

Managing Mega Events: Experiences from China and Brazil

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Background

China and Brazil are the two fast growing economies. As far as the size is concerned both countries occupy huge space of the globe. Both of them have plenty of natural resources. In the past few years both of them have given adequate attention to the development of science and technology within their countries. Apart from working in frontier areas they are trying to spread scientific and technological literacy among the masses. In order to create interest about these disciplines among young lads they regularly organize contests for school children. In China it is known as CASTIC (China Adolescent Science and Technology Innovation Contest) while in Brazil it is called MOSTRATEC (A Science and Technology Fair). CASTIC is organized by CAST (China Association of Science and Technology), Beijing while MOSTRATEC is organized by Fundasao Liberato, a Technical School at Novo Hamburgo located in the southern part of Brazil. Both, CASTIC and MOSTRATEC, are mega events with more than 400 science projects and more than 100 other relevant stalls. Both are international events with the participation of countries from different parts of the world. About 15 countries apart from China participate in CASTIC while about 25 countries apart from Brazil participate in MOSTRATEC. I had an opportunity to participate in 28th CASTIC held at the historic city of Nanjing in China from August 1 to 6, 2013 and in 28th MOSTRATEC held in the industrial town of Nov Hamburgo, in Brazil from October 21 to 15, 2013. Organization of these events was a big challenge. Nevertheless, authorities from China and Brazil could deal with these challenges successfully. This article discusses how they manage these mega events and what lessons we can learn from them.

Reception and Accommodation of the Participants:

Participants from different parts of the country as well as from different parts of the world arrive to the place of the contest usually a day before the beginning of the event. A large number of them might arrive in a short span of time and transport used might also be different. Some arrive by surface transport while some arrive by air. Organizers of both the events request for travel schedule of guests in advance. This information is passed on faithfully to the members of the Transport Committee which then plans to receive the team and take it to the hotel. The entire responsibility of coordinating two and more teams arriving at the same time and transferring them to their respective hotels falls on the shoulders of this committee. At both the places we have observed that this task is managed well without any flaw.

The number of participants coming for the contest is quite large to the tune of 1500. They need to be accommodated either in the same hotel or in hotels located close by. Chinese organizers tend to book the entire hotel for the event. Fortunately, they have big hotels so that all the participants can be accommodated in one or two hotels.

Organizers of MOSTRATEC, on the other hand, are handicapped by the size of the hotels in the city. Hence, they resort to making arrangements in different hotels. A person who receives you at the airport has names of hotels along with a list of persons going to specific hotel. Accordingly, they are put in a specific vehicle and transferred to the designated hotel. We were delayed in reaching Novo Hamburgo as we missed our connecting flight at Sao Paulo. The people of transport committee, however, waited for us until midnight, arranged for the vehicle and ensured that we reached hotel comfortably.

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| <p>Exhibition venue and transfer</p> | <p>A venue has to be so big that more 500 projects could be displayed comfortably. Moreover, there should adequate space for the display of stall from industries and other educational institutions. Envisaging that the exhibition would be attended by a large number of local people enough open space has to be made available to facilitate the movement of visitors. Taking these requirements into account a suitable venue for the event has to be identified. 28th CASTIC was held in the International Convention Centre (ICC) at Nanjing, the capital of Jianshou province in China.</p> <p>Fortunately, such convention centers exist at a capital city of the province and are owned by the state government in China. The ICC chosen for the organization of CASTIC was so huge that only a quarter of the centre was adequate for the event. Like CASTIC the organizers of MOSTRATEC had identified a City Exhibition Centre in Novo Hamburgo for the event. It is owned by the Municipal Council of Novo Hamburgo and is big enough to organize such events.</p> <p>The distance involved between the hotel and the venue of the exhibition was quite large. The organizers had to arrange for transport between hotel and venue. For that they had hired adequate number of buses from travel agency and made them available at appropriate places and at a fixed time slot. The information brochure given to the participants gave details about the departure of these buses. Volunteers were also appointed to ensure that people occupy seats in their designated buses prior to the time and reach safely to the venue in the morning. The same procedure had to be repeated for the return journey. It must be noted that the time schedule was followed critically on all the days of the event. As a result we could reach the venue in time and leave for hotel in time without the wastage of time for waiting. The participants of the contest also cooperated with the organizers to make the transfer from the hotel to venue and back smooth.</p> |
| <p>Project Display and Safety</p> | <p>Adequate facility for the display of the project is essential in any science exhibition. Some participants bring posters; some others bring a working model of the project while some bring both and they need facility for the display of the posters and for the demonstrations of the working model. The organizers at both the places made it sure that adequate facility is provided for the display of each project. Each project was given a small cubicle that had panels for display of posters and a small table where the model can be placed. Each cubicle was properly numbered and adequately illuminated. At the same time an additional electric plug point is provided that can be used for gadgets running on electricity. Apart from these general facilities a few projects were given additional facilities if they had demanded for it. In fact the mentor of the project was expected to write to the organizers if he/she had any specific requirement. It is notable that even these requirements were fulfilled.</p> |

