

## Who bids for events and why?

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An important feature of major sport events today is that they have become so commercially focused, driven by business corporations from the worlds of global media, marketing, sports apparel and event organising, that their staging clusters vast volumes of transnational capital. The Summer Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup are the archetypal mega-events in this regard, because of their size and levels of participation and the revenues they generate. Although smaller in scale, second-order events such as the Commonwealth Games or the rugby or cricket World Cups have also become highly commoditised.<sup>2</sup> The commercial nature of major events partly explains their appeal to many aspiring hosts from across the globe – be they national governments or urban authorities – for which hosting such an event offers a chance to lure capital and tourists, and which seek to leverage the much-lauded branding opportunities that such an event can afford.

### The motives underpinning bids

There are also other motivations for staging a major event. These include the search for global prestige and prominence; the attempt to project a particular image of the host in the international arena; and the use of an event to give force to certain diplomatic or domestic objectives.<sup>3</sup> It has been convincingly argued, for instance, that one of the key goals behind the People's Republic of China's bid for the 2008 Summer Olympics was to mark the country's ascendance as one of the new world powers.<sup>4</sup> Four decades earlier a similar objective underpinned Japan's hosting of the 1964 Summer Olympics,<sup>5</sup> and the Japanese government linked the staging of the games to the large-scale transformation of the capital city and an ambitious plan to double national income over the next 10 years – a feat Japan went on to accomplish.<sup>6</sup> In a comparable way, South Africa's hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup was the culmination of a lengthy period of experimenting

with major and lesser events in the post-apartheid era in order to help meet largely unaccomplished domestic goals of socio-economic transformation, national unification and greater international visibility,<sup>7</sup> while much the same can be said for Brazil's recent FIFA World Cup and prospective staging of the 2016 Summer Olympics.<sup>8</sup>

Sometimes the political motivations outweigh the economic rationale. This seems to be the case for many aspiring hosts from the global South or the world's emerging economies, where foreign policy objectives are often placed ahead of goals like urban or national economic revitalisation that typically underpin bids from industrialised states.<sup>9</sup> This helps to explain why aspiring hosts are willing to spend vast amounts of money on extensive, protracted and – more often than not – unsuccessful bid campaigns as they compete for the right to stage an event. And it is not uncommon for bidding contests to be highly antagonistic or to become mired in controversy as bidders use a variety of strategies to try to outwit their opponents. Mostly these take benign forms, such as the mounting of public relations campaigns to cast an aspiring host in a more favourable light vis-à-vis other contenders.

Sometimes, however, bid contests centre on discrediting opponents' capabilities or become an arena of bickering, personalised attacks and graft.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, bidding wars have become part of the theatre of major events, and reveal as much about the changing nature of sport and event politics as they do about the states and cities that bid for events. It was common discourse among the football elite in South Africa, for instance, that the country was bundled out during the last stages of the contest for the 2006 FIFA World Cup as a result of backroom deals.<sup>11</sup> Further, the bid for the 2010 World Cup saw at times acrimonious exchanges between the South African and English bid committees about South Africa's crime situation and the country's capacity to host the event.<sup>12</sup>

## How bids come about

Recent investigations into Russia's and Qatar's successful bids for the 2018 and 2022 FIFA World Cups, respectively, underline just how much is at stake for aspiring hosts and the extent to which bidding processes can be manipulated for strategic purposes. The organisational practices of the sport federation that holds proprietorship of the event, along with prior institutional experiences in dealing with public scrutiny or scandals, are, arguably, important factors shaping how sport federations steer bidding contests and the culture within which such contests take place. In this sense, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) experienced organisational shock much earlier than FIFA, being subject to a lot of criticism and scrutiny concerning established practices of graft surrounding bidding contests. This was the case particularly with the scandals and allegations of corruption in the lead-up to the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Games, since when the IOC has attempted to make bid processes more transparent and to ensure stricter compliance with bidding guidelines.<sup>13</sup>

Most of what the public sees of bid campaigns results from extended processes of networking, strategising and alliance formation among what could often be disparate interest groups in a given domestic context, including the likes of sport associations, business groupings, political office bearers and city managers. As a rule, bids to stage a particular event can be submitted to the international sport federation in whose name the event is staged only by the national member, such as the National Olympic Committee in the case of the Olympic Games, or the national football, cricket or rugby organisations in the cases of the FIFA, cricket and rugby World Cups.

By the time a bid is presented to an international sport federation it has gone through several processes of domestic consensus-building, as well as political layers. While it may be typical that campaigns to host Olympic Games are initiated by alliances between city governments and local businesses seeking to draw profit for the city (or sometimes themselves<sup>14</sup>), eventually their

campaign would have to appeal to a wider group of political actors in order to muster national support.

