

A (not so) short history of the FAI World Air Games

“The FAI flagship program”

FOREWORD AND WARNING

In January 2020, the FAI President initiated a working group to review the future of the World Air Games. Its conclusion was that a review of the past World Air Games is necessary before considering further World Air Games. The project was stalled. In December 2020, the new FAI President put it back on tracks.

The CIVL President started to work on the review, but his research was stopped by the Covid-19 pandemic and the impossibility to access the FAI archives.

The archives became available again in late August 2021. Seven hundred pages or so were digitised. The work continued at a very irregular pace, dictated by the many unpredictable urgencies and daily tasks that Air Sports Commissions have to face.

After the CIVL President completed his review, the text was circulated within the Commission Presidents to be amended as needed, then it was sent to the Executive Board.

This is a historical/political review with limited financial information. It was completed on July 19, 2022. A complete financial review was deemed necessary. It was provided on September 16, 2022.

For the sake of easier reading, texts have been unified as far as possible in the present conjugation time. Consequently, some citation tenses have been adjusted. Some citations have also been reconstructed without “()” or “...” to underline the changes, but the words written here were written there. So, strictly speaking, this cannot be considered as a historical document ☹ but hopefully as a good reference of the “FAI flagship program” ☺.

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THE ANALYSIS

The World Air Games are an idea that came from the ASC Presidents. According to the FAI President addressing the General Conference in 1989, the World Air Games are for them “a powerful vehicle for unifying world air sports and greatly increasing their prestige and influence.”

Seven years later, as the 1st World Air Games are around the corner, what matters most for the FAI is to get new revenues to “reduce the financial burdens for both the FAI and for its members”. The way to do it is “to elevate air sports in the eyes of the public to levels where they become valuable to media and thus to sponsors”.

Until 2020, this will remain the FAI policy.

This policy reaches its apex post-Dubai 2015. The “engine to drive FAI engagement and revenues” is described by consultants, Executive Board and secretariat as a 4-spoke wheel guaranteed to bring FAI success: high-profile events to bring spectator interest, to bring media coverage, to bring sponsorship, to bring high-profile events, to bring, etc.

The original Air Games series concept and the post-Dubai workshop conclusions are: “Build from the bottom up”. They are led astray. The World Air Games Series and Tour are meant for money, without initial ASCs or NACs involvement, around the idea that the FAI can be more a commercial entity than a sports federation. It is a delusion: consultants get richer and the FAI is ruined.

The culture of secrecy has been a constant in the years 2015-2020. Contracts and financial files were not shared. This culture has to be stopped.

We still don't have a proper financial evaluation of the different World Air Games, but we understand that the only one that made a profit is the one that did not take place: THK 2020.

Today, the World Air Games are challenged. Even Dubai and its sporting and media success. What was the true price of the 2015 World Air Games, including the hours spent by the secretariat? What benefits did the World Air Games really bring? Did sponsors and partners come rushing to FAI? Did NACs and ASCs see a new flow of pilots and organisers? Did any improvement (like software) trickle down to our 700 or so competitions? And what about Dubai? What was the World Air Games legacy there? The World Air Games seriously damaged the practise of parachuting in Dubai and it has taken 5 years for them to put on another (downgraded) Dubai International Parachuting CHampionship in 2021.

We cannot move forward without addressing these questions candidly.

Today, our experience of past World Air Games points out to these keys for success:

- Forget the Olympic dream, be humble, don't believe the consultants, believe the reality of airsports.
- No concepts are imposed from the top down.
- ASCs and NACs are involved from A to Z.
- No ASC or NAC is pressured to take part reluctantly.
- Experts are running the events at all levels. It means that key people may receive compensations for their time and work.
- Dedicated budgets are allocated from the start to the people who run the show: the ASCs.

At the time this review is written, there are apparently parties interested in multi-sport events.

ASCs are ready to participate at any time. Along the years, they have developed concepts of their own to fit all purposes. Here is, at least, one benefit from the World Air Games and Air Games series.

NACs know better than anyone how far they can support such events.

Both must be listened to from the very start. Both must be heard.

Olympic Ambitions

The World Air Games story is somehow linked to the FAI Olympic ambitions. In the 1930s', the FAI "sets out to explore new horizons. Joining the Olympic movement promises air sports to reach new heights." Gliding is a demonstration sport in Berlin 1936, is selected for Helsinki 1940, but World War II breaks out and the Games are cancelled.

The Olympic dream is forgotten then revived in the early 1980s'. Everyone understands that it will be difficult. Other possibilities of Olympic activities should be studied.

In 1987, the Group of Presidents of FAI Commissions takes the initiative and asks the General Conference "to agree to the concept of organising at regular intervals a multisport event to include aerial activities of no less than seven different FAI sporting commissions." The General Conference agrees and, in 1989, the FAI President presents the project as "a powerful vehicle for unifying world air sports and greatly increasing the prestige and influence of the Commissions". France is to organise the First World Air Games in 1991 and Greece the second in 1995.

France 1991

Three regional areas, nine disciplines, spectacular tasks, rules based on the Sporting code but scoring simplified for the public and press consideration, ASCs in charge of the rules and of overseeing the events.

At the 1990 General Conference, the French organisers state that due to the lack of cooperation between the Aeroclub de France and the air sports federations, they cannot deliver the World Air Games in 1991 and request to run them in 1993. The General Conference refuses. The First World Air Games will be in Greece in 1995.

Greece 1995

The government and Air Force get involved in the "Icariada – World Air Games". Organising and coordinating committees are set-up, terms of reference and general rules are shared, contracts are signed. Nine disciplines—with hopefully a few World championships—will be spread over six mainland and island venues. The FAI committee organises visits, venues are approved. The inadequate or lack of local organisation and personnel is one of the many problems. In 1993, the Greek elections bring in a new majority. Its government slows things down. In 1994, it dissolves the organising committee. The Icariada has passed.

Turkey 1997

A new bidding process collates Australia, South Africa and Turkey. Soon, Australia and South Africa step back. In June 1995, Turkey and its NAC, the THK, are given the FAI Council's trust.

The preparation is well organised on the FAI side, with ASC and FAI "Experts" appointed on a "semi-professional" basis (we don't know how and how much they were paid). They will deliver 2,891 workdays—eight years!—most of them fieldwork. The THK structure is poorly adapted, with changing personnel and a slow decision process: a source of frustration and lost time. The entry and participation fees are reasonable, but we don't know in which budget they go.

The 1997 World Air Games events follow the Cat 1 formats. Most of them are World and Continental Championships. They are a resounding success with 1,700+ pilots from 60 nations in nine disciplines and 18 events, but the spread of venues over the country and poorly attended opening and closing ceremonies fail to carry the spirit of unity originally envisioned.

Spain 2001

At the end of the bidding process, Spain is chosen over Austria for its proposals on media coverage, PR and marketing. Organisational, financial and media shortcomings take FAI to the brink of cancelling the Games. The events finally take place in nine venues, with 13 World Championships and 7 World Air Games Championships. They are technically acceptable thanks to the positive attitude displayed by local Spanish organisers, competitors and FAI staff. Without it, the World Air Games would have turned into a disaster.

The post-World Air Games is difficult with bad feelings between the organisers and the FAI and financial issues that will take a year to clear out.

Slovenia 2005

At the same time that Spain is awarded the 2nd World Air Games, the bidding process for the 3rd World Air Games opens. Only Slovenia raises its hand and is awarded the 2005 Games by the 2000 General Conference. Negotiations start and, within a year, fail. There are “key weakness” in the Slovenian project. A new bid process must open for 2005. The Slovenians point out that what they went through is not fair. An analysis of the first two World Air Games clearly points out to the need for a new concept.

Revisiting the World Air Games

For the ASCs, smaller format, venue and duration are needed. For the Executive Board, three different formats could be proposed to the bidders to choose from. For the Coordinating Committee, ASCs have to come up with proposals.

A new product is presented to the 2002 General Conference. Expertise and professionalisation are the vital ingredients. The bidding process is open. Two bids are received. Malaysia's has significant weaknesses. Poland is chosen but the ASCs are not following: not enough time. There will be no World Air Games in 2005.

The Executive Board looks for new solutions. Professionals are contacted: Knatchbul Associate and Clarion Events. They come up with proposals but it goes nowhere because they both want the property rights. Why not put the World Air Games on hold and organise smaller events that will eventually lead to new World Air Games? The first Air Games concept is presented to the 2005 General Conference. It goes nowhere.

The 2006 General Conference hears TSE Consulting's very commercial “special presentation”. More than a sports event, a celebration. One week, ten sports, two venues. It triggers many practical questions. The bids are open for 2009.

In 2009, Turin is chosen over Moscow and Odense. Following TSE's advice for a 2-year cycle, bids are open for 2011 and 2013.

Turin 2009

The 2nd World Air Games take place from June 7 to 13. As stated by the FAI President, it's a difficult pregnancy but once the baby is born it goes quite well. The TSE format is almost followed: seven days, four venues, 11 disciplines, 400 competitors. A sporting success but not a financial one. The organisers owe €300,000 to the FAI. It will take them three years to honour the debt. There will be accusations of abuse: an indelible stain.

Who in 2011?

Only Russia is interested but they need time to get financial support. A first extension is given, not a second one. Russia withdraws.

Who in 2013?

The 2-year cycle is questioned but the bidding process is launched anyway. Apparently, nothing happens. The 2011 and 2012 General Conference are mute.

FAME

Along the years, the World Air Games have been seen mainly as a source of revenue. In January 2012, the Executive Board discusses creating a marketing agency established under Swiss law, located in Lausanne and controlled by the FAI. The purpose of the company is to engage in high-end events and, above all, to generate income which would enable the FAI to better support its members and the ASCs.

FAME is created. It provides the structure to allow FAI to go commercial. It will be activated “when the time is right”. Board’s members are changing, but FAME remains a dormant company until 2014 or so. It is then used as a means to move money around but doesn’t really deliver anything. It is dissolved in 2021.

Dubai 2015

The bidding process opens in January 2013. A number of parties seem to be interested but in May, there is only one check received, Dubai’s. Negotiations start on all levels. FAI strategy is defined: more an exhibition than a competition. One principle: rely on paid professional staff contracted by FAI. Each commission details its possibilities and requests. Building the event is difficult. The concept, mission, vision, structure, communication, participants figures, budget, etc. are refined as the preparation moves forward. Managing the cultural diversity becomes an issue and the object of a seminar.

The World Air Games take place from December 1 to 12. An exceptional and luxurious event with 951 competitors, 52 nations, 23 disciplines, impressive ceremonies, lavish buffets, a medical conference, 15,000 hours of TV time. There is no doubt that the Dubai World Air Games are a success. There is also no doubt that they generate a lot of frustrations. The one shared by all ASCs is financial. They organise their events professionally but are never paid the promised remuneration and fees. What really happened with the World Air Games revenue is a nagging still unanswered question.

The Air Games Series

The general concept of the Air Games Series are first presented to the 2015 General Conference just before Dubai.

In April 2016, a two-day Evaluation workshop gathers 29 Dubai participants to define the road to the next World Air Games. Doubts are shared but the general feeling is that we can do it again if we refine the concept of an “air sports showcase for non-sport-specific audiences and for the media”.

The Air Games Series are detailed to the 2106 General Conference. Consultants run the show, ASCs and NACs are ignored. Four events with 40 to 60 competitors in each of three to five disciplines. It is not what the workshop wanted. It is a commercial dream but not anchored in the reality of what can be delivered. A year later, it is replaced by an Air Games Tour with national teams accumulating points to decide who is the “Greatest Flying Nation on Earth”. The concept is even worse. By 2018, the Air Games Series and Tour are forgotten, the drones now taking pre-eminence. Along the way, the FAI reserve is used as income. At least one million CHF is spent with nothing to show for it.

