

Soft power and its audiences: Tweeting the Olympics from London 2012 to Sochi 2014

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Abstract:

The 'Tweeting the Olympics' project (the subject of this special section of *Participations*) must be understood in the context of efforts by host states, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and other actors involved in the Games to cultivate and communicate a set of meanings to audiences about both the Olympics events and the nations taking part. Olympic Games are not only sporting competitions; they are also exercises in the management of relations between states and publics, at home and overseas, in order to augment the attractiveness and influence or the soft power of the states involved. Soft power is most successful when it goes unnoticed according to its chief proponent Joseph Nye. If so, how can we possibly know whether soft power works? This article reviews the state of the field in thinking about public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and soft power in the period of this project (2012-14), focusing particularly on how the audiences of soft power projects, like the London and Sochi Games, were conceived and addressed. One of the key questions this project addresses is whether international broadcasters such as the BBCWS and RT used social media during the Games to promote a cosmopolitan dialogue with global audiences and/or merely to integrate social media so as to project and shape national soft power. We argue first that the contested nature of the Olympic Games calls

into question received theories of soft power, public and cultural diplomacy. Second, strategic national narratives during the Olympics faced additional challenges, particularly due to the tensions between the national and the international character of the Games. Third, the new media ecology and shift to a network paradigm further threatens the asymmetric power relations of the broadcasting paradigm forcing broadcasters to reassess their engagement with what was formerly known as ‘the audience’ and the targets of soft power.

Introduction: who and where are the audiences of soft power, public and cultural diplomacy?

2012-14 was a period in which the UK (London) and Russia (Sochi) sought to create an image of their respective Games that would affect public opinion at home and overseas in ways that would bring instrumental benefits: legitimacy and popularity for the respective governments, and opportunities to increase investment, tourism, student recruitment and cultural ties with and from other countries. It was also a period during which questions of soft power became central to debates about public diplomacy in the UK, particularly in relation to international broadcasting and the end of Foreign Office funding for the BBCWS in 2014 (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2014; House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence, 2014). Furthermore, the ‘rise of the rest’ and the diffusion of power from state to non-state actors have placed soft power and its audiences at the core of foreign policy (Nye 2011:101; House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence 2014).¹ In this context, a concept of international relations based on attraction and influence rather than command and control came into prominence, and the practices of public diplomacy emerged as one of the primary tools which governments sought to use in order to generate soft power (Nye 2011:101). If the Olympics presented an opportunity to reinforce political and economic objectives through soft power strategies, the narrow pursuit of national agendas appears to stand in tension with universalist or cosmopolitan Olympic ideals. And, as this article suggests, previous hosts have had similar goals and have sometimes met with dire geopolitical and financial consequences.

In an expanding but uneven global media ecology, the identity of nation-states is projected through public diplomacy tools to create images and narratives of nations among domestic and international audiences. Such engagement has the potential to create opportunities for political, economic and cultural benefits. In the context of global mediatized political performances, the ‘narrative of a nation’, is spelled out through representations of shared experiences and ‘sets of stories...historical events, national symbols and rituals’ (Hall 1992:293 as cited in Hogan 2003:101). The Opening and Closing Ceremonies of each Olympics are replete with, and extensions of, such representations of events, symbols and rituals – and a key focus of our project. ‘Statecraft’ has become ‘stagecraft’ (Kunczik 2003:120 as cited in Rivenburgh 2010:187). Yet these narratives and

representations involve not only the discursive construction of the nation, as in Anderson's 'imagined communities', but also the performance of the entire interacting international sphere of nations (Miskimmon et al. 2013; O'Loughlin forthcoming). State-sponsored national identities and performances jostle and compete, contradict and contest one another in the global media arena. These mediatized performances project national narratives about what kind of world order they inhabit: about the values, interests and forms of political organisation that bind or divide the community of nations. These globalized cultural and political conditions, far from erasing national identities, incite a more forceful expression of national identity in an atmosphere of 'corporate cosmopolitanism' (Gillespie and Webb 2012). And it is in the global political contestation around Olympic Games that some states assert sovereignty and self-determination against the encroaching influences of powerful rival nations and the global corporate actors amongst them (Hogan 2003:103); powerful national and corporate interests also respond to those challenges. This contest or competition (Price 2015), with the Olympics and IOC at the centre, we argue, calls into question received theories of 'soft power; and 'public diplomacy'.

Nye famously defined soft power as 'the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment' (Nye 2008:94). Soft power 'co-opts people rather than coerces', where people include foreign populations and governments alike. Soft power arises in a large part through the 'values ... [a] country expresses in its culture' as well as the 'moral authority' in the eyes of foreign and domestic policies (Nye 2008:95, 97). Any nation has a degree of soft power without necessarily attempting to create it; it is the by-product of what others find appealing about it. Of course, the Olympics provide the opportunity for states to deliberately instrumentalise soft power resources in order to bring benefits of various kinds. But how do we know how audiences respond to soft power projects?

Theories of soft power, both those of Nye and of his critics, have paid scant attention to audiences or the 'targets' of soft power (see Gillespie and Nieto McAvoy 2015 for an overview of the main critiques). To be sure, if soft power relies primarily on the attraction it exerts on its subjects, is it enough to focus on the resources of agents of soft power and their strategies while neglecting its audiences? Arguably, the problem might be not so much in trying to define the inner workings of the 'soft' but in the shifting meaning of the term 'power'. In a context of new media, like Twitter, and the diffusion of power, notions of state 'power over' publics are being rebalanced by ethical discourses of audience empowerment (e.g. Berenskoetter 2007:3; Lukes 2007; Leblow 2007; Ringmar 2007; Fisher 2010; Lock 2010; Fitzpatrick 2014; van Ham 2014). Here, the overseas audiences of soft power are viewed not so much as passive subjects but as active agents and legitimate stakeholders who play a role in shaping global media events as co-creators of meanings. Audiences might actually have something to say about the Games – via global news organisations like the BBCWS on their Twitter platforms. Researching the Games through the lens of BBCWS and Twitter forces us to analyse the complex relations between public and cultural diplomacy as sources and resources, tools and techniques of soft power. It does so in the context of the

profound shifts that are taking place in international communications and in relations between states and publics.

