiled on 16 June 2014. Designed by Adam Yunusov, it was inspired by country's ancient and contemporary culture. The logo included flame, water, the mythical Simurgh bird, an Azerbaijani carpet and a pomegranate. The pomegranate, called Nar in Azerbaijani, was one of two mascots for the Games, along with a g a z e l l e n a m e d J e y r a n (g a z e l l e i n Azerbaijani). The symbolic nature of the logos were intended to reflect the spirit of Azerbaijan and inspire young people to engage with the event (7).

Hosting the Olympic Games is often viewed as a means of raising a nation's sporting profile as well as a tool for economic development, social regeneration and cultural integration (2). The Olympic Games are regarded as the world's most prestigious sporting occasion and have been documented as a significant catalyst for urban regeneration and as a means of enhancing a city's landscape and physical appearance. Staging the Olympic Games necessitates refurbishment of existing, and construction of new, sporting facilities and supporting infrastructure such as an Olympic Village, new housing, parks, recreational areas and transport links, all of which can become legacies for the host community when the Games are over.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the first European Games represented a turning point for Azerbaijan. The games were universally acclaimed as a triumph of organisation accomplished in a very tight timeframe, and an audience of many millions witnessed not only with an outstanding sporting spectacle, but the emergence of a confident, dynamic sporting nation forging a new future upon a foundation of rich heritage and proud traditions.

The Games more than achieved their objectives, attracting tourism, sponsorship, and economic benefits while leaving a legacy evident in the staging of further world-class sporting events, including the Islamic Solidarity Games and Formula 1. The success of the European Games prompted more investment in sport at all levels, leading to more international success

for Azerbaijan athletes than ever before and greater engagement with sport at all levels of society.

References:

1. Bowdin, G.A.J and Allen,J., 2006. Events management. Elsevier Publications
2. Dunn, K.M., Mc Guirk, P.M. and Winchester, H.P.M. (1995) Sports tourism: the social construction of event management and its effect on sports tourism. pp. 149-167.
3. Dwyer, L., Mellor, R., Mistilis, N. And Mules, T., 2001. Forecasting the economic impacts of events and conventions. Event Management, 6, pp. 191-204
4. Strauss, A.L. and Corbin, J.M., 1998. Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory
5. Baku 2015 European Games Official Web Site [<http://www.baku2015.com/>]
6. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2015_European_Games
7. <https://azertag.az/>

İlk 2015 Avropa Oyunları beynəlxalq yarışma kimi

Mircavad Mustafazadə

Açar sözlər: mega-idman, beynəlxalq, müştəri, simvol, təsisçi, icma

Xülasə: Məqalədə 2015-ci ildə ilk dəfə olaraq Bakıda keçirilən Avropa oyunları, onun təşkili və işıqlandırılması tədqiq edilir. Müxtəlif kütləvi informasiya vasitələrində işıqlandırılması əhəmiyyətli bir məsələ kimi araşdırılır. Bu oyunların Azərbaycan siyasətinə və iqtisadiyyatına necə təsir etməsi barədə də məlumat verilir. Burada Bakını Avropa oyunları çərçivəsində dünyada təmsil etmək üçün böyük bir fürsət olması haqqında məlumat verilir. Eyni zamanda məqalədə beynəlxalq meqatədbirlərin keçirilmə qaydaları haqqında geniş məlumat verilir.

**Первые Европейские Игры 2015
как международное соревнование**
Мирджавад Мустафазаде

Ключевые слова: мегаспорт, международный, покупатель, символ, сообщество

Аннотация: В этой статье исследуется Европейские игры и их организация в Баку впервые в 2015 году. Освещение различных СМИ также рассматривается как важная проблема.

Здесь исследуется, так же как эти игры влияют на политику и экономику Азербайджана.

Приводится информация о том, что в Баку-2015 появилась большая возможность представить Азербайджан в мире. На самом деле это была прекрасная возможность для молодой и динамичной страны, такой как Азербайджан, продемонстрировать себя перед миром. В то же время предоставляется широкая информация о правилах международных мегасобытий.