

The role of a host country image and mega-event`s experience for revisit intention: the case of Poland

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The role of a host country image and mega-event's experience for revisit intention: the case of Poland

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Abstract: Based on the survey data for EURO 2012™ visitors in Poland (N=103), the following hypotheses are given: (H1): The host country image will positively influence the EURO 2012™ visitors' revisit intention, (H2): The mega-event experience will positively influence the EURO 2012™ visitors' revisit intention to the host country, (H3): The host country image has more positive impact on the EURO 2012™ visitors' revisit intention than the mega-event experience.

The results show that there is a significant and positive relationship between the host country image and the EURO 2012™ visitors' revisit intention and there is no significant relationship between the mega-event experience and the EURO 2012™ visitors' revisit intention. The results lead to conclusions that for traveling mega-events' fans, the attributes of association, which organized the mega-event may be more important than the event's experience and the host destination.

Keywords: revisit intention, mega-event, country image, EURO 2012™

INTRODUCTION

Competition on an international tourist market forces people, responsible for tourism development, to take up activities that are closely associated with nation brand creation, which in fact, is an important factor conditioning the development of a particular area of any country. Each city, region or country tries to attract the biggest possible number of potential tourists, who in the further prospect, might turn into entrepreneurs, investors and sponsors. Such a situation is, with no doubts, desirable since such people can give a true drive to a local economy. In result, recent years let us witness popularization of a broadly understood use of nation brand image and reputation, not only for economic or social purposes, but also for the tourist ones. In recent years, the key factor that created the image of Poland as an attractive tourist destination were the European Football Championships, most frequently referred to as EURO 2012™.

Just like a good product for a company, a strong nation brand brings plenty of benefits for a country, region or city. Undoubtedly, the nation brand allows to associate a particular country with its distinctive features, advantages, values or symbols, which results in its better and easier recognition in the context of an attractiveness of a particular place compared to competitors. On the basis of the above statement, it can be assumed that the more the country is recognizable the more trusted and attractive it is for potential visitors, e.g. investors and tourists. Another undeniable benefit resulting from a well-developed nation brand is the fact that the given country is perceived and properly recognized internationally, which significantly enhances the interest in it. Such a situation, definitely predisposes the country to quicker achieving its political, cultural and economic goals. Moreover, the strong nation brand promotes as well as facilitates the sales of particular products made by the companies belonging to the so called, positive origin group, even in case when the product itself is not well known or promoted, but it is recognized because of the country of origin.

The most important role in the process of the brand creation, in order to present the appropriate image of the given place, is played by a marketing strategy based on investigating, developing and spreading a positive image of this place around global markets. The effectiveness of the above described strategy largely depends on the present image of the place and its future potentials.

Nowadays, a strong competition between cities, regions or countries can be observed, mainly in order to attract tourists and investors, but also to be awarded prestigious titles or get the right to organize mega events, such as EXPO exhibitions or other ones of cultural or sports character.

Mega sports event growth may be attributed to three main reasons: 1) modern technologies of mass communication that reach the entire world population; 2) the formation of a sport-media-business alliance that transformed professional sport in the late 20th century; and 3) the wide range of benefits that these mega events offer to host cities, regions and countries (Horne and Manzenreiter, 2006)

That is why, a need for promotion, based on creating and cultivating a strong image of a given place brand, appeared, basically because only such actions lead to gaining competitive advantage on the global market.

The success of the marketing strategy based on a particular place image is strongly affected by such factors as its attractiveness, credibility, frequency of communication, kinds of communication channels and the correlation between those and the place's identity (Gibson, et al., 2008; Chen & Funk 2010). In order to achieve the desired effects, the process of creating and implementing the right image of the given place requires constant verification and improvement. Continuous monitoring and analyzing of how the image of the place is perceived on the target markets is absolutely vital, mainly because the image of something is

simply a very subjective picture created in the recipients' consciousness and it can be very easily distorted (Frias, Rodriguez, Castañeda, Sabiote & Buhalis 2012).

Two leading concepts are considered in specialist literature while referring to the scope of creation and the vectors of functioning of nation brands. These are the two models: the Anholt's model of a regular hexagon of a nation brand and Olins's model of four areas of a nation brand (Olins, 2002; Anholt, 2009; Hakala, Lemmetyinen & Kantola, 2013). The factors that make these two models different are: firstly, the author's point of view (i.e. recipient's or sender's perspective) and secondly, the number of nation brand vectors distinguished.