To mount a campaign for a multi-city tournament such as the FIFA World Cup, numerous coalitions would have to be clustered around the national football organisation, and an array of urban authorities, local and transnational firms, and sometimes political parties and other constituencies would have to be persuaded of the potential merits of the event. In the case of South Africa's bids for the 2006 and 2010 finals, for instance, the national football association had to procure the support of the governing party, the country's largest trade unions and, in the latter phases of the bid, the members of the Confédération Africaine de Football. Typically, therefore, bidding campaigns involve a range of stakeholders and usually unfold over several phases. It is not uncommon for the character and central messages of the bid to morph as key champions change or have to be secured.

### Concluding remarks

Cities and states launch campaigns to host major sport events for a variety of reasons, and the way in which they prioritise certain objectives relative to others, be they economic or political in nature, suggests something about prevailing socio-political dynamics in the domestic settings. In all instances, the content of bid campaigns represents the outcome of extended processes of consensus-building among varied urban or national actors. However, history suggests that it is usually the interests of the most powerful corporate or political players that determine the shape, flavour and eventual impacts of events, and that most bid campaigns reflect what has been termed 'strategic misrepresentation' and 'a deep-rooted culture of deception' concerning the potential costs and benefits of staging an event.<sup>15</sup> Bids usually project a positive future vision for the aspirant host, but they are seldom called to reckoning when these lofty goals are not realised.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Scarlett Cornelissen is a Professor in the Department of Political Science at Stellenbosch University, South Africa.
- <sup>2</sup> See, for instance, David Black, 'Dreaming Big: The Pursuit of "Second Order" Games as a Strategic Response to Globalization', *Sport in Society*, vol. 11 (2008).
- <sup>3</sup> David Black and Janis van der Westhuizen, 'The Allure of Global Games for the "Semi-Peripheral" Politics and Spaces: A Research Agenda', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 25 (2004).
- <sup>4</sup> Xu Xin, 'Modernizing China in the Olympic Spotlight: China's National Identity and the 2008 Beijing Olympiad', *Sociological Review*, vol. 54 (2006).
- <sup>5</sup> William Kelly, 'Asia Pride, China Fear, Tokyo Anxiety: Japan Looks Back at Beijing 2008 and Forward to London 2012 and Tokyo 2016', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 27 (2010).
- <sup>6</sup> *Japan Times*, 'Olympic construction transformed Tokyo', 10 October 2014; *Taipei Times*, 'Japan says "banzai" over Olympics', 18 September 2013..
- <sup>7</sup> Scarlett Cornelissen and Albert Grundlingh (eds.), *Sport Past and Present in South Africa: (Trans)forming the Nation* (London: Routledge, 2012).
- <sup>8</sup> Christopher Gaffney, 'Mega-Events and Socio-Spatial Dynamics in Rio de Janeiro, 1919–2016', *Journal of Latin American Geography*, vol. 9 (2010).
- <sup>9</sup> Jonathan Grix (ed.), *Leveraging Legacies from Sports Mega-Events*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014).
- <sup>10</sup> John Sugden and Alan Tomlinson, 'International Power Struggles in the Governance of World Soccer: The 2002 and 2006 World Cup Bidding Wars', in John Horne and Wolfram Manzenreiter (eds.), *Japan, Korea and the 2002 World Cup* (London: Routledge, 2002).
- <sup>11</sup> *Sunday Times*, 'How a humiliated old man sold SA's World Cup hopes down the river', 9 July 2000; Peter Alegi, "'Feel the Pull in Your Soul": Local Agency and Global Trends in South Africa's 2006 World Cup Bid', *Soccer and Society*, vol. 2 (2001).
- <sup>12</sup> Marcel Korthes and Manfred Rolfes, 'Unsicheres Südafrika, Unsicheres WM 2010? Überlegungen und Erkenntnisse zur Medialen Berichterstattungen im Vorfeld der Fußballweltmeisterschaft', in Christoph Haferburgh and Malte Steinbrink (eds.), *Mega-event und Stadtentwicklung im Globalen Süden: Die Fußballweltmeisterschaft 2010 und ihre Impulse für Südafrika* (Frankfurt: Brandes & Apsel, 2010).
- <sup>13</sup> Kristine Toohey and Anthony James Veal, *The Olympic Games: A Social Science Perspective*, 2nd edn (Wallingford, UK: CABI Publishing, 2007).
- <sup>14</sup> Helen Lenskyj, *Olympic Industry Resistance: Challenging Olympic Power and Propaganda* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2008).
- <sup>15</sup> Bent Flyvberg, 'Case Study', in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonne S. Lincoln (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011); Bent Flyvberg, 'Policy and Planning for Large-Scale Infrastructure Projects: Problems, Causes, Cures,' *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, vol. 34 (2007).