The Road to THK 2020

Albuquerque, Malaysia and THK are interested in the next World Air Games. The first two bidders are facing the same issues: a change of State or local leaders, hence the impossibility to secure funding. THK it will be. No matter that the project is at the exact opposite of what is wanted by the Evaluation workshop. At no point are the ASCs involved in the decision process.

The money flows in, visits to venues are organised, the organising structure is built, but “slight delays” occur. Both THK and FAI elect a new President. Time is lacking, the stakes for both entities are huge. The World Air Games are postponed and we are “looking forward to jointly creating the supercharged World Air Games 2022”.

One FAI

At the same time that the Executive Board takes control of the World Air Games, the One FAI project is in full development. We have to rethink the FAI. ASCs must be involved in the decision-making. A working group is implemented to consider options. It goes nowhere.

From Supercharged to Terminated

Again without consulting the ASCs, the Executive Board imposes for the 2022 World Air Games a format where “all World and Continental Championships for ASC disciplines included in World Air Games 2020 shall be held as part of World Air Games 2022.” The THK runs into financial problems, linked to political problems. Its Board is fired, replaced by government administrators who are not responding. “The World Air Games 2022 cannot go ahead, but the FAI will take this opportunity to review what the World Air Games product could look like before making a decision on 2025.”

Olympic Ambitions

The World Air Games story is somehow linked to the FAI Olympic ambitions.

In the 1930s', the FAI "set out to explore new horizons. Joining the Olympic movement promises air sports to reach new heights."

In 1936, Gliding is a demonstration sport at the Berlin Olympics. No competition takes place and no medals are given, as per the current rules.

In 1940, Gliding secures a berth on the Helsinki Games programme but World War II breaks out and the Games are cancelled.

In 1975, a survey is sent to all International Federations "concerning the amateur status". FAI does not answer and is erased as a recognised Olympic International Federation.

In 1983, a Council/ASC meeting reports: "There is much desire to have some FAI sports recognised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Parachuting, hang-gliding and gliding are the most probable sports to be considered. The FAI Office will study the matter and report on contact with IOC."¹

In 1984, the Council sets-up a Working Group: the FAI is to apply for "re-establishment of IOC recognition". The General Conference adopts a resolution to that effect.

In 1985, the FAI President meets the IOC President, the Council keeps negotiating with IOC with parachuting and hang-gliding as Olympic sports. The IOC recognises FAI as an Olympic International Federation.

In 1986, a Coordinating Committee is implemented under the helm of the FAI President. IGC, IPC² and CIVL are requested to "spread FAI's image all over the world... The sport which will enter the Olympic Games must be spectacular (and) able to promote sport among young people." Parachuting "now has the best chance to be elected as a demonstration sport for the 1992 (Barcelona) Olympic Games". But first, Seoul 1988!

In 1987, IPC lobbies and obtains to be part of the opening ceremony of the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games.

Barcelona 1992 is still sought after, but the Coordinating Committee understands the difficulty to be an Olympic discipline and reports that "other possibilities of Olympic activities will be studied".

The World Air Games Are Born

On September 7, 1987, the Group of Presidents of FAI International Committees³ meets in Stockholm, Sweden.

Are present for the FAI the President, George Lloyd, Treasurer, First Vice-President, and Director General. For the Committees, representants of Sporting, General Aviation, Experimental Aircraft, Membership Extension, Aerobatics Statutes, Education, Hang Gliding, Microlight Flying, P.R., Gliding, Parachuting and Aeromodelling.

"The group considered a proposal for organising an international meeting of air sports. The project and possibilities of organising have been investigated for a considerable time.

The Group resolved to propose to the General Conference to agree to the concept of organising at regular intervals a multisport event to include aerial activities of no less than

¹ The Council later became the Executive Board.

² Today ISC.

³ Soon to become Air Sport Commissions.

seven different FAI sporting commissions. Such events are not to be staged during Olympic years. The project is to be known, initially at least, as the FAI 'Icarus Games'.

The group is aware that France is prepared to organise the first of these events and recommends to the General Conference to approve their application. However, if during the preparation of this first event it is found that it is impractical to proceed, FAI Council shall take appropriate steps."

The September 1987 General Conference examines the Icarus Games summary, approves each point and resolves that the FAI President and Director General will draft model contracts that define the obligations and responsibilities of each party, that the draught will be widely circulated and finalised at the June 1988 Council meeting.

The October 1988 General Conference receives a 21-page report from Richard Fenwick, President of the Aeroclub de France, and Bernard Lamy. The report details how the first "World Air Games" could take part in France in 1991 over two weeks: eight sites in three regional areas, nine disciplines, spectacular tasks, rules based on the Sporting code, scoring simplified for public and press attention, commissions in charge of rules and overseeing the events. Also detailed aims, calendars, locations, entry and competitors' requirements, national team composition, management and direction responsibilities, protest process...

The General Conference "highly" appreciates and approves the French project: "The date and place of the 1st World Air Games 1991 in France will be determined by the organiser, i.e. the Aeroclub de France. The final programme will be defined after consultation between the organiser and the presidents of the FAI Committees for presentation to the FAI Council."

The General Conference also approves a Greek proposal for a 2nd World Air Games in 1995, under the name "Icariada, World Air Games". It reads: "Icariada stands for freedom and daring, aspiration, rational ambition and determination. An association of Icariada with disaster can only be based on ignorance of the myth of Icarus and its significance. Icariada not only conjures bad luck or accident, but stands for self-discipline, prudence and knowledge of the laws of nature."

At the September 1989 General Conference, the Aero-club de France details its government-supported project: participation, structure, technical aspects, budget, etc.

The FAI President, Clifton Van Kann, refers to the "FAI in a changing World", a global village where FAI needs to lead, where environment and ecology must be taken into consideration, where "we are rapidly approaching the outer limits of what can be done in membership under existing concepts", where the Air Sports Commissions (ASC) must address safety issues, where air sports must be more appealing to the public, where the free access to the sky must be defended. "If this Conference decides to proceed with the World Air Games, the Commissions will have a powerful vehicle for unifying world air sports and greatly increasing their prestige and influence."

Olympic Letdown

The FAI seems to realise that the Olympic dream may be just this: a dream. The 1989 and 1990 General Conferences don't discuss the Olympics.

Dr Kepak was the FAI president from 1984 to 1986, he is now its Secretary General. His early 1990s' reports are not optimistic: "The door to Olympics in the future is not yet opened. And it is very difficult to predict when one or more air sports are finally admitted in the programme. Parachuting has failed in its attempt to enter the Olympics as a demonstration sport at Barcelona, in spite of a huge effort and the expenditure of much money. All Olympic sports have been 'sold' to the media and the media do not want many changes. No changes are planned up to the year 2000. Air sports still are not quite prepared for Olympic Games. They have not fully understood what is expected from a modern sport in the future. Top-level sports cannot survive without professionalisation, which means without sponsors and media contracts."

Still, Kepak sees the Olympics as a means to develop air sports: “This must not stop us promoting our sport via the IOC and expanding it to other countries via the IOC. It is important to become Olympic: there is discrimination against non-Olympic sports.”

So, the dream is somehow still alive, with a dedicated Olympic Coordinating Committee and parachuting, hang-gliding and ballooning still trying to become Olympic disciplines but without much success.

The Olympic Coordinating Committee will disband in 2000: “We were somewhat naive that achieving inclusion into the Olympic sports programme would be a matter of getting recognised, upping the profile and getting in all under ten years. That we are at it for close to 20 years – and that the prospect of making it in the near future has not improved significantly – is a reality that must not bring out defeatism but the proper assessment of what has been achieved.”

France 1991

France, where the first national Aero-Club was created ((1898) and where the FAI was born (1905), is to hold the 1st World Air Games. The venues are now concentrated in the Midi-Pyrénées region with its Regional Council as the organiser.

In 1990, unfortunately, the French air sports community is divided between the mostly honorific Aero-Club de France (ACdeF) and the very operative UFFAS (the union of the eight airsport federations). The UFFAS refuse to work with the “out of step” ACdeF. Without cooperation, there is no permanent representative, nor organising and patronage committees.

The ASCs also have a hard time focusing on the event: they are supposed to submit their rules proposals to the CASI but they don't. CASI now finds unrealistic to organise such a big event on such short notice and would rather concentrate its effort on the 1995 Greek World Air Games.

At the October 1990 General Conference, the Regional Council announces that they are not in a position to organise the World Air Games in 1991 and request to be trusted to run them in 1993, with the support of the ACdeF, UFFAS and FAI President, and “with a substantial sum as a guarantee”. There is serious opposition, starting with “most of the FAI ASCs”. The General Conference does not accept the Midi-Pyrénées proposal. The First World Air Games will be in Greece. The FAI President is tasked “to develop a complete definition and specification of the World Air Games, to be presented at the next General Conference”. The World Air Games are to be the property of the FAI. Greece is to come up with precise proposals at the 1991 General Conference.

Greece 1995

At the September 1991 General Conference, the National Aero-Club of Greece presents its “tentative Icariada Programme”: a minimum of 16 events in nine disciplines are spread over six venues across mainland and islands. Air Force bases are widely used. Gliding and parachuting are expected to be World championships. Ballooning is welcome if the commission pays for the cost and runs a World championship. Man-powered and solar-powered flights are hoped for.

The newly formed FAI World Air Games Coordinating Committee goes to Greece, visits venues, meets officials. Its report concludes that there are ample facilities available and comprehensive technical support. The government is committed to support the Icariada, the locations are well suited, the weather statistics are good, but there is no organisational capacity nor much competence available and no ordinary fund until 1993. Four months is

given to the Greek NAC¹ to raise USD 200,000 and to the World Air Games Coordinating Committee to recruit expert personnel in the ASCs.

The September 1992 General Conference hears the words of the Greek Minister of Sports and of the FAI President, Olavi Rautio, both hoping that the World Air Games will be soon legalised in an official document. The World Air Games Coordinating Committee establishes its terms of reference that describe “widespread events, highly competitive character, high level of publicity, popularisation of air sports to the non-air sports public, financial and ideal benefits to the FAI”. The Committee is “empowered to act as an advisory body to the FAI Bureau, represent the ASC, call upon any and all ASC Presidents to advise and assist, coordinate any and all expert support.”

A progress report is examined by the FAI Council in its February 1993 meeting: a draught agreement and basic sports general rules have been sent to Greece. The Minister of Sport has appointed a governmental nine-member Organising Committee. The FAI documents define some general principles: the World Air Games are conducted in accordance with the FAI statutes and regulations; the sporting rules are defined by CASI and the Commissions; the events are governed by the Commissions; the FAI provides, at cost, any air sports expertise. The World Air Games should welcome some 2000–3000 competitors (nominated by the NAC) and officials (nominated by the Commissions). The cost of officials is supported exclusively by the organiser. All sponsoring and media rights are the exclusive property of the FAI, that may transfer to the organisers some of them. An annexe details the sporting basic rules. Another annex sets the remuneration of personnel supplied by the FAI, covering all costs except travel, lodging and transportation in Greece (US\$1,550 per week for long-term personnel, US\$2,400 per week for expert personnel).

At the time of the October 1993 General Conference, the World Air Games agreement has been signed with the Organising Committee. The Committee “expresses pride that the dream of an Olympic of air sports is close to achievement”, but a change of majority and a new government is slowing things down and may request new negotiations.

