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**Soft Power, Sports Mega-events and Emerging States:  
The Lure of the Politics of Attraction**

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## **Abstract**

This article highlights and analyses a hitherto largely neglected dimension to the growing agency of large developing countries in global affairs – their hosting of international sports mega-events. Why are large developing countries hosting sports mega-events and what does this contemporary phenomenon tell us about the significance of, for example, the Olympics and World Cup in global affairs? We explore these questions through examination of the cases of the three most active sport mega-event hosting states in recent times; Brazil, China and South Africa. The 2008 Beijing Olympics, the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, and the up-coming 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games in Brazil provide interesting cases with which to explore developing country agency in the international system and in particular the discursive basis of that agency. We see the hosting of sports-mega events as the practice of public diplomacy by states to both demonstrate existing soft power capability as well as pursue its further enhancement.

## Introduction

There was a time when international sports governing bodies such as the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) had to persuade reluctant states to host their key events, the football World Cup and the Olympic and Paralympic Games respectively. The last three decades, however, has seen the increasing political salience of sport among governments of all political hues who see in it a relatively cheap means of improving a nation's image, credibility, stature, economic competitiveness and (they hope) ability to exercise agency on the international stage. This has led to the situation we have today, where even consistently popular states such as the United Kingdom (Anholt, 2012) are willing to spend over £17 million on *attempting* to win the right to host a sports mega-event such as the 2022 World Cup (House of Commons, 2011). Up until very recently the key sports mega-events (World Cup and Olympic Games) were predominately staged by wealthy Western states. Not anymore; large developing states have successfully entered the fray. Inter-state competition to host an event – even so-called second order international sports events such as the Commonwealth Games or Pan American Games (Black 2008) – is now fierce as a greater variety of states vie for a chance to avail themselves of the 'twin suns of prestige and profit' (Guttmann, 2002) thought to accompany the staging of these sports spectacles. While this observation in itself may not be new, there is very little research to date on the key reasons why this is the case beyond work that focuses on the link between sport events and domestic social and economic change.<sup>1</sup> The growing rivalry to host sports mega- events, and, in particular, the emergence of new players in this rivalry such as China (2008 Olympic Games), South Africa (2010 World Cup), India (2010 Commonwealth Games), Brazil (2014 World Cup; 2016 Olympics) and Qatar (2022 World Cup) are important and interesting developments in international politics that warrant detailed scholarly attention. While there has been significant reflection on the increasing power and influence of developing countries in international relations (IR) scholarship, and in particular the emerging powers (India, China, Brazil and South Africa), such analysis has focused almost

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<sup>1</sup> A notable exception is Scarlett Cornelissen's extensive work on South Africa's hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup. See Cornelissen (2004a; 2004b; 2007; 2008, 2009; 2010; 2011a; 2011b), Cornelissen, Bob and Swart (2011) and Cornelissen & Swart (2006). See also Ndlovu (2010); Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2011a; 2011b); Van der Westhuizen, & K Swart (2011).

exclusively on their growing material sources of power – notably their remarkable economic growth in the last decade or so (Payne, 2008; Cooper, Antkiewicz & Shaw, 2007; Shaw, Cooper & Antkiewicz, 2007). Several studies focus on the extent to which, as fast developing economies, these states play a far more active and influential role in global economic affairs and have become game changers in the governance of the global economy through routine involvement in international economic organizations such as the World Trade Organization and economic summits such as the G20 and the G8 (see. Alexandroff & Cooper, 2010; Li, 2009; Narlikar, 2010; Schirm, 2010; Shaw, Cooper & Antkiewicz, 2007; Stephen, 2012). There certainly appears to be a structural shift in the global economy, with large developing countries such as Brazil, China and South Africa enjoying more economic power and influence beyond their region.

There is a key strand of this growing developing country agency in the international system that has yet to be explored; their now predominant role in hosting sports mega-events. A look at the list of countries hosting the Olympic Games and World Cup in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century reveals a clear shift away from Western to Southern countries (see Table 1 below). There is not only a new order in the international political economy, but also one in the international politics of sports mega-events with the latter reinforcing the trends in the former. This development is analytically significant in two ways. First, it highlights the need to conceptualise emerging powers beyond the narrow materialist approach that currently dominates analysis of Brazil, China and South Africa's agency in global affairs. Second, it underscores the need to mainstream international sports into IR. The political willingness and economic ability of emerging states to bid for, and host, major sporting events, adds another important dimension to their growing authority in global affairs and highlights the diversity of the sources of their power which now goes beyond their emergent market status.<sup>2</sup> Thus, we present hosting sports mega-events as both evidence, and projections,

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<sup>2</sup> While recognising that China has enjoyed great power status in the post World War Two period as a permanent member of the United Nation's Security Council, Beijing has significantly broadened the scope of its global reach beyond this formal venue as its contemporary relationship with Africa indicates. See Alden, Large & De Oliveira (2008); Brautigham, 2009; Taylor (2009).

of emerging states' increasing discursive as well as materially based agency in the international system.

