

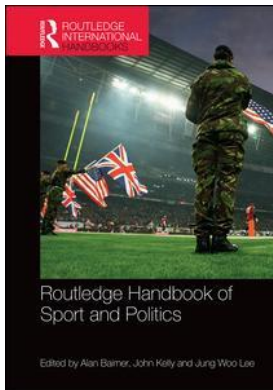
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3

SPORT AS A FOREIGN POLICY AND DIPLOMATIC TOOL

Udo Merkel

The so-called ‘Christmas Truce’ during the First World War (1914–18) made sport famous for pacifying the opposing sides (Brown and Seaton 1994; Jürgs 2003; Weintraub 2002) – albeit temporarily. Although this episode is often cited as evidence of sport’s peace-making ability, the following three anecdotes are, at least, equally impressive and show different facets of the relationship between sport and international politics: The well-known ping-pong diplomacy made an important contribution to an improvement in Sino-American relations in the early 1970s (Carter and Sugden 2012; Hill 1996: 123; Kanin 1978). In 1998, a group of five American wrestlers and the same number of officials visited Iran to participate in the international Takhti Cup tournament. It was the first US delegation to visit Iran since before the Iranian Revolution. Symbolically, one of the most significant moments was the hoisting of the American flag in Tehran. Since 1979, the only images of the Stars and Stripes banner in Iran were those of flags being burned in anti-US demonstrations of animosity and resentment (Goldberg 2000). In spring 2004, the Indian cricket team toured Pakistan for the first time in 15 years. The tour followed a general agreement between the South Asian neighbours on a timetable for peace talks over the disputed province of Kashmir. It was initiated by an ‘informal’ visit of former Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf to watch a cricket match in India that the previous Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and his Foreign Minister, Natwar Singh, also attended. It was the Indian government’s willingness to let the cricketers tour Pakistan that convinced Pakistanis that Delhi’s conciliatoriness was sincere and genuine (Bhaskaran 2006).

Ping-pong, wrestling and cricket diplomacy show that international sport encounters can be an effective foreign policy tool, and, in particular, a safe and gentle way of improving international relations. This view is widely, and uncritically, supported by high-profile and prominent politicians, sport administrators, the media and even musicians and singers, such as U2’s front man Bono (Drezner 2006). Sport’s ability to bring about global unity and peace, for example, has also been praised by former United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, who has repeatedly emphasised the potential of mega sports events, such as the Olympic Games and the Soccer World Cup, to unite citizens of different nations, ‘rebuild fractured relationships . . . break down barriers and challenge stereotypes . . . and overcome the most deep-rooted conflicts’ (Anan 2010: 30).

Although there is some truth in this statement, this chapter argues that only the systematic and lasting use of sport, both at grassroots and top levels, can make it a powerful diplomatic

tool. It also suggests that the use of sport as a foreign policy and diplomatic tool can be successful only if it is embedded in and supported by a wider strategy that pursues the same political goals. Otherwise, it is likely to fail, as Carter and Sugden (2012) have convincingly shown in their analysis of baseball diplomacy between the United States and Cuba in the 1970s. On its own, or even at odds with the overall direction of a government's foreign policy, sports-led diplomacy is helpless and ineffective. This was, and continues to be, most evident on the politically divided Korean peninsula, where a variety of sport exchanges, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, between the Republic of Korea (ROK), in the South, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), in the North, were a prominent and integral part of both countries' foreign policy agendas and had a significant impact on the political climate in Korea. This case study offers a unique opportunity to examine critically the changing role and political efficacy of contemporary sport diplomacy as the global sport order takes shape in the twenty-first century.