The popularity and ubiquity of the soft power concept has paralleled the development of the field of public diplomacy. Public diplomacy is the practice of conducting foreign policy by influencing overseas publics (Cull 2008:xv). This includes communicating foreign policy goals (Cowan and Cull 2008:6, 7) but also constructing lasting relations and dialogue with overseas publics and trying to use these relations to steer overseas publics to exert pressure on their governments. Possessing soft power, it is assumed, enables the management of engagement with overseas publics. International broadcasting is a good example, whereby states fund news organisations in order to influence the global new media environment in diverse ways. The degree to which state-funded, international broadcasters exercise editorial independence varies hugely between nations, and at different historical moments but the Olympics offer perfect opportunity for states and broadcasters to collaborate to project a national narrative (Gillespie and Webb 2012).

Cultural diplomacy is a state or actor's demonstration of cultural resources and their facilitated transmission to global public or specific foreign publics, for instance through education exchanges, art or museum partnerships, or scientific cooperation. The work of the British Council, as the UK's pre-eminent international cultural relations organisation is a good example of the cultivation of attitudinal and behavioural dispositions favourable to the UK over the long term. Public and cultural diplomacy overlap and should be treated as complementary soft power tools. Both are traditionally outward-facing and unidirectional activities, rather than reciprocal and mutual engagements between publics and state actors. They are funded by the state to attract and influence foreign publics: get 'them' to learn 'our' language, like our culture, prefer our news, and so in time become more receptive to our values and even our interests.

There are several problems that arise from this model, which is ultimately based on unsubstantiated and simplistic assumptions about culture, communication and audiences. On the one hand, how influence, attraction or passive cultural 'osmosis' (Bially Mattern 2007:118 n.4.) is supposed to happen is not usually addressed by either the theory or the practice of soft power (see, e.g. Bially Mattern 2007; Leblow 2007; Vuving 2009; Rothman 2011 for exceptions). If 'soft power depends more upon the subject's role in that relationship than hard power does' and attraction 'depends upon what is happening in the mind of the subject (Nye 2007:169), why are most accounts of soft power still state-centric and agent-centric? Alternative models for thinking about influence in the 21st century media ecology are required to overcome the problems that practices of soft power often ignore, particularly that of how influence and attraction works on overseas publics and whether and how it is translated into 'desirable behaviours'. Here, the concept of 'strategic narrative' might prove more useful in understanding 'the formation, projection and diffusion, and reception of ideas in the international system' (Roselle et al. 2014:74).² Accordingly, thinking about soft power in terms of narratives also helps shift the focus to its subjects as it enables tracing the reception and interpretation of specific narratives (Roselle et al. 2014). In a post-

Cold War international system and rapidly changing communications ecology, national narratives are faced with new challenges relating to contestation and credibility (Roselle et al. 2014:78). As will be argued, strategic national narratives during the Olympics faced added challenges, particularly due to the tensions between national narratives and the internationalist character of the Games.

Second, the new media ecology and emergence of a 'network paradigm' further threatens the uneven power relations of the broadcasting paradigm and forces states and broadcasters to reassess their engagement with what has been termed the 'former audience' (Gilmore 2004 as quoted in Procter et al. 2015, this issue). With the emergence of social media among other factors, the traditional information/broadcasting paradigm is being challenged and arguably replaced by a network paradigm that is based around notions of reciprocity and mutuality (Fitzpatrick 2011). The immediate consequence of this is the questioning of public diplomacy strategies that favour a 'sender-message-receiver' transmission model of communication, conventionally practiced by international broadcasting outlets. In this paradigm, concepts of soft power and public diplomacy are often conflated with the notion of nation branding so that they are all considered 'as expressions of the same image problem' (Pamment 2014:53). Emphasizing the need to design tactics that help get 'the right message' across, theories and practices often rely on communication strategies from the fields of marketing and public relations, which fail to consider complex cultural contexts. And we have not even touched on the ethical issues involved in the marketing bad foreign policy (Iraq 2003) or seeking behavioural modification in publics. For although the discourse of public relations may adumbrate the profoundly behaviourist underpinnings of public diplomacy and soft power theory, we must ask what would an ethical public diplomacy look like?

In contrast, the 'connective mindshift' in public diplomacy has favoured strategies based on 'the relational framework' over the 'the information framework' (Zaharna et al. 2014). Shifting the focus from message content to message exchange, 'the relational framework' argues for the promotion of dialogue through the participation in, and the creation and management of networks (Willis et al. 2015, this issue). If networks have always been at the heart of social interactions, new media has proved to be a catalyst in changing the way in which information is used in these networks; shifting from broadcasting paradigm in which audiences are seen as passive consumers of information, to a collaborative one in which users are both receiving and creating knowledge. Similarly, soft power as a resource, which needs to be translated in desired behaviours, needs to be 'wielded' in the first instance while it is 'created' by the members of the network in the second (Zaharna 2009:94). The 'creation' of soft power can be seen as a result of the dynamics of the network. The formation of a common identity as a 'knowledge community' based on a shared narrative leads to co-building trust and credibility and, in turn, soft power (Zaharna 2009:106-107). A relational framework which favours quality over quantity, cooperation over competition, coordination over control, a global constituency (including domestic and diasporic publics at home) over segmented audience, and processes over

products are essential to respond to the changes in the global communication era and hybrid media ecology (Zaharna et al. 2014). Whether the UK's and Russia's public diplomacy strategies were ultimately favouring relational soft power strategies during London 2012 and Sochi 2014 (as opposed to mere unidirectional nation branding objectives) is part of what this project explores.

This shift in public diplomacy belatedly mirrors the 'active audience' concept that challenges assumptions about the fixed roles of producers and consumers of information as conceived by the broadcasting paradigm. In today's digital media ecology, audiences for media events like the Olympics interact with other audiences and media outlets and participate in a global public sphere. They can also help to frame the discussion by competing (and perhaps collaborating) with traditional knowledge gatekeepers. Whether they do or not is an empirical question which the Tweeting the Olympics project addresses. The methodological articles in this special section explore the nature of these emergent publics and networks and the changing relation between broadcast media and its audiences, particularly through the use of social media such as Twitter. The research presented in this issue also intersects with the BBCWS' interest in exploring Twitter as a resource for engaging overseas publics in a 'global conversation' (Gillespie and Webb 2012). What might seem to be a difficulty for broadcasters provides opportunities for researchers to re-think audience research methods by focusing on the interactions between 'old' and 'new' media, the mutual challenges, adaptations and attempts at control (Procter et al. 2015, this issue). A shift towards a relational model of international communications that is based on forging connections across border finds its challenge, as we will see, in the degree of control that any given agent of soft power is willing to give up in favour of embracing democratic processes in the creation of meaning, particularly relating to national narratives. Whether international broadcasters such as the BBCWS and RT used social media during the Games to promote a cosmopolitan dialogue with a global audiences and/or merely to integrate social media so as to project and shape national narratives is one of the key questions this project addresses.