W. Olins distinguished four basic vectors (areas) of nation brand functioning, particularly important from the creation of the country's image and reputation point of view:

- public diplomacy (famous personages, political, cultural, scientific and sports events and achievements, country's actions on international arena, cultural institutions and the media);
- direct foreign investments (investment locations, services and packages for investors, investors' friendly environment creation, pro-investment policy development);
- brand export (brand companies, products and services stimulation, human capital, the country of origin effect building);
- tourism (regions, cities, tourist attractions and events, emotional impact on recipients, tourist products quality growth stimulation, institutional infrastructure creation).

Therefore, according to the above concept, an event including a mega-event, can be used to create a country's image, however this process is influenced by many subjective experiences, including those from the past, the use of which is often made quite unconsciously. Hence, there appears a question: what affects the mega event participants' willingness of revisiting the country more strongly, the positive image of the country as the tourist destination or the

positive memories from their participation in this particular mega event (Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Kaplanidou 2010; Chen & Funk, 2010, Gripsrud, Nes, Olsson & Ulf 2010)?

Creating the nation brand and the image of Poland in the context of organization of EURO 2012™

The tourist brand of Poland makes a peculiar analogy of the brand of the country. The key aspect of the promotion of the image of Poland is the desire that the brand POLSKA™ would become the nation brand of primary choice and appear in each announcement in order to make itself unrivalled, easily recognized characteristic. In order to achieve the desired effect the name is used in all possible marketing communication tools that are employed to create the nation brand and the image of Poland. On request of the Polish Tourist Organization, in the years 2011 and 2012 there was organized a big multimedia promotional campaign directed to French, German and British markets. Its key aspect was the slogan „*Move Your Imagination*”. The campaign was accompanied by a series of TV spots under a common title: „*Poland - Feel Invited*”. The spots’ main goal was to stimulate the creation of the Polish nation brand in the minds of the recipients, emotionally (PTO 2011).



Figure 1. Polish advertising slogan

Source: Polish Tourist Organization

The whole campaign was based on short TV spots showing the image of Poland as the country where the visitor can feel happy and after the return to his home country he will

willingly recommend Poland as the place where you can feel like at home and you are able to get beautiful and nostalgic memories. The basic purpose of the tools used in the campaign was to show its main characters as the people who got wonderful and positive memories from their stay in Poland. The main target audience of the campaign were the people who are especially interested in urban and cultural tourism (the four host cities of EURO 2012™ in particular), but also those expecting active tourism and the possibility of relaxation in the attractive natural environment.

Other tools employed to promote Polish nation brand and the image of Poland during EURO 2012™ were the activities related to *public relations* such as: organizing studio trips, an on-line game (where a player could impersonate a tourist visiting Poland) events, happenings, press advertisements placed in the world-wide published newspapers (altogether 280 adverts promoting Polish tourist products) TV commercials shown by *BBC* and *CNN*, *outdoor* advertisements, social websites, blogs and *display* campaigns run in the Internet search engines (PTO 2012).

However, the promotion of Poland did not finish together with the end of the final match of EURO 2012™. It is still being continued and its target audience is the group of tourists and fans who visited Poland during the European Football Championships. The campaign is carried out by means of:

- „Thank you for the shared support” – its main aim is to maintain and stimulate the interest in Poland and create the positive image of the country.
- „I Love Poland” – promote Poland all around the world by placing the words *I Love Poland*, on promotional gadgets such as: e.g. T-shirts, caps, stickers etc.
- „Come back! You haven’t seen everything.” – its main idea is to arouse the will for revisiting Poland and to build database for direct communication e.g. *citylights* at the airports and *billboards* placed by main roads leading to the Polish borders.

Nevertheless, the campaign called „*Poland - Come and find your story*”, seems to show much more versatile character. It is based on the motifs taken from well-known fairy tales, (A Red Riding Hood, A Little Mermaid, Alice in Wonderland and Romeo and Juliet), which in fact, is the example of a modern nation brand creating tool, referred to as *storytelling* – the main aim of which is to enchant the recipient by telling him a particular story. The fundamental objective of the above mentioned campaign is the fight against stereotypes and prejudices from the past. In 2013, the layouts referring to the motifs of the most internationally recognizable fairy tales, appeared in newspaper advertisements as well as on huge outdoor commercial surfaces, in Germany, France, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden and Holland.