In this context, the purpose of this article is to highlight and analyse a hitherto largely neglected dimension to the growing agency of large developing countries – their hosting of international sports mega-events. Why are large developing countries hosting sports mega-events and what does this contemporary phenomenon tell us about the significance of, for example, the Olympics and World Cup in global affairs? We explore these questions through examination of the cases of the three most active sport mega-event hosting states in recent times; Brazil, China and South Africa, focusing on diplomatic policy objectives rather than domestic social and economic policy objectives. These examples are also interesting because they provide an opportunity for an empirically based analysis of the concept of soft power and of diplomatic practice by states, drawing from a more expansive set of actors used by scholars to date.<sup>3</sup> Our argument unfolds as follows. First we outline our conceptualisation of soft power and discuss how we apply it to emerging states' use of sports mega-events as an integral part of their public diplomacy. We argue that the hosting of sports mega-events provides emerging states with the potential to practice public diplomacy to attract the citizens of other states using the global media. We suggest that hosting sports mega-events is performative political practice and, as such, is evidence of their increasing global reach, as well as their ability to leverage international credibility and status and project their carefully managed image abroad through the discursive praxis of public diplomacy. The subsequent section then applies these conceptual insights to a series of short empirical examples in order to highlight instances of the practice of the politics of attraction by emerging powers

### **The practice of public diplomacy and the exercise of soft power**

Just as emerging countries have become much more relevant to contemporary international politics and have been mainstreamed in contemporary IR scholarship, hosting sports mega-

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<sup>3</sup> Most case studies of both soft power and public diplomacy focus on the United States or Canada. A growing number of studies focus on China and the Middle East. See Cull (2008); Dinnie & Lio (2010); Leonard & Smewing (2003); Nye (2008); Peterson (2002); Potter (2008); Wang (2008).

events has become more relevant to the diplomatic strategies of Brazil, China, and South Africa. Indeed, the strategic political benefits are just as significant as the (perceived) economic benefits to the host nation, and may well be the prime motive for bidding and hosting. For the most part, however, IR has ignored the strategic relevance to states of hosting sports mega-events. In comparison to economists who have sought to analyze the economic costs and benefits of hosting these events (see for example, Gratton, Dobson & Shibli, 2001; Gratton, Shibli & Coleman, 2006) as well as the increasing number of sociologists who have highlighted their impact on the emergence of, for instance, a global sports culture (see for example Maguire, 1999; Markovits & Rensmann, 2010) IR scholars have been mostly silent. As Levermore has pointed out, and as we have discussed in more depth elsewhere, IR (and political science) has barely had an impact on the study of sport in general and on the political use of sport by states in particular (see for example Grix, 2013a; Levermore & Budd, 2004). If IR is slowly waking up to the strategic significance of sports mega-events to states, scholars who have focused on states and their strategic use of sports mega-events and linked this with the concept of soft power are few and far between (Grix and Houlihan, 2013; Black, 2007; Cornelissen, 2010; Finlay & Xin, 2010; Manzenreiter, 2010)<sup>4</sup> We build on this emergent literature by mobilising Joseph Nye's soft power concept to better understand states' strategic motivations behind bidding for and hosting sports mega-events and what they hope to achieve.