Sport diplomacy, in the context of this chapter, is defined as the whole range of international contacts between athletes, teams, spectators, fans, coaches, administrators and politicians in the context of sports competitions, events, exchanges, cooperations and collaborations that are motivated by broader foreign policy concerns and have implications for the general relations between and the overall political climate in the countries involved. For governments, the involvement of non-governmental and non-state actors is convenient and relatively risk-free. If their efforts are unsuccessful, politicians will not suffer from embarrassment and the political fall-out will be minimal. Beach suggests that any analysis of foreign policy, including diplomatic activities, needs to address three main areas: first, what those actors involved in foreign policy prioritise and want; second, the decision-making processes; and third, the output or what those actors eventually do (2012: 12–13). This chapter focuses on the results and outcomes and links these to wider governmental foreign policy goals, but will have to ignore the second field as 'most foreign policy decisions take place behind closed doors' (Beach 2012: 3).

Prior to the 2018 Winter Olympics in South Korea's Pyeongchang, which is located close to the border with North Korea, it is timely to focus on sport diplomacy on the divided Korean peninsula. Even relatively recent publications on sport and international relations (Levermore and Budd 2004) hardly mention this interesting and contemporary example. Although there has been an increased academic interest in the study of socio-economic, cultural and political aspects of sport in South Korea (Ahn 2000; Horne and Manzenreiter 2002; Manzenreiter and Horne 2004; McBeth 1988; Ok 2007), boosted by the successful staging of the 1988 Summer Olympics and the 2002 FIFA World Cup, hosted together with Japan, the role of sport as a foreign policy tool has been largely ignored, with the notable exceptions of Bridges (2012) and Jonsson (2006), who touch on this issue.

Conceptual considerations

Political tensions, rivalries and international conflicts have long accompanied and impacted the development of modern sport (Riordan and Krüger 1999), whether it is capitalism versus communism (Riordan 1999), separatism versus integration (Hargreaves 2000; Sugden and Bairner 1995) or nationalism versus internationalism (Merkel 2003). Since the beginning of the twentieth century, political agendas and ideological conflicts (Hoberman 1984; Riordan and Arnaud 1998) have disrupted a large number of international sports events. States and governments frequently used international competitions as high-profile public forums to validate their political systems and ideological preferences, and to pursue specific foreign policy goals. In its broadest sense, foreign policy is defined as,

the particular actions taken by a state or other collective actor as directed toward other collective actors within the international system. Foreign policy actions can be undertaken using a variety of different instruments, ranging from adopting declarations, making speeches, negotiating treaties, giving other states economic aid, engaging in diplomatic activity such as summits, and the use of military force.

(Beach 2012: 3)

Any analysis of sport as a diplomatic tool needs to be embedded within the broader fields of foreign policy and international relations. Within the academic study of international relations, the three major theoretical approaches are Realism, Pluralism and the more radical Marxist perspective (Mingst 1999: 60–108). At first sight, there appears to be no place for sport in any of these paradigms, as they are primarily concerned with trade, security, international terrorism, the armed forces, foreign policy and economic relations. The Realist approach can make little contribution to a better understanding of the role of international sport in global politics, as it almost exclusively focuses on the state, as the primary unit of analysis, and its military capabilities, in the wider context of an international system that is characterized by uncertainty and insecurity:

What makes realist theory unattractive for the exploration of the diplomatic value of sport is the scant attention it gives to the role of non-governmental organisations such as governing bodies of sport that are central to the utilisation of sport for diplomatic purposes.

(Houlihan 1994: 40–1)

This paradigm would be very limiting, as it is unable to capture the complexity and subtleties of the Korean people that exists in two nation-states with very different socio-economic and political systems, standards of living and levels of contact with the outside world (Cumings 2004, 2005).

Like Realism, the capacity of the Marxist paradigm as an overall theoretical framework is limited. This approach acknowledges the impact of non-state actors and the importance of non-security issues, but it almost exclusively focuses on economic structures, developments and inequalities. Although there is no doubt that many aspects of international sport are highly commercialised and driven by the greediness of international governing bodies, the commercial interests of multi-national sponsors and corporations, the Marxist approach offers only limited scope for assessing the efficacy of sport as a diplomatic resource as the latter has limited economic value in the Korean context.