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| <p>Inaugural and Valedictory Functions:</p> | <p>Inaugural as well as valedictory functions are organized on a grand scale at both the places. But they are short and devoid of long boring speeches and felicitations of dignitaries. At both the places local language is used for announcements and speeches: Chinese in China and Portuguese in Brazil. However, there is a major difference in the way these functions are arranged in China and in Brazil. Chinese organizers give more emphasis to cultural programmes than do Brazil organizers. During the inaugural as well as valedictory functions of 28th CASTIC held at China dance performances of school children were arranged. They were well rehearsed and were managed in a shortest possible time. In similar functions at Novo Hamburgo no such effort was made. Chinese organizers are eager to display their progress in space technology. That is why they continuously display pictures showing their achievement in this field. To support these efforts they have even arranged an interview of a first Chinese female astronomer during the inaugural function. Brazilian organizers do not attempt to make any such show. Nevertheless, both of them arrange these functions without wasting any time, they start in time and end in time unlike many Indian functions. The dignitaries are seated in the first row and come to the stage one by one only when called for. Each one of them makes a short comment and goes back his place in the audience. I think we must learn to arrange inaugural and valedictory function like China or Brazil do. They are more graceful, short and non-taxing to the audience.</p> |
| <p>Translation Facilities:</p> | <p>Language of communication is a big hurdle at both the places. In China Mandarin is used for communication while Portuguese is used in Brazil. The international participants, who do not understand these languages, face problems in communication. This problem is solved by providing translators both at CASTIC and at Mostratec. Organizers of CASTIC make available a translator full time with every international group. The translator himself/herself receives the group at the airport and accompanies it until the team departs. The persons for this work are identified from the pool of students learning English in the university. They are given necessary orientation before the arrival of the guests. They are also provided accommodation in the same hotel as the visiting team so that they can interact with their assigned team whenever required. These translators play a multitudinous role.</p> <p>Firstly they keep the team members informed of various activities associated with the exhibition. Secondly, they themselves understand the salient features of the project and then explain it to local people. They also help in giving information when the participants are taken out for sightseeing. In addition, they also help to go to different places in the town and to do some shopping.</p> <p>Mostratec does not follow the practice of giving dedicated translator to each group. Instead, it has a pool of students from their own institutions who are learning English as a language. On the request of the school these students make themselves available for a variety of task that teams from other countries may need. They first try to understand the salient features of the project and then help students to explain it to local visitors. Since they are roughly of the same age they can establish quick rapport with the school students from other countries. This results into a lot of cultural exchange and the friendship continues even after the contest. There is also a dedicated booth for translation that fulfills all translation requirements.</p> |

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| | <p>An illustrative example would bring out this point better. There was a beautiful display stall by Fundasao Liberato. When I reached there I realized that the person there was unable explain in the matter in English. She went to translation booth and requested for a person who could speak English. Honouring her request a boy was identified and sent to the stall. He could then explain to me various activities of the technical school. It is worth mentioning that the Translation Booth remained open all the time of the exhibition with competitive personnel.</p> |
| <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Help Desk</p> | <p>As stated above students from different parts of the world would come to the exhibition. Even though they would carry their project with them they needed additional things like a card board sheet, transparent cello tape, scissors, etc. for the proper display of the project. To fulfill this demand a Help Desk was set up at both the places (CASTIC and Mostratec). Anyone who needed help could access the desk and get the required item.</p> <p>Help desk was not meant only to provide things but also to provide help. If someone wanted help in displaying the items brought he/she could approach the Help Desk. In addition if someone had any problem with the cubicle given then also he/she could approach the Help Desk. I would like to share a personal experience and describe a specific situation where the help desk played its role. The electrical connection at the stall given to us at Nanjing was not working. When we reported this problem at the help desk a person came with a small unit (with plug point and wire) and replaced it immediately. It means they were aware of possible problem and were ready with their solutions.</p> |
| <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Involvement of local industries</p> | <p>China has recently become a manufacturing hub. Most of the things of day to day use are now- a-days made in China. As a result, there are a large number of industries around the town where CASTIC is arranged. The organizers attempt to get the help from these industries for a variety of reasons. Firstly, they look for sponsorship from these industries. Secondly, they are invited to put their stalls and display their products. Thirdly, they are encouraged to come forward to give away awards to the deserving projects. It is notable that the industries respond positively to these appeals and take active part in the organization of CASTIC.</p> <p>Like China Brazil is now developing industrially. Apart from local industries many multinational companies are opening their branches in Brazil. Many of them come forward to support the activity of Mostratec, a science and technology fair. Big stalls of these industries are seen in the exhibition hall for the entire period of the event. Many of the industries come forward to give way awards to prize winning projects. A notable thing is that some of the industrial houses come forward to support the travel of Brazilian students and teachers to take part in similar activities held elsewhere like INTEL, ISWEEP, INESP (International Environment Sustainability Olympiad), etc. This gesture on the part of the industries is regarded with high respect by the organizers of Mostratec.</p> |