The research on the image of Poland and the effectiveness of the country’s promotion has been carried out in Poland since 2004. The main conclusion drawn from the research done so far, is that abroad, the picture of Poland is neither obvious nor coherent. On some markets, the image of Poland is still perceived from the angle of neutral or negative associations, in spite of the fact of the country’s joining the European Union in 2004 or organizing EURO 2012™ football tournament. However, a noticeable decrease of this tendency has been observed in recent times. The results of the research concerning the image of Poland abroad, conducted in 2011 on request of the Ministry of Economy, showed that the country was basically seen as the eastern state with a relatively strong economic position, compared to other countries of the region, and the image of Poles turned out to be better than the image of the country itself (AGERON, 2011). The most frequently appearing spontaneous connotations regarding Poland can be grouped into the following categories of answers:

- national connotations – World War the Second, the fall of communism, holocaust, Solidarity trade union, Smolensk air disaster;
- the natural environment connotations – forests, woods, the Tatra mountains, the Baltic Sea, the Mazurian Lake District;

- famous people connotations – John Paul II, Nicolaus Copernicus, Fryderyk Chopin, Maria Curie, Lech Wałęsa, Roman Polański, Agnieszka Radwańska, Adam Małysz;
- religious connotations - Catholicism;
- product connotations – vodka, sausage, pierogi, amber, E. Wedel, LOT (AGERON, 2011).

Unfortunately, Poland is still often seen from the angle of common stereotypes and prejudices, which in fact are more and more frequently far from Polish realities. To the most commonly recognized stereotypes about Poles and Poland belong the following:

- the country is poor and not developed technologically;
- it is boring, grey, cold, gloomy and dull;
- it has high crime rate (numerous thefts and corruption);
- it follows conservatism, traditionalism and is very bureaucratic;
- Poles are alcoholics;
- it is the country with high level of piety where the Catholic religion is cultivated too much;
- it provides cheap labour force, a Pole is perceived as a professional, however there are ambivalent attitudes (on one hand he is a highly specialized expert, but on the other hand, he is an unprofessional con artist);
- Polish national features – industriousness, resourcefulness, creativity, hospitality, tolerance, openness, good communication skills, laziness, stubbornness, unruliness, suspicion;
- Polish women are beautiful;
- Poland is a friendly family country of a rural character;
- it offers good food products and is famous for excellent cuisine (AGERON 2011).

In the *Country Brand Index* CBI published in 2012, Poland was classified on 75th position, out of 118 countries, which means a promotion compared to 79th place in 2011 and 82nd in 2010. The leading positions of the index are occupied by such countries as Switzerland, Canada, Japan, Sweden and New Zealand (FutureBrand, 2012).

Analysing both, the published list of the Country Brand Index presenting the attractiveness of particular countries and the report on the research concerning the image of Poland from 2011, it can be concluded that Poland does not fully take advantage of its attributes and is not able to promote its undoubted economic development - important from the investors' and entrepreneurs' point of view – effectively enough. Moreover, it must be pointed out that the level of knowledge of contemporary Poland among the citizens of other countries is really low. It can be also assumed that if Poland had not been one of the host countries of EURO 2012TM, the advertisements presented in foreign media would not have had such a positive final effect.

METHODOLOGY

The main aim of the present research was an attempt of finding the answer to the question if the tourists visiting Poland during the football championships, EURO 2012TM, would be willing to revisit Poland and recommend the country as an attractive tourist destination, to their friends. It was also checked if the country's image or positive impressions related to the football tournament organization could result in a revisit intention. Therefore, the following research hypotheses were taken into consideration:

Hypothesis 1: The host country image will positively influence the EURO 2012TM visitors' revisit intention,

Hypothesis 2: The mega-event experience will positively influence the EURO 2012TM visitors' revisit intention to the host country.