Pluralism appears to provide a much more helpful theoretical framework for the study of sport diplomacy. It has several advantages over the other paradigms. First, it acknowledges the central role of the state within international relations but also recognises the input of non-state actors, for example non-governmental organisations and civil society initiatives that have no formal political status and diplomatic powers. Second, Pluralism acknowledges that the policy agenda of foreign offices is multi-layered and tends to include exchanges and negotiations addressing social, cultural, economic and environmental issues. Third, the increasingly 'porous nature of territorial boundaries' and 'the multiplicity of international connections . . . and interactions based on trade, tourism, media communications, and migration' (Houlihan 1994: 42) are usually taken into consideration. Furthermore, Pluralism does not treat the state as an autonomous actor, but as an organisation that tries to accommodate various, sometimes conflicting, interests. One major concern of most modern states is to avoid large-scale military conflicts,

since security and self-preservation are deemed absolutely essential. It is, therefore, in the self-interest of each state to cooperate with others. Such cooperation, through diplomatic dialogue with others, requires continuous interactions in a variety of realms. The general public tends to be excluded from most of these activities. However, foreign policy initiatives that occur in the world of international sport tend to be highly visible and allow ordinary citizens, to some extent, to participate and experience both the symbolic and real elements of foreign policy.

International politics and foreign policies on the divided Korean peninsula

During the Cold War (1947–1991), international sports events provided both North and South Korea, both founded in 1948, with an impressive public stage for their ideological battles. Both countries claimed to be the true representative of the Korean people, their distinctive culture and 5,000-year history. They either did not participate, in protest at the other's presence, or, when they engaged with each other, the competition was fierce (Ha and Mangan 2002). That changed considerably after the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul, which North Korea boycotted. This event is widely considered a 'major factor in South Korea's emergence on to the world stage' (Cho and Bairner 2012: 285). South Korea's capital put on a spectacle that celebrated the country's technological progress, modernisation, democratisation and wealth that the North was unable to match. While South Korea nowadays boasts Asia's fourth largest economy, on a par with many developed nations, the North is one of the poorest countries in the world. In addition to 'a large economic disparity, a democracy gap, [and] a vastly different culture' (Feffer 2003: 57), the North has rather limited contact with outsiders. What ties both countries closely together is the purity of their ethnic roots, a deep sense of shared injustice and external threats.

'The start of the Seoul Games . . . truly marked the end of inter-Korean competition for legitimacy' (Cha 2009: 59), which used to be one of South Korea's major foreign policy goals. Currently, security and trade are at the top of the country's international political agenda. Despite the DPRK's secretive and often apparently irrational behaviour on the international stage, North Korea's political aspirations and foreign policy objectives are crystal clear. First, the political regime is most concerned about a peace treaty, as it would guarantee the territorial sovereignty of the state and, finally, end the infamous chapter of the Korean War (1950–1953), which cost the lives of three million Korean civilians and 700,000 soldiers. Such an agreement would also reduce the risk of military action from outside forces that could lead to regime change. Second, and going hand in hand with the first objective, North Korea's rulers want respect through recognition of its legitimacy – however absurd that might appear to the international community (Tisdall 2010). More recently, the North's foreign policy agenda appears to be overshadowed by the government's desire for the socialist system to survive, improving its reputation, as a politically stable country, and attracting desperately needed foreign investment.

The only foreign policy goal both countries share is their desire to reunite the divided Korean people (Ministry of Unification 2005). In July 2014, South Korea's president, Park Gyeun-hye, set up a new committee, comprising more than 70 members from government, private sector organisations and universities and chaired by herself, which was tasked with preparing for Korean reunification. In September of the same year, at a meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, North Korea's Minister for Foreign Affairs proposed a confederation between the two countries to prevent war and secure peace. However, there are currently several insurmountable political barriers that make the reunification of the divided

Korean people an unrealistic political vision (Chamberlin 2005). Furthermore, several polls over the last few years have repeatedly shown that young South Koreans are considerably less enthusiastic about reunification than their parents and grandparents.