Finally, the credibility of cultural diplomacy and international broadcasting, in particular international news broadcasting, is threatened by overt diplomatic objectives and visible or perceived close ties with the government (Cull 2008a:33-36). International broadcasters and cultural diplomacy organisations are often torn between wishing for formal independence from their state, performing the appearance of independence, or openly accepting the state's goals and being seen to work in the state's conception of the national interest (Webb 2014; Gillespie and Webb 2012). Two of the UK's foremost institutions of soft power, the British Council and the BBCWS, are seen by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as key public diplomacy partners. It is worth noting then that neither the British Council nor the BBC see their activities as directly concerned with soft power strategies, but rather see soft power as a by-product of their work:

The BBC is not a soft power 'asset' to be deployed at will by the Government.

However, through providing global public goods, the most trusted objective international news services, and content which deepens knowledge and understanding, and is inspiring and entertaining, it is able to project positive values about the UK around the world, and enables the UK to accrue soft power, both geopolitically and economically. (BBC 2013:140)

This is an important contradiction to bear in mind – one that was only partially resolved by the withdrawal of FCO funding for BBCWS in 2014 in favour of license fee funding. It remains to be seen whether the UK audiences who, except for insomniacs and intrepid travellers, know little about the BBCWS, will appreciate its significance as one of the UK's most important soft power assets. Its future remains very insecure despite its integration into BBC domestic.

Despite criticism of the concept of soft power that suggests alternatives to think about influence and attraction, and about the role of overseas (and domestic) publics as stakeholders in foreign policy, Nye's soft power is still the most popular term of public diplomacy strategies. PD scholars often note that even when problematic, soft power is nonetheless the 'best term we have for encapsulating ideas for which there are few good terms' (Pamment 2013:767). In fact, a performative approach to soft power 'suggest that the term is not fixed, but a malleable signifier of political action' (Hayden 2012:5). The significance of soft power 'lies in the term's *potentiality* across contexts as a resource for policy argumentation' (Hayden 2012:5) whereby it is used to justify 'reallocation of resources to policies like public diplomacy, international broadcasting, and strategic communication' (Hayden 2012:7). However, policy makers should be aware that any initiative 'that begins with the objective of designing a "programme to enhance ... soft power" will encounter difficulties' (Rawnsley 2013:778), not least because soft power is built over time and through organizations and institutions that generate engagement, relationships, credibility and trust (Gillespie and Webb 2013; Rawnsley 2013). As our research on London 2012 has concluded, the immediate (and contested) soft power capital accumulated by events like the Olympics 2012 and its 'patriotic cosmopolitan' narrative might only be short-term if there are no further initiatives and investment in institutions and non-commercial projects that 'carry out their activities in ways that people recognise as credible and valuable over a long period of time' (Gillespie and Webb 2013:450).

The Olympic Games, and in particular the act of hosting the Olympic Games, involves the convergence of cultural diplomacy, international broadcasting, and benign patriotism in an assertion of soft power within a multilateral yet competitive community of nations. Amongst other performances of national identity, the Olympics stands out for its attraction of truly global audiences through a celebratory atmosphere, which offers a vehicle for the demonstration of political clout and economic prowess. The Olympics are not simply 'events-on-their-own...they are not seen as messages but as media' (Dayan 2010:23). They are used a stage for national performances for engagement with international audiences, governments, and markets. The rituals, symbols, and pageantry of the Olympics are 'firmly

grounded in material relations'. This includes, on the one hand, economic development ranging from tourism to international investment and, on the other hand, political positioning by demonstration of ideological proximity while fostering trade relationships (Hogan 2003:102).

Internationalist Rhetoric and the Nation-Branding Objective

A revitalized aspect of the modern games, the Olympic Truce, offers an entry point into understanding the symbolic gestures that characterize much of the Games. The Truce highlights the antithetical assertion of nationalism via notions of universal internationalism such as those appealed to under the banner of 'Olympism'. Originally an imperative between hostile city states for the ancient games, it presents a corollary between the internationalism of Olympic competition and the often changing interpretation of progressive 'civilization', employed in part as mechanism for political outcomes within the international community (DeLisle 2011:17). Pierre de Coubertin, whose internationalist vision came to define that modern sense of Olympism, did not seek to exclude nationalism but rather co-opt and sheath it by appealing to a common community of nations (Morgan 1995:81). In this manner, the modern Olympics have always been a project of multi-lateral soft political power, where a 'gigantic egalitarianism' between nations would appeal to the 'civilized world' fostering a transcendent 'state without borders and barriers' (Coubertin 1901 cited in Morgan 1995:83). Yet this 'sincere' internationalism, as de Coubertin called it, was to draw from the world of cross-cultural currents, built from, rather than reducible to, nationalisms (Morgan 1995:88).

From the outset this universalism has been a vehicle through which political and commercial motivations are pursued. Early 20th century 'evangelical internationalisms', manifest through cultural movements such as the Olympics, Esperanto and the Scouts, were vehicles for a 'transideological crusade', deepening the cultural currency of purportedly apolitical 'global' virtues (Hoberman 1995:31, 37). In the contemporary era, these values have shifted to issues such as human rights, the environment, and technological modernization, a transformation of the Olympic character that has occurred alongside a parallel process of commercialization, often left as an undeclared dimension of the Olympic narrative (Roche 2002:168; Roche 2006b). Hoberman argues that in its earlier iteration the Olympics moved from being a Euro-centric aristocratic movement, primarily functioning to empower networks of wealth beyond the confines of the nation-state, to a political sanctuary in the post-war period - 'unregulated by democratic political process' - for discredited but never the less high-ranking functionaries of conservative and far-right national communities (Hoberman 1995:6, 35). In its more recent iteration, many argue, the universal values of Olympism have become a Trojan Horse for large-scale transnational market capitalism. For example, Morgan points to the 'casual (non-moral) language of the market' (Morgan 1995:80), which is used to dismiss the fact that no African nation has hosted the Olympics as simply apolitical financial reality that is not in contradiction with Olympic internationalist ideals. Below we explore how the public diplomacy around Olympic

Games involves a tension between open engagement and profit-driven interest.