Test events are requested in 1994 to train the personnel. The FAI side visits the venues and declares all events feasible, but regrets the serious delays and inaction, the inadequate or lack of local organisation – “by July 1993, almost nothing was in place” –, the late payments, the absence of promotional or commercial initiatives, hence revenue generation. Doubts are shared about solving the many remaining problems and the General Conference gives the authority to FAI Officers² “to decide whether to continue the Icarida or to cancel the contract”.

The February 1994 Council reports that, in Greece, the newly elected government has stopped all support of the project and disbanded the Organising Committee. Icarida is too closely identified to the past government and attacked by other sports federations that fear the event will divert spending away from them. The Greek NAC “urges support for a smaller-scale event, capitalising on all efforts made. The Air Sports Commissions support the new project, to no avail. The Icaradia agreement disappears with the dissolving of one of its two signatories.

Hence, on the recommendation of the World Air Games Coordinating Committee, the Council invites new bids, to be received by September 1994, for World Air Games to be held in 1997–1999.

1994: The First Bids

The October 1994 General Conference hears the bids of Australia, South Africa and Turkey.

¹ National Airports Control. NACs are FAI Members.

² The equivalent of today Executive Board members.

Australia's includes any air sport that has the support of its ASC. Events will be centralised in one venue (Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne or Adelaide) with the support of the corresponding State. Funding by the federal and state governments. Significant entry fees per participant (USD 1,000). Request to delay the non-returnable deposit in favour of a percentage of profit.

South Africa's includes the disciplines of nine ASCs spread in eight venues and over a five-month period. The government supports the event. Participants entry fees set at USD 500. "Factors advanced in support of bid: good weather, value for money, experienced organisers, friendly welcome, beautiful country." Turkey includes the disciplines of six ASCs – "possibly others too" – spread in three venues. The government and the Air Force support the event. Good support of the Turkish Aeronautical Association (THK) so few experts will be needed. Entry fees similar to First Category events. Low cost ensured because of access to government and Air Force facilities.

As the General Conference gets closer, Australia accepts the non-returnable fee, South Africa accepts the simultaneous conduct of events and Turkey accepts outside support and expertise.

The General Conference welcomes the three bids as a base for further negotiations. Each ASC is to develop and approve its sporting content adjusted to each bid. The bidders have four months to complete a Candidature File built on 15 themes, from competition location to guarantees. Two more months is given to finalise the bids, then two months to the FAI Council to take a decision.

When the Council meet in June 1995, Australia and South Africa have given up. The FAI Coordinating Committee evaluates the remaining bid as "viable, despite certain weaknesses in the areas of budgetary projections, public relations and marketing." The ASC Presidents' Group support the bid. The Council is almost unanimous when it decides that Turkey will host the 1st World Air Games in 1997, "subject to satisfactory completion of negotiations with the World Air Games Coordinating Committee and ASCs regarding the detailed content of the programme and arrangements for budgeting, marketing, public relations and security".

It Will Be Turkey

At the October 1995 General Conference, the FAI President, Eilif Ness, congratulates all involved. The World Air Games Agreement is signed and the USD 100,000 deposit is paid: "The seriousness demonstrated by THK in their preparations for this great event convinces me that the First World Air Games will be a great success."

The experts from nine ASCs visit Turkey and proposed sites and areas. Following their recommendations, THK organises four test events in 1995 and will run five more in 1996. With the commitment of various ministries and directorates of the government, with Turkish businessmen forming an Advisory Group for finances and marketing, with the support of Turkish Airlines and of all FAI ASC, all lights are green for a "very attractive event, not only for the participants but as well for the spectators".

The Test Games

The 1st World Air Games are the first item of the FAI President's report the October 1996 General Conference: "This greatest of FAI endeavours overshadows most other activities. The preparations are proceeding according to plan and have recently passed their most important milestone: the Test Games. All but one of the twelve has been completed. Any doubt that anyone held is now dispelled: the World Air Games are feasible, the THK can organise it, Turkey is an ideal venue and the World Air Games will happen!"

The rosy picture ends here. The President details administrative matters: list of entry fees, accommodation, rules on advertising, financial conditions that entitle FAI to certain income generated by the Games. Then he states what he really thinks: the World Air Games are mainly for financial reasons, not sportive ones. Only if they are a success, the sport may benefit from them: 'If anyone did not pass with honours at the Test Games, it was the membership at large, whose interest for sending competitors was considerably less than THK had reason to expect. Low participation made their considerable investment in the Test Games a costly exercise. If we are ever to make the membership by an Aeroclub in the FAI less of a financial burden than it is today, the best action we can take is to support the World Air Games. The only way in which we will succeed in reducing the financial burdens of members, not only in terms of FAI costs but also on the national scale, is by creating new income both for the FAI and for its members.

'As of today, it is only a successful FAI World Air Games that holds promise of generating, over time, such new income for the air sports community. By elevating air sports in the eyes of the public to levels where they become valuable to media and thus to sponsors, the concept of World Air Games is our most important tool for future new income. The World Air Games is the only process with the potential to achieve this over which we ourselves have some sort of control. Another way to achieve the same goal is by gaining access to the Olympic programme, but that process, as it has become so frustratingly clear over the past decade, is something over which we do not have control.

"These perspectives constitute a powerful reason for all of FAI to join in on the World Air Games. Not only do the World Air Games offer an outstanding opportunity for aerial athletes of all countries to harvest honours and to project positive images of their own countries. The potential of the World Air Games to create, over time, increased media attention and thus sponsor income, offers other opportunities that should further motivate us all to join the effort. It is difficult to see any stronger motivating factor for NACs to send their athletes to the World Air Games in Turkey next September than making the World Air Games a gigantic success. This is an investment today for better sports tomorrow."

The World Air Games Coordinating Committee goes into details: advertising rules are defined, BDO International will audit the finances, each test event is analysed, the programme and entry fees are finalised.

The entry fees are spread into basic entree fees, basic participation fees and upward adjustments for additional days and services. The report is confusing, it is hard to understand who pays what and for what. There is no mention of sanction fees to the FAI or ASCs. It refers to the World Air Games Agreement. Without reading this contract, we cannot analyse further.

The World Air Games Coordinating Committee "looks forward very optimistically" to the First World Air Games, but "we still need to work on how to merge all 17 events in one big event. Opening and closing ceremonies are one issue, communication links is another, and flow of information and people during the World Air Games and all over Turkey is another one!"

Seven months later, "merging into a big event" is still not being achieved, as the World Air Games Coordinating Committee report to the May 1997 Council: "The World Air Games may not carry the spirit originally envisioned by FAI".

Turkey 1997: The 1st World Air Games

The October 1997 General Conference describes the First World Air Games...

The FAI President: "The First World Air Games were completed with flying colours just one month ago. Not only the Games were a success: all the World Championships within the Games had substantially larger participation than any previous ones. More than 3,000 air sports enthusiasts participated in 17 events. This clearly shows the synergy effect of the World Air Games. Our host, THK, supported by our Commissions' experts, passed the test, and made it a smashing success.

Of course, not all was perfect. While each event was a success, the feeling of togetherness proved hard to create, hampered by the geographical spread of events and the lack of information. The opening and closing ceremonies were only for the few. All this can be improved in the future. Let us not forget, however, that from the outside world, it was much more of a coherent event than appeared from those inside. Many hours of transmissions by Eurosport created much positive interest and response and placed the World Air Games firmly on the television screen.

There is little doubt that the World Air Games hold promise of generating new income for the air sports community. So far, the centrally received financial products of the Games have been modest indeed. Clearly, we must all continue to develop, improve and consolidate the World Air Games as FAI's main tool of the future."

The World Air Games Air Sports Coordinator, Srecko Medven: "The Games were a success on the open stage. Behind the scenes, however, numerous administrative and organisational problems were encountered. Almost all of them were solved (more or less successfully) in time." The 25-page report lays out all aspects of the June 1995–September 1997 period. Some facts...

The Project organisation was shared between a three-person Executive Team with representatives of both FAI and THK, and a much larger Organising Committee with the whole THK Board and extra Turkish World Air Games representative. Every single decision had to be made by the Organising Committee, a slow and inefficient process. After the test events, THK replaced most personnel at key positions and a General Coordinator took the place of the Executive Team. Experience was lost and bureaucratic procedures did not improve. THK recruited 50 or so people spread in commissions for each sport. Some of them were very good, but most had poor knowledge of English and air sports. "The selection and management of human resources were, together with the language barrier, the main handicap of the entire THK World Air Games organisation. There should be decision-making authorities delegated to different levels, which actually never took place."

The agreed Main Project Document determined the FAI support to the organisers in terms of know-how expertise and ASC Event Experts on a semi-professional basis. "Each of the nine ASCs involved had to appoint its expert, with an expected available time of 39 weeks over the three-year period." The nine ASC involved were IPC, IGC, CIMA, CIAM, CIVA, CIVL, CIA, GAC and CIG. "Globally, they served 1,251 workdays, including 764 days of fieldwork." The FAI Air Sports Coordinator was also hired on a semi-professional basis and added 532 workdays, including 290 days of fieldwork. Overall 1,783 workdays, almost five years! More workdays obviously went to other members of the ASC and SMCP (?) who worked on the World Air Games as "expatriates" during the event. 34 such expatriates are listed, plus the "complete organisation of Arc-en-ciel for the Long-Range Air Race." Their involvement is not assessed and there is no indication that they were paid. "They covered demanding tasks and critical positions in almost all events. This was the only way to conduct events on required Category 1 level."

One of the ideas of the World Air Games is to attract participation with reasonably low entry fees. Based on the entry fee catalogue of each and every ASC Category 1 event, the basic entry fee of USD 600 and the basic participation fee of USD 250 was agreed. Upward adjustments were determined for events that deviated from the standard time frame and by additional services supplied." The entry fees without accommodation included went from USD250 to 450; with accommodation included, from USD600 to 800, with the exception of Long-Range Air Race at USD3,000. We are guessing that the entry fees went to the FAI and the participation fees to the THK. We don't know if any part of the entry fees went to the ASC.

The programme was set by the THK and approved by the FAI. The time frame was from September 12 to 22. Some disciplines started earlier. There were both centralised (Ankara) and local (each site) Opening ceremonies. The Award ceremonies took place in each site. The closing ceremony was centralised in Efes: "It was a big disappointment", with few participants due to transportation issues and no message conveyed.

The flying was spread in seven venues: THK flying centres, Air Force bases and newly established sites. Airspace access was not an issue except for gliding with no long task possible.

Out of 80 active or associate members in good standing, 60 took part in the World Air Games. In total, 1,714 pilots, 1,168 other NAC delegation members and 301 ASC officials took part in 18 events in nine air sports. THK estimated the Turkish personnel at 1,000 persons.

Events were run according to the Sporting Code. There were seven World Championships, 12 European Championships, one World Cup and six World Air Games Championships.

The FAI Coordinating Committee concludes technically. “Without doubt, the success of the 1st World Air Games has exceeded expectation with regards to participation. In terms of needed improvements, the greatest effort must be directed toward a much-extended exposure to the general public. The fact that most of the competitions are not conducted in media-friendly ways does account for the failure to make the events more understandable ‘on the screen’ to an excited general public and consequently to generous sponsors. One of the main lessons learned is that FAI expertise and especially the active involvement of ASC experts are essential to achieve the required level of the single events, while coordination among experts and integration of the FAI resources with the event organiser’s counterpart can make the difference between failure and success.”

