This study is focused on international sport supporters who feel attracted to mega-sport events and visited the 2014 FIFA World Cup Brazil. As these events take place infrequently while changing from one continent to another, many individuals consider them as a once-in-a-lifetime chance to be experienced ‘live’ at the stadia or Fanfests. These sport fans do not only overcome existing constraints based on personal factors of their social environment but also depending on the host destination. The study shall give more insights into the negotiation process between constraints and motivation of global sport event attendees as well as to examine their planned and actual travel behavior including individual consumption. The study has relevance for sport and tourism marketers as they are highly interested in finding out who these sport tourists are, how they can be characterized, and, most importantly, how they can be activated in the global sport tourism setting.

Preuss (2005) speaks of ‘event visitors’ who are attracted to the event and travel to the host cities because of the event itself. Those Word Cup tourists include spectators, players, officials, volunteers and representatives of the media as well as sponsors. However, for this study, the emphasis is exclusively put on members of the DFB Fanclub Nationalmannschaft, a commercial fan club of the German Soccer Association having more than 50,000 paying members. Enabling German soccer fans to attend the FIFA World Cup in Brazil and to support the German national team from the group stages up to the Final in Maracana, the DFB offered flights, hotel accommodation, bus transportation, and match day tickets. Nonetheless, only about one tenth of the Fanclub members actually traveled to Brazil cheering for the German squad on their way to their 4th World Cup title.

Although there has been various interest among scholars to research the variety of motivating factors which examine intentions to attend mega-sport events as well as constraints which keep people off from travelling (Kim and Chalip, 2004, Neirotti and Hilliard, 2006), evidence-based information about the actual attendance of mega-sport events remains underdeveloped in the literature (Funk et al., 2009). Constraints play an important role in a person’s travel decision making. Crucial factors such as monetary costs, long distance flights, family obligations, and risks provided by the host destination such as health and safety may be perceived as travel inhibitors (Kim and Chalip, 2004). One of the single most conceptual developments in explaining leisure constraints is the three-dimensional construct of Crawford and Godbey (1987). Based on their findings they developed the ‘hierarchical constraints model’ (Crawford et al., 1991). The authors proclaimed that people regularly negotiate through the three defined constraints. Kim and Trail (2010) picked on the negotiation proposition in the context of sport consumer behavior. They focused on developing a model which explains the relationships among motivation and constraints in a sport setting and were interested in its implication for event attendance of sport fans. They found that the internal motivators ‘attachment to the team’, ‘coach’, ‘sport level’ and ‘sport’ led to the highest variance in attendance and therefore, functioned as the most important independent variables for sport event attendance. Gilbert and Hudson (2000) and Hudson (2000) described financial constraints as the ones which had the highest impact on skiing travelers. Additionally they found significant differences in regards to travel constraints among men and women. Funk et al. (2007) found that travel motives differ among gender and cultural backgrounds among individuals who travel to participate in an international running event.

Next to overcoming constraints, not much is studied about ‘planned’ vs. ‘actual’ travel behavior in the sport tourism context. Woodside and Dubelaar (2002), March and Woodside (2005) found considerable differences between both variables in the tourism setting. So was the ‘real’ monetary spending much higher than originally intended. In addition, they found differences in onsite expenditures based on the travel distance. The further one travelled, the more one spent.
Therefore, this study aims to find out:

a) What are constraints and motives among members of the Fanclub Nationalmannschaft who actually traveled respectively non-traveled to the 2014 FIFA World Cup Brazil?

b) Do they differ based on individual characteristics and demographics?

c) Do differences exist between ‘planned’ and ‘actual’ travel behavior?

The author was given permission by the DFB Fanclub Nationalmannschaft management to apply a qualitative study by interviewing members of the Fanclub who were based in a hotel in Cabo Frio, approx. 100 ml. east of Rio de Janeiro. A semi-structured interview guide was developed incl. an informed consent form of the study purpose. On July 12th 2014, one day before the WC Final, face-to-face interviews were conducted among randomly chosen fan club members who were willing to participate (n=3). The interviews lasted around 1 hr. each and were recorded. In addition contact information of multi club members (n=12) were gathered. They agreed to participate in the study following the World Cup by either participating in face-to-face interviews in Germany or via individual Skype interviews. Among these club members were official coordinators of the Fanclub who have access to hundreds of regional club members who did not travel to the World Cup Brazil for various reasons. Via these coordinators the author will randomly approach some of these non-travelers (n=15) and interview them as well. The author is aiming to conduct a minimum 20 interviews to define common pattern and key themes of constraints, motives, planned and actual travel behavior among Fanclub members. Data analysis will be conducted by using qualitative research software NVivo.

This research focusses solely on soccer supporters who are members of the DFB Fanclub Nationalmannschaft. This offers multiple advantages for the study to make inferences. First, the participants belong all to one group of club members in contrast to unorganized national team supporters. Second, members who did not travel to Brazil can also be approached and included in the research following the World Cup although their travel behavior cannot be studied. This is important as it will determine the significance of travel constraints which led to non-travel. Third, all interviews can be conducted in German. Finally, as the DFB Fanclub has more than 50,000 members, there would be a great potential to conduct a quantitative follow-up study based on the qualitative findings. The latter would be of high value for the DFB to market and increase its Fanclub Nationalmannschaft for upcoming international tournaments. Moreover, the results of this study will allow future comparisons with both fan clubs of other national soccer associations and organized soccer communities in the sport tourism context of mega-sport events.