

2014 World Cup: opportunities and risks for the host country's image

by Manfred Ritschard

2014 FIFA World Cup Brazil: this is supposed to be the best World Cup ever. What soccer officials have evoked for a long time – i.e. the fantastic opportunity to position Brazil as an excellent host country – may also turn into a disaster for its image. Thanks to large training companies, though, host cities may become better prepared to play their role of hosts.

During the World Cup, large crowds of excited supporters will flock to the host cities and surrounding regions and – at least that is what is expected! – spend lots of money. In addition, there will be many Brazilian supporters watching the matches outdoors and in the international community. All expect a perfectly organized long party, which – hopefully! – will happen without any wild riots and major mishaps.

Now let's look at it from the perspective of the people that during the 2014 World Cup will provide services to the public: cab drivers, police officers, street vendors, waiters in restaurants, salespeople, railway employees and many others. For these people, World Cup days are labour-intensive, stressful and exhausting. Many of them will be relieved when everything is over.

Thousands of volunteers, specially recruited for the 2014 World Cup, will also play an important hosting role. They will be extremely motivated and therefore work almost for free: the joint experience, the "World Cup spirit" and attractive merchandising articles they will receive as

gifts is pay enough for them. Many of those volunteers have probably never been faced with such a challenge before. Will they be able to sustain their enthusiasm when their nerves are on the edge due to the crowd? How will they deal with sensitive situations? Are a couple of briefings and a written manual enough? How will all these ambassadors of the Brazilian hospitality be prepared for the 2014 World Cup?

Time is running out for host cities to present their concepts on how they wish to approach these training campaigns. Instructing and training thousands of participants on how to behave and deal with difficult situations in the commotion of supporters represents an enormous logistical challenge. Planning and implementation require much more than a year. And before that, the funding of those projects has to be provided. In Brazil, planning is normally done on a short-term basis. Can that work?

Based on our experience with similar training campaigns for the UEFA European Cup 2008, we suggest the "train the trainer" principle. Special training sessions will qualify

supervisors and project managers of different companies as service coaches, i.e. to conduct individual 10-minute training sessions with staff members, in which they will rehearse previously prepared and defined behaviour towards visitors. This means that when the supporters come on rushing, less stress-related service errors happen and that supporters really feel welcome in Brazil.

Thanks to the 2014 World Cup the quality of services and thus Brazil's image shall exhibit an enduring improvement. The perspective of visitors and of the media coverage is therefore decisive: is the visitor treated well and does he feel welcome? The training campaigns' main goal is to make the visitors that come to the World Cup go "aah" and "ooh" and to establish a professional communication with them.

This may be achieved through training campaigns that focus on establishing a friendly contact with visitors, but also on dealing with stressful situations and complaints in a confident manner. Brazil shall also win the hospitality cup. The starting whistle is soon to be blown and tension is sure to increase! ■



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