The FAI President concludes politically. “The First World Air Games mark the end of a three-year strategy plan for the FAI. The three set goals were: modernise FAI in terms of working tools and method; secure FAI’s proper place in international organisations and aviation; create new sources of revenue to lessen members’ financial burden and increase FAI’s ability to act. The goals are reached with a FAI on the Internet, the meeting with ICAO, the joining with GAISF and IWGA, the ASC’s initiatives to develop new formats, including competition in the cyberspace.” But we have to go further: “The chore of the process is the improvement of our television profile. Catching the attention of the public is first and foremost the responsibility of the ASCs. It is their job to convert the excruciatingly boring competition forms into something that people want to look at.”

The Road to Spain 2001

The First World Air Games are barely finished when the bidding process opens for the next one. Bidders are encouraged to be part of coming plenaries in all disciplines. Austria, Poland, Spain and Turkey are on the starting blocks.

The bids are evaluated by the May 1998 Council. Poland and Turkey have given up. Austria and Spain give presentations. The World Air Games Coordinating Committee has analysed the general compliance extensively, technicalities, ASC’s input, proposed organisational structure, financial issues, proposed World Air Games concept and FAI benefits. It recommends Spain and the Council agrees (26 for, 14 against, 1 abstention).

At the September 1998 General Conference, after further negotiations, a Joint Venture agreement is signed with the FAE (Spanish Airsports Federation) during the opening ceremony. An important difference is that the FAI retains all media rights for itself.

In his report, the FAI President lays out the FAI business plan: the World Air Games are developed “to become FAI’s main financial tool of the future, clearly the future major source of new income for the air sports community. So far, centrally received financial products have been modest, a quarter million USD over the past five years. Central income can only come from the overall value of the World Air Games, consequently the development of this value is a primary FAI objective.” The World Air Games Coordinating Committee, repository of the know-how after six years of activity under its belt, is given the authority to supervise commercial and media operations.

1999... The May Council reports progress on events, planning, finance and communication strategy. The World Air Games should be a very high profile with 23 events, including 14 World championships.

The General Conference details: the Joint Venture Projects are driven by the Coordinating Committee and the Secretary General: TV production, merchandising, industry support, public relation and marketing. FAI signed an agreement with a television distribution company that will also produce the programs. "The first money ever to enter FAI's coffers has been generated." 40% of the production cost is supported by the FAI, half of it coming from the ASCs. The Secretary General "spends considerable time on World Air Games matters". The Managing Director and Media Officer are semi-professional. "It is the hired professional capacity that makes it possible to effectively manage these projects at all".

The FAE President announces a USD eight million investment, 5,000 athletes and 700 medals, 13 different venues but a single event.

2000... The May Council, in a nine-page report, evaluates the financial operation of the World Air Games, the appropriate risk management structure and the adequate and acceptable control by FAI members. Its conclusions: there is no advantage to conduct business through a separate entity; proper financial control and appropriate organisation must be addressed; the decision-making process must be reorganised; FAI must establish a Business section with professional staff; the Secretary General must have authority and dispose of funds.

It is suggested to dissolve FAI-Enterprise, established in 1994 to create a "firewall" between FAI and the organisers of events.

The FAE President complains that the FAI disciplines are "stuck in the past", too long, too costly, and asks the ASCs to deliver shorter, more attractive and easier to understand events. He also wants a "modern" FAI, with a much stronger president with a team that he chooses, not an elected one, and with ASCs that cannot refuse to be part of the World Air Games: they should comply and that's it.

The General Conference hears different reports on the 2001 World Air Games. The technical and manpower situation is detailed for each discipline. The test Games are a success except for parachuting. The TV exposure is growing, with promising new contracts. There are financial difficulties that lead to delays in structuring the organisation.

The FAE President details the investment. Cost for the organisation without the investments for infrastructure: \$8.5 million. Recoverable: only \$3.5 million. The difference is to be obtained by public financing and private sponsorship. Revenue of sales and sponsorship is estimated at \$4.5 million by the FAI Media Committee but, with the lack of media attractiveness, \$1.5 million is a more realistic figure. The Spanish organisation committee, 2001 ECO, is made up of 28 official institutions whose different ways of acting could affect the World Air Games cash-flow.

At the last minutes of his six years as President, Eilif Ness concludes: "What is the purpose of FAI? There are those who maintain that FAI is a service organisation set up to provide certain services to its owners. Others maintain that FAI is an institution with its own identity created to promote aeronautics. One thing is beyond doubt: the FAI was not intended as a service bureau. FAI is an international institution with the clear mission and responsibility for the development of sporting aviation. This has been my understanding and guidance."

The new president, Wolfgang Weinreich, doesn't seem to agree when he outlines his priorities: if the World Air Games 2001 is his "overriding initial concern" (concern!), his other goals—the renovation of FAI structure and management, the promotion of airports through the work of the ASC, a suitable operating environment for airports through lobbying international organisations, securing FAI financial future, the importance of teamwork – show a down-to-earth approach of his role.

Spain 2001: The 2nd World Air Games

The Executive Board has now replaced the Council. It holds two meetings before the 2nd World Air Games. Analysis of issues and progress made are extensive: 2001 ECO has limited capacity and experience and there are personal conflicts between FAI and Spanish officials; money due from Andalucian authorities is still not received; 2001 ECO is in clear breach of contract in several areas; the World Air Games Managing Director is in conflict with 2001 ECO and no longer involved in the project; Spain has taken unilateral control of TV; no venue is yet selected for the opening ceremony... The Executive Board works on solutions and “reconfirms FAI’s full support to 2001 ECO in its effort to achieve the common goal of a successful World Air Games”.

The 2nd World Air Games take place from June 23 to July 1. No report is found detailing the events and participation. A 2002 report states “2,000 athletes”. We can only assume that the events went as described in the program. World Championships: 5 for IPC; 2 for CIVA, CIVL and IGC. World Air Games Championships: 3 for CIA, 2 for CIAM and GAC. Venues are Grenada, Seville, Baes de Segura, Burgos, Palma del Rio, Aldoganoles, Sierra Nevada, Lillo, Cordoba.

Post-World Air Games, the Executive Board meets on October 14 and 15 and the General Conference on October 18 and 19. The analysis is extensive although few reports are received from NACs in the debriefing process and none from Spain.

The FAI President, in his report, states that “the goal to have a single World Air Games like an Airsports Olympics was not met, the intended goal with media coverage and public presentation of our sports was also not met and thus expected commercial results could not be realised”.

The financial report is very vague. It points out that the sharing of expenses between 2001 ECO and the FAI was not defined enough. That some money could still be expected to come from the local authorities. That “insufficient funds remain in the World Air Games reserve to be able to fund World Air Games preparation in 2002”. As described by the FAI President, “the World Air Games financial situation in Spain was found to be in a very critical status”, which almost led to the World Air Games cancellation.

The financial issues – missing audited accounts, disagreement between 2001 ECO and FAI on sanctions fees and media cost, lawyers involved – will take two years to be solved.

The FAI President at the 2002 General Conference sums up the situation: “The World Air Games investment was to be 60% from Spain and 40% for FAI (partly from ASCs and partly from World Air Games reserves – non-refundable deposits paid to FAI by World Air Games organisers). The income was intended first to cover the investment. Any profit would be split proportionally. 740K CHF was the total investment and 310K CHF the total income. Difference 430K.”

The World Air Games 2001 ends up for the FAI with a 258K CHF loss.

The World Air Games Managing Director, Srecko Medven, summarises his full evaluation:

“FAI had made the assumption that the satisfactory technical conduct of the World Air Games events was assured and that sites would be provided as described in the bid. Spain has been awarded the Games because the proposals for media coverage, PR and marketing in the Spanish bid were more promising than in the others. However, because of a variety of shortcomings, FAI came near to having to cancel the Games on several occasions. However, as it turns out, technically acceptable contests were achieved in most events, although without the positive attitude displayed by local Spanish organisers, competitors and FAI staff, the World Air Games would have turned into a disaster. There were numerous administrative problems. Although the technical resources were generally adequate, most events were seriously undermanned. Parachuting, gliders aerobatic and powered paragliding came close to collapse. Insufficient resources existed in the central Madrid office to give efficient, effective and timely support. For reasons which must be examined, the merging of local events into one recognisable overall event was not

achieved. Media exposure was minimum outside Spain. Even local tourism offices were unaware of the World Air Games. The Opening and Closing ceremonies did not match expectations.”

The discussion that follows is fiery.

The 2001 ECO representative reports with personal attacks and statements that are “open to challenge as regards their factual accuracy”. The FAI President refuses any discussion on the report and it is not attached to the minutes. Alvaro de Orleans Borbon, then in the Executive Board, points to Spain’s “gigantic effort, but Spain is only receiving brickbats”. Two ASC presidents suggest learning from the experience and let bygones be bygones. The General Conference unanimously adopt a resolution thanking the Spanish air sports community for its “enormous effort and commitment despite serious financial shortfalls” and “look forward to the help of Spain in planning future World Air Games”.

Slovenia 2005

1998... At the same time that the General Conference awards the 2nd World Air Games to Spain, the Coordinating Committee sets the way for the 2005 World Air Games: bidding by 1999, primary evaluation by the ASCs in 1999 and 2000, decision in 2001...

2000... The only bid received is from Slovenia. The General Conference empowers the Executive Board to negotiate and take the decision to approve it or not.

2001... In June, the Executive Board rejects the Slovenian bid. The decision is taken “on the basis of key weaknesses and failure to provide satisfactory answers to a number of vital points”. The issue is mainly financial: the NAC has no money to go any further, the government’s support cannot be guaranteed unless they are awarded the Games. The Slovenians protest strongly. The bidding requirements are not possible to meet. The whole process is unfair.

Revisiting the World Air Games

The Executive Board agrees that there is no chance to have World Air Games in 2005 under the current concept. Significant changes are needed.

The Executive Board tasks one of its members, B.J. Worth, to “revisit the World Air Games: Scope of Product, FAI Goals, Event Organisers”. He writes...

“In reviewing the materials and records from FAI’s previous World Air Games efforts, it is clear that one theme is consistent: The World Air Games, as envisioned and amended by FAI, is a wonderful product in concept, but one that is very difficult to cultivate and bring to fruition.

“The primary obstacle is money, which is related to a lack of spectator awareness and a lack of media coverage, which translate into a lack of sponsor support. The second obstacle is finding professional event organisers and marketing experts who are capable of successfully exploiting the Games.

“Regardless of these obstacles, the World Air Games has the potential to serve FAI – its ASCs, its member nations, and the athletes – in many positive ways. Therefore, the Executive Board overwhelmingly decided to actively nurture the further development of the World Air Games.”

The 2,000-word argument is sent to the ASC Presidents (and who else?) and addresses

- Developing the Future World Air Games

“It is vitally important that all of FAI’s experts and affected parties – especially the Executive Board, ASCs and FAI athletes – are able to collaborate and work towards a unified World Air Games goal.”

- Purpose of FAI World Air Games

“The FAI World Air Games are conducted to determine champions in all World Air Games sporting events, develop camaraderie among the world’s top air sports athletes, showcase air sports to the public, promote public participation in air sports, and generate revenues for the World Air Games Organisers and FAI.”

- Moving Forward Using a Natural Progression:

“FAI should not expect to create a fully functional World Air Games product in one shot, as it tried to do in its previous attempts. FAI will probably be best served by developing and building its World Air Games product from the ground up. FAI could endorse small (national and regional) ‘Air Games’ that test World Air Games formats and World Air Games events to serve as building blocks for establishing a fully functional World Air Games.”

- What should FAI’s next step be for the World Air Games?

