



CITY FOCUS

Kazan

A New State of Play



Women and children doing Zumba dancing along the beautiful Kazan riverbank.

Kazan, the capital of the Republic of Tatarstan, transformed from a city torn apart by gang violence to Russia's sporting hub. Now a champion for healthy lifestyles, green spaces and multi-cultural diversity, Kazan's miraculous revival offers many lessons for other cities.

Kazan was once a decaying city plagued by poor public health. Only one out of seven people, or 13.1% of its population, regularly participated in sport and recreational activities, and municipal schools had poor nutrition standards. As it moved to market capitalism in the 1990s, Kazan was mired in lawlessness and organised crime. Drug traders, shady businessmen and prostitution ruled the streets, while youth gangs engaged in aggressive turf wars. Faced with a deteriorating city, grim prospects, and a general cloud of pessimism, Kazan saw an exodus of young people and families in search of a better future.

Kazan Mayor Ilсур Metshin, who took office in 2006, was eager to rehabilitate the city's decaying image. Under his leadership, Kazan made incredible strides over just one decade to brand itself as Russia's sporting capital, while investing in health, green strategies and social programmes.

Modernisation Through Sport

Through sport—a prominent strategy in the city's policies—Kazan was given new life.

It embarked on the Healthy Kazan initiative, a major project under its social and economic development strategy, building over 30 new sport facilities and hosting the 2013 Summer Universiade.

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The event, which brought together 12,000 young athletes from 170 countries to compete in 26 sports, attracted US\$3 million (S\$4.04 million) in investment and generated 23,000 jobs, while raising Kazan's international profile. These funds were pivotal in upgrading the city's sport infrastructure and making sport attractive, convenient and affordable.

The city went on to host major sporting events like the FINA World Aquatic Championships in 2015, the FIFA Confederations Cup in 2017, and the 2018 FIFA World Cup. Kazan will also host the 2021 European Short Course Swimming Championships and the 2024 FINA European Swimming Championships.

Today, Kazan's 2,000 sport facilities—which range from stadiums, indoor ice arenas and playgrounds—cover almost all parts of the capital and are regularly used by some 30,000 of its citizens. The mayor's office is actively encouraging a lifelong love for sport. It organises annual hockey and football tournaments, which attract over 7,000 children and youth participants, and holds major ice hockey, triathlon and athletics events.



Kazan Arena is a key hosting venue for world-class sports events taking place in Kazan.



Children playing outdoors on a snowy day in Kazan.



Toh Ee Ming is a freelance journalist who contributes to the South China Morning Post and the Xinhua News Agency, covering society, politics and culture.



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Giving Youth a Better Start in Life

Beyond sport, Kazan has made it a priority to improve school nutrition. It invested 950 million rubles (\$\$20.51 million) into modernising its food processing and production facilities, increasing hot meal coverage to 93% in 2015, up from 37% in 2005. From 2006 to 2015, the Department of Food and Social Catering delivered to students 300 million hot meals, 50 million of which were free for children from poor families.

The Kazan government also upgraded the city's youth clubs, offering free activities that have been crucial in pulling young people off the streets. Over 5,000 children, teens and young adults under 35 years old take part in activities at the city's youth clubs,

which include fencing, taekwondo, rhythmic gymnastics, modern dance, 3D modelling, robotics, intellectual games and hands-on classes. Kazan's Health and Development Foundation also launched a healthy youth lifestyle programme, and trained teachers to discuss topics like risky behaviour, HIV prevention, substance abuse, conflict and communication skills with teens.

Beautifying the City

The Kazan government also sought to improve the city's environment and boost its well-being and health. Lagging at 45th place in the ecological rating of the biggest Russian cities, Kazan had to shake off its drab industrial image—one choked with cars, air pollution and few green public spaces.

The city's Environmental Council, along with socially responsible private and public enterprises, embarked on a massive makeover. The Green Record project—a mass planting of more than 150,000 trees—involved students, authorities, academics, public organisation representatives and more than 150 enterprises. The number of city parks and gardens more than doubled from 52 to 138 and park attendance increased tenfold as a result.

The concept of *blagoustroistvo* (the beautification of public services or infrastructure) was made a major priority for the wider Tatarstan region. Spearheaded by Natalia Fishman-Bekmambetova, who was appointed in 2015 as presidential

plenipotentiary for parks and public spaces at age 24, the city began taking citizen participation seriously and designed public spaces based on extensive public consultation. For instance, the public pavilion in the Gorkinsko-Ometyevsky Forest was built with a large container box park offering co-working spaces for entrepreneurs and start-ups, play areas, cafes and a skating pavilion.

Kazan was also among the first cities in Russia to pioneer green building standards and brought in environmentally friendly buses that slashed harmful emissions. Within just five years, Kazan catapulted from 45th place to 7th place in Russia's environmental ranking of cities.

02 Playground in Gorkinsko-Ometyevsky Forest for children to play in nature.

01 The opening of a pump track in Gorkinsko-Ometyevsky Forest added new play areas for young riders.

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Breathing New Life Back into Kazan


Today, its citizens and officials proudly call Kazan the “Third Capital of Russia”, a title granted by the Russian Patent Office in 2009.

From 2006 to 2018, the proportion of citizens actively participating in sports and recreation grew from less than 10% to 42%. Average life expectancy increased to 75 years, above the national average, while the mortality rate fell by 19%. In a signal of renewed confidence in the city’s future, the number of registered marriages has increased by 1.5 times, and there are 2.3 times more children born in Kazan today than in 2000.

In 2018, it was shortlisted for the Guangzhou International Award for Urban Innovation and earned a special mention for the Lee Kuan Yew World City

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Prize in the same year. In November 2019, the city was recognised by the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation as having the best living standards in the country.

“The infrastructure solutions are changing the life of cities. At the same time, people also change—they begin to believe in themselves and in tomorrow,” Mayor Metshin said about the city’s development. 

01 Citizens of all ages enjoy the picturesque Kolomenskoye Kazan Garden.

02 Mass sports events like marathons have become commonplace in Kazan.