For Nye the changing nature of international relations after the end of the Cold War, and the risk attached to deploying traditional military forms of power, has led to 'intangible power resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions' becoming more important in inter-state relations (Nye, 1990: 167). This should not be taken, however, to mean that Nye advocates replacing traditional hard power with soft power in international relations, but rather that states ought to make far more use of the latter. Nye distinguishes between power to 'influence the behaviour of others to get the outcomes one wants' (coercive power) and the ability to 'attract and co-opt them to want what you want' (soft power) (Nye, 2004: 2). In this conceptualisation, the ideational dimension to soft power is key and is found in the ability of states to communicate universally shared values (such as, we argue, those rooted in international sporting competition) in order to court the publics of other states. Used in this way, soft power is a discursive mechanism for increased agency in global affairs through the performative politics of attraction

rather than the use (or threat of use) of military or economic force.<sup>5</sup> In this sense soft power resides in the ability to shape the preferences of others and align those preferences to your own. As such it is similar to Lukes' third dimension of power, 'the power to shape, influence or determine others' beliefs and desires, thereby securing their compliance' (Lukes, 2007: 90), as well as the Habermasian notion of legitimation and persuasion in relation to explanations of domination within democracies (Habermas, 1979).

In the cases of Brazil, China and South Africa we consider the extent to which soft power is being used to communicate their identity as similar to others on one level – on the assumption that similarity is key to attracting others – based on the reproduction of shared sporting norms and values at the core of international sporting events such as the Olympic Games and World Cup. By hosting international sporting events they can show the world that they are guardians of universal norms and, in so doing, can construct attraction by illuminating truths such as fair play that have universal appeal. This willingness to champion existing shared sporting norms is an important point in their ability to attract the publics of other states because, as Qobo (2013) has argued, the political nature of emerging powers (such as the authoritarianism of China, the high levels of income disparity in Brazil, and the high levels of political corruption in South Africa) means that they hardly possess attractive domestic political values that are easy to export. Which is not to say that there are not examples of the successful politics of attraction beyond hosting sports mega-events; China's interventions in Africa over the last decade, for instance, have not only been based on gaining agency in that continent through material incentives, but also by offering an alternative model of African development to the failed models of Western development praxis. China's growing involvement in Africa demonstrates not only structural power shifts but also normative shifts in global affairs and is illustrative of the growing agenda and norm setting authority of large developing countries in the international system (see Brautigham, 2009; Mohan & Tan-Mullins, 2013). South Africa, on the other hand, can enhance its agency in world politics with a successful soft power strategy of communicating their new found democratic values in the post-apartheid era, not least through the politics of attraction

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<sup>5</sup> Note Mattern's (2005) argument that the model of attraction in Nye's concept of soft power is based on the use of representational *force* and should therefore be seen as a coercive form of power.



embodied in Nelson Mandela, South Africa's first post-apartheid president.<sup>6</sup> In so doing it can also legitimately claim a place at the top table of multilateral summitry such as the G20 meetings and join the other emerging powers in extending their agency beyond their regional base.

### *The soft power of sports mega-events*

Staging sports mega-events potentially provides emerging powers with opportunities to generate attraction even where they possess unattractive domestic political characteristics and we suggest that there is growing evidence to suggest that the *international* dimension of sporting success – be it national teams and national representatives abroad or staging a sports mega-event - is one arena in which the politics of attraction is played out through soft power. Externally, states seek to attract others through activities that ‘create a favourable impression and increase understanding among foreign audiences’ (Potter, 2009: 51; see also Sharp, 2009). The key advantage, as we have stated, of a sports mega-event is that the hosting state is able to communicate their attractiveness through the shared cultural values of sport. Because of the centrality of universally admired values in international sporting events, hosting states can enhance their attractiveness to others by demonstrating that they not only share those values, but also that they wish to champion and collectively celebrate these within the context of their own distinctive cultural, social and political values. In a detailed study of Cuban sport policy and diplomacy for instance, Huish (2011) highlights how Havana projects its image as a virtuous developing country through the international dimension of sport by sending sportsmen and women to some 100 developing countries to work on sports capacity building projects. This brings no material benefits to the Cuban economy but rather serves to enhance cooperation between Cuba and other developing states and builds South-South solidarity. The Cuban case demonstrates that different (and otherwise unattractive political states) states can still exercise agency through the politics of attraction.

Those states burdened with unattractive political and social values that impact others’ perception of them deriving from, inter alia, particular historical events, human rights issues, or

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<sup>6</sup> For a detailed analysis of South Africa's influence in world politics see Lee, Taylor & Williams (2006)

poverty appear to have much more to gain from mobilising soft power to (positively) change their image. South Africa (2010 World Cup); China (2008 Olympic Games), India (2010 Commonwealth Games) and, in the future, Qatar (2022 World Cup), are – and will be - bound by the attempt to use sports mega-events to persuade others that (negative) stereotypes about their nations are wrong. Indeed, Kurlantzick went as far as to say that ‘China’s growing soft power [which] has emerged as the most potent weapon in Beijing’s foreign policy arsenal’ (Kurlantzick, 2007: 5). That said, sometimes the strategy of attempting to use sports events to harness soft power can backfire and fail; witness the Formula 1 international motor race hosted by Bahrain in 2012 and 2013. On both occasions the event drew the kind of attention that host states fear as protestors used it to spotlight and criticise the undemocratic nature of the political regime (we refer to the negative side of sports mega-events in more detail below).