Despite this overarching internationalist narrative, nationalism cannot *not* be extricated from the particularities of hosting the Olympics as a 'global media event' (Couldry and Hepp 2009). As an event, the Olympics harken back to Dayan and Katz's original formulation of media events: It is both a 'contest' between nations and also an opportunity for 'conquest' by the host-nation (Dayan and Katz 1992). With the convergence of global media attention on the Games, the official narratives of sport and contest vie with narratives of national prestige, controversy, and geopolitical pressure. Through both its political and mediated legacy, the Games have been exploited to articulate and partially determine political moments in history: the recognition and rise of Nazi Germany in 1936, the affirmation of London's post war recovery in 1948, the political manoeuvring of the Cold War primarily in Moscow 1980 and Los Angeles 1984 (Roche 2006a:37). As Cull argues, 'the entire modern Olympic project may be conceptualized as an exercise in public diplomacy' (Cull 2011:119, 123). It is a spectacle for the advancement of diplomatic objectives, branded by host nations for domestic and international prestige, while contested, and sometimes successfully rerouted, by global actors with alternative perspectives and goals in mind. In 2008 the BBC's Director of Olympics Games coverage, Roger Mosey, declared that the 2012 London Olympics was a chance to bring 'the UK to the world and the world to the UK' (Mosey 2008). The UK government, as well as the BBC, were compelled to create strategies to enact that statement. The 2012 project reported in this special issue constitutes one effort to explore whether such a transaction between the UK and the world occurred and whether public diplomacy objectives were achieved.

The global media attention that converges on host-nations presents divergent opportunities and risks. For established powers, hosting the Olympics is a chance to fortify a national image of progress, leadership, and stability. However, countries with an existing positive image overseas risk tarnishing that. Wide-spread criticism of the ailing infrastructure at the Atlanta 1996 Games served as a critique of US economic dominance (Miah, García and Zhihui 2008:326). For nations consistently represented within international news settings in a negative manner, the Games offers an opportunity. Image management can be used to contest false, stereotypical or out-dated national identities (Kunczik 2003 as cited in Rivenburgh 2010:190). Did China turn the 2008 Beijing Games into an opportunity? Being the host-nation and host-city means engaging with the 'high-risk mechanism' of the Olympic spotlight: the Summer Games are often employed as the platform to 'rebrand an entire nation', and the Winter Games, having only been held in a national capital once (Oslo 1952), are conventionally a project of regional and local promotion (Cull 2011:121). Sochi 2014 had promised to be an exception to this rule, as the media narrative rarely diverted from debating Russia's re-emergence as a global power.³

For emerging powers, as well as emergent and recovering national economies, to host the Olympics can mean 'political rehabilitation' of a nation or its 'arrival onto the world stage' (DeLisle 2011:17). Rome 1960, Tokyo 1964, Munich 1972 are examples of displaying the post-war societies of the Axis powers and their reconciliation with the global community

(Cull 2011:122; Young 2006). This gives the hosts 'a symbolic affirmation of the country's recovery from political pariah status that had followed odious actions' (DeLisle 2011:25). Though Beijing 2008 can be interpreted as the global mediated consecration of China as a great power, it has also been understood as a vehicle for a particular rehabilitation to 'supplant images from 1989', displacing one icon, Tiananmen Square, with a more celebratory one of the Games (DeLisle 2011:25). The poignancy of this stems from Beijing's successive bids for the 2000 and then 2008 Summer Games, where human rights concerns and the lack of public reconciliation following Tiananmen ostensibly blocked China's earlier bid (DeLisle 2011:23).

Russia's recent Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics is another example of rehabilitation. In this instance, the mainstream media narrative implied a once-demoralized successor to the USSR seeking a return to the world stage as a great power. Beijing 2008, Sochi 2014, and Rio 2016, alongside the FIFA world cup (South Africa 2010, Brazil 2014, Russia 2018, Qatar 2022), represent a shift towards global recognition of these emerging economic powers through the platform of sports-oriented global media events (Almeida, Marchi, Wanderley and Pike 2013:271, 274). This trend follows on from earlier recognition of the sub-national political and economic emergence of Quebec via the Montreal 1976 Games and, more closely related to other forms of nation-branding, the economic 'rebranding of a society in transition' that was the narrative of Seoul 1988 and Barcelona 1992 games (Cull 2011:121, 122). In this way, the international community gives recognition to certain values and identities. We might expect this to trigger broader public debate about this too, which highlights the increasingly important role of the subjects of soft power as active audiences and legitimate stakeholders in foreign policy. Public diplomacy around each Games by both the host nation and IOC would today have to be prepared for open social media debate in multiple languages about great power politics and national or sub-national identities.

The Games also provide a venue for the alignment of nations as political actors rather than only the rebranding of a single actor. The Cold War saw many such alignments including a multitude of Olympic boycotts in response to inter-state grievances and subsequent demonstrations of inter-state loyalties. The 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Games, the first Olympics after the 9/11 attacks, was 'opportunistically framed' by much of the western media to publicly delineate established powers with emerging partnerships, while also affirming outsider status to other nations, in the political alignments of the 'war on terror' (Atkinson and Young 2005:277). This can be understood as an act of diplomacy of the host nation, yet such diplomacy continued to frame subsequent Summer Games. Atkinson and Young argue that the international media contributed to a narrative of Athens 2004 as a security concern that co-opted the Games into discourse revolving around the threat of terrorism facing all nations (Atkinson and Young 2005:290). Established in Salt Lake City in 2002, this narrative still persists through to the most recent Games as a necessary discussion for any host nation.⁴

After its successful bid to host the Olympic, London 2012 became the Games that would celebrate diversity and foster engagement beyond national borders embracing a

cosmopolitan discourse (Pope 2014). FCO strategies were aimed not only at priority countries but at diasporas in the UK in order to ‘promote British culture and values at home and abroad (Foreign Affairs Committee 2011:23).⁵ As explained by the report: ‘Thanks to the city’s diversity, there will be supporters from every Olympic nation. Every athlete will have a home crowd’ (Foreign Affairs Committee 2011:18). Whether this cosmopolitan identity translated into cosmopolitan practices and global conversation is debatable, as discussed in the articles in this issue. Nonetheless, the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee concluded in its report in 2011 that, to unify its focus on youth, sustainability, security and trade, the message to be conveyed should be:

the one successfully deployed in the UK’s original Olympics bid, that London is an open and welcoming city, and that the UK is a diverse, inclusive and friendly country—in a word, that both London and the UK are *generous*. Such a message would help to redress some long-standing misperceptions of the UK (Foreign Affairs Committee 2011:3).