Hypothesis 3: The host country image has more positive impact on the EURO 2012™ visitors' revisit intention than the mega-event experience

In order to check if the above listed hypotheses are true, 103 football fans from such countries as Great Britain (36 respondents), France (32 respondents) and Germany (35 respondents), who visited Poland during EURO 2012™, were surveyed. The selection of nationalities of the surveyed fans was decided about purposely, because it was limited only to those who appeared in Poland in the largest number. The survey was conducted with the use of a special survey form including questions concerning mega-event visitors' experience adapted from Chaohui, Lin and Qiaoyun (2012) and revisit intentions adapted from Kaplanidou (2007). The event experience questions were evaluated on a five point Likert scale ranging from 1= „very negative” to 5=”very positive”. This item was adapted from the destination image literature (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999), under the assumption that mega-events are tourist attractions (Walker, et al., 2013).

Table 1 Research technical data

Characteristics	Survey
Study population	EURO 2012™ visitors
Geographic scope	Poland
Sampling size	103
Sampling error	± 3.9%
Confidence level	95% p=q=0,5
Information collection method	Personal interviews
Date of study	08.06.2012 - 01.07.2012

Source: authors

To analyse the survey results effectively, an additional indicator, called *Net Promoter Score* (NPS), was used. It measures synthetically the respondents' level of satisfaction as well as

reflects their natural behaviours. The NPS indicator shows the difference between the percentage of people who are inclined to recommend the given subject of the research (so called, enthusiasts – answers 9 and 10) and those who are resistant to recommend anything (so called, grumblers – answers 0-6). Answers 7 and 8 are of neutral character and are not included in the result of the NPS indicator. The same indicator was used by Reichheld (2003) and Ritson (2006) in order to recommend tourist products and services.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

As the results obtained from the conducted research show, the main sources of knowledge about the country of destination for the visitors who came to Poland during the European Football Championships, turned out to be the Internet (46%), friends (29%), television (15%), newspapers (4%) and, in the lowest extent, the family – for only 6% of the respondents. The straight majority of the survey subjects came from, the so called Y generation, which means the generation of technological innovations (Benckendorff, Moscardo & Pendergast 2010). Therefore, such results should not be considered surprising, especially in times of a great popularity of mass media, such as the Internet or television, whose key tool of the image creating marketing communication is the image advertisement (e.g. promotional TV spots) and the modern Internet tools, including social websites (Nusair, Parsa & Cobanoglu 2011). However, as many as 16% of the German respondents declared that for them, the main source of knowledge about Poles and Poland were their family members. Such a situation may be caused by the historical background (Germanization, wars) or by the fact of the two countries being close neighbours.

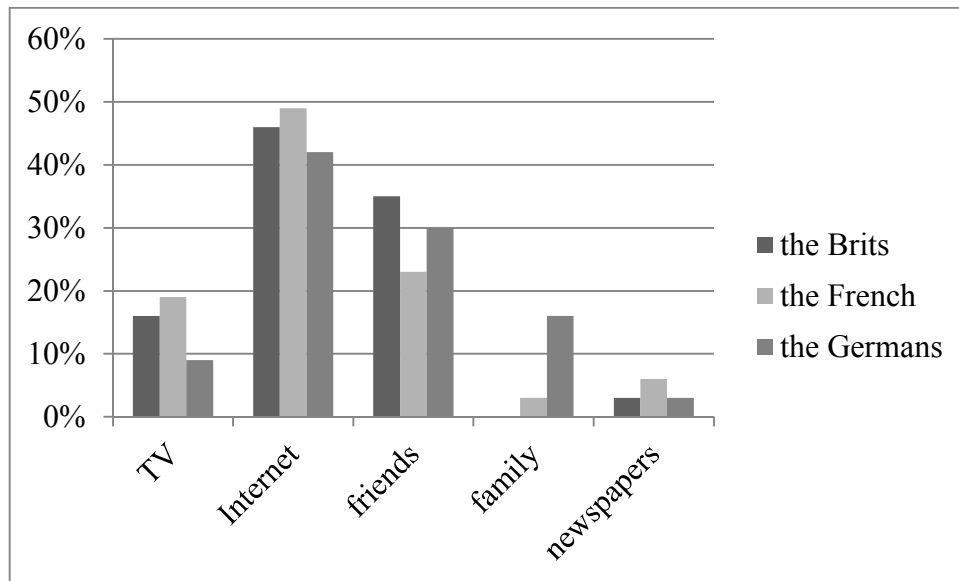


Figure 2. The source of knowledge about Poles and Poland according to EURO 2012™ visitors.