Inter-Korean sports events, exchanges and cooperation

In the aftermath of the 1988 Seoul Olympics, political relations between the two Korean states gradually improved. Reunification initiatives proposed in 1998 by former South Korean President Kim Dae-jung succeeded for about ten years in moving the divided Korean peninsula in a new direction. His innovative and pragmatic foreign policy towards the North, known as the 'Sunshine Policy', favoured rapprochement and engagement, included economic assistance and encouraged cultural exchanges and political cooperation in order to normalise relations and, ultimately, achieve reunification. The 'Sunshine Policy' focused on peace, reconciliation and prosperity for the whole Korean nation through multi-faceted people-to-people contacts. This was clearly reflected in, and strengthened by, various forms of cooperation in the world of sport. Most notable and of great public interest were sport exchanges and the so-called 'unification sports events'. They became important diplomatic tools to engage with the other, foster a sense of pan-Korean unity and keep the reunification issue in the public discourse.

The first ever 'Unification Football Matches' were held in October 1990 and took place in both countries' capitals, Seoul and Pyongyang. The friendly tournament had become possible through talks between the sports ministers of the two Koreas during the Asian Games in Beijing earlier that year. Ten years later, Pyongyang and Seoul hosted the first 'Unification Basketball Tournament', with two matches played in both capitals. Two years later, in 2002, the 'Inter Korean Unification Soccer Match' took place in the sold-out World Cup Stadium in Seoul. The display of national flags was strictly prohibited, and North and South Korean football players carried the unification flag, a white banner with the shape of the Korean peninsula embroidered in a deep blue. In November 2005, a group of 150 South Korean marathon runners flew directly to the North Korean capital to participate in the 'Pyongyang-Nampho Marathon for Reunification'.

Both Koreas have been deadly serious about the use of sport as a diplomatic tool in order to improve relations and promote unity between the two countries. Therefore, a number of unusual and innovative measures were taken to avoid any uncertainties or ambiguities. In February 2006, for example, when the national women's ice hockey sides of both countries met for a friendly match in Seoul, one of the South's best players, Hwang Bo-young, did not play. She had to watch the game from the stands as she had fled from North Korea in 1997 aged 19. In the spirit of peace and friendship, even the rules had been modified and checking on the ice was not allowed (Yoon 2006). Only one month later, another North Korean ice hockey team was invited to play a friendly match in the South. On this occasion, it did not lead to a competition between North and South, as two mixed teams were formed, each comprising players from both countries. Even the teams' names, URI (meaning 'we') and HANA (meaning 'one'), reflected the reconciliatory spirit of this event.

This incomplete but exemplary list of 'unification sports events' and the various forms of sporting cooperation and exchanges between the North and the South, prior to the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, clearly demonstrates that both countries were keen to promote, grow and intensify dialogue, celebrate commonalities and unity, and demonstrate to their respective populations their commitment to reunification. That was certainly also the rationale for the state-controlled North Korean media occasionally reporting on the outstanding performance of the South Korean soccer team during the 2002 World Cup finals. The media

discourse in North Korea (Merkel 2012b), which is exclusively orchestrated and strictly controlled by the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), suggested that South Korea's surprising success in 2002 should be seen as a continuation of the North's impressive achievement at the 1966 World Cup in England (Polley 1998). The same strategy, that is, exploiting the symbolic potency of high-profile sports events, can also be found in the context of international competitions.

Contact and dialogue at global sports spectacles

Both Koreas have regularly used the global media attention that mega sports events tend to attract to remind the world and their respective people of their commitment to reunification. On various occasions, both countries formed a unified team for the official opening and closing ceremonies (Bridges 2012: 94–107; Choi 2002: 107–115; Jonsson 2006: 97–150). When the two Korean teams marched together at the 2000 Sydney, 2004 Athens and 2006 Turin Olympic opening ceremonies, at the 2002 Busan Asian Games, the 2003 Aomori Winter Games and the 2003 Daegu Summer Universiade, they displayed the above-mentioned white flag with the shape of the Korean peninsula embroidered in a deep blue and used the name 'Korea'. The presidents of both nations' Olympic committees usually followed the two flag bearers (one from each country) in front of the athletes and coaches. Bridges suggests that, 'for both Koreas a desire to pass a political message to the United States may have contributed to this continued cooperation through joint entries to sporting mega-events' (2012: 101). As long as Washington does not take 'North Korea's security fears as seriously as those of the United States and understands that division in the region ultimately undermines democracy, human rights, and economic progress' (Feffer 2003: 164), the political tensions on the divided Korean peninsula will remain high.