If this cosmopolitan identity would be better pursued within the relational framework and using dialogical communication strategies – which would foster in turn the co-creation of national and transnational narratives – public diplomacy strategies around London 2012 were often better characterized as nation branding tactics, as they were ultimately more concerned with promoting a competitive identity (Pope 2014). While the 2011 report acknowledges the need to respond to the changes in the geopolitical context and new media ecology, it still emphasizes an approach based on ideas of ‘spreading the message of the 2012 Games’, while advocating the use of social media and ‘viral marketing’ (Foreign Affairs Committee 2011:20). Ultimately, overseas publics are conceived by the FCO not as equal counterparts in a global conversation, but as passive subjects of UK’s soft power and public diplomacy, which are in turn described as tools to be deployed during the Olympics in order to change perceptions and gain influence ‘to assist in the in the delivery of the FCO’s objectives’ (Foreign Affairs Committee 2011:3, 19).

The IOC and Olympic Charter as public diplomacy actor and instrument

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is itself an actor in international relations with public diplomatic capacities and a degree of soft power. The Games are not only a vehicle for nation-states, the Olympics are an international force itself. The IOC is the global corporate entity, comprising of an internally elected committee, which holds the rights to the Games and is fundamentally responsible for their staging, interpretation of the Olympic Charter, and the formulation of rules and regulations (Mastrocola 1995:143-144). Formally, the IOC is a non-governmental organization, yet for the following discussion the IOC may be better understood as a foreign policy actor, with its own public diplomacy goals, with Games as the mechanism and source of its soft power (Cull 2011:119). The IOC and its Olympic movement function as a corporate citizen in a global civil society, defining the external

management and diplomacy associated with the Olympics. This occurs primarily through the management of rights and responsibilities between the 'corporate [political] actors' at the national, multilateral, and international level alongside international NGOs, as well as the commercial transnational and multinational corporations involved in the production of the Games (Roche 2002:167, 172).

The IOC decides what political values to privilege. Returning to the Olympics Truce, once again we can highlight the stark disparity between the Olympic rhetoric and Olympic reality. This disparity is fundamental to any investigation of soft power and global media events, leaving space for the exploitation of celebratory cultural diplomacy by national and commercial actors (Roche 2002:173). In recent years, the prominence of the Truce has been developed by the IOC in co-ordination with the United Nations (UN). Despite an often unproductive relationship earlier in the post-war period, the UN is positioned, unlike the IOC, to actually broker and leverage bids for international calm (Roche 2002:175). This partnership, however, extends beyond the Truce and is one of the diplomatic tools that contribute to the IOC's soft power: the very act of determining what is and what is not acceptable political use of the Olympics positions the IOC as the arbiter of subsequent public diplomacy and debate. This is demonstrated through changes to the Olympic Charter and its enforcement amongst other objectives during the host city selection process and preparations prior to Games.

The UN supports the Olympic Charter as a source of international law, a customary authority that is accepted as the 'best evidence of current international practice' (Mastrocola 1995:147, 148). While the IOC has no sound legal basis to compel government actions, the UN has pressured the IOC to use the Olympics as a leveraging platform to address human rights issues globally (Mastrocola 1995:147, 148). Through amendments to the Olympic Charter and Code of Ethics, both human rights and environmental concerns have been added to the notion of Olympism in recent decades (DeLisle 2011:26). The former includes notions such as the 'harmonious development of human kind' and the 'preservation of human dignity', as well as prohibiting 'any form of discrimination with regard to a country or a person on grounds of race, religion, politics, gender or otherwise is incompatible with belonging to the Olympic Movement.' (International Olympic Committee 2013:11-12). In the 1990s, environmental issues rose to the foreground, repeated as an Olympic theme by host cities through the association of public health, pollution, and outdoor sporting events. These Charter elements, and the degree to which they are applied, become the topical levers not just for activist pressure but as mechanisms for the IOC and other nations to elicit public claims regarding policy development from host nations and host-cities. In the case of Sochi 2014 Winter Games in Russia, the IOC's interpretation of the Olympic Charter prior to the Games and subsequent redevelopment of the Charter following Sochi Games provided two decisive moments of public diplomacy in the global controversy sparked by Russia's legislation aimed at LGBT communities (Associated Press 2014). With this in mind, analysis throughout this special issue has explored how values around nationalism, ethnicity and gender have been deliberated among broadcasters and

publics, highlighting the importance of both agents and subjects of soft power in the co-creation of narratives and the shifting nature of their roles.

The IOC also uses cultural diplomacy, deriving much of its soft power from control of the Olympics as a cultural event. Cultural diplomacy is evident in the process of selecting host cities and negotiating benchmarks prior to and during the Olympics and Paralympics. In this manner, the IOC promotes, prohibits, and overlooks many national, political, and commercial objectives. China's 'Ping Pong Diplomacy' in 1971 is understood as an acceptable use of sport for the purpose of 'international cooperation and harmony', while more clear attempts at promoting national prestige to the detriment of other peoples or to the detriment of international cooperation would be prohibited (Mastrocola 1995:155-156). The vague associations and ideals of Olympism are to be promoted (Roche 2002:169), yet prestige too closely associated with political ideology outside of Olympism is prohibited (Mastrocola 1995:156). It is the very determination of acceptable political objectives and ideological terrain that provide the IOC with the instruments of a transnational public diplomacy actor. In this context, Olympic rhetoric can easily give way to the IOC's own public diplomacy agendas and in particular its role in facilitating the economic agendas of host nations and corporate partners.