### *Sports mega events as public diplomacy*

Public diplomacy, in its classical sense, is diplomacy directed at the public of other countries as opposed to traditional diplomacy that targets policy makers and governments (Sharp, 2009: 247).<sup>7</sup> It is most often – though not always - a state driven activity which aims to create an open and responsive public milieu in other countries – an arena for the politics of attraction - in order to craft a more receptive environment for the foreign policies and economic interests of that given state using positive messages and images. Hosting major sporting events fits nicely with this concept of public diplomacy since such events are modern state-centric affairs which provide unique opportunities for hosting countries to fix the gaze of a global television audience. Opening ceremonies are the embodiment of this rendition of the purpose and content of public diplomacy, involving the construction, celebration and mass communication of a positive account of the history and culture of the host nation to the publics of other countries. These events are the quintessence of the performative politics of attraction, of winning hearts and minds – and, of course, commercial opportunities.

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<sup>7</sup> Although we have here focused on state-driven diplomacy we have elsewhere highlighted the extent to which diplomacy can, and often does in involve both state and non-state actors (Lee, 2004; Lee & Hocking, 2011)

The appeal to states of sports mega-events as a vehicle for the practice of internally as well as externally facing public diplomacy is that sport is a collective event which is culturally understood and socially played out through the lens of shared and celebrated universal values. Constructed in this way, sport can play a key political role in nation building by arousing domestic pride in a national team's achievements and, at the international level, by signalling a collectively recognised identity on the international stage that is appealing to others (Maguire, 2002). Sport also works on another level as part of the cultural sources of a state's soft power, along with broader cultural exchange (knowledge, language, art) between countries. Sports mega-events, foremost the World Cup and Olympic Games, are communicative practices that can be successful in attracting the attention of billions of people across the globe and are hence a perfect platform to showcase the hosting nation, their culture and image (Lin, Lee & Nai, 2008: 28; Potter, 2009). As communicative practices, international sporting events are important opportunities for hosting states to showcase their sameness (which is not only a core component of attractiveness to others but also a source of legitimacy as global agents). By successfully hosting a major sporting event to showcase shared social norms and sameness, the state can enhance its international prestige and attractiveness in order to boost their agency in international politics.

How this benefits the state deploying soft power is not made entirely clear in Nye's writings, but in successful cases - and South Africa's hosting of the 2010 World Cup is one - the result can be an improvement in a nation's image and political and economic credibility. By profiling and showcasing themselves globally they can attract others through inbound tourism, increased trade and inward investment, and a growing sense of national pride through the feelgood factor that accompanies major sports events (Grix, 2013b; Chaplin, 2006). In turn, these internal developments provide the foundational elements that help the state supervise the political extension of the mega-event into a foreign policy soft power instrument. This is dependent upon effective global communication practices to cultivate attraction and international political legitimacy since 'legitimacy comes from common attraction' (Mattern, 2005: 595). Political legitimacy is a necessary condition for states to bring soft power into play. Alternatively, where communication practices fail and the hosting state's attempts to build complementary constructions of cultural distinctiveness and value/normative sameness are unsuccessful (the 2010 Commonwealth Games in India and the Union of European Football Associations

(UEFA) Championships in Poland/Ukraine are examples of this), then legitimacy is questioned and agency may be diminished. As such, public diplomacy as a means to enhance agency has its risks; the world's gaze can often be focussed on the negative aspects of the socio-economic and political system. Rather than becoming opportunities to attract they become events that repel.