“A comprehensive World Air Games Presentation Package should be prepared. The production, publication and distribution of News Releases and Video News Releases, featuring air sports events and athletes, could greatly help FAI fulfil many of its World Air Games purposes. The ASC technical experts are best qualified to supervise and conduct the technical aspects of most World Air Games events. Professional event organisers are most capable of organising and conducting a World Air Games. Media professionals are most capable of documenting, distributing, and publicising World Air Games events. Marketing experts are most capable of exploiting the rights of a World Air Games, such as bringing sponsors to the table. The FAI itself, however, is the entity with the complete vision of what the World Air Games could be and should be.”

- Securing World Air Games Organisers.

“FAI’s most capable source of World Air Games organisers would likely be professional event organisers with a history of conducting aviation-related events, such as air shows or other aviation events that attract public spectators, media, and sponsors.”

B.J. Worth concluded: “Fortunately, all the ASC Presidents will have an opportunity to address the World Air Games with the Executive Board and secretariat hierarchy during our upcoming meeting in Lausanne.”

We don’t know how the “revisiting” progressed.

The World Air Games Coordinating Committee works on a new concept. The draught is presented to the Executive Board and to the ASC Presidents, then to the General Conference.

The Executive Board brainstorms. FAI is not equipped to control an event like the World Air Games. Three different concepts could be presented to the bidders to choose from. “A World Air Games that is not commercially successful is a lot of effort for little result; the World Air Games is, after all, a product designed to bring an alternative revenue source to FAI.” Its conclusion: the project cannot go forward without the ASCs’ support. There should not be World or Continental championships included in World Air Games.

The ASC Presidents agree that “with classical contest formats, FAI could not achieve the declared goal of obtaining media and general public exposure of air sports, leading to revenues for FAI. They therefore decide that newly conceived formats must be developed for a new World Air Games concept which would be more compact in geographical area, maybe smaller in numbers and conducted over a shorter period of time.

The Coordinating Committee asks the ASCs “to start working on these new concepts and to come forward with proposals”.

The World Air Games reserves stand at CHF 53,435, “not sufficient to pay for the expenses involved in preparing the new World Air Games concept. FAI will have to face a long funding gap between World Air Games”.

Poland 2005

The 2001 General Conference is unanimously “in favour of continuing with FAI’s flagship program: the World Air Games”. A 15-month time frame is set, from ASCs

proposals to evaluation, decision, preparation of bidding documents, bidding process, evaluation of bids and decision. The Executive Board is “empowered to decide on a future concept in consultation with the ASC Presidents, to prepare the bidding process and issue invitations to bid” for the 2005 World Air Games.

There are difficulties, starting with finding someone to do the documentation work. Professional assistance may be needed. Bidding will open ‘to entities other than NACs (commercial event organisers for example)’. Bidding will be a 3-step process – intent, bid, World Air Games awarded – with non-refundable deposit at each stage.

An eight-page “new product” is presented to the October 2002 General Conference. “It should make it easier to find good organisers. FAI is looking for organisations with good experience. Expertise and professionalism are the vital ingredients. FAI can provide technical expertise. Our role is to sell FAI to the professionals.” The concept is approved unanimously.

The October 2003 General Conference is informed that Poland and Malaysia are the only bidders left in stage 2 of the bidding process, “both with significant weaknesses”. They are enthusiastic but “have yet to grasp the implications of the new-style Games”. The Coordinating Committee has doubts on its role. “It cannot effectively handle external negotiations with bidders and organisers. Such work has to be done by professional staff, not volunteers. FAI must adopt the same high standards of professionalism it expects from bidders.”

A few weeks after the General Conference, Poland is awarded the 2005 World Air Games by the Executive Board. The negotiation starts. The FAI President visits Poland twice. “A dedicated and efficient-looking team is put in place”, but “only two ASCs are fully supportive, some are hesitant, and others deny their participation, mainly due to the time constraint”. The Executive Board cancels the World Air Games. The FAI President apologises to the Polish partners: “It is the FAI that failed, not the Aeroclub of Poland”.

A New Way Has Been Found

At the October 2004 General Conference, the FAI President reports: “I am convinced that FAI is not in a position, with the given structure we have, to conduct successful World Air Games relying on our own resources. Bearing all this in mind, a new way to realise World Air Games has been found.” Knatchbull Associates, run by a former manager of Discovery Channel, and Clarion Events, a UK-based organiser, are interested. “In order to save FAI’s chances and not lose time, I signed a letter of intent and agreement with them. It will be up to the new Executive Board to continue with the evaluation and further planning in order to realise a new edition, hopefully, of the World Air Games.”

Snippets from the discussion that follows: “It is wrong to oppose voluntary work to paid work. Unpaid work can also be professional and expert... FAI should evaluate its know-how and beware of putting valuable rights into private hands... It is necessary to analyse precisely what went wrong before making an irrevocable decision... Government guarantee is needed to underpin an event like the World Air Games. No government will give such guarantee to a private company...”

The General Conference, again unanimously, tasks the Executive Board to evaluate all options and to report in 2005 on the way forward.

A new president is elected. Pierre Portmann replaces Wolfgang Weinreich.

The Air Games Concept

The 2005 General Conference puts an end to the Knatchbull/Clarion proposal. The FAI Executive Director reports:

“It has many merits, but the Conference has decided that it does not wish to give away rights in perpetuity for fear of losing control over how the product would look to the public.

All should work together to develop the World Air Games plan within FAI and keep control of it. The primary obstacle is financial. World Air Games are expensive. FAI has not yet developed spectator, media or sponsor interest. FAI needs to find professional organisers who can deliver a comprehensive marketing plan.”

The report then explains B.J. Worth’s 2001 proposal. “One option is to downsize, putting World Air Games on hold and building from the ground up, initially from smaller events styled “FAI (Region, Continent) Air Games”, leading eventually to another World Air Games. The number of athletes could be much lower, thus reducing the cost. Air Games could be conducted at existing venues where arrangements are already present. The Games would give added value to the organisers. The concept has been presented to VPs and ASC Presidents and they agree on principle. Efforts are under way to find professional events’ organisers.” One interesting opportunity exists with the Russia NAC, another with the North American Council of Air Shows. “There is a need for a presentation package (30K needed) and World Air Games management capability at the FAI HQ. The Secretary General is tasked with defining what is possible.”

The TSE Consulting Concept

At the 2006 General Conference, there is no trace of the promised Air Games. Instead, TSC Consulting, a firm established in Lausanne, presents its concept:

“Taking you higher, a guide for potential hosts.

“Thrills on the ground, magic in the air, guaranteed success – We truly believe that the World Air Games demonstrate the future of our sports and can showcase your city and region in new and innovative ways... More than a sports event, a global celebration of the passion of flying and the opportunity to focus this worldwide passion in your own country... The conjunction of an official competition and with an air show successful in terms of interactivity and attractiveness...”

“One week, ten sports, unlimited adrenaline—Following the spectacular opening ceremony on Sunday afternoon, competitions run for five days at two venues. Friday and Saturday are the pinnacle with the finals taking place. An incredible air show closes the World Air Games on Saturday evening.

“Tough competitions, spectacular shows – Ballooning, with their spectacular launches and their ability to point amazing pictures in the sky... Microlights, a combination of speed, economy and precision, bravery and adventure as the competition unfolds... Aeromodelling, aerobatics and other routines within reach of the spectators making it fun for everyone... Helicopters, daring pilots demonstrating their acute skills in manoeuvring these impressive machines... Parachuting, artistic display and group formation demonstrate the athletes’ skill as they fight fear and gravity...”

“Celebrations – Gliding, these high technology and extremely environmental sailplanes soar through the air with the grace of a bird... Aerobatics, pilots show elegance and aesthetics while displaying their skills in manoeuvring both gliders and powered aircrafts... Hang-gliding, the pureness and simplicity of airsports... Paragliding, although quite new, one of the most popular airsports...”

“Working together, taking you higher—October 2006: launch of the bidding process. February 2007: shortlisting by the FAI Executive Board. April 2007: deadline for submission of phase 2 documents. May 2007: reports from FAI experts. June 2007: final presentation to the World Air Games Committee followed by the decision on the World Air Games 2009 host.”

This very commercial “special presentation” triggers many practical questions: profit centres from organising accommodation, FAI ownership of the Games not secured enough, NACs’ representation, amount and schedule of the bidding fees, lack of time to bid for 2009, low number of participants (350 expected), need to understand better the product, ASC interested or not and why, need to get NACs’ support...

“Closing the debate, the FAI President announced with great pleasure the official opening of the bidding process for the FAI’s flagship event, the World Air Games 2009.”

Turin 2009 – The 3rd World Air Games

According to the FAI Sports & Development Director’s report...

“After several months of intensive work with sports consultancy TSE Consulting, the bid and evaluation process for the World Air Games 2009 is launched in October 2006 at the FAI Conference in Chile. On June 1, 2007, final bids from Moscow (RUS), Odense (DEN) and Turin (ITA) are presented at the Olympic Museum in Lausanne. The FAI Selection Committee awards the organisation of the World Air Games 2009 to the city of Turin.

“The Turin local organising committee (LOC) is faced with difficulties in securing access to air space and in finalising its legal status and management structure. Communication and coordination problems quickly appear between the LOC and the FAI. The emergence of the world financial crisis adds uncertainty and prevents the LOC from achieving the required level of sponsorship. The LOC therefore decides to reduce its global budget by 35%. The consequence is the cancellation of the full international media coverage and of the air-to-ground system for freefall parachuting events.”

Jean-Marc Badan, who played a central role, is promoted as FAI Events and Sports Director and “fully dedicated to World Air Games 2009/2011”. He is to be assisted by an additional person soon to be hired. Later, Jean-Marc Badan will evaluate his World Air Games work as 70–75% of his total work for the FAI.

The 2008 General Conference hears the President of the LOC. The eight test events have been carried out positively with 200 pilots from 23 nations and 30,000 spectators, which surpassed expectations. The main problem is finding sponsors. Coverage by the national broadcaster, RAI, is hoped for. The closing ceremony will feature the Freece Tricolour aerobatic display team: usually such an event guarantees 300,000 spectators.

Technical aspects are detailed per discipline. Side attractions are planned to draw the public. 392 athletes are now expected. Precise pilots’ selection process remains to be defined: ASCs and NACs will both have to approve them.

The 3rd World Air Games take place in Turin from June 6 to 14, 2009.

The 2009 General Conference hears...

The FAI Sports & Development Director: “In spite of the difficulties, the World Air Games 2009 is declared opened on June 6, 2009, by the Mayor of Turin. Attended by over 10,000 spectators, an impressive opening ceremony is held at the San Carlo central square in Turin, crowned by the lighting of the Icarus Flame, which the Hellenic Aeronautical and Air Sports Association has flown in from Greece. A total of 265 athletes from 41 nations compete in 19 disciplines. All competitions on the final program are successfully completed. No serious accident occurs. The new format of the World Air Games is well perceived by athletes and officials, and very valuable know-how and experience are gathered.”

The FAI President: “The World Air Games confirmed that the format we decided on works well. Of course, we are still learning, and we will apply the lessons learned in future editions. The FAI Board and the ASC Presidents are convinced of the value of such an event, that brings all air sports together. We are actively searching for an organiser for 2011, not an easy task in the current world financial and economic crisis. Our preparations for the 2009 games have clearly confirmed that close cooperation with a professional organisation is necessary and that FAI has to keep more control over the organisers through a revised organiser agreement. We are in the unfortunate situation that the local organising committee did not respect, up to now, the financial obligations of the organiser agreement. They owe us today US\$300,000 and €30,000. The Committee decided, without any prior consultation, in view of their shortfall in budgeted income not to pay FAI, which the FAI Executive Board considers to be totally unacceptable. We shall ask

delegates during the conference to authorise the board to undertake all actions to oblige the LOC and the Aero Club of Italy to accomplish their obligations.”