Controlling the Narrative in the Potemkin Village

Dayan and Katz insist that 'live-ness' is a defining feature of media events. The sports venues, Olympic village, and host city become the source of events and of the narratives broadcast to global audiences, but intense scrutiny over these spaces is temporary. Though international media report on the host nations and cities from the successful Olympic bid onwards (if not during the bidding process), it is the presence of international media during the Games that provides the foundation for the live transmission and mediated engagement that foment conditions for a media event. This fundamental convergence of news media is central to Price's notion of the media event as 'platform' (Price 2011) (See Introduction chapter). As a product of the national and international political and economic elite, global media events are organized with clear commercial and public diplomacy goals in mind. The control of this platform, and the narratives produced through it, are interwoven with those goals. Price qualifies, however, that the ownership of the Olympic platforms itself is already 'multiple and ambiguous' as are the specifics of a dominant or accepted narrative (Price 2011:x). In light of this issue's discussion of soft power and public diplomacy, the dominant narrative referred to here is that of the host-nation and their global image management.

Democratic host states seek to control the narrative and media reporting of the Games; Roche reflects on the 'capacity for a certain degree of authoritarianism' even when officials know multiple audience interpretations make control of meaning impossible (Roche 2008:287). Given the unpredictability of audience reception, Olympics organizers and host-nation enforce strict control of processes over which they *do* have influence (Rivenburgh 2010:200). This translates into the controlled experience of the media event as it unfolds

to specifically avoid a snowball effect of undesirable narratives or the pre-mediated seizure of the event narrative. The presence and proximity of the global media combines with the vortex of the commentary across traditional and social media such that ‘intra-media sourcing patterns’ allow for narratives to ‘snowball’ towards a sharp, yet often sharply skewed, media constructed image or narrative related to the events (Rivenburgh 2010:190). Regardless of whether they are factual or exaggerated, images become a political quandary for the host nation when they threaten to overturn public diplomacy objectives (Tehrani 1984:59 as cited in Rivenburgh 2010:190). Dayan describes a more extreme context where the narrative is ‘hijacked’, implying an ‘involuntary antagonistic’ derailing of the organizer’s and host’s narrative through an often spectacular ‘seizure’ of the media’s attention, and therefore the global public’s attention (Dayan 2005 as cited in Price 2011:86). Price extends this argument by highlighting the investment and organization of the event platform, which if it can be seized, offers an already established forum for the broadcast of alternate political agendas. These agendas are multiple and varied, from criticisms of the host-nation policies, to human rights and environmental campaigns, to an assortment of particular political groups seeking to raise awareness and draw attention to their cause. The Foreign Affairs Committee report for the Olympics 2012 concluded that the Games posed ‘potential reputational risks as well as opportunities for the UK’ and urged the FCO and its Olympics public diplomacy partners to make sure that there was ‘a “rapid response unit” adequately resourced and prepared to take swift action to rebut or challenge negative stories appearing in the world media’ (2011:6). Despite (or perhaps as a result of) the intention to dominate the narrative, London 2012 was not without controversies over security and ‘hard power.’ These included, for instance, the failure of local security firm G4S to provide its promised services and international media reporting on high-velocity missiles posted on the roof of residential homes around the Olympic village in East London (Pope 2014).

While Olympic organizers and host nations find ways to curtail and restrict protest, and more acutely establish security regimes to stop the violent seizure of the event through terrorism and hostage taking, such strategies cannot cross the threshold of physical violence and bodily harm, which itself will become a media spectacle (Neilson 2002:19).⁶ However, the very act of trying to control the narrative is a communicative gesture liable to be noticed and interpreted by overseas audiences (Holland and Chaban 2011). Soft power is diminished when actors try to use it. A basic flaw in many soft power initiatives can be explained by incongruences between specific communication strategies and the organisation’s grand strategy— for instance, whether they really value foreign publics as legitimate stakeholders of foreign policy or not (Zaharna 2009:158-159). Essential to a ‘connective mindshift’ is pursuing an ‘integrative’ grand strategy, which will welcome change and the empowerment of foreign (and domestic) publics (Zaharna 2009:158-159). Many of the tensions that underscore decisions regarding the regulation of the media and the control of the narrative stem from the contradictions not only between different concepts of audiences, but between discourses and practices.⁷ If the London 2012 opening ceremony presented a nation open, tolerant and able to laugh at itself, the effort to control debate contradicts and

therefore undermines that identity and its appeal. If Russia, expected to be more controlling in its approach to international communication, were to step back and allow open debate about Sochi 2014, this might enhance its soft power to those supporting such values. In short, control is as much about how talk proceeds as who says what – a matter of style over content – of being seen by others to approach communicating in a certain way.

Regulating the Media Regulates the Narrative

Nye argues that the intricacies of international public diplomacy in particular and politics in general, have become ‘a contest of competitive credibility’ (Nye 2008:95). Overt attempts to control media narratives can be counter-productive and, thus, Olympic organizers divide and regulate media towards a common agenda without having the ability to impede journalists’ autonomy. Olympic organizers rely, however, on the ‘functional dependency’ of the media upon the organizer’s technical and logistical support and degrees of site access (Kunczik 2003:119 as cited in Rivenburgh 2010:190).

The Olympics, among other mega-events such as the FIFA World Cup, often appear to operate as a closed media system in their own right (Rowe 2003:8). Attempts at controlling this system extend far beyond the well-publicized exclusive broadcasting rights of the Olympics within each national region. The IOC uses their definition and redefinition of a journalist, their determination of media practitioners’ rights, and the physical channelling of journalist activities through the Olympic Zone and host city. Each of these serve as a lever for the control for the Olympic media narrative, and analysis of changes to such control can illuminate wider technological changes to journalism and the IOC’s race to contain and exploit such changes (Miah et al. 2008:320). The exclusive accreditation system, relatively stable since the 1980s, has been adapted recently to divide journalist across three tiers of access most clearly represented by three separate press centres: the International Broadcasting Centre, the Main Press Centre, and the Non-Accredited Media Centre. Partnering broadcast companies, as IOC funding partners and a primary vehicle for creating a sense of ‘live’ global spectatorship, are considered not just journalists but ‘Olympic rights holders’ with Olympic studio spaces and ring-side access (Miah et al. 2008:326). They represent the top tier of IOC accredited journalists. The Olympic pricing structure allows for extra cameras and commentary stations at the venues for additional sponsorship payments (Rivenburgh 2010:197). As paying partners and sponsors, these journalists appear wholly co-opted towards the success of the celebratory narrative, akin to embedded reporters with military accreditation in conflict zones. The second tier are the non-broadcasting partners who are nonetheless IOC accredited journalists without Olympic broadcasting rights who are allowed use the Main Press Centre as primary point of access to the day’s events, with rights to work from within the Olympic site.