We discuss three examples to highlight the usefulness of soft power as a broad-brush heuristic device to understand emerging states' motives for hosting sports mega-events. We highlight the constitutive, performative, and discursive nature and role of sports mega-events in international relations using a state-centric approach (since states drive the decision-making and funding around bidding and then lead the hosting process) to explore their public diplomacy praxis. The concept of soft power gains analytical traction once it is employed as a broad organising principle to understand a variety of state's motives for hosting sports mega-events. Authoritarian regimes (cf. China), advanced democratic states (UK, Australia etc.), autocratic states (Qatar) and emerging states (South Africa, Brazil) have been, or are, interested in using sport to increase their international credibility, prestige, and potential for agency. We put forward soft power as a concept to capture the diplomatic strategies these very different regime types undertake when hosting sports mega-events. We suggest that with the contemporary development of a global audience for international sports, recent and future Olympics and World Cups, the primary aim for host nations (see Table 1) is/will be the praxis of the politics of attraction through global image leverage and shared norm dissemination. They will have other, secondary, aims, but the politics of attraction is primary.

Table 1 *Recent and upcoming sports mega events in emerging states*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Country</b>
<b>2008</b>	Olympic Games	China (Beijing)
<b>2010</b>	Commonwealth Games	India (Delhi)
<b>2014</b>	Winter Olympics	Russia (Sochi)
<b>2014</b>	FIFA World Cup	Brazil
<b>2016</b>	Olympic Games	Brazil (Rio de Janeiro)
<b>2018</b>	FIFA World Cup	Russia
<b>2022</b>	FIFA World Cup	Qatar

In what follows we briefly highlight the possibilities hosting a sports mega-event offers China, South Africa, and Brazil to practice public diplomacy in order to both project and boost their soft power. That each of these states have been successful in the bidding process to host the Olympics and World Cup is a remarkable achievement in itself, signally their individual arrival as credible powers but also collectively the new order of things not only in international sports but in the international system *per se*. We highlight the simple fact that hosting such events both signals, and promises further opportunities to enhance the agency of large developing countries in global affairs, and certainly beyond their regional bases. While it is far too early to confidently assert that the hosting sports mega-events has led to the socialisation of others and thus enhanced soft power, what hosting does do is augment their status as emerging powers and highlights the social and political dimension to their agency, dimensions largely ignored by the emergent market conceptualisation of Brazil, China and South Africa that underpins much of the arguments about their emergent power status.

**Empirical examples: 2008 Beijing Olympic Games - China's coming out party**

China's choice as the host for the 2008 Olympic Games was the first of seven emerging states (from 2008-2022) and represents a bold move on behalf of the IOC, signalling the international acceptance of this one-time pariah state. While the IOC would maintain it is simply being fair by shifting the Olympics to what the head of FIFA, Sepp Blatter (2011), referred to as 'New Lands', it is very clear that the idea is to extend and spread the Olympic (and FIFA) corporate brand to new and large markets. China adopted sport and sporting glory to assist domestically in validating its own political ideology, with several commentators arguing that the Beijing Games was more about propping up domestic support than showcasing the nation to the wider world (Brownwell, 2008; Collins, 2008). Scholars have argued, however, that there is little doubt that China used the Olympics to promote its rise as an emerging power and aid its integration and agency in the international system (Lee, Bairner & Tan, 2008). If we accept Cull's notion of the Olympic project itself as an exercise in public diplomacy, then it is clear that China used the Beijing Games in search of the politics of attraction and the soft power that comes with this (Cull, 2008; See also Tomlinson, 2010).

When thinking about China and sport most instinctively point to the example of the so-called 'ping-pong' diplomacy in 1971, an event which can be read as an 'ice-breaker' role for sport: after the United States (US) table tennis team had visited China in 1971, President Nixon lifted a 20 year trade embargo; thus initial sporting contacts between the US and China led on to more formal discussions and negotiations, following a basketball competition between the two countries one year later. The idea was to facilitate communication after a long freeze in relations (Epsy, 1979); the fact that the Chinese were clearly superior in ping-pong, and the US clearly superior in basketball, was designed to rob sport temporarily of one of its core attractions: its unpredictability. In this case sport is simply the means to an end: the opening of long-stalled diplomatic relations. With the hosting of an Olympics, however, sport moves from an ice-breaker to an event that attracts the world's attention towards the host's handling of the event and its political and social systems. In so doing, the host's performance in the Olympic medal table becomes a sign of those systems' strengths vis-a-vis other nations (see Hilvoorde, Hilling & Stokvis, 2010).