Furthermore, by participating regularly in international sporting events the North Korean rulers hope to gain from the political legitimacy conferred automatically on any country invited to participate. In 1999, North Korea's women's soccer team qualified unexpectedly for the Third FIFA Women's World Cup in the United States. However, the even bigger surprise was that the North Koreans accepted the invitation to travel to North America, although the two countries do not have formal diplomatic relations. The North Korean regime appears to believe that sports diplomacy will boost their attempts to establish formal government-to-government or international non-governmental relations while maintaining strict control over the limited and selective people-to-people contacts. At the same time, it is important for the North to create and globally convey an image of political stability favourable for foreign trade and investment in order to achieve system survival.

Almost as significant as the first Pyongyang summit between the two leaders of North and South Korea in 2000, Kim Jong-il and Roh Moo-hyun, respectively, were the 2002 Asian Games, hosted by the city of Busan in South Korea. North Korea sent 312 athletes, 111 sport officials and around 250 cheerleaders to Busan.

Such a large delegation had never been dispatched before or been allowed to stay for such a long period. [. . .] watching the games provided repeated one on one contacts between North and South Koreans making them an important opportunity to dissolve the Cold War popular culture.

(Jonsson 2006: 86)

Although North Korea's flag and anthem are officially banned in the South, the DPRK was allowed to raise its flag outside the buildings of the local media centre and organising committee

in Busan. Since the division of the Korean peninsula in 1945, this was the first time that the official banner of the DPRK was exhibited on South Korean territory. Even North Korea's anthem was played on several occasions and North Korean visitors were given permission to use official DPRK insignia. As before, the public display of both countries' desire to reunite was most visible, and emotionally reinforced, at the opening ceremony. Athletes from the North and South used the unification flag, wore identical outfits and walked together hand in hand into the stadium.

After previously marching together at the opening ceremonies of several international competitions, in November 2005, sport administrators from North and South Korea agreed, in principle, to form a unified team for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The deal was struck on the sidelines of the 2005 East Asian Games in Macau and fully supported by the IOC. Taking the symbolic reconciliation of the divided Korean people one step further seemed to be the logical extension to years of inter-Korean rapprochement and an important milestone towards fulfillment of the ultimate foreign policy goal of reunification. The South Korean National Olympic Committee was skeptical and predicted four major challenges: first, the principles determining the actual selection of athletes; second, harmonising training methods; third, agreeing lines of communication and responsibilities; and finally, finances. After two years of intense negotiation, the two Koreas did not compete as one team at the Beijing Olympics as they could not agree on the principles guiding the selection of athletes. Nevertheless, many political commentators saw the declaration of intention itself as a major breakthrough and a new milestone for inter-Korean efforts to travel one step further in their cooperation (Kim 2006). North Korea's willingness to engage constructively with the South and gradually to abandon its isolationist politics, was, however, undermined by two significant events that caused a severe deterioration of their political relationship.