Beyond these two tiers is an added third tier for the swathe of what the IOC deems non-accredited journalists, made up of underfunded journalists, bloggers, and others who do not have the financial and/or institutional backing to gain accreditation. This includes professional journalists who are working without the IOC-licensed access and entitlements,

but are nevertheless present and covering the games. They are not allowed to enter official venues in a journalistic capacity. This category also includes those who ‘self-characterize as journalists [and]...through blogs and similar devices, may have a greater impact on public understanding of what the Olympics mean and why’ (Miah et al. 2008:321). Such changes offer a proliferation of platforms through which the IOC can promote the Olympic brand, but these journalist and bloggers also represent a challenge to the controlled media system. The IOC’s comprehensive control over Olympic coverage, so clearly manifest in broadcasting, is potentially undermined by ‘unpredictable online environments’ and the new forms of journalism and information-sharing native to such spaces (Hutchins and Mikosza 2010:281). Rivenburgh notes that the financial limitations on this large group of journalists mean that they are less able to engage with the actual event, and in some cases less able to stray from the media centre and experience the city as they report constantly to remote production teams at home covering the Olympics (Rivenburgh 2010:197). This further contributes to the intra-media sourcing as well as the reliance upon and often-unchecked magnification of social media discussions and perspectives.

During the first six days of the Atlanta 1996 Games the computer systems journalists depended upon to meet deadlines were not fully operational and transmitted unreliable information (Rivenburgh 2010:194). Meanwhile, non-IOC accredited journalists were left underserved and unmanaged by the IOC, without at that time a press centre of their own. Non-accredited journalists criticised the lack of preparation and the crumbling infrastructure in Atlanta. At the 2000 Sydney Games these journalists’ presence and potential influence were recognized; they were given a Non-Accredited Media Centre (NAMC), which complimented the accredited Main Press Centre and International Broadcasting Centre. Such accommodation represents a management of the journalists and their subsequent narrative by the IOC, as ‘the immediate, lived experience of journalists’ finds its way into news media narratives as stand-in for the host-culture and their preparedness (Rivenburgh 2010:194).

By the Torino 2006 Winter Olympics, the NAMC focused on accommodating the swell of online journalists alongside the appearance of video bloggers and others using new online video sharing services such as YouTube as low cost production platforms (Miah et al. 2008:321, 326). In parallel, official broadcasters such as NBC had embraced online streaming of their exclusive Games coverage, such that the Internet became a source of officially-endorsed live coverage. At the Beijing 2008 Games, the proliferation of mobile media prompted organizers to promote a form of mobile coverage and video sharing by athletes, spectators, and self-styled citizen-journalists through short recordings on popular video chat phone apps (Hutchins and Mikosza 2010:279). Whether it is tiers of accreditation, physical media centres, platforms for online sharing, or the strict policies about athletes’ social media use discussed earlier, the facilitation of users’ ability to create content and communicate within the Olympic venues represents a strategy for controlling the Olympic narrative.

When Public Diplomacy clashes with Domestic Politics

Inextricable from these projects of national rebranding is the impact on the host-nation's domestic citizenry and the government's relationship to them. Given the lengths hosts will go to secure a coherent and positive image of a successful Games, there are a variety of possible outcomes in relation to domestic and regional populations that over time may undermine the nation-branding exercise. The Berlin 1936 Games are the most salient example, while other Olympics point to the complexities between domestic power management and global standing.

DeLisle examines the possible outcomes for the Beijing 2008 games, where the 'most audible' strand of the Olympic narrative stressed nationalism alongside 'domestic prosperity and order' and, of course, the obligatory appeals to international cooperation that is Olympism (DeLisle 2011:31). With the nominal success of the games on the global stage, the regime's increased confidence could lay the foundation for starkly divergent outcomes domestically. On the one hand, the increased openness towards scrutiny could be met with a greater congeniality towards international norms. On the other hand, the domestic power structure could be emboldened by the success of heavy-handed political repression and forced relocations, while nevertheless remaining aware of the benefits of superficially appearing to embrace international concerns (DeLisle 2011:52). The fortunes of Russia's Sochi 2014 Games, interrupted by unrest in Ukraine and the international community's disavowal of Russia's annexation of Crimea, is another example, focused upon in this issue, where success in global diplomacy can have unexpected ramifications for domestic and regional politics.

The Mexico 1968 Games offers an example of the risks taken by an emerging nation in hosting the Olympics. The Games became a spectacle of political embarrassment abroad and a historical watershed leaving the domestic population with memories of authoritarianism and repression (Zolov 2004:9). Mexico sought to present itself globally as politically tolerant, harmonious and modern, exploiting its unique position that spanned the ideological fault lines of Cold War alliances. Yet the expenditure of building this 'New Mexico' sparked nation-wide protests that successfully appropriated Olympic imagery and arguably the wider Olympic platform, showcasing the state's subsequent violent repression of the movement to those watching around the world (Zolov 2004:29). The Games diminished the state's credibility on the global stage, left the domestic population divided, and a generation distrustful of the government. Arguably, however, there was a positive legacy of the 1968 Games. Mexico was the first host to combine a 'Cultural Olympiad' with the sporting events. With over 1,500 events, a third of which were located outside the host city, the Cultural Olympiad would introduce the vital role of showcasing the cultural offerings of host city as well as the country, fostering the notion of Olympic legacy beyond the Olympic infrastructure, while simultaneously enfranchising a wider swathe of intellectuals, artists, and cultural practitioners into the building of the Olympic narrative (Zolov 2004:169, 183). Both represent important mechanisms of domestic governing and global public diplomacy.

As Tomlinson succinctly states, a bid to host the Olympic Games has increased focused on 'Not impact, not effects, not outcomes, but legacy' (Tomlinson 2013:138). The delicate international political climate from 1968 through to the 1980 Games necessitated that the host focused on the urgent issues of the day such as human rights, terrorism, long-term debt and political boycotts, and it was not until the mid-1980s that the concept of domestic legacy emerged within the minutes of the IOC meetings (Tomlinson 2013).