The example of the Beijing Games is instructive in indicating the risks involved in hosting sports mega-events for, on the one hand, if your state suffers from a poor image based on the past,

poor human rights or undemocratic governance, then a major sports event *could* be the best way to re-socialise others towards a more positive image. On the other hand, however, showcasing your nation to a global audience – Beijing’s cumulative TV audience reportedly topped 4 billion (international Olympic Committee, 2008) - and the intense media scrutiny that comes with it may not be quite the Olympic effect you seek and may not be the best way to improve your image and increase your influence on the world stage (DeLisle, 2008). China, although a more closed society than most, still operates in a ‘world of the internet and global satellite news’ that means that the nation will be ‘known as it is, not as it wishes to be’ (Cull, 2008: 137), leading to a constant stream of bad press around human rights issues.

China’s hosting of the Olympics could be read not as an attempt to present a *changed* nation to the international community, but rather one that has arrived. As we discuss below in relation to Brazil, China is not attempting to be part of a core, occupied as it is by advanced capitalist states, but rather an emerging, alternative power to those in the West, as is clearly evident in its on-going interventions in Africa. Despite the difficulty in measuring the impact that Beijing has had on China’s international influence, Hall (2006: 64) is correct in arguing that ‘the ability to attract events is often regarded as a performance indicator in its own right of the capacity of the city or region to compete’ internationally.

#### *2010 World Cup: South Africa (and Africa’s) renaissance*

Although many commentators expressed surprise at the awarding of the 2010 World Cup to South Africa, Pretoria had been applying for, and hosting, what Black (2008) termed second and third order events for many years. Shortly after becoming a democracy in the post-apartheid era (1994) for instance, South Africa played host to the very successful 1995 Rugby World Cup – along with symbolic and iconic photographs of Nelson Mandela sporting the victorious Springbok’s colours – the 1996 African Cup of Nations, the 1999 All-Africa Games and the 2003 Cricket World Cup. Like China, success in bidding for these events signaled the international credibility of this once-pariah state, providing a platform for the exercise of the politics of attraction.

The difference between all the events above and the World Cup is its global reach. Media coverage, according to FIFA of the event reached an estimated 46% of the world's population;<sup>8</sup> providing an unparalleled platform to use the event as a form of public diplomacy to improve the image of their nation among foreign publics abroad. Lepp and Gibson point to a host of negative images that encompass the whole of Africa, of which South Africa is part. These include social, political and economic instability, war, terrorism, corruption, (violent) crime, disease, poor healthcare facilities and so on – embodying the unattractive nature of African politics to others (Lepp & Gibson, 2011. See also Donaldson & Ferreira, 2009). Cornelissen, Bob and Swart (2011) rightly see South Africa's hosting of the World Cup in part as an exercise in post-apartheid state-building in which the state used the event for both internal state-building and external showcasing. South Africa also framed its bid - and the event itself - as 'pan-African'; that is, it represented the African continent. This was the politics of African attraction by the continent's leading power.

There is no doubt that South Africa took a risk in inviting the world's media to scrutinize its country for four weeks. With 49% of the population living under the poverty line, 25% of its population unemployed, 18% HIV/AIDS infection rate and an extremely high crime rate, it is easy to understand the misgivings of the world media that South Africa was even considered for the World Cup (Harris, 2011). Despite these concerns, consensus among commentators is that this event has definitely put the new, democratic South Africa on the map, fulfilling one of their central foreign policy goals of presenting itself as a global middle power. A number of studies evidence this successful socialising of others, reporting changing perceptions among visitors to South Africa from negative to more positive (see Cornelissen, Bob & Swart, 2011; Donaldson & Ferreira, 2009; Holtzhausen & Fullerton 2013). Some 309, 000 visitors came to South Africa for the World Cup (South African Tourism, 2010), with some 51% suggesting that they would never have thought of visiting had it not been for the Finals (Knott, Fyall & Jones, 2013). There is, therefore, some evidence to show that South Africa has been able to attract foreign publics as the first African state to hold a global sports mega-event and that it was successful in practicing the politics of attraction in hosting the 2010 World Cup.

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<http://www.fifa.com/worldcup/archive/southafrica2010/organisation/media/newsid=1473143/index.html>. Accessed, 14.5.13.