Jean-Marc Badan, on the objectives that have been set and on the results:

“To determine World Air Games Champions – They have been awarded in each of the 19 disciplines on the sports program.

“To create a sense of cohesion between different air sports disciplines and create camaraderie among the world’s top air sports athletes – The distance from Turin of the remote venues did not make it easy for competitors from there to meet those of sports based in Turin. However, it was very encouraging to see competitors visiting other venues, expressing their enthusiasm when looking at other sports and meeting new people. The 2009 Games, however, highlighted the need for ASCs to decompartmentalise their activities, share experience and exploit synergies better.

“To showcase air sports to the general public and generate revenue for the LOC and the FAI – Budget cuts prevented the LOC from providing extensive media coverage. These objectives were therefore only partially achieved, but the FAI gained experience about how to present sports and athletes better and improve media support to future organisers.

“To promote FAI events and create an attractive platform for TV, media and other external stakeholders – Media exposure of air sports is progressively improving, producing encouraging results, reflected in the increasing number of cities and professional event organisers asking for information on FAI events.”

Marina Vigorito, then Secretary General of the Italian Gliding Federation and FAI delegate at IGC, tells the story...

In the autumn 2006, the FAI launched a call for the organisation of the World Air Games to be held in June 2009. Angelo Moriondo, president of the Aeroclub Torino, set up a Promoting Committee and, after having found human and financial resources largely supplied by the Piedmont Region, presented Turin’s candidacy for the organisation of the World Air Games.

Among the 15 candidates presented, Turin passed the first selection, together with London, Moscow, Melbourne and Odense. After the second selection, there were only three finalists left: Turin, Moscow and Odense. On June 1, 2007, at the Olympic Museum in Lausanne, the FAI President awarded the World Air Games 2009 to Turin.

On July 24, 2007, a private society, the Organizing Committee of the World Air Games – Turin 2009, was formed. For brevity, it was then called the LOC. The organising committee was assisted by the local public bodies involved in the event (region, province and municipalities), the Chamber of Commerce, the sponsors such as Alenia/Finmeccanica, Fiat, Sanpaolo Intesa Bank, Panasonic, Total, La Stampa magazine together with the Aeroclub of Italy and the National Olympic Committee.

In August 2007, in Paris, the president of the LOC Turin signed the organiser agreement with the FAI president. It provided for a fee of \$500,000 to be paid by the organiser and an initial expenditure budget of approximately €6.9 million. Due to the financial crisis that hit the world economy in 2008, the budget was then progressively reduced to 4.3 million, with cuts in promotional and communication expenses.

The Committee established the operational structure, finding the necessary skills for the organisation of a global event and most of them were found among those who had worked in organising the 2006 Winter Olympic Games.

The World Air Games were officially presented to the Mayor of Turin during an official visit of the FAI President on October 23, 2007. On April 19, 2008, during an aeronautical show in Turin, the event was presented to the public.

To draw the attention of the aeronautical world to the future event, the Aero Club Torino, in agreement with the LOC and the Aero Club of Italy, had promoted and sponsored the candidacy of Saint-Vincent (Aosta) for the organisation of the FAI General Conference in 2008.

The competitions took place from Sunday 7 June to Saturday June 13 at four main venues:

- In Collegno at Turin-Aeritalia Airport: acrobatics (powered and gliders); helicopters; parachuting; model aircraft; experimental aircraft; ultralight; sailplanes.
- In the city of Turin, at Palaruffini: radio-controlled electric model airplanes, indoor.
- At the Avigliana Lakes: hang gliding and paragliding (aerobatics, slalom and precision) with a landing platform positioned on the lake.
- In Mondovì: the hot air balloon competitions.

A total of about 400 competitors arrived in Turin to compete for the 25 titles, representing a hundred national federations. From a sporting point of view, the competitions were conducted adequately. At the time, in Italy, the system of the Aeronautical Sports Federations was in force, to which the Aeroclub of Italy had delegated the sporting power, therefore the federations and the FAI sports commissions had collaborated beautifully for the success of the events.

Furthermore, the World Air Games had the effect of triggering or accelerating a series of important investments at the airport of Turin, both from an economic and purely promotional point of view. In October 2008, the construction of a new hangar was completed. The low building in the northern area of the field was renovated at a cost of just under €300,000; it became, at the end of the games, the new operational base of the first aid and rescue helicopter. In April and May 2009, the green areas in front of the building, the parking lot, the internal access roads were completely reorganised; the restaurant was expanded and renovated; estimated cost: €250,000.

The problems arose after the closure of the Games, when there was a shortage of approximately CHF300,000 in fees for the FAI. The discussions were endless. The LOC did not want to pay off the debt, claiming to have no more money. The Aeroclub of Italy said it was not the body that had to honour the debt, accusing the LOC of not being able to manage the millions of euros received and having wasted them (what actually did happen).

In the end, following the suggestion of a senior FAI Executive Board member, an agreement was found between the FAI and the Aeroclub of Italy. Some intellectual properties and technology on tracking and scoring system would be transferred from LOC to FAI. As a FAI member, Aeroclub of Italy would be upgraded for three years to Class 1 membership, hence paying a fee much higher than the one corresponding to the real number of Italian pilots. The agreement was ratified by the General Conference in 2011 and the debts were paid.

However, that decision was never ratified by the Italian General Assembly and had a very negative impact on the image of the Italian NAC and its president, Giuseppe Leoni, accused of abuse of office and bribery, because the Aeroclub of Italy used public money to pay a debt of a private company – the LOC Turin – which is forbidden. Leoni justified himself saying that the Aeroclub of Italy was paying the debt to support one of its members, the Aeroclub of Torino, but this was not true since the Aeroclub of Torino was only one of the bodies of the LOC. The lawsuit was resolved with an acquittal on appeal, but this indelible stain remained in the public imagination.

One more story: on the last day of the gliding competition, many pilots and crews still didn't have their accreditation for the Turin awards ceremony. At the last briefing, the head of the Swedish team stood up to protest that his pilots could not attend. The man was John Grubbstrom, to become the following year President of the FAI.

Who in 2011? And in 2013?

Following the advice of TSE Consulting, the Executive Board decides to establish the World Air Games in a 2-year cycle.

At the 2007 General Conference, detailed plans are shared for the launching of the 2011 World Air Games bidding procedures.

By 2008 and the General Conference, only one bid has been received: Russia. The potential organiser is late in presenting phase 2 of the bid. He asks for an extension of the deadline due to the internal working of their government and the length required to get financial support. It is accepted. A second extension is refused. Russia withdraws its bid.

FAI looks for other bidders. Odense is again interested. Other potential cities are affected by the financial crisis; they want to wait and see how the Turin World Air Games go.

At the 2009 General Conference, Odense confirms its bid for 2011, but three months later a new mayor is elected. The new team has other views and priorities and withdraws its support. A new city is found by NAC Denmark, Herning. Discussions start and go nowhere: the proposed budget is lower than Turin's, the time frame is very short – 13 months with no possibility of test events – , there are conflicts with the current competition calendar, availability of pilots is questionable. With these uncertainties, the Executive Board consults the ASC Presidents and, in May 2010, cancel the 2011 World Air Games.

The bid process for the 2013 World Air Games is launched just before the 2010 General Conference. The Conference question the decision to have World Air Games every other year. The failure of World Air Games 2011 shows that the difficulties encountered by the host and ASC alike. The IOC President himself recommends a four-year cycle for such events. Jean-Marc Badan agrees that this can be reconsidered.

The bid process is very similar to the 2009 one: letters of intent, bid documents sent, evaluation, visits, reports and a decision in eight months by June 2011. The financial conditions are presented: CHF 6,000 as bid fee; CHF250,000 as sanction fee; CHF250,000 as a refundable deposit; in-country cost paid by the host for athletes and officials; at least 50% of the officials' travel paid by the host; media rights for the FAI.

At the end of the General Conference, a new president is elected. John Grubbstrom replaces Pierre Portmann.

The 2011 and 2012 General Conference are mute on the 2013 World Air Games subject. At the 2012 meeting, the report on FAI sports strategy "plans to solicit an expression of interest and enter into bilateral discussions with potential host" for a 2015 World Air Games". The Executive Board is also mute on the World Air Games 2013 in its January and May 2012 meetings, but we don't have all its reports. The 2013 World Air Games seems to have volatilised into thin air.

FAME

Along the years, the World Air Games have been seen mainly as a source of revenue. In January 2012, the Executive Board discusses creating a marketing agency.

"It could be established under Swiss law and located in Lausanne. First find an initial investor, establish a small (paper?) company, issue shares that could be sold to investors. FAI should hold at least 51% of the shares. While the FAI, together with its ASCs, had experience and know-how on developing events and rules, the FAI would need external expertise to develop a business plan, finance and operate professional events, and to attract and convince potential investors about the value of Air Sports."

The May 2012, the Executive Board details:

"It is a very interesting period in FAI's history with the creation of a commercial company and consequential potential cooperation with a third party. The purpose of the company is to engage in high-end events and, above all, to generate income which would enable the FAI to better support its members and the ASCs.

"FAME would be an instrument to the FAI. It would coordinate activities in cooperation with host cities and sponsors, sell expertise in air sports and even possibly organise

events. It would act as a support service to ASCs to bring promotion and marketing experience to ASC events. It would also act as a holding company for ASC subsidiary entities.

“FAME may also be implicated in searching for World Air Games potential host cities.

“How would potential future sponsors be allocated? That would depend on the approach. FAME would actively seek sponsorship, but it may be that future sponsors would look to partner with FAI rather than FAME. There was also the question of tax, FAI benefiting from a favourable regime.

“There would be three directors (Robert Henderson, Chairman; Robert Clipsham and Jean-Marc Badan, Directors) and a non-voting Secretary (Robert Hughes).

“The Executive Board votes unanimously in favour of continuing the process to legalise the constitution of FAI Airports Marketing & Events S.A. (FAME).”

FAME is created. It provides the structure to allow FAI to go commercial. It will be activated “when the time is right”. Board’s members are changing, but FAME remains a dormant company until 2014 or so. It is then used as a means to move money around but doesn’t really deliver anything. In April 2022, it is on its way to be dissolved.

The Road to Dubai 2015

2012... The format of the World Air Games is again in question.

President John Grubstrom together with the newly appointed Secretary General, Stéphane Desprez, visit Dubai where the FAI 2012 Parachuting Mondial is held following three successful Dubai International Parachuting Cups. An impressive event with over 1,000 athletes, excellent media coverage, excellent organisation and a generous budget, They approach the organiser to discuss the possibility of him hosting a World Air Games in Dubai.

The ASCs agree that the Executive Board should decide on the principle and on the bid process: bilateral cooperation instead of bids? The secretariat is instructed to update the documents. A number of parties seem to be interested in hosting the Games. The SportAccord Convention in Canada is seen as an opportunity to speak to contacts.

The bid process for the 2015 World Air Games opens in January 2013. In May, only Dubai has sent the required CHF6,000 bidding fee. Dubai it will be.

