



ANNEXE 12A – A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WORLD AIR GAMES

Back in the 1980s, the idea to include Airsports to the program of the Summer Olympic Games was born. The first step was the participation of a large team of parachutists to the opening ceremony of the 1988 Olympics Games in Seoul. The team performed well with a large formation representing the five Olympic circles landing inside the stadium.

A Working Group was established to deal the issue and negotiate with IOC. By that time, the criteria to be part of the Olympics were not as of today: only numbers were needed to prove that the sport was popular and worth to be part of the Games.

The negotiations between FAI and IOC were not successful and this Olympic dream ended. As an alternative the FAI President announced that FAI would build its own equivalent of the Olympic Games: the idea of World Air Games (WAG) was born.

Still the idea of the Olympic Games was not completely abandoned and the Working Group existed until second WAG in Spain. Then the project ended and the Working Group disappeared. At the time, his chairman was the Slovenian S. Medven who was also Sports Director for the WAG.

France, the country where FAI was born, was supposed to host the first WAG. Unfortunately due to internal problems (NAC vs Federations), the WAG was cancelled.

An ambitious NAC President from Greece decided to step in and took the lead to host the WAG in Greece. The idea was to spread the event all over Greece in a similar way as the 2022 WAG in Turkey. Imagine that, by that time, the technology was not what it is today and spreading the event all over a country was going to be quite restrictive. This was extremely expensive and, although some funding was secured from the State, this wasn't enough to secure the WAG. The project collapsed.

We were in the beginning of the 1990s. The first two attempts to organise WAG were not successful, five years had been spent and a lot of money as well.

The first WAG happened in Turkey in 1997. The format was quite similar to the project cancelled last December. A lot of venues spread all over and almost all events World Championships. The event was a financial failure. The Turkish government spent an enormous amount of money without any real income for them or even for FAI.

The next edition of WAG happened in 2001 in Spain. The spread of the events was not as extensive as in Turkey, but still not around a single city. The financial result was similar to the first WAG and this was quite critical for the Spanish NAC which was almost bankrupted. Not all the events were World Championships and the idea of smaller events with only the best of the best was on the table.

This idea was also considered for the next edition of the event in Italy (Turin) in 2009. The same financial problems occurred and the NAC of Italy, in order to fulfil the agreement signed with FAI, had to pay by instalments over a few years.

In 2014, Dubai decided to take the lead and organise the event in one and only place with the best of the best. Preparation was very short, and the December 2015 event was successful, not because the event by itself generated some income, but because the organisers were devoted to this project and wanted to invest on it for the sake and the reputation of their country.

Dubai 2015 was not perfect and FAI organised a 3-day seminar in August 2016, with 29 participants from the FAI Executive Board and secretariat, Air Sports Commissions, NAC, managers and heads of delegations of the last WAG. Doubts were replaced by enthusiasm for a new event to be built together over a few years, that would 'capture the essence' of our disciplines. In brief, Dubai style but better prepared.

The FAI Executive Board and secretariat started working on it. Bidding process was opened. Albuquerque and Malaysia were interested. Visits were organised with Commissions representatives included. In the end, the potential bidders could not deliver.

In late 2017, Turkey then came up with a project for 2020 very much like their 1997 WAG: big events spread around the country. The FAI Executive Board and secretariat took the matter in their own hands. Commissions were not consulted. Revenue was the key motivation. The agreement was signed between FAI and THK.

The Commissions did not agree with the format, complained that they had to do all the work, that they could not fit the WAG in their regular competition calendar. Preparation of WAG 2020 was going too slow. In December 2018, the WAG 2020 were postponed to 2022 to be 'supercharged'. Again without the Commission's input, the Executive Board decided that all events would be World or Continental Championships.

The CIVL thought that it would be possible and our 2019 Plenary voted to hold such Cat 1 events in Turkey in 2022. The Bureau quickly realised that it was a bad improvised decision, suspended it and looked for alternatives. Proposals were made to the FAI in April 2019. We started working on our new project but found it difficult to make any progress as key questions were not answered: basically, who was responsible of what and what was the budget?

Then came, last December, the cancellation of the WAG: the THK was running into political and financial problems and could not pay FAI what it owed.

So to sum up this WAG historical review, so far we had three failures, three events with a lot of problems left behind for the organisers to deal with, and only one event that we can refer too in a positive way. And in the eyes of the participants, none of these events were considered to be close to the initial ambition: participate in the Olympic Games of Airsports.