First, the outcome of the general elections in South Korea in February 2008 had a huge impact on inter-Korean relations. South Korea's new president, Lee Myung-bak, took a much tougher stance than his liberal predecessors Roh Moo-hyun (2003–2008) and Kim Dae-jung (1998–2003) who had won the Nobel Peace Prize for his 'Sunshine Policy' in 2000. Lee abandoned their successful strategy and replaced it with his 'Vision 3000', which tied economic aid and political cooperation to the de-nuclearisation of the North. Second, the killing of a South Korean tourist by a North Korean soldier in July 2008 in the south-east of North Korea played an important role. The 53-year-old woman was shot after wandering into a fenced-off military area near the Mount Geumgang resort, a popular tourist destination and symbol of cross-border reconciliation, which was accessible to South Koreans. Both events meant that the two countries did not even march together at the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Two years later, China hosted the 2010 Asiad in Guangzhou. This event was marked by the absence of any reconciliatory gestures, signs of goodwill and cooperation between the two Koreas. The South Korean basketball team turned their backs when North Korea's anthem was played, whilst DPRK fans ignored South Korea's anthem and remained seated. Although only a railing in the stadium separated the spectators from both Korean countries, there was no interaction between them. At the same time, in November 2010, North Korea fired dozens of artillery shells onto the island of Yeonpyeong, approximately 120 km west of Seoul. The surprising attack set more than 60 houses ablaze, killed two South Korean soldiers and two civilians, and sent the local population fleeing in terror. The artillery strike was the first of its kind since the end of the Korean War in 1953 and provoked angry reactions from the international community.

What these examples show clearly is that, during the decade before the 2008 Beijing Olympics, sport as a diplomatic tool did not only 'promote détente between the two Koreas'

(Levermore and Budd 2004: 3) but was also used to keep the issue of reunification in the public discourse. Despite the two Koreas marching together at various opening ceremonies of high-profile international events and the popular ‘unification sports events’, these kind of exchanges were not a cure-all for political tensions, animosities and conflicts that have existed for over half a century. They constitute only small steps that can have positive effects beyond the playing field and onto the chessboard of international relations.

North Korea’s mass games as a foreign policy tool

North Korea does not only rely on symbolic gestures, people-to-people contacts and joint activities with the South as diplomatic tools. The country’s unusual but spectacular mass games also contribute to its foreign policy. Although the North has regularly hosted mass games over the last decades, since the beginning of this millennium, these more or less annual events have grown grander, more sophisticated and prominent (Burgeson 2005). Most notable is the Arirang Festival, which premiered in 2002, and the ‘Prosper our Motherland’ show of 2008, which celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of the foundation of the DPRK.

They usually take place in Pyongyang’s gigantic May Day stadium, which can host up to 150,000 spectators. The shows comprise and combine three distinct elements: first, in the centre of the stadium, complex and highly choreographed group routines performed by tens of thousands of young gymnasts (with large artificial flowers, flags, hoops, balls, ropes and clubs), acrobats (with poles, ladders, springboards, trampolines and huge metal-framed wheels) and dancers in colourful costumes. Second, the backdrop, a giant human mosaic forming elaborate and detailed panoramas of historical and contemporary events, achievements, landscapes, architecture, portraits of individuals, such as the country’s previous leaders, Kim Il-sung (1912–1994) and Kim Jong-il (1941–2011), slogans and cartoons. More than 20,000 schoolchildren hold up coloured cards that are part of a book with almost 200 pages. They turn them so quickly and in such complete unison that these images appear to be animated. The music constitutes the third element and links the performance in the centre of the May Day stadium with the backdrop. The combination of these three elements offers an impressive spectacle and a highly politicised package with a complex and multi-layered political agenda (Merkel 2008 and 2010), which goes far beyond propaganda ‘crude, didactic propaganda . . . we associate with totalitarianism’ (Hill 2003: 152).

This spectacle is full of political meanings and messages. Most prominent are the themes of Korean division, unity, nationalism and reunification. They feature more frequently than any other issue. The celebration of Korean unity is not restricted to the North Korean population, but includes South Koreans and promotes ‘an extreme form of ethnocentric Korean nationalism . . . that expresses pride and self-esteem based on the greatness of the Korean nation’ (Lee and Bairner 2009: 394).

One of the sets depicted a dramatic theatrical representation of the division of the Korean people. Several hundred young performers magically assembled into the perfect shape of the whole Korean peninsula. Subsequently, the southern and northern halves of the peninsula inexorably drifted asunder; aching arms were outstretched in futility as unseen forces pulled the two halves apart. At the same time, the backdrop created a colourful panorama of Korean children repeatedly uttering, ‘How much longer do we have to be divided due to foreign forces?’