In October, the ASC Presidents meet the Executive Board and state their requests: the World Air Games must rely on paid professional staff contracted by FAI and in place nine months before the start. The Games are organised by FAI and paid for by the host. The Commissions detail their positions: IGC: no benefit but will lend moral support. CIG: sand and helicopters are not a good mix. CIACA: will create local interest. CIA: in favour but needs more detail. CIVL: glad to bring accuracy and aerobatics. CIMA: will present slalom in front of an audience. IPC: After the three past years of very successful competition in Dubai in all parachuting disciplines, would now be obliged to select which disciplines to include to reduce numbers. CIAM: glad to be involved. CIVA: carefully positive, absolute need for a professional and dedicated FAI organiser. GAC: interested if all expenses reimbursed. In conclusion, the FAI strategy is questioned. How do the World Air Games fit into it? Suggested: the World Air Games are more an exhibition than a competition.

In March 2013, the FAI Secretary (Susanne Schödel) and Sports and Events Director (Markus Haggene) meet the LOC and visit the proposed venues. They report to the May Executive Board meeting: LOC Dubai are polite but surprised by the slow process, the focus on the Organiser Agreement, on the request for a deposit, on the ownership of this Air Sports Olympics. “The lack of enthusiasm weakened FAI position”. Given the short period—less than a year and half—the preparation cannot rely only on volunteers. External experts and outsourced activities are needed, a professional project

management would be a must. Disciplines, schedules and venues are being set. Dubai will be attractive for sponsors, FAI's and others.

The Executive Board exchanges. There may be some risks and questions: a short time to prepare; inexperience of the new FAI management team; difficulty to benefit from the previous World Air Games experience; expense policy to be set up, including compensation for technical delegates; clear commitment of ASCs needed. Conclusion: 100% in favour, this is a golden opportunity to showcase our sports, a strategic investment.

At the October 2013 General Conference, Rob Hughes, FAI Sports Director, "reminds that the World Air Games are intended to be the flagship event in the FAI, gathering all air sports in one event. The FAI is still in the bidding process for 2015. FAI is still having options to study, details to work through. A meeting is planned with potential organisers and the decision would potentially be taken by the end of November."

The Executive Board meets in Dubai in December 2014. All venues have been visited. "Liaisons" persons have been appointed in all sports. They are asked to present their discipline to the host, insisting on its "commercial appeal" and on the FAI professional expertise. Progress is made on the budget concept. "Cost issues and remuneration arrangements are covered in the Memorandum of Agreement."

Between February 2015 and November 2015, the Executive Board meets nine times.

Progress reports are made, all approved. The concept, mission, vision, structure, communication, participants figures, budget, etc. are refined as the preparation moves forward. A dedicated Sports and Events Director has been hired, Markus Haggeneby becoming Sports and Marketing Director. It is not all rosy: "The host feels uncomfortable with inappropriate behaviour, ongoing complaints, unacceptable wording in communication and requests with an ultimatum by some FAI representatives." FAI tends to forget that Dubai has successfully implemented 5 DIPC's and one parachuting Mondial held over three different site and with more athletes than are planned for the World Air Games. "Managing diversity successfully" becomes an issue and the object of a seminar.

In March: "Until now 80% of the entire sanction fee (CHF 250,000) has been paid by the host. FAI has not committed to any expense exceeding the amount of the received money and reserve dissolution as budgeted." Expenditure and revenue are detailed in a presentation.

In May, we learn that costs for FAI Experts will be charged to LOC by FAI on the following basis: USD 275 per FAI Expert per working day with the exception of the parachuting experts who are those used in the previous 6 events and who will also coordinate the whole event. They will be paid separately directly by the Organiser. A medical symposium is added. It is supposed to be high-level congress. The budget is in the hands of Dubai.

July meeting lists challenges, risks, headaches and obstacles, and to answer them action plans. It concludes: "Let's be optimistic. Whatever happens it will be a major, exciting and fantastic event!"

August brings concern about the administrative and sporting organisation lagging behind schedule. Downsizing or cancelling the World Air Games is thought about.

In September "the situation continues to be tense, the decision-making process is ad hoc and difficult. There is a communication breakdown between some key persons on LOC and FAI sides."

In October, Bob Henderson, in charge of safety, has visited the two main sites and reports "a perfectly normal operation. Facilities are really good, with very little additional work to be done." The Meet Directors have met. The schedule for sporting events is finalised, the one for officials and VIPs is not. The first press conference in Dubai is very well internationally attended.

In November, the FAI President and Secretary General visit Dubai. They solve the issue of the remuneration of the so-called FAI Experts and of the Quattro Media involvement and cost-sharing for the production of footage during the World Air Games.

The 2015 General Conference hears the Arab Emirates Aerosports Federation Vice-President (“Dubai is ready and will rise to the occasion, making the World Air Games an unforgettable experience”) and the FAI President (“The road has been a bumpy one, nevertheless things have improved and the LOC are putting in a tremendous effort”).

The General Conference starts working on the next World Air Games. The FAI is at the crossroads. We can continue the way we’ve been going and improve it, or we can take a different path and fit our events strategy and concepts to target sponsors and companies. We need to design and implement strictly a new sponsorship/marketing/event branding concepts: the World Air Games series. To be developed in a further chapter!

Dubai 2015 – The 4th World Air Games

They take part from December 1 to 12. Nobody can deny that they are an exceptional event, a tremendous success in many ways, but nobody can deny there are also many issues.

At the 2016 General Conference, almost a year after the event, the FAI President is nothing but enthusiastic: “Never before we had the opportunity to market our sport. There were 951 competitors from 52 nations, 40 prize ceremonies, and we generated 28,000 hotel bed nights. We arranged a much-appreciated VIP program for potential future sponsors and partners. We had a very successful medical conference with prominent speakers. We had 1,500 hours television time and >20,000 airings in 198 countries. We produced a 28-minute highlight show for international distribution. The post-event evaluation workshop was a great moment of team building and the general feeling is that it was fantastic and must be done again. This has been extremely successful and now we are planning for the next World Air Games!”

Witnesses are many that describe with delight, like the FAI President, the World Air Games warm welcome, the profuse information, the impressive ceremonies, the lavish buffets and, yes, the 23 sports events mostly highly visible from or around Skydive Dubai. A luxurious table book is published to celebrate this luxurious event.

SportCal – Sports Market Intelligence delivers a factual 72-page Global Sports Impact Event Study “for the sole and confidential use of the FAI”. Its chapters: Overview, Economic, Media, Social Media, Sporting, Social, Legacy, Comparative Data Analysis. Coming from a supposedly neutral party, the Legacy chapter is interesting.

“The legacies for the FAI and air sports include

- The compact nature of the Dubai event was acclaimed and encouraged greater integration of the different air sports at the games, from commission level to athlete level.
- The use of a ‘hub’ venue, which had a full day of competition scheduled on each day of the event, incorporating multiple air sports.
- The presence of a dedicated FAI media team at the event (in addition to LOC media team), which meant that desired FAI messages could be spread during the games.
- World Air Games 2015 demonstrated that the FAI World Air Games can be held in the midst of a busy airspace area; the Dubai competition sites were between two international airports.
- World Air Games 2015 could be used as a catalyst to promote a stronger culture of cross-commission cooperation in the future.
- This culture could see the emergence of more multi-discipline competitions on the

FAI calendar.

- A dedicated website and new bidding process have emerged since the games.

“The legacies for Dubai and the Emirates Aerosports Federation include

- An ever-improving hub venue for air sports. The Skydive Dubai venues (Palm and Desert campuses) have undergone extensive development since the introduction of the Dubai International Parachuting Championships in 2010 and continue to improve. The venue itself did not have any permanent facilities added to host the games. Instead, it used temporary structures so that the space could be returned to general use after the event.
- A new airfield for aeromodelling disciplines; The RC Airfield, which hosted aeromodelling and microlight competitions, was built specially for World Air Games 2015, creating a new permanent facility.
- Local knowledge of organising multiple air sports. Despite being a young national federation, the Emirates Aerosports Federation was already a distinguished host of parachuting competitions. Following hosting World Air Games 2015, EAF now has improved local knowledge of organising other air sports events. The favourable climate in Dubai for air sports means that it is a potential venue for further single- and multi-discipline air sports World championships in the future.
- Further developed transferable knowledge of hosting multi-sport events.”

At the end of its report, SportCal writes: “The effect of World Air Games 2015 on interest and participation in air sports in Dubai and worldwide, is unknown.”

The media coverage goes: 40% in Africa where air sports are hardly present; 40% in Europe, FAI’s main market; 10% in North and South America, which are strong markets; 5% only in Asia-Pacific, FAI’s highest potential of development; 5% in Middle East. What did it bring to the sport?

The Evaluation Workshop takes place in Lausanne on April 2 and 3, 2016. Are participating: five Executive Board members; two secretariat members; six ASC presidents; ten event directors, liaisons, or judges; six heads of delegation; three facilitators. On the agenda: “What could have been better. What went well. What type of World Air Games do we want. Key areas of work.”

There is a lot of frustration expressed. “What could have been better” collects 100+ Post-It and “What went well” 28, which is not a surprise as nobody is interested in trains that arrive on time. Still... At the end of Day 1, the feelings are very mixed, but “We share concerns” and “This can be fixed”. Day 2 ends with a precise-enough description of what is wanted: “To showcase air sports for non-sport-specific audiences and for the media. To create a FAI toolbox of events attractive to organisers that is easy to set up, entertaining, and that can be combined together or not.”

The frustration shared by all ASCs is about finances. ASCs don’t organise events, they find organisers and get sanction fees for it. In the First Category events of many disciplines, some key officials are remunerated or have their expenses covered by the organisers (Event Director, Scorer...) or by the ASCs (Technical Delegates, Judges...). At the 2015 World Air Games, ASCs are asked to organise everything (with the exception of parachuting as the staff, other than Judges, used previously were used again and directly paid for by Dubai) and come with most of the technical staff (globally, 231 volunteers), so ASCs are expecting a share of the World Air Games sanction fee and stipends for their key experts. They are ignored on the first and misled on the second.

- A share of the CHFxxx,xxx sanction fee is never discussed. (The 2015/2016/2017 General Conference financial statements show an amount of CHF 545,539 for sanction fee and reimbursements.)
- Stipends for ASC experts are discussed from the start with the Executive Board and Secretariat, and ASCs are told not to worry, that it will happen. Doesn’t the

World Air Games Memorandum of Agreement states that USD 275 per day per FAI Expert will be paid by the host? Doesn't the FAI President, upon return from his November 2015 visit to Dubai, announce as "main achievement the remuneration of so-called FAI-Experts"?

During the World Air Games, ASCs are told that the so-called experts have been defined "for the sake of the argument" so an amount of revenue could be defined. Hence, the amount agreed is a flat sum rather than a person-by-person evaluation. The amount is deemed "suitable for Commissions to cover the expenses of their people as in other Cat 1 events. It will be at the discretion of each Commission how to use these funds and decide how their people will be reimbursed." The amount agreed with LOC is not shared.

On February 10, 2016, FAI informs the Commission Presidents that some of the money has been kept to pay for "open reimbursement claims and uncovered technical costs not reimbursed by the host and expenses of the International Air Sports Board (?), Commission EnvC and FAI Head Office". The amount of money obtained is still not shared and will never be. The amount available – 70,000 Swiss Francs – is divided equally between the 10 Commissions at the request of Commission Presidents. They will learn later, but not from the Executive Board or secretariat, what the global amount was: USD126,000, of which they got 55%.

Since Turkey 1997, everyone has been insisting that expertise and professionalism are vital ingredients to success. The one time that the FAI obtains dedicated funds, it fails to deliver. The ASCs feel cheated, some Event Directors are plain furious: they took time off before and during the Games, they are professionals and the money they were promised is used for other purposes.