This is now part of branding and selling the host city. In 1999, concepts of sustainable development and legacy were introduced to the Olympic Charter, which interjected a new managerial rationality to the Olympics. Leveraging the benefits of the Olympics shifted towards a deeper marketization and commoditization of the sports media complex in the host city, which developed into a new repertoire of soft power tools for the IOC and governments alongside corporate sponsors (Tomlinson 2013:143). The architecture of the Olympic village has long been thought of as a primary legacy while also acting as the idyllic representation that the host nation and city hopes to project internationally (Muñoz 2006:175). The construction of venues and athlete accommodations offers a material representation of national development and/or leadership by highlighting technological and cultural accomplishments of these buildings. Earlier legacy projects had highlighted representations of Taylorism and Fordism in progressive urban infrastructures. This shifted to notions of urban regeneration, through to the current vogue where state branding meets urban marketing (Muñoz 2006:184). This was most recently manifest by the Adidas sponsored 'adiZones' public exercises areas, which were set up across London as both a regeneration project but also corporatisation of public space (Weber-Newth 2014)

The legacy and impact of the Games for the host-city focuses nearly wholly on economic development. Host-cities profit and position themselves within a wider global market economy through the Olympics, and even arguably through the media spotlight of the bidding process itself (Oliver 2011). Tourism and the local events industry are the clearest beneficiaries of the Olympic spotlight. The cities gains 'landmark venues' showcased across global media. However, the promises of increased local employment and sustained economic gains, in some cases to justify the displacement disadvantaged residents and migrant workers, are often temporary, if fulfilled at all (Tomlinson 2013:145). In 2012, UK public diplomacy projected a national identity based more upon economic competitiveness than cosmopolitan connections; any cosmopolitan imagery was of a branded kind, promoting the UK as cosmopolitan rather than enacting cosmopolitan communication (Pope 2014). This hints at contradictions arising not only from different communication strategies but conflicting conceptions of the roles of audiences. Whether this competitiveness was achieved is perhaps moot.⁸ The public diplomacy task during London 2012 is was ultimately to control journalist coverage of the event at the time and then perform success afterwards.

Conclusions

In this special section, the Olympic Games acted as a prism for our investigation into the

changing spaces of audience engagement through public and cultural diplomacy and international broadcasting at a time when each is adapting to a rapidly changing digital environment. The Games offered a chance to reconsider the role of soft power across contemporary global media cultures, where political action and diplomacy can no longer be untangled from their mediated enactment and execution.

Above all, this article makes clear why the Olympic Games is useful for analysing tensions central in social science: between nationalism, universalism and patriotic forms of cosmopolitanism; between instrumentalism and nation branding on the one hand versus the intrinsic joy of sport and solidarity on the other; between host states' desire for control of media and public narratives of the Games versus the spontaneity and chaotic dynamics of social media and a multilingual, multiplatform media ecology; between satisfying the preferences and expectations of the host's domestic public versus pleasing international publics who may have different interests, values and expectations; between espousing tolerance and diversity versus an event based on competition and therefore the likelihood of antagonism and even conflict; between the theory and practice of public diplomacy within the context of the 'connective mindshift' that has not only changed the focus from the agents to the subjects, but has ultimately reconceived the concept of audiences as co-creators of soft power, bringing a challenge to public diplomacy strategies, international broadcasters and audience research methodologies.

In the article we showed how the approach taken by UK and Russia governments often (and inevitably) meant falling on one side of each of these trade-offs. Consequently, the way the host country sets up the platform for the Games inevitably steers the Games' meaning in a certain direction. Ultimately, the meanings of particular instances of Olympic Games rest with audiences at home and overseas, and their interpretations and subsequent behaviour. How those meanings are formed is the main subject of the other research articles in this special section.

Intrinsic to these trade-offs are questions of identity, hierarchy and solidarity. For this reason, in this special issue many of the analysis articles explore dimensions of these questions. The project team decided to pursue this by focusing on how issues of nationalism, religion and gender were debated in social media spaces and television coverage and across both. We also addressed questions of control of the Olympics agenda by measuring how social networks and media content form, are sustained, and decay (Fisher/Willis, Aslan et al). In this way and through these analyses, the special issue makes an original and multi-faceted contribution to our understanding of how public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and soft power function around global media events such as contemporary Olympic Games.

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Notes:

¹ Although Nye has developed the term 'smart power' to 'counter the misperception that soft power alone can produce effective foreign policy' (Nye 2004; Nye 2010; Nye 2011:22).

² Although Nye uses the concept of 'narrative', by focusing on soft power he fails to develop a framework to capture the processes that shape and are shaped by narratives and its components (Roselle et al 2014:75).

³ London 2012 was also perceived at risk of being an exception, as an increase in London's reputation as a 'world city' might not have necessarily benefited the whole of the UK (Foreign Affairs Committee 2011:30).

⁴ These media narratives are not without consequences. Security measures ballooned at the Salt Lake City 2002 Games, amounting to approximately 25% of the budget at US\$310Million (Atkinson and Young 2005:276). Boykoff and Fussey examine this darker side of the Olympic legacy, namely

the justification and development of a 'sizeable security infrastructure' that can be employed to deter terrorism but also suppress activism and even 'low-level incivilities', in place of the promised urban, social and economic renewal (Boykoff and Fussey 2013:254). In this manner, the political management and control of media event space itself is a legacy written into the city.

⁵ The FAC was 'supplied in confidence with the FCO's list of priority countries', which was not reported (FCO 2011:19).

⁶ In fact, the Foreign Affairs Committee report stressed that 'We welcome the unequivocal assurance by the Government that the long-standing rights of free expression and freedom to protest peacefully in the UK will not be suspended because of the Olympic Games. We recommend that the Government, both in the run-up to the Games and during the Games themselves, should firmly resist any pressure that may be applied by certain foreign governments to curtail the rights of freedom of expression and freedom to protest peacefully in the UK' (Foreign Affairs Committee 2011:24).

⁷ The same tension can be traced in the House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence report which stresses the importance of engaging with a global 'hyper-connected' audience, but ultimately advocates for one-way communication strategies in order to wield soft power (Gillespie and Nieto McAvoy forthcoming).

⁸ One only needs to refer to the House of Lords 2014 report on soft power to see the varied interpretations of the impact of the Olympics.