More recently, the reunification theme has become more prominent than ever before. This is largely due to the above-mentioned leadership and fundamental policy changes in South Korea. The Arirang Festival even describes the unification of the divided Korean peninsula as the ultimate achievement that will secure a prosperous future for the whole nation.

The 'Prosper our Motherland' show, went beyond the emotional celebration of Korean nationalism and unity and referred explicitly to specific meetings and treaties that were intended to drive the reunification of the two countries forward but have not yet been fully implemented (Merkel 2012a).

One of the fundamental preconditions for successfully communicating these foreign policy messages is, of course, the presence of witnesses, preferably large numbers of foreign and local spectators as well as the international media. This is particularly important for another key foreign policy objective; namely, to generate an alternative global discourse about North Korea that distracts from the country's autocratic political system, the prevalent militarism and economic hardship. In 2002, only a small number of foreigners were allowed to attend the Arirang Festival (Watts 2002); three years later, more foreigners than ever before experienced this extravaganza first-hand (Watts 2005). Even Americans were issued with short-term visas, allowing them to visit Pyongyang. 'The festival brought official delegations from China, Russia and Cuba as well as high ranking visitors from Mexico and a host of other nations' (Cho and Faiol 2005: 37). Along with a growing number of curious Western spectators, in 2005 ordinary South Korean citizens were, for the first time, allowed to fly directly from Seoul (Incheon) to Pyongyang and watch the Arirang spectacle. That degree of openness was clearly intended to show the strength and stability of North Korea. This message would not be heard loudly and clearly unless there were select groups of foreigners there to witness it. In 2012, the hundredth birthday celebrations of Kim Il-sung and the Arirang Festival attracted several thousand tourists from all over the world, particularly from Europe (Paris 2013).

Conclusion

For most of the post-Second World War period, the hosting of and participation in international sports events have been dominated by three major patterns: first, during the Cold War, when both capitalist and communist countries, for example the United States (Sage 1998), West Germany, the former Soviet Union (Riordan 1978 and 1980) and East Germany (Merkel 1999), used the often outstanding success of their top-level athletes to demonstrate the ideological superiority of their political systems, consolidate and/or gain international recognition, and promote relations with and win support among developing countries; second, as a cheap but high-profile means of publicly expressing disapproval of another country's actions, for example through boycotts or attempts to marginalise states in the world of international sport; and, third, as a vehicle for building, reinforcing and promoting a distinctive national identity and gaining international recognition.

However, sports events can also facilitate international cooperation, increase understanding and bridge profound differences. This potential has been systematically exploited on the divided Korean peninsula, where the use of sport as a diplomatic tool by both governments, as well as non-governmental organisations, has helped to build contacts and improve relations. For almost a decade prior to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, sport was an integral and highly visible element of their overarching foreign policy agenda and provided a multi-layered network for engagement and dialogue between the two Korean states. National and international sports events were used systematically to send diplomatic signals and pursue specific foreign policy goals. These efforts show that sport is able to make considerable contributions to international relations – not as spectacular one-off gestures, but as planned, thought-through, structured and meaningful activities at both grassroots and higher levels. Inter-Korean sport encounters were an efficient way of keeping the highly emotional issue of reunification, currently an unrealistic political dream, in the public discourse. Considering the declining support for reunification among young people

in South Korea, the world of sport also offers an opportunity to test, reinforce and gather domestic support for a specific foreign policy goal.

The lack of symbolic and practical cooperation at, and in the years after, the 2008 Beijing Olympics was an accurate reflection of the general deterioration of inter-Korean relations caused by the introduction of a new, much more confrontational, foreign policy agenda. This development clearly shows that the efficacy of sport as a diplomatic tool largely depends on the overarching foreign policy framework and rationale.

Enhancing North Korea's international profile and improving the country's reputation are two of the many tasks of the contemporary domestic mass games. These impressive spectacles provide the North Korean rulers with a rare opportunity to present the usually secluded country to the rest of the world and to showcase the strength and stability of its socialist system. For the North Korean government, this is an inexpensive symbolic gesture demonstrating more openness and improving its questionable reputation.

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