Source: author`s research

Describing the level of their knowledge about Poles and Poland, the foreign visitors, most frequently, declared it was very low (69% of respondents). It is supposed that the reason for such condition may have been caused by three basic factors. Firstly, it shows a very low interest in Poland as the tourist destination country, secondly, it shows Polish nation brand as having been hardly recognizable before EURO 2012™ organization, and thirdly, it reveals a very poor result of marketing communication of the country, including the effectiveness of the foreign advertising campaigns. Moreover, 74% of the respondents declared they had never visited Poland before.

The results of the survey showed that the image of Poles and Poland was best assessed by the Brits (97% of positive and only 3% of neutral opinions) and the French (88% of positive, 3% of negative and 9% of neutral opinions), and the Germans appeared to be the most critical respondents, expressing 82% of positive, 6% of negative and 12% of neutral opinions. Numerous researches prove that the improvement of the host country image is one of the benefits that can be achieved due to the organization of a mega event (Brown, et. al., 2004;

Gethard, 2006; Kim & Morrison, 2005; Lee, et.al., 2005; Florek, et al, 2008; Walker, et al, 2013).

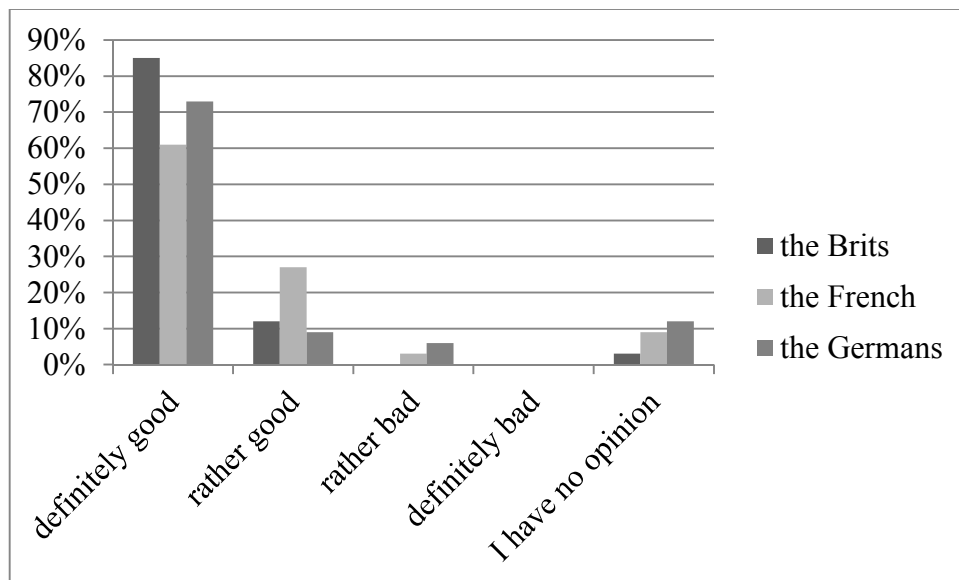


Figure 3. The assessment of the image of Poles and Poland expressed by the visitors to EURO 2012™

Source: author's research

The results of the research concerning the foreign visitors' intention of revisiting Poland within the period of the coming 3 years, indicate that they will probably return (on average, 41% of all the responses) and they will definitely return (on average, 32% of the responses). The Germans and the Brits appeared to be those who replied they were most willing to revisit Poland (82% and 79%, respectively) and the French expressed the weakest intention of coming back. (only 58%). Thus, it can be assumed that 3/4 of the surveyed expressed the intention of revisiting Poland within the period of the coming 3 years.