At the end of the 2016 General Conference, a new president is elected. Fritz Brink replaces John Grubbstrom.

The Air Games Series

The first idea of the Air Games Series is described by B.J. Worth, an Executive Board member, in a 2001 report (see above). The concept is explained to the 2005 General Conference (see above).

Ten years later, a first extensive version of the Air Games Series is presented by the Executive Board to the 2015 General Conference just before the Dubai World Air Games: a four-page document and 48-slide presentation as "a long-term proposal" with a "sports strategy and brand development defined up to 2020. It will require investment in terms of finance, manpower and experience. With our air sports events, we must ensure spectator visibility, media and sponsor interest. They must be clearly defined products in regard to placing, pricing and promotion." Then the virtuous 4-spoke circle is possible, a "simple recipe": high-profile events, bringing spectator interest, bringing media coverage, sponsorship, bringing other high-profile events, etc. A dedicated team will be "the vehicle to be used. ASCs and NACs must be convinced about the usefulness of this transformation. The ultimate goal is to ensure financial sustainability of the FAI so that they can benefit financially as well."

The "Road to 2020" is detailed and its budget defined until 2020. Revenue, cash in, funds used: 2,6 million, including 1,6 million in sponsorship. Expenditure: 2,88 million.

Some participants are supportive: small events run by professionals will give impetus to all competitions; it will give us a sense of being a family. Some ask the right questions: The proposal has not been widely discussed? Is this what the NACs want? Who will pay for the events professional teams? Or made the right comments: The plan shows a deficit of CHF 700,000, not a good return on investment, The cost will be real long before we have a sense of what income is possible, If this was easy, someone else would have done it.

The answer of the Executive Board: “The only guarantee is that if we do nothing, FAI is out of the game. We have to define our products and we need professionals to do so. This is an important step for the future of air sports.”

At the 2016 General Conference, the CEO of Jump, a strategic sports consultant, presents 55 slides “exploring the need for and feasibility of an annual Air Games series”. They present, but with more details, what was presented the previous year. Case studies are detailed, key success drivers and constraints explained, potential locations displayed, programs simulated, commercial rights, obligation and revenue stated. For a year with four events, 40 to 60 competitors in each of three to five disciplines. “The potential revenue is conservatively estimated at 2 million, with associated cost of around 1,7 million.” He concludes: “There are many details still to work out on the sports side. Over the next five months, we will go to the market with the concept and determine what hosts and sponsors are prepared to buy.”

The discussion that follows is lively. Too many practical details are missing starting with the competitors (where to find them when they are already busy with the current events?) and the interest for NACs to send national delegations. There are too many “ifs”, “then” and “perhaps”. Still, the General Conference approve and budgets the concept for another year.

At the 2017 General Conference, the FAI Sports and Events Director reports that the Air Games Series has run out of steam. Sports marketing agencies are hesitant to partner with FAI and to co-finance as long as the events do not exist. NACs have issues with financing their teams. Host cities want a Guide document and to know what costs will be.

The Air Games Serie is abandoned for an Air Games Tour thought up by a member of the Executive Board, following a conference call with the FAI Secretary General and Sports and Events Director. The Air Games Tour is “Air Games events with a national focus. Athletes compete within national teams and accumulate points event by event to become the Greatest Flying Nation on Earth.” The concept has been circulated within the ASCs before the General Conference. Just like the Air Games Series, it is not anchored in the reality of our sports.

Some ASCs protested strongly: “This is a major defocus of what we are doing. We are a sports organisation, not a show business. Volunteers will be hard to find. Pilots are not interested. It will hurt us instead of helping us. We are very far from the post-World Air Games seminar, and we wonder what happened to its conclusions on the road that was supposed to lead us to the 2020 World Air Games.”

Some NACs also protest: “In 2015, we had had a very active discussion about the Air Games Series and the substantial aspirations they had for the sponsorship and other income it would generate, and the substantial investment they were contemplating making in that programme. We have now spent hundreds of thousands of Swiss Francs and another 500,000 are itemised in the budget for 2018. In 2016, we had a 55-page presentation on the Air Games Series which did not seem to move the discussion very much towards what they would actually be doing. It had no numbers in it. The concept paper we have seen today similarly does not seem to have homed in on what we are going to do. It also has no numbers. Are we willing to continue to fund the investment implied in this initiative when we have no clear view of what the income stream will be?”

The FAI President answers that it will be discussed with the budget and that the Executive Board had made clear progress in the last few months.

The budget is discussed: CHF 768K have been spent and another 202K will be in 2018. Some are “confused by the use of reserve as income. Reserve should not be used for operations, only emergencies”.

The treasurer answers that “the Executive Board feels that the project is worthwhile and is looking into replenishing the reserves in the near future. If we don’t take the risk and act today by running a deficit, we will be obliged to reduce our activities and our services to air sports people around the world.”

“We try to anticipate, adds another Executive Board member. We are among the few people that don’t make money, FAI has a fantastic reputation, we must not waste that. The FAI has to evolve and establish its brand and make an imprint in the sports commercial world.”

A year later, when the 2018 General Conference takes place, the Air Games Series and Tour are forgotten. No item in the agenda, not a word in the President’s report. The drones have taken pre-eminence. Along the way, at least one million has been spent with nothing to show.

The Road to THK 2020

In conclusion of the April 2016 post-Dubai Workshop, ASCs are challenged to propose new events to show off our “heroes”. “Visible from the ground, easy to understand, cost effective for all, within a clear time schedule and with clear selection process”. A two-month time frame is defined: project launched with ASCs, consolidate feedback, discuss during the ASC Presidents’ meeting, present to informal NAC Presidents Group meeting, approve the next steps.

The project and the timeframe are superseded by other interests, namely kicking off the bidding process for the future World Air Games. The bidding process is open.

Albuquerque – “The bid is backed by one of the world’s biggest events, the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta. The full infrastructure is up and running and the organising committee are on board as is the city, the State and various stakeholders in the region (economic/touristic bodies, museums, philanthropes, etc.)” Additional costs due to the FAI World Air Games create budget issues and the question on return on investment is raised. Albuquerque pays the required bidding instalment to pursue the process.

Malaysia – “Same situation for MAS related to cost and return on investment. A very limited infrastructure is in place which would demand much more input from FAI and the ASCs. Company Aerolomba and Adam Din, as former organisers of the Red Bull Air Race (RBAR), are the main drivers of the bidding process. An upcoming election needs to be considered. Sites visits have been made.”

THK – “The Turkish NAC ran the First World Air Games in 1997 and is well aware of the dimension of the event. They plan to organise the event all over the country. An opening ceremony would bring everyone together in a same place.”

The 2017 General Conference examines the bids. Only Turkey is really discussed. It is pointed out that the project is in complete opposition to what the post-Dubai workshop wanted. The FAI President and Sports and Events Directors ensure that “the workshop has been very important; they learned a great deal from Dubai; this is not a head office project but one for the entire FAI community; the Executive Board will take the decision after consultation with the ASCs”. In the end, the General Conference gives the power to the Executive Board to choose the next World Air Games venue.

In December 2017, the Executive Board confers.

The Malaysian bid goes nowhere: there are elections for a new king and everything is stalled.

The Albuquerque bid cannot go forwards due to budgetary issues related to the increased cost of oil and elections, which mean that the future of city and state sponsorship cannot be guaranteed.

The THK bid is in an advanced stage. “Since the THK wants to host a huge event, the storyline surrounding it needs focus. The deviation from the ideal World Air Games concept will create opposition in the FAI community”, but “bid projects do drive change in an organisation. Many of the identified activities establish ambitious objectives and call for FAI-managed projects and events to deliver the desired results.”

The Executive Board awards the World Air Games to THK. The Head Office is to negotiate the organiser agreement. The THK will be invoiced the first CHF100K. The other bidders will be informed, then a public announcement will be made.

The Executive Board “applauds the huge efforts made by the Secretary General and by the Sports and Events Director to arrive at this agreement”.

At no point are the ASCs involved in the decision process.

Some ASCs warn the Executive Board that there are human rights and political issues, that the THK is in frontal conflict with the government. They are ignored.

The 2018 General Conference is shown a presentation of what looks very much like the 1997 World Air Games: spread out venues, thousands of participants. A delegation of 24 FAI representatives spent eight days in June visiting venues. Another more modest technical visit took place in August. The FAI President talks about “slight delays”. The Coordinating Committee is still not including NAC and ASC representatives. Who will be competing and how is not yet defined.

At the end of the General Conference, a new president is elected. Robert Henderson replaces Fritz Brink.

The THK also elects a new president. A meeting takes part at the end of November 2018 and “there is unanimous agreement that the opportunities for the World Air Games and the opportunities to showcase THK and Turkey are huge. In order to fully leverage these opportunities and deliver safe and fair competitions, FAI and THK jointly agree to move the dates of the World Air Games from 2020 to September 2022.”

During the same meeting, again without any ASC input, the Executive Board agrees that “all World and Continental Championships for ASC disciplines included in World Air Games 2020 shall be held as part of World Air Games 2022. The championships shall be reformatted as appropriate for the event. An Executive Board Working Group shall be formed to recommend the framework/format of the competitions for each ASC.”

The FAI President’s letter concludes by “looking forward to jointly creating the Supercharged FAI World Air Games 2022”.

One FAI

At the same time that the Executive Board takes absolute control of the World Air Games, the One FAI project is in full development. We have to rethink the FAI. FAI decision-making is fragmented. There is frustration amongst volunteers. FAI purpose must be redefined, air sports achievements and the framework to support them coming at the top of the list. NACs’ collaboration must be helped by the creation of a NAC handbook. ASCs must be involved in the decision-making of FAI. Working Groups will be implemented to consider options.

Nothing will come of it.

THK 2022 – From Supercharged to Terminated

As the Executive Board and secretariat push the ASCs to respect the all-Cat 1-event format although they are aware of that “the ASCs show a lack of trust”, the THK runs into financial problems and requests “to delay the event to 2025 and freeze further payments until 2023”. The political struggle between the THK and the Turkish government intensifies. The THK Board is fired and replaced by government-appointed administrators. FAI has a non-functioning partner. There is no sign that THK will be in better shape in 2025. The Executive Board decides “to terminate the organiser agreement and do their best to recover the funds owed under the organiser agreement signed by Turkey”. Everybody knows that whatever is owned is lost.

In December 2019, one year after having supercharged the World Air Games, they are terminated.

In his declaration, the FAI President concludes that “the World Air Games 2022 cannot go ahead, but the FAI will take this opportunity to review what the World Air Games product could look like before making a decision in 2025”.

2020 – A New Evaluation

In January 2020, the FAI President implements a Working Group: “This debate started in Lausanne in December and I would like to start it here by asking that the future shape and style of the FAI World Air Games be considered with the objectives of deciding: (a) the aim of the event; (b) what sports disciplines participate; (c) the style (size, proximity of disciplines, number of participants); and (d) the financing of the event.”

The Working Group included all ASC Presidents and five Executive Board members. After a short exchange, there is a consensus amongst ASC Presidents that ASCs may be ready to support the World Air Games if they can be proved to be worth the effort. First and foremost, a proper evaluation of the recent World Air Games – Dubai and Turkey – must be done. What did they bring? How much did they cost? The financial aspect is considered as crucial, no precise report having ever been presented.

On the Executive Board side, Marina Vigorito points out that the financially catastrophic Turin World Air Games should be part of the evaluation. There is no input from any other Executive Board members. The project is stalled.

In December 2020, the new FAI President, David Monks, puts the evaluation back on tracks. The CIVL President started to work on it, but... Etc. (see above).