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| <p>Project Assessment</p> | <p>The assessment of projects displayed in the contest is undertaken very systematically. A group of judges is identified who are given orientation about the purpose of exhibition. Each judge has to declare that he/she has no vested interest in the activity. They are then acquainted with the criterion of judging the projects. Each judge is given a brief write up of the project describing its genesis, its function and possible applications. They can either come in group or visit the exhibit individually. At both the places it is ensured that the mentor or any adult is not close to the project. Only the participating students are allowed with the project. They are asked key questions about their work, their involvement and their understanding of the project. Based on the marks given by the judges the projects are ranked. This assessment is done separately for within country projects like (Brazilian projects or Chinese projects) and for international projects. The awards are given in a specifically arranged award ceremony. CASTIC arranges award ceremony during Valedictory Function while Mostratec arranges a special Award Function.</p> |
| <p>Opportunities for mentors</p> | <p>The student participants remain busy with their projects during the exhibition. The mentors who accompany them, however, have relatively free time at their disposal. They can spend some time in interacting with other mentors informally or in visiting other projects. In addition, a formal mode of interaction is arranged during the exhibition. Both at CASTIC and at Mostratec workshops and or seminars are arranged for the mentors. These workshops or seminars pertain to the topic of general interest among the teaching community. CASTIC usually arranges a seminar on Science Education for the mentors as majority of them are science teachers. On some occasions, guest lectures are arranged to acquaint the teachers with the recent developments in science and technology. During Mostratec also similar events are organized. A seminar on Use of ICT in education was arranged at Novo Hamburg during 28th Mostratec.</p> <p>The proceedings of the seminar went on in Portuguese. Hence a separate seminar was arranged for the mentors who could speak English. It offered an opportunity to interact and share experiences from countries with diverse backgrounds. It came out that in spite of diversities the needs of education are similar and there is great scope for collaboration among different countries.</p> |
| <p>Food and health aspects</p> | <p>Providing food to such a big number of participants is certainly a big challenge. This challenge is met successfully at both the places although the mechanism followed is different. CASTIC organizers prefer to make food arrangements in the hotel where the participants are staying. For that they have to arrange transport of people from the venue to the hotel in the afternoon. Each participant is given coupons for breakfast, lunch and dinner at the time of registration. He/she is expected to hand over requisite coupon to the person in the hotel. This mechanism ensures that the person is an authentic user and also helps to keep an account of the number of persons who have taken food in the hotel.</p> <p>Mostratec organizers arrange for food (both lunch and dinner) at the venue itself. This arrangement saved time required in the transfer of people from the venue to the hotel and back. The entry into the dining hall was based on the bar code pasted to the identity card of each of the participants. A bar code was scanned using the bar code reader at the entry of the dining room before giving entry. This mechanism enabled the organizers to ensure that the person is authorized. Moreover, it facilitated to know who has taken food and who has not. It has also avoided the possibility of a person going into the dining room twice or misusing it for carrying food for someone else.</p> |

**Summary and
Conclusion:**

Recent trends show that there are four countries, India, China, Brazil and Russia that are progressing quite fast. Bringing these fast growing economies together a group called BRIC has also been formed. They are trying to collaborate with each other so that they can learn from each other's experiences. Participations in events like CASTIC and MOSTRATEC also provides opportunities to learn from each other. My participation in both these events has been quite educative. I could see how they manage these mega-events successfully. I think we have a lot to learn from their professionalism in terms of reception, accommodation, transport, display arrangements, translation facilities and food services. The warmth that we have experiences at both the places is beyond description. More and more exchange visits, I am sure, will help bring people from BRIC countries closer. We at our end should strive for that.