The final example differs from the above in so far as the sports mega-events have yet to take place (2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games) and so our examination of the politics of attraction focuses on the bidding process (socialising the IOC and FIFA decision-makers). Brazil is at the forefront of the new emerging powers discourse; already the world's fourth largest democracy, towards the end of 2011 Brazil overtook the UK to become the world's sixth largest economy. While wider debates rage about the ways in which Brazil will exercise its newly found power in the international system (Vieira, 2012), the unprecedented hosting of the two largest sports mega-events in the world have received far less scrutiny. Brazil is no novice at showcasing itself through large scale events: the successful staging of the 2007 Pan American Games was clearly a precursor to winning the right to host both the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games. This was followed by the successful hosting of the global Rio+20 Sustainable Development Conference in 2012. It is clear that the rationale behind wanting to stage the two biggest sporting events in the world is simply an extension of this global exposure.

The vast majority of emerging states use sports mega events to announce their arrival on the world stage as major players, as a so-called 'coming out' party (Kuper, 2011) or 'to signal their "graduation" to the status ... of advanced state' (Black & Van der Westhuizen, 2004: 1206); however, in Brazil's case, it is not simply to announce that it is ready to join the advanced western capitalist states (that is, move from the periphery to the core), but to indicate its shift from a regional actor to a global actor in international affairs. As we have suggested, sports mega-events are part of a package of measures used by emerging states to express and enhance their soft power; however, sport is an ideal mode because of its universal appeal and an ability to cross deep cleavages in society, which makes it attractive to event hosts, but also to a global audience and an essential factor in the politics of attraction exercised by hosting states.

Winning the bidding process for the Olympics or World Cup usually sends out a number of positive signals of inclusion and acceptance in the international system: being chosen for two in short succession suggests that the IOC and FIFA have enough trust in Brazil to put on successful events and a belief that it can put its historical in-fighting to one side, streamline its

culture of opaque **bureaucracy** and clamp down on the rampant corruption linked to its political elite (Rohter, 2010). That is, re-fashion the unattractive political and social elements. The latter is reflected in Brazil's 69<sup>th</sup> spot in the 2012 'corruption index' put together by the NGO 'Transparency International', joint with South Africa and eleven places above China.<sup>9</sup>

Providing both events are successful, staging them will constitute another step on the way to becoming an embedded regional, and global, power. Brazil's rise is clearly not just economic; this is likely to be matched by political influence as we have seen with the examples of China and South Africa both of whom are, post event, established participants in multilateral summits such as the G20.

## **Conclusion**

Brazil, China and South Africa have less in common than the analytical compartmentalising of them as emergent powers would suggest. They are not, for instance, equally emerging; China's economy is growing faster than Brazil's or South Africa's, and China has long been a nuclear power and permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. What they do have in common, however, is that they have all become predominant players in the hosting of sports mega-events. In this article we have explored this contemporary phenomenon, arguing that it indicates and reinforces what IR scholars have already signalled - the structural shift in contemporary international affairs in which a plurality of states are now active participants in the global system and where, in particular, large developing countries such as Brazil, China, and South Africa enjoy influence in multilateral and bilateral settings far beyond their region. Sports mega-events are notable socialising events in which the majority of states compete with each other, watched by a majority of the world's population, and sponsored by the world's leading transnational businesses. In this global context they provide unprecedented diplomatic opportunities for host states in particular to practice the politics of attraction by championing universally shared and admired sporting norms in ways that project a positive image of themselves in order to increase credibility and status on the world's stage. This is crucial for states like Brazil, China and South Africa whose political and social systems are otherwise

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<sup>9</sup> The index records the manner in which countries around the world are perceived and is based on a wide range of surveys and followed closely by investors and civil rights groups alike. See: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2011/dec/01/corruption-index-2011-transparency-international#data> Accessed 30.07.12

difficult to export to others. The socialising of others through public diplomacy is both an exercise and augmentation of the host state's soft power. We have focused on how large developing states have increasingly, and successfully, hosted and/or bid for mega sports events as part of a diplomatic strategy to increasing their potential for agency in international affairs. In the case of China and South Africa the successful hosting of the 2008 Olympics and the 2010 World Cup respectively signalled a shift from pariah state to included state. For Brazil, China, and South Africa the successful bidding for (and in the case of the latter two) successful hosting of a sports mega signals and boosts also a shift from regionally based emerging power to embedded global power.

The significance of soft power is well established in IR following the seminal work by Nye. Here we have ontologically extended this concept beyond its usual developed state focus to highlighting how large developing states make use of soft power to transform their state image and enhance their international positioning through hosting sports mega-events. In so doing we have drawn attention to the contribution that Nye's concept of 'soft power' can make to an understanding of emerging states and their attempts through sports events to increase their agency on the international stage.

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