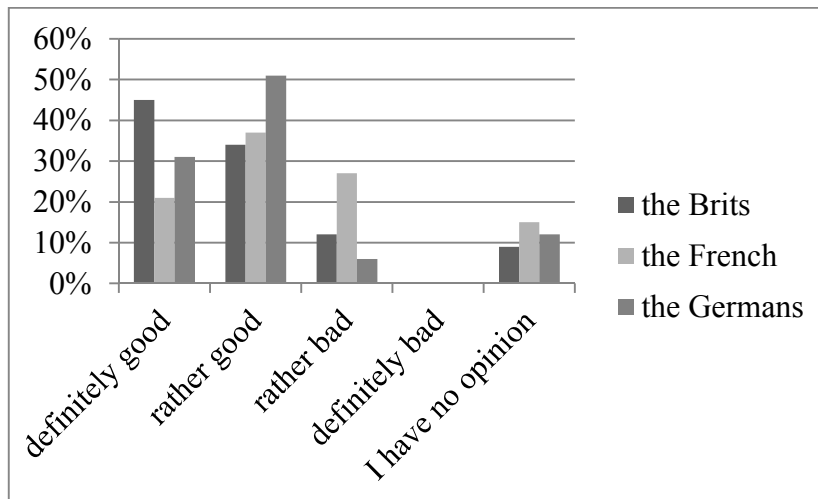


Figure 4. Respondents' reply to the question: Do you consider revisiting Poland within the coming 3 years?

Source: author's research

Pearson's correlation analysis method was applied in order to check, if there is a relationship between the way the country's image is perceived and the revisit intention, in the context of participation in a mega event. The correlation coefficient between the host country image perceived by EURO 2012™ visitors and their revisit intention was 0.246 ($p\text{-value} = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$) Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant and positive relationship between the host country image and EURO 2012™ visitors' revisit intention. Such a situation allows to assume that earlier mentioned hypothesis 1 can be supported.

In order to assess the satisfaction from particular elements of EURO 2012™ organization, such aspects as safety, fan zones, first-aid posts, sanitary base and stadiums' quality, were considered. The highest marks were given by foreign visitors to the preparation of the stadiums (99% of positive and very positive opinions) and the lowest, to the sanitary base condition (only 51% of positive and very positive opinions).

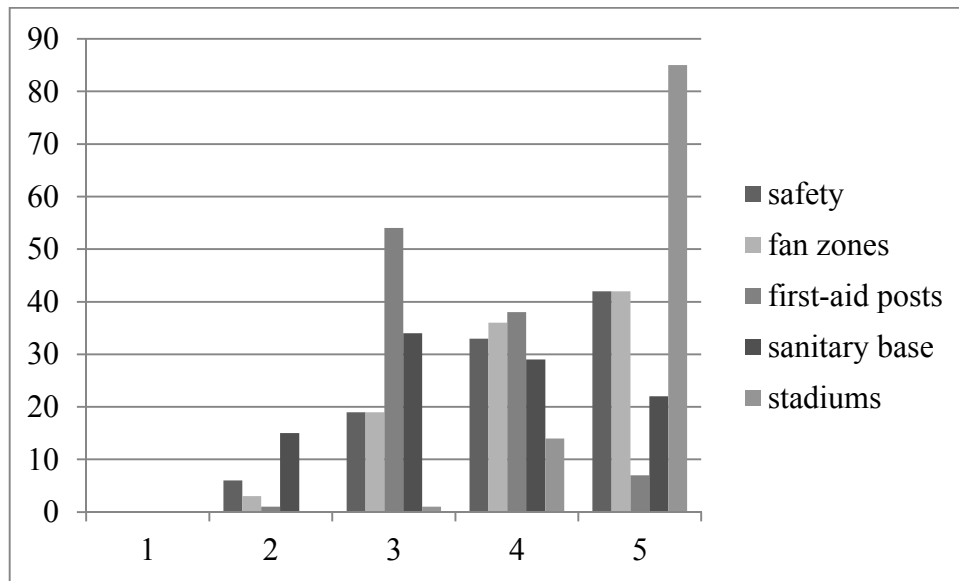


Figure 5. Satisfaction from particular elements of EURO 2012™ organization

Source: author's research

The detailed analysis of the obtained results, considering the division into respondents' nationalities, showed that the particular elements of EURO 2012™ organization were best assessed by the French, a bit worse by the Brits and most critically by the Germans. The research results presented in literature show that positive experience gained from participating in a mega event has no particular influence on a revisit intention, however it significantly affects word-of-mouth intentions (Lee et al. 2005; Walker, et al., 2013). The importance of word-of-mouth for sport tourism was identified by Thwaites (1999) who underscored the role of positive experience during revisit intention and in the later studies it was recognized as an indicator of consumer loyalty (Petrick, 2004; Matos & Vergas 2008).

The correlation coefficient between mega-event experience and EURO 2012™ visitors' revisit intention to the host country was 0.062 ($p\text{-value}=0.149 > \alpha = 0.05$). Therefore, there is no significant relationship between mega-event experience and EURO 2012™ visitors' revisit intention, so the hypothesis 2, is not supported. The lack of support for hypothesis 2 is not surprising since previous research noted that event image perceptions of the Olympic Games did not influence intentions to revisit the destination (Kaplaniudou, 2007; Kaplanidou 2009).

Thus, it can be said, that the host country image has a positive impact on the EURO 2012™ visitors' revisit intention, however, the mega-event's experience does not reveal any significant influence.

Additionally, when asked how willingly they would recommend Poland as an attractive tourist destination to their friends, most frequently, the respondents chose the values of 7 or 8 (in the 0-10 scale) which puts them into the group of, so called, neutral visitors. The group of, so called, "enthusiasts" (values 9-10 chosen) included 23% of the German, 19% of the British and 12% of the French respondents.

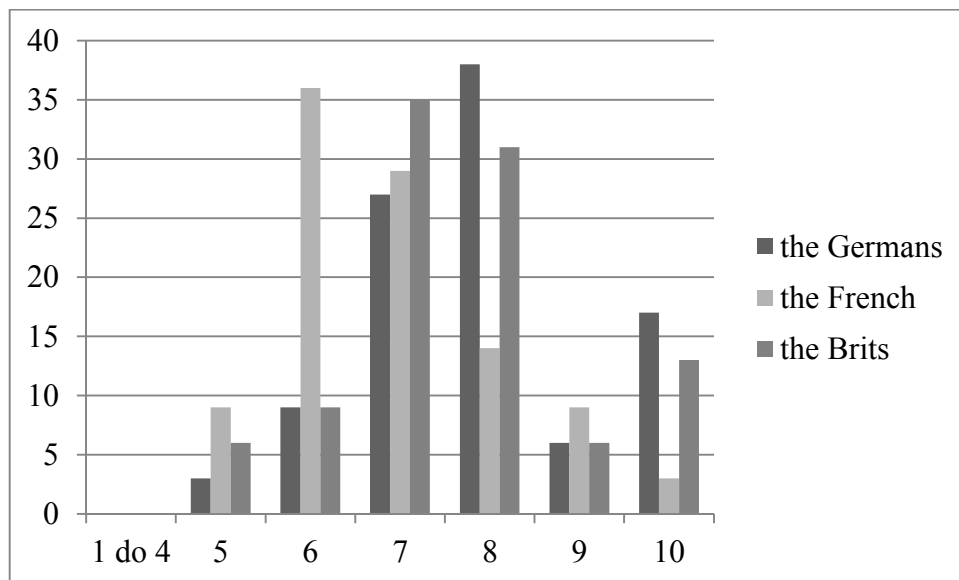


Figure 6. Respondents' answers to the question: How willingly would you recommend Poland as an attractive tourist destination to your friends and other people?

Source: author's research

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the conducted research and a careful study of proper literature, it may be concluded that a successful organization of a mega-event does not necessarily lead to the increase of the visitors' revisit intention to the event's host country. In case of the final success of a mega-event organization, it is much easier to gain a word-of-mouth effect than to

persuade the visitors to come back to the host country. Such conclusions undoubtedly show that the revisit intention is highly influenced by the host country's image, and the given country becomes the fans' destination basically due to the sports event organized there. However, it must be additionally assumed that the revisit intention to a particular country is also influenced by some other factors, such as subjective attractiveness of the country or the tourists' tendency to travel. Thus, the fact of the lack of a particular interrelationship between a mega-event experience and a revisit intention is quite understandable.

It must be also borne in mind that for people who choose a particular country as their tourist destination due to the event organized there, the fundamental reason for travelling is the fact how prestigious the event is, and how big their desire for participating in the event is (Walker et.al., 2013). In such case, the place itself, becomes of secondary importance. Therefore, the expectations towards mega-events to be used as tools for creating the image of a particular tourist destination, are fully justified. However, the process of arising revisit intentions is primarily affected by already existing image